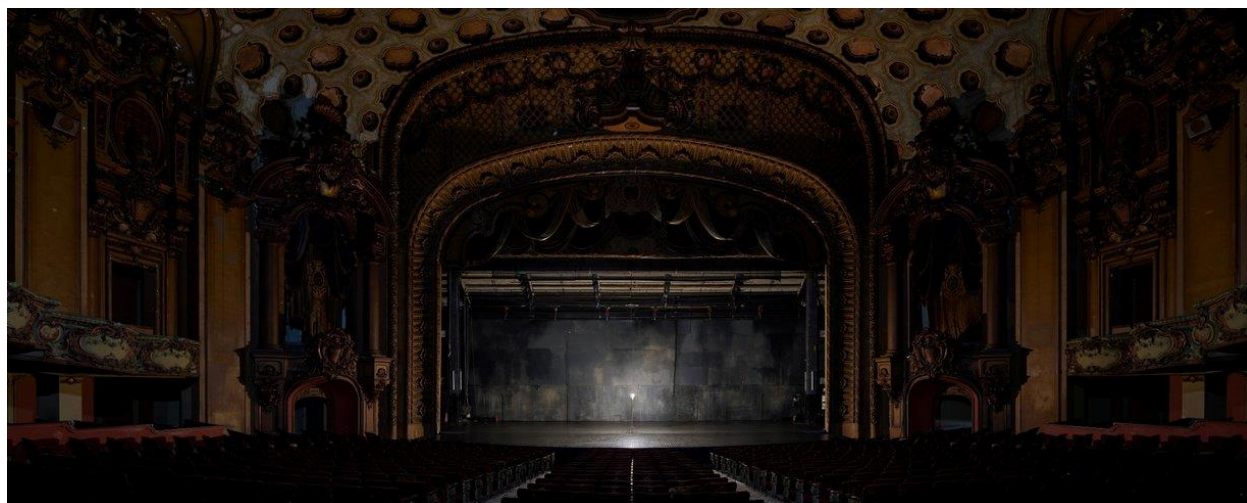


MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

Jul 29 Stan Douglas: Ghostlight | Hessel Museum of Art

Amy Wei



Stan Douglas, *Ghostlight*, 2024. Inkjet print mounted on Dibond aluminum, 48 1/8 x 120 inches. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro and David Zwirner. © Stan Douglas.

In *Ghostlight*, Stan Douglas assembles a photographic world suspended between precision and performance. The exhibition, spanning nearly four decades of work, presents photography as a mode of staging that is never passive, rarely spontaneous, and always alert to the historical conditions behind the image.

The exhibition's centerpiece, *Ghostlight* (2024), is both architectural and theatrical in nature. The ten-foot-wide image captures the interior of a historic Los Angeles theater illuminated only by a lone bulb at center stage. The composition is carefully symmetrical, austere yet heavy with suggestion. Although no actors are present, the set feels lived-in and haunted by gestures. Douglas doesn't attempt to restore the past, but rather reconstructs its scaffolding, creating a form of spatial archaeology that utilizes photography as a method of excavation.



Stan Douglas, *Stranded*, 2017. Digital chromogenic print mounted on Dibond aluminum 94 1/2 x 71 inches. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro and David Zwirner. © Stan Douglas.

Across the gallery, Douglas's 2017 *Scenes from the Blackout* series offers imagined episodes from a fictional New York City power outage. In *Stranded* (2017), clusters of people sit and lie across the steps of a neoclassical building that appears to be a train station, bathed in the amber glow of natural lighting outside. Some chat or rest their heads on each other, while others appear dazed, quietly waiting for something to shift. The composition evokes both civic gathering and existential pause, drawing on the language of historical painting and documentary photography. The atmosphere leans toward quiet social inertia rather than panic—a tableau where a shared pause feels weighty. While the work evokes real-life NYC blackouts of the 1970s and Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the scene is entirely constructed. With cinematic precision, Douglas reimagines disruption as a choreography where nothing is accidental and everything is deliberate.



