

## 303 GALLERY

Carter, Stinson. "Doug Aitken". The Wall Street Journal (5/4/12)

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## Doug Aitken

*A walk through the West Coast artist's studio comes with a cup of ginger tea and a lesson in how to play a musical dining table with xylophone mallets*



Amanda Marsalis for The Wall Street Journal

SOUND MIND | Doug Aitken outside of his work space



Amanda Marsalis for The Wall Street Journal

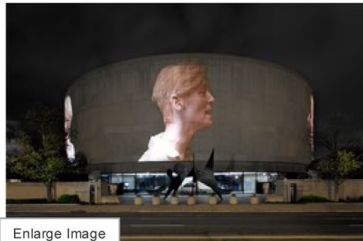
A room in the studio

**LOCATED ON A QUIET STREET** in Venice, Calif., Doug Aitken's studio is within breeze range of the ocean and walking distance of his home. His latest project, titled "Song 1"—a massive creation of video projection and sound—has been transforming the cylindrical exterior of the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, from sunset to midnight for eight weeks (it closes May 13). The blue-eyed Redondo Beach native looks like an ex-skateboarder, and his relaxed Southern California demeanor makes it easy to forget that he's famous in every modern art scene in the world. His cross-genre creations—including video, architecture, sculpture and books—make him a difficult artist to categorize. He built a Sonic Pavilion in Brazil that records the sound of plate tectonics one year, and then created a video and performance piece on a barge in Greece the next. He's had solo exhibitions at the Whitney and the MoMA in New York, the Georges Pompidou in Paris and the Serpentine Gallery in London, to name a few. Here, Mr. Aitken gives us a tour of his studio compound a block off Venice's Abbot Kinney Boulevard.

**My office has** two buildings that function like the right and left sides of the brain. There's a room where everything is being edited for an upcoming project, but you can pull out of that into a tranquil space to work in a different, more solitary medium. It's an architectural unfolding of the process instead of just one chaotic structure.

**I don't really care about** interruptions. I accept technology and I don't turn things

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Enlarge Image

Doug Aitken

'Song 1' at the Hirshhorn Museum

### Doug's Office Essentials



iStockphoto

Gridded index cards  
Aeron chair  
MacBook Pro, iMac, iPhone  
Harman Kardon HK3380 receiver  
Ion USB turntable  
Bose speakers  
G-Drives  
HP Deskjet F4480  
Vinyl records, 45s, CDs, iTunes

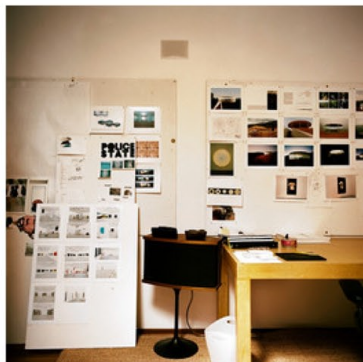
off. I've found a peace with fragmentation and a harmony with switching gears quickly to other things.

**My project boards** seem to work very well. The images are constantly circulating and changing—different projects in different stages of incubation. It's important to have new ideas in your peripheral vision. Some are things we're using for reference, and some are new pieces. Some may never amount to anything, but you might find yourself in a few years gravitating toward that image again because it's burned into your retina, and something about it builds a new trail of DNA.

**I based the Hirshhorn project on a** song written in the late '20s, "I Only Have Eyes For You." I took one song that everyone from every generation has come in contact with, whether they like it or not, and created a large-scale artwork out of it. The perfect pop song is a 20th-century creation; it's not a sonnet, it's not an opera, it's something short—three and a half minutes by nature—and has this ability to travel, and to defy class and economic structures. It could be in the Philippines in a cab today.

**For me, music is** more of a tool than any object I hold in my hand. I'm fascinated by the structure of music. The more you get into it, the further it goes.

**Every kitchen needs a sonic table.** It's a musical instrument that we can also use for meetings and meals. I designed it out of a frustration with communication. I found myself at one of these museum benefit dinners with assigned seating. I was dozing off and thinking, "These are probably fine people, I just have nothing really to say to them. But maybe if sound could take over when words fail, I could create a social space based on sound."



Amanda Marsalis for The Wall Street Journal

Mr. Aitken's project boards

**I have a weak spot for** late '60s-early '70s yippie paperbacks and protest manifestos. I find them at flea markets or online. One of my favorites is "Right On," a compendium of student protests made into this 95-cent paperback with the most amazing graphics.

**I'm into drinking** boiled ginger right now. That's as culinary as I get. Lately we've had it on the stove every day, this cauldron that everyone's dipping into.

**At work, what keeps my team going** are chocolate-covered espresso beans. They are the Quaaludes of the 21st century, and the threshold of extreme

chemicals here.

—Edited from an interview by Stinson Carter