



Peter Doig/MATRIX 183 Echo-Lake

February 13 - April 9, 2000

**University of California
Berkeley Art Museum**

Peter Doig/MATRIX 183

“I use the photo like a map, but it is not a tracing, just a way of giving me a foot into a kind of reality that I want.” —Peter Doig¹

British/Canadian artist Peter Doig stands in a position seemingly riddled with contradictions: straddling national identities; employing a medium (photography) historically thought to lead to the eventual disappearance of his own medium (painting); and working within a continuum of large scale figurative and landscape oil paintings. Doig is unconcerned with whether people think he is British or Canadian; he creates highly stylized, personal reflections of areas and events but thinks that working from memory alone would be “too whimsical”; and, while acknowledging “the painter’s inheritance,” is bothered when people see his work as part of “traditions in general.”² One can posit the idea of Doig as an outsider, knowing that those who hold such a place often have the keenest sense of vision and perception. How do we understand Peter Doig and his stunning, luminous, silent, euphoric, foreboding paintings?

Peter Doig often depicts a place that has been fathomed, dreamed of, glimpsed, or maybe even known. His devastatingly beautiful paintings cover a subject, an image, a place sometimes time and time again. He always paints from photographs—at times from postcards, newspapers, and popular films but often from his personal photographs, whether taken or found by him or a friend or family member. His paintings exude a sense of quiet or solitude or a respectful presence in nature while simultaneously forefronting a masterful, even garish, presentation. Doig loves color; he teases it in and out of shadow and reflection. His paintings are a record of physical and psychological travels. Filled with mystery, they are icons of autobiography filtered through an acute perception. In *The Heart of Old San Juan*, a basketball court is blanketed in lush, jumping green, documenting Doig’s visit to Puerto Rico. Despite the personalization of formal elements, many of Doig’s sites are recognizable: the stadium in Buffalo, New York; a tunnel by the side of the highway in Toronto; and a scene from *Friday the 13th*, the movie.



Color xeroxes of the paintings included in Peter Doig/MATRIX 183 *Echo-Lake* have been taped to the wall in my office for several months. I feel as if I have been a silent witness to each hockey game, euphoric dance at a rock concert, luminous ripple off the painter’s lake, and passing snow storm. Peter Doig paints scenes I wish I had seen, capturing the instantaneous and fleeting beauty of the ordinary that we know can be extraordinary if we are lucky enough to see it as such. The clarity of the works does not appear stylistically, as the images are sometimes just a little blurry, but through the stopping of time, the recording of the present for later.

Artists have been capturing their surroundings in paint for over 15,000 years. Throughout the twentieth century and accelerating with the rise of conceptualism and Michael Fried’s prediction of the end of art, or at least the death of painting, critics, curators, and historians have questioned the validity of the medium while artists have continued to paint. What is it about painting that provokes such ambivalence or even animosity? Now, at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the next, Peter Doig’s idiosyncratic, extended, and intriguing use of this traditional medium (painting) and style (representational) again brings into question debates on its relevance. Unlike other contemporary artists such as Fabian Marcaccio who deconstructs the medium quite literally by silk-screening impastoed gestures and exposing the stretcher; and Joseph Marioni, David Simpson, or other monochromatic painters who have reduced the medium to its most essential elements; Doig steadfastly reflects an ambiguous yet familiar place between high and popular culture, and familiar locations and nowhere. His paintings encourage the viewer to look longer and harder at the known and the mundane. Thus he succeeds in imbuing the ordinary with the inspired spectacular.

In terms of subject, not style, Doig’s work can be positioned within two traditions—that of Western landscape painting with heroic, moody

Cobourg 3 + one more, 1994, oil on canvas, 78-3/4 x 98 inches. Provinzial Versicherung Düsseldorf.
Photo courtesy of Victoria Miro Gallery.



representations of nature; and Impressionism with depictions of daily life, scenes previously thought irrelevant or inconsequential but which serve as the true basis for human interaction. Doig’s compositional strategies combined with his odd and intense color schemes have garnered comparisons to artists as diverse as Pieter Bruegel, Edvard Munch, Pierre Bonnard, Barnett Newman, Alex Katz, Edward Hopper, and Gerhard Richter.

Although Doig draws his subject matter from photographs, he deliberately selects those whose blandness leave room for invention. Here the quality of uneasy juxtaposition occurs again: he works from real life but intends to create artificial, fabricated landscapes. One is left wondering about, even longing for, the real. Doig describes painting as being about “working your way across a surface, getting lost in it.”³ Doig equates many elements of his work—its very big size; its subjects of skiers, horror movies, and drug use alluding to his adolescence in Canada—with losing oneself and the inherent freedom that follows an escape from the blandness of the everyday.⁴ Movies, arguably the ultimate escapist vehicles, are extremely important for understanding Doig’s work. He has said, “I would like to think of the paintings as movie scenes with the viewer acting as director.”

