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Doug Aitken's art train rolls out of Washington Saturday afternoon

By Melissa Bell, Published: September 6 at 6:21 pm [E-mail the writer](#)

Doug Aitken ambitions do not shrink. Last year, the Los Angeles-based artist consumed the entire exterior of the Hirshhorn museum, wrapping it in his video and in music for his piece *Song 1*. This year, he plans to trail his art across the whole country, with the help of more than a hundred other creative types. On Saturday afternoon, with little fanfare, one of the largest art events this year will roll out of aboard a train heading west, when Doug Aitken's [Station to Station](#) departs Washington at 2pm.

Aitken fans can glimpse the traveling show in the capital when it departs on the cross-country trip. And it's not just any train. Aitken's adorned the outside of the cars in bright L.E.D. lights. Train producer Adam Auxier said fans could watch from the Silver Spring, Rockville or Shady Grove metro platforms to see the display. Auxier leased the privately-owned train cars and set up deals with Amtrak to tow the cars behind Amtrak locomotives. He rode the route a number of times to make sure the group had the best locations. For the more picturesque viewing of the train, he recommends staking out a view of the tracks from Harper's Ferry around 2:30p.m.

On board, artists, musicians, filmmakers, crew members and a car full of journalists will travel across the country to the final stop in Oakland arriving September 28th. Some participants will make the whole trip, others will join for one-night events planned in various cities. The performance list reads like a who's who from the art and music world: Patti Smith in Minneapolis, Olaf Breuning in Barstow, Ariel Pink in Pittsburgh, among many others.

The city events will take place at railyards, old train stations and a drive-in theater. Aitken's work often plays with nostalgia, building his art over the past, invigorating the old with his new work. As he did with [the Hirshhorn](#), by taking a notoriously difficult architectural design and lighting up the surface, so he plans to reanimate the stretches of land across the country.

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“The train system runs across the American landscape like untapped arteries,” Aitken wrote in an email. “Much of our journeys have been replaced by interstates and highways. I was interested in using the train to become a nomadic broadcast tower, broadcasting new and experimental culture while tapping into unknown and amazing creators from the locations in which the train stops.”

While Aitken says the experience is based on the idea of a nomadic happening, it’s anything but spontaneous — or free. Molly Logan, the executive producer, said Doug first sketched out the idea on a napkin four years ago. And while Levi’s is sponsoring much of the event, attendees will have to buy a ticket to attend the shows in the various cities — that is if they are not already sold out.