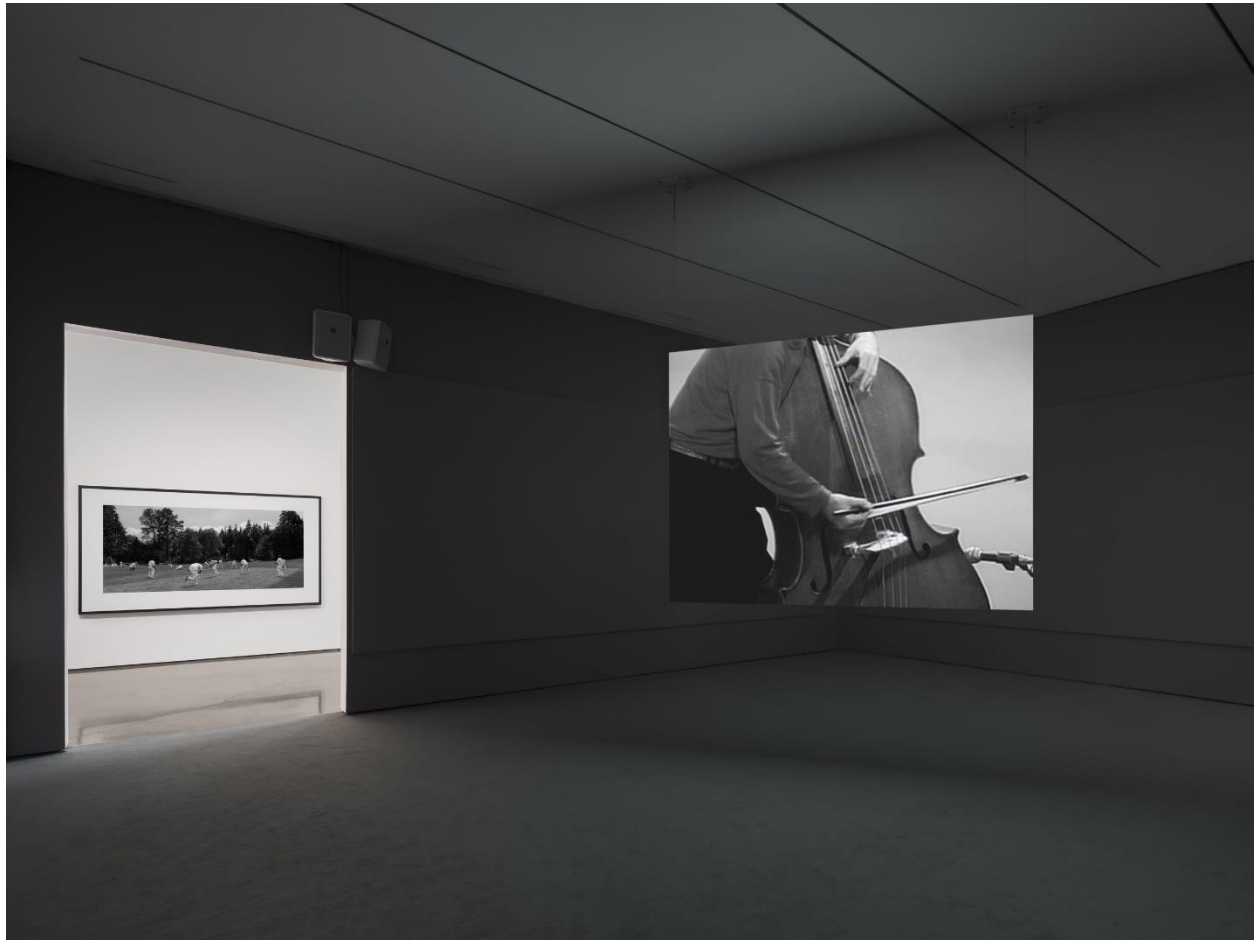
Stan Douglas, *Disco Angola: Exodus, 1975, 2012*. Digital chromogenic print mounted on aluminum, 71 x 101 1/2 inches. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro and David Zwirner. © Stan Douglas.

Another example of photographic fabrication, *Exodus, 1975* (2012), belongs to Douglas's *Disco Angola* series, which fuses the aesthetics of 1970s American nightlife with the revolutionary movements unfolding in Angola during its war for independence. Shot in the 2010s, the works mimic the grain and visual codes of 1970s photojournalism. In *Exodus*, a group of people appears in mid-motion, seemingly fleeing or migrating, but the scene is pure invention. Douglas's manipulation of historical style serves to critique the photographic archive: how it seduces, constructs authority and erases what cannot be made legible.



Stan Douglas, *88Wo*, 2017. Lacquered UV ink on gessoed panel, 59 1/8 x 59 1/8 x 2 inches. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro and David Zwirner. © Stan Douglas.

Photography is not merely a tool for preserving moments for Douglas; it is a method of rehearsal and a means of re-seeing the world. In works like *88Wo* (2017) and *AMMA* (2017), Douglas moves entirely away from figuration. Both works are derived from discrete cosine transforms (DCTs), the mathematical basis for image compression in JPEG files. Visually, they appear as high-gloss grids of shimmering interference patterns. Where *Ghostlight* and *Stranded* meditate on the performative spaces of the past, *AMMA* and *88Wo* implicate the digital present, where all images are encoded, manipulated and infinitely transferable. If his earlier photographs simulate memory, these seem to speak in the language of systems that are designed and surveillant.



Installation view from *Stan Douglas: Ghostlight*, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, June 21 – November 30, 2025. Photo: Olympia Shannon 2025. © Olympia Shannon.

By focusing precisely on his photographic series, Stan Douglas's *Ghostlight* offers more than spectacle or aesthetic refinement. The exhibition showcases Douglas's continued commitment to photography as a critical reenactment: not archives recreated, but histories reframed and rehearsed. Douglas' images continue to provoke thought about the reliability of images, staged history, and how visual archives are constructed and perceived.

Stan Douglas: Ghostlight runs until November 30, 2025, at the Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, NY.



Installation view from *Stan Douglas: Ghostlight*, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, June 21 – November 30, 2025. Photo: Olympia Shannon 2025. © Olympia Shannon.

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