Doig often paints an image over and over, explaining that the subject contains something to which he is repeatedly drawn. *Canoe-Lake* depicts such a scene. The painting is based on the end of *Friday the 13th*, a routine horror movie in which, as part of a dream sequence, a slumped figure floats across the reflective surface of a lake. Peter Doig/MATRIX 183 *Echo-Lake* includes three versions of this sequence. For my part, this jarring image inspired the entire show. *Canoe-Lake* is a fiercely horizontal work with an elongated canoe stretched across the painting. It is full of conflict and harmony, marrying figuration with abstraction, seductive color with suspect subject matter, and voyeuristic curiosity with safe distance. When asked by a viewer if the woman in the

Buffalo Station I (detail), 1997-98, oil on canvas, 68-7/8 x 106-1/8 inches. Thomas Dane, London.
Photo courtesy of Victoria Miro Gallery.



painting was dead, Doig replied, “Not dead. It is hard to describe exactly - perhaps daydreaming? In a way, I suppose that making paintings is a bit like daydreaming. It gives you the chance to depict something that isn’t there, something that is out of the ordinary.”⁵

In *Cobourg 3 + one more*, Doig presents the action behind a screen of snow. The snow definitively positions the viewer outside the frame while simultaneously inviting a closer look. In the distance, four obscured figures stand returning our inquisitive gaze and perhaps doing nothing more. Despite knowing that Doig paints scenes of cold, blustery environments from photos in his London studio, I think of *Figure in a Mountain Landscape* as a self-portrait of the artist—perhaps more of a conceptual or psychological self-portrait rather than an actual one. Doig’s description of the subject exemplifies much of the intended experience of his paintings. “It is a mountain landscape and the figure is painting a painting, but he is becoming part of the landscape that is being painted. The whole thing becomes a painting, rather than a painting depicting a painter. I think the forms hover in reality.”⁶ The notion of reality itself could be the essence of Peter Doig’s paintings.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

Peter Doig was born in 1959 in Edinburgh, Scotland, moved to Trinidad, West Indies in 1962, and then to Canada in 1966. In 1979 he moved to London to attend the Wimbledon School of Art. He received his Bachelor of Arts from St. Martin’s School of Art in 1983, and earned his Master of Arts degree from the Chelsea School of Art in 1990. Currently, Doig lives and works in London. Peter Doig/MATRIX 183 *Echo-Lake* is the artist’s first one-person museum exhibition in North America and will travel to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, and The Saint Louis Art Museum.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1999
 - “version,” Kunsthauus, Glarus, Switzerland
 - “wing-mirror,” Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York, NY
- 1998
 - “Blizzard seventy-seven,” Kunsthalle, Nurnberg, Germany; Whitechapel Gallery, London, England; and Kunsthalle, Kiel, Germany
 - “Buffalo Station,” Victoria Miro Gallery, London, England
- 1996
 - “Freestyle,” Victoria Miro Gallery, London, England
 - Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York, NY
 - “Homely,” Gessellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, Germany
- 1995
 - “Blotter,” Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin, Germany
- 1994
 - “Concrete Cabins,” Victoria Miro Gallery, London, England
 - “Drifter,” Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York, NY

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2000
 - “Examining Pictures,” Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, University of California, Los Angeles, CA
- 1999
 - “Examining Pictures,” Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, England; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
- 1998
 - “Peter Doig/Udomsak Krisanamis,” Arnolfini, Bristol, England; and The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland

Heart of Old San Juan (detail), 1999, oil on canvas, 98-1/2 x 76-3/4 inches. Collection Gavin Brown & Lucy Barnes, New York.

1997
“Alpenblick,” Kunsthalle, Wien, Austria

1996
“Answered Prayers (John Currin, Peter Doig, Richard Patterson, Raymond Pettibone),” Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin, Germany
“Drawings from the M.A.B. Library,” Ac Project Room, New York, NY
“Belladona,” ICA, London, England

1994
“The Turner Prize Exhibition,” Tate Gallery, London, England
“Prix Elliette von Karajan,” Salzburg, Vienna, and Paris, France (1st prize jointly with Herbert Brandl)
“Peter Doig/Moira Davie,” Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York, NY

