

REGEN PROJECTS

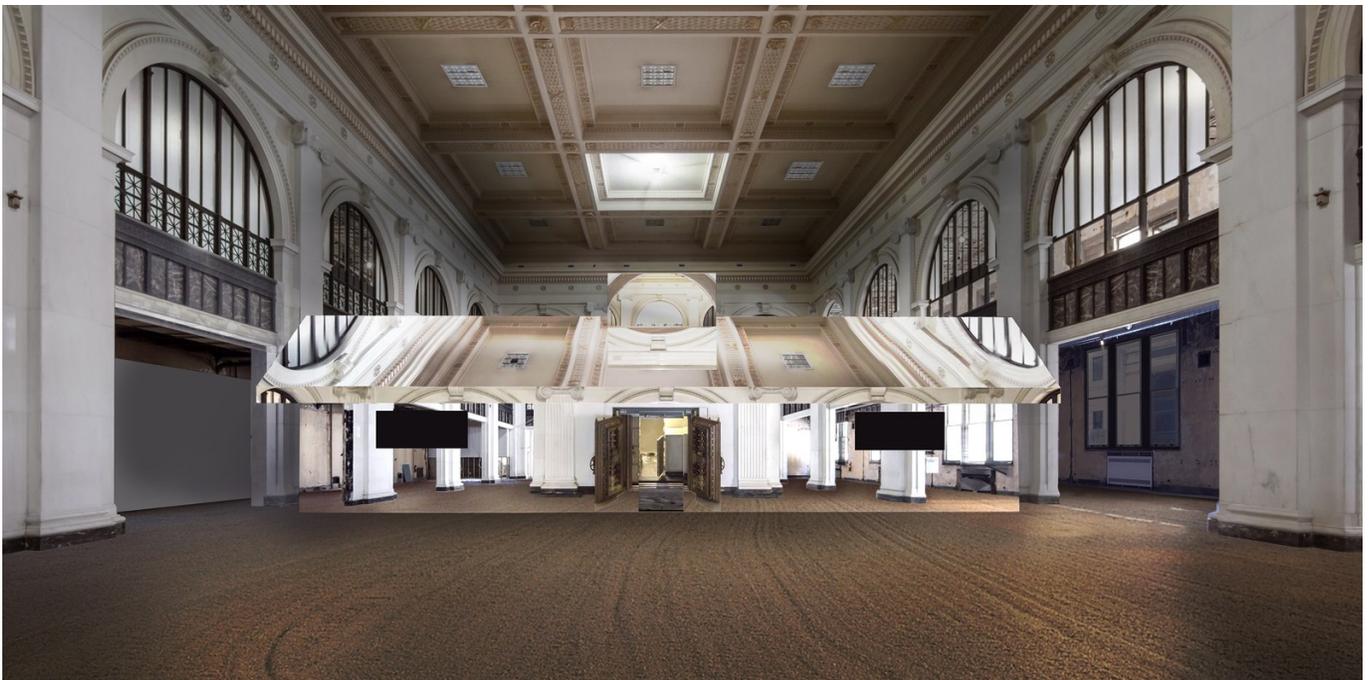
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ART + AUCTIONS

Doug Aitken's Newest Installation Is in a Former Detroit Bank Building

The Beaux Arts interiors—with their Roman arched colonnades and decorative bronze flourishes—frame Aitken's striking collage of textures



Doug Aitken, *Mirage Detroit*, 2018.

Photo: Courtesy of the Artist; Image by Doug Aitken Workshop

Mirage, L.A. artist Doug Aitken's mirror-clad facsimile of a typical suburban American home, debuted in the desert in early 2017. Perched on a Coachella Valley hillside, its reflective features—the walls, the chimney, and the gabled roof—functioned as a kaleidoscope of desert colors as they change throughout the day, from the saturated blue of high noon as it sinks through the gradients of sunset to the navy blue of night. In October, the much loved sculpture returns, but finds itself in virtually the opposite environment: inside Detroit's former State Savings Bank, a century-old downtown building where the two-story windows will be blacked out.

"It's a sculpture made entirely out of reflections, essentially living in darkness," says Aitken, describing the new *Mirage Detroit* as "a completely new work." This edition, a brand new piece with seamless, more refined mirrored panels than its predecessor, plays less with color and space than with architecture and pure light.

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Doug Aitken, *Mirage Detroit*, 2018.

Photo: Courtesy of the Artist; Image by Doug Aitken Workshop

Mirage Detroit sits amid the splendor of the bank's Beaux Arts interiors, where Roman arched colonnades and decorative bronze flourishes frame an open space that runs the length of a city block. Aitken and longtime Radiohead set designer Andi Watson are composing a light show, "almost a choreography," he says, to illuminate the piece. "The lights will move in a slow, drone-like way, creating these fragments of reflection and light bursts."

It's an activation of a dormant architectural gem, completed in 1900 by McKim, Mead & White, the New York architecture firm behind other Beaux Arts classics like Penn Station and the Brooklyn Museum. Since the Detroit's College for Creative Studies invited Aitken to create an installation, the artist has been adamant about not succumbing to the "preconceived notions" so often applied to the city—the so-called "ruin-porn" that fetishizes crumbling walls tagged with graffiti. What the State Savings Bank offered, in contrast, was a crystallized moment of grandeur in Detroit history, a vault, according to Aitken, both literally and figuratively.

As a whole, the installation is a collage of textures that reflect different recurring themes in Aitken's body of work, from the familiarity of Americana to the slickness of cinema and the roughness of Land Art. Beneath the house of mirrors, Aitken is lining the white marble floor with a bed of stones from a local riverbed. "There's a deep history I wanted to reveal with a geological presence," he says, "something site-specific and tactile as opposed to the sleek architectural space that it once was."

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Doug Aitken, *Mirage Detroit*, 2018.

Photo: Courtesy of the Artist; Image by Doug Aitken Workshop

With the decline of industry in Detroit, the State Savings Bank went through many lives. Born during the Gilded Age, it had stints as an office supply store, a computer training center, and the site of a Super Bowl XL party. In 2013, it was saved from demolition by the Detroit Historic District Commission, and in 2014, it was purchased by the local Bedrock Real Estate with no specific plans in mind for its use.

“It’s boomed,” Aitken says of the bank. “It’s been bankrupt, it’s been dormant, it’s been crowded.” Meditating on the historic resonance of the building, the narrative inherent to its walls, and its embodiment of the mythic perseverance of culture in Detroit, Aitken’s aim is simply “to give the architecture a heartbeat,” he says. “A pulse.”