



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SFAI and SFMOMA Present *Doug Hall: The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described* – First Time on View in Bay Area in 25 Years

Large-scale media installation features electric arcs firing from a functioning Tesla coil creating a storm within the gallery

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San Francisco (January 27, 2015) – [San Francisco Art Institute](#) (SFAI) and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art ([SFMOMA](#)) will jointly present Doug Hall’s seminal large-scale installation *The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described* (1987) from March 28 to June 6, 2015, in SFAI’s Walter and McBean Galleries. The installation includes three channels of video—displayed via six monitors and a projection—accompanied by a functioning Tesla coil; two large steel chairs; and a tilted, commanding steel-mesh barricade. Bringing together powerful moving images of nature in turmoil, physically imposing sculptural elements, and startling bolts of electricity that periodically extend from the coil, the installation is a potent reminder that we are subject to the forces of nature, as well as the influence of media.

“The storm is in the mind. The lightning is in the room. It is the terrible uncertainty: the imperceptible, the sublime, the invisible made physical...” –Doug Hall, 1987

Taking his title from a phrase in an 18th-century treatise by Edmund Burke on romanticism and the sublime, the work juxtaposes the romantic, idealized notion of nature with its often terrifying reality. The video montage cuts between documentary and found footage of industrial plants, interiors of utility and research facilities, and intense weather conditions—tornados, floods, fires, electrical storms. Hall and videographer Jules Backus (1944–1996) filmed storms throughout the United States, gathering material during residencies with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Severe Storms Laboratory, the United States Coast Guard, the U.S. Forest Service and other organizations. The work, originally commissioned by the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston for Hall’s midcareer survey *The Spectacle of the Image* (1987), addresses the physical manifestation of power and stages a critique of mediated images. As the viewer confronts the impact of the exhibited Tesla coil—which creates a rupture, according to Hall, “between the world as representation and the world as fact” —Nikola Tesla’s groundbreaking work on the distribution of electric power and information at the end of the 19th century provides another avenue for interpretation.

This exhibition marks the first time *The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described* has been on view in the Bay Area since 1989, when it was presented by SFMOMA in the museum’s original location at the War Memorial Veterans Building. The piece was one of the first major acquisitions of SFMOMA’s Media Arts Department after its establishment in 1988. Hall has had a close relationship with the museum since the 1970s, and a number of his photographs and video works are represented in SFMOMA’s collection. This co-presentation is part of the [SFMOMA On the Go](#) program.

Doug Hall: The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described is jointly curated by Hesse McGraw, vice president for exhibitions and public programs at SFAI, and Rudolf Frieling, curator of media arts at SFMOMA and visiting faculty at SFAI. It is jointly organized by the San Francisco Art Institute and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Generous support is provided by Linda and Jon Gruber.

Opening Reception

Saturday, March 28, 6–10 pm

The Uncertainty Salon, 8pm

San Francisco Art Institute, 800 Chestnut Street, San Francisco

Admission is free and open to the public

Following the reception in the Walter and McBean Galleries, the public is invited to a conversational encounter that considers Doug Hall's installation, *The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described*, from multiple vantages. During this salon, curators Hesse McGraw and Rudolf Frieling will host a rapid-fire series of contributions by guest artists and scholars that will ignite discussions across disparate fields and perspectives, including psychology, science, performance, media critique, technology, utopia, the sublime, contemporary art, and the legacy of Nikola Tesla.

Film Screening

Date and Time TBA – visit <http://www.sfai.edu/events-calendar> for updates

San Francisco Art Institute Lecture Hall, 800 Chestnut St., San Francisco

Free admission

Doug Hall, *Storm and Stress* (1986), 47:52 min.; Collection SFMOMA

Michael Klier, *Der Riese* (The Giant, 1982–83), 82 min.; courtesy the artist

In conjunction with the exhibition *Doug Hall: The Uncertainty of the Thing Described*, SFAI and SFMOMA will present a rare screening of *Storm and Stress*, an early and important work by Hall that documents connections between landscape, media, and climatic conditions. *Storm and Stress* traces emergent conditions in a continuum between the theater of the news and severe weather events. For this screening, Hall also has selected Michael Klier's landmark film *Der Riese*. The first film to be constructed entirely of surveillance footage, *Der Riese* presents a subtle critique of our technological hubris; thirty years following its production, it remains a starkly unsettling portrait of the surveillance state.

About the Artist

Doug Hall lives and works in San Francisco, where he was born in 1944. Hall received his BA in anthropology from Harvard College in 1966. In 1969 he returned to San Francisco, after receiving his MFA in sculpture from the Rinehart School of Sculpture of the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). He founded the media art collective T. R. Uthco (1970–1978) with Jody Procter (1943–1998) and Diane Andrews Hall. His internationally acclaimed work spans performance, video, photography, and sculpture, and is included in numerous public and private collections. Hall's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including solo exhibitions at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; Kunst-Werke; Centro de Arte de Salamanca; Centro Cultural São Paulo; Portland Museum of Art; Carnegie Museum of Art; Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Long Beach Museum of Art. The survey *Doug Hall: In Finite Spaces*, organized by the Newcomb Art Gallery, Tulane University, New Orleans, toured from 2003

to 2005. Hall is professor emeritus at SFAI, where he taught from 1980 until 2008. He is currently Visiting Artist in Graduate Fine Arts at California College of the Arts.

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About San Francisco Art Institute

San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), founded in 1871, is one of the country's oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher education in the practice and study of contemporary art. As a diverse community of working artists and scholars, SFAI provides students with a rigorous education in the arts and preparation for a life in the arts through an immersive studio environment, an integrated liberal arts and art history curriculum, and critical engagement with the world. Committed to educating artists who will shape the future of art, culture, and society, SFAI fosters creativity and original thinking in an open, experimental, and interdisciplinary context.

About the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Founded in 1935 as the first West Coast museum devoted to modern and contemporary art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) is currently undergoing a major [expansion](#) project that will significantly enhance gallery, education, and public spaces, enabling the museum to better showcase its expanded permanent collection. While the museum is temporarily closed for construction, through 2016, SFMOMA is “on the go” with an extensive array of off-site programming across the Bay Area, including collaborative and traveling museum exhibitions, major outdoor projects and commissioned installations, and new education initiatives.

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