

## **Diller + Scofidio + Renfro**

Early installations and performative works

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Diller and Scofidio's early visual art, installation and performance work focused mainly on the body and its nature of substance/surface of pleasure and pain. Moving from the work of Rebecca Horn, Shinya Tsukamoto, David Cronenberg and the whole early nineties *PostHuman* thing, D&S concentrated their early attention on witnessing and studying the -back then- fully ongoing process of incorporation of technology into our sensorial and emotional life. Their theatrical piece "*The Rotary Notary and His Hot Plate*" also known as "*Delay in Glass*" and first performed in 1987 was particularly profetic of their future activity, both in visual arts and architecture. Staged as a complex system of quotations and elaborations on Duchamp's "*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*" masterpiece, "*Delay in Glass*" remixed Duchamp's anti-semiotics with a wink at many of D&S future favorites. An even better key to their work as visual artists can be found in their 1989 MoMA "*Parasite*" show. In this complex, sprawling installation, the themes of surveillance, interference and augmented reality met in a body of work that was probably more dense than intense. Still, the use of surveillance cameras and ubiquitous video screenings cleverly prophetized the advent of reality shows and mediatic over-exposure. Their 1991 "*Tourisms: Suitcase Studies*" was a rather shallow, if not magniloquent counterpart to their still interesting "*Visite Aux Armees*" essay/book.

The work attracted hilarious comments from the always vigilant Jerry Saltz, during their 2003 Whitney Museum retrospective:

*“Each (suitcase) sports a postcard and a quote from someone like Baudrillard, Barthes or Umberto Eco. Presumably, Eco's first name is misspelled as "Unberto" on the Utah bag because the piece is so boring no one could bear to read it”.*

Saltzisms apart, the piece (a pack of suitcases each showing a postcard and a text, arranged to -supposedly- evoke the aggressiveness of modern tourism) highlights the sometimes excessive literality of D&S's approach to visual arts practice.

Later on, the couple used their art-world credentials to dedicate more and more of their time to their “normal” practice as architects. “Normal” projects kicked off in 2002 with the quasi-mythical “*Blur*” pavillion on the Neuchatel lake, in Switzerland. This project stands out as the real meeting point of D&S's artistic and architectural inclinations. As a matter of fact, it would be impossible to describe “*Blur*” as a mere architecture. The (now sadly dismantled) pavillion was covered by water shot as a fine mist through 13,000 fog nozzles. This artificial cloud measured 300 feet wide by 200 feet deep by 65 feet high. A built-in weather station controlled fog output in response to shifting climatic conditions such as temperature, humidity, wind direction, and wind speed. Public approached *Blur* via a ramped bridge. Inside the foggy mist, visual and acoustical references were erased, leaving the visitor alone with the optical “white-out” . This sensation of total nothingness was and is the real focal point of the whole project, as opposed to standard expo pavillions, where the visitor is usually engaged in contextual activities or entertained with the lore and history of a particular culture. Diller & Scofidio (now Diller + Scofidio + Renfro) have paved their way to architectural stardom with a handful of spectacular project proposals, many so-so art installations,

and an active, motivated role as visual culture theorists. Their work as visual artists might not be striking or revolutionary, but surely deserves attention and, most importantly, is essential to understand the peculiarity of their brilliant architectural production.