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Around the Mall

SCENES AND SIGHTINGS FROM THE SMITHSONIAN MUSEUMS AND BEYOND

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It Happened Last Night at the Hirshhorn

The night was ablaze on the National Mall yesterday evening when suddenly at about 7:40 pm, the circular building that critic [Ada Louis Huxtable](#) once derided as the "largest donut in the world" became, with a burst of image and sound, one of the most unusual movie screens in the world, maybe the universe. Hyperbole notwithstanding, it was a moment. Runners stopped running. Bike messengers leaned on their bikes. Buses on Seventh Street slowed to crawl, the passengers inside craning their necks. And dozens of passersby sat down on the Jersey barricades and granite walls along the streets.



Tilda Swinton appears in Doug Aitken's SONG 1. Courtesy of FCharles Photography

It was a night to remember. Normally, the nighttime quiet on the National Mall is broken only by the footsteps of marathoners hitting the pebble pathways. The nine to fivers flee and the city sidewalks roll up for the night. But even a New Yorker from that city that never sleeps, that urban epicenter of art and culture, might begrudge this southern town of politicians and policy wonks, just a brief acknowledgement.

Because last night, the Hirshhorn Museum's debut of SONG 1, a 360-degree projection screen work by the internationally acclaimed Los Angeles artist Doug Aitken, briefly changed all that.

At least that's my humble opinion. I was up on the rooftop of the adjacent National Museum of Air and Space with my colleague Ryan Reed filming scenes for the video presented above. When the sun finally dropped below the clouds and the 11 projectors and multiple outdoor speakers blared, we both said in unison. "Now, that's cool."

303 GALLERY



Framed by the springtime blooms, the Hirshhorn rocks the city. Courtesy of FCharles Photography.

The work, [described in the April issue](#) of Smithsonian magazine, revolves around the classic 1934 pop song “I Only Have Eyes for You.” A number of musical artists, including Beck and Tilda Swinton, perform the song in ragtime, gospel, doo-wop and high-speed percussion variations. “The music evolves with each playing, sometimes resembling a torch song, or a country standard, or raw electronica,” reports Abigail Tucker. “Its rhythms shape the images streaming across the Hirshhorn, from highway traffic patterns to the movements of clouds.”

Says Aitken: “It’s about bringing architecture to life.”

Dear Ms. Huxtable, the largest donut in the world is now one of the most exciting 360-movie screens and its playing nightly from just past sunset until midnight through May 13. Now, that’s cool, don’t you think?