Selected Bibliography

- Bonaventura, Paul. “A Hunter in the Snow,” (interview), *Artifactum*, Autumn 1994.
- Brown, Neal. “Peter Doig at Whitechapel,” *Frieze*, November/December 1998, no. 43.
- Cork, Richard. “Cold comfort in a land of snow,” *The Times*, June 23, 1998.
- Cruz, Juan. “Peter Doig,” (review), *Art Monthly*, March 1996.
- “Peter Doig, Whitechapel Art Gallery,” (preview), *Artforum*, May 1998, p. 69.
- Edelstein, Leo. “Peter Doig: Losing oneself in the looking,” *Flash Art*, May/June 1998, vol. 31, no. 200, p. 84-86.
- Jones, Gareth. “Weird Places, Strange Folk,” *Frieze*, September/October 1992, no. 6.
- Moszynska, Anna. “Daytime Astronomy,” *Tate Magazine*, Summer 1998, pp. 30-35.
- Searle, Adrian, “Nature of the Beast,” *The Guardian*, June 16, 1998.
- Searle, Adrian. “The Twilight Zone,” (profile), *The Independent*, October 21, 1994.

Canoe-Lake, 1999, oil and charcoal on paper, 15 x 22 inches, Clarissa Dalrymple

Canoe-Lake, 1999, watercolor on paper, 9-3/4 x 7-7/8 inches, Alexander Lasarenko, New York

Echo-Lake (Reflection), 1999, watercolor, sugar, and ink on paper, 10-3/4 x 27-1/2 inches, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum; purchase made possible through a gift from George Leitmann

Ferris Wheel, 1999, oil on canvas, 36-1/2 x 30 inches, Alexander Lasarenko, New York

Heart of Old San Juan, 1999, oil on canvas, 98-1/2 x 76-3/4 inches, Collection Gavin Brown & Lucy Barnes, New York

High-way, 1999, oil on canvas, 39 x 30-1/3 inches, Collection of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg

The painter’s lake, 1999, watercolor, sugar, and ink on paper, 10-3/4 x 27-1/2 inches, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum; purchase made possible through a gift from George Leitmann

Rainbow Wheel, 1999, oil on canvas, 78-1/4 x 73-1/4 inches, Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz

Study for Echo-Lake (Screaming Cap), 1999, oil on canvas, 16 x 12 inches, Michelle and Jason Rubell, Miami Beach, Florida

Study for Echo-Lake (Screaming Cap) (detail), 1999, oil on canvas, 16 x 12 inches. Michelle and Jason Rubell, Miami Beach, Florida.

Study for Grasshopper, 1999, oil on photograph, 6 x 8 inches, Collection Gavin Brown & Lucy Barnes, New York

Study for Orange Forest, 1999, oil on canvas, 12 x 9-1/2 inches, Collection Chip Tom and Michael W. Rabkin

Buffalo Station I, 1997-1998, oil on canvas, 68-7/8 x 106-1/8 inches, Thomas Dane, London

Canoe-Lake, 1997-1998, oil on canvas, 78-3/4 x 118-1/8 inches, The Bailey Collection, Toronto

Daytime Astronomy, 1997-1998, oil on canvas, 78-3/4 x 110-1/4 inches, Warren and Victoria Miro

Figure in Mountain Landscape, 1997-1998, oil on canvas, 113-3/4 x 78-1/2 inches, Private Collection, London

Work in MATRIX

Please Note:

Peter Doig will give an artist’s talk on Wednesday, February 16, at noon.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson will give a curator’s walkthrough of the exhibition on Wednesday, March 15, at noon.

Novelist David Knowles will read from his debut novel *The Third Eye* on Saturday, March 25, at 4:00 p.m.

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cover: *Canoe-Lake*, 1997-1998, oil on canvas, 78-3/4 x 118-1/8 inches. The Bailey Collection, Toronto.

above: *Ski Jacket*, 1993, oil on canvas, 20 x 18-1/8 inches. Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz.

¹ Adrian Searle, “I’ve never been canoeing on a toxic swamp [A conversation with Peter Doig],” *Blotter* (Berlin and London: Contemporary Fine Arts and Victoria Miro, 1995) p. 10.

² Gareth Jones, “Weird places, strange folk,” *Frieze*, September/October 1992, vol. 6, p. 26; Searle, pp. 12, 14.

³ Searle, p. 10.

⁴ Leo Edelstein, “Peter Doig: Losing oneself in the looking,” *Flash Art*, May/June 1998, vol. 31, no. 200, p. 86.

⁵ Anna Moszynska, “Daytime Astronomy,” *Tate Magazine*, Summer 1998, p. 33.

Figure in Mountain Landscape (detail), 1997-98, oil on canvas, 113-3/4 x 78-1/2 inches. Private Collection, London. Photo courtesy of Victoria Miro Gallery.