

**Douglas Gordon**  
**"I Had Nowhere To Go"**  
 Galerie Eva Presenhuber  
 5.11.2016 – 21.1.2017

During his studies (when he was, as it happens, a student of Phyllida Barlow's), Douglas Gordon painted rotting fruit. But his interests were not so much metaphysical as in the chemical process of decomposition, and how after a while all rotten things look the same: what remains is the memory of what they used to be. Reflections on memory



run through Gordon's diverse oeuvre – not least in his best-known work, *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), an appropriation of Hitchcock's film where it is radically decelerated – and viewers inevitably think back to their recollections of the film. Gordon's latest work, the feature-length video *I Had Nowhere To Go* (2016) originates from a collaboration with the Lithuanian-American artist Jonas Mekas, who published his diaries of the same title in 1991. Mekas's diaries tell about the most difficult moments of his life – how in 1944, aged 22, he faced the void and fled Lithuania to escape the war. Later he was imprisoned in a labour camp in Germany, escaped, and hid in a farmhouse until the war's end, before studying philosophy in the country where he had once been imprisoned, and then, in 1949, emigrating to the USA, where he still lives. But this is not a documentary nor a biography that the viewer can passively enjoy. Gordon ventures a radical approach, transferring Mekas's story of exile to the space of cinema and art. The flickering projection appears within the silver wallpaper that covers

the space. Mirrors are set into the wall at irregular intervals, reflecting the projected screening, while two smaller monitors are set on the floor in the middle of the room presenting the ten minutes of images in the predominantly sound-based work. As suddenly as the images turn up in the videos, the cracked but strong voice of an old man fills the gallery. This voice belongs to Jonas Mekas, who is reading from his own diary.

Gordon uses a number of techniques to counter the cinematic mode of presentation of his story. The darkened

void of the room makes the viewer more receptive, for darkness undermines psychological defences and makes us more permeable to the dreams of others. Secondly, the use of digetic, or environmental sounds is crucial to the construction of the work. Disproportionately loud noises, including thunder, the sound of a waterfall, or even traffic, produce a calculated degree of discomfort, even shock. It's impossible to take merely voyeuristic pleasure in someone else's terrible life story when feeling fear yourself. Interspersed are scenes that are almost universally interpretable: the gestures of great apes, or close-up images of chopping red fleshy fruits. The effect is disturbing, rather than explanatory. This is also a way of bringing the anxieties about exile in Mekas's story into the immediate present of the viewer, both personally and geopolitically, given the suffering and hopelessness all too often faced by the 65 million globally displaced people today.

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