

## Hamish Fulton: Walking Artist



Hamish Fulton, GOOGLE CHAMPA TENZIN FLOWING ROUND WITH THE CROWD RIGHT SHOULDER WAY OF THE SUN WALKING SEVEN CIRCUITS OF THE BARKHOR KORA ROUND JOKHANG TEMPLE AT NIGHT BY THE LIGHT OF THE SEPTEMBER FULL MOON LHASA TIBET 2007, Vinyl and paint, 102 x 171 in

Hamish Fulton

Josée Bienvenu Gallery

September 8 – October 12

By **ROBERT C. MORGAN**, SEPT. 2016

The artist Hamish Fulton has been committed to walking as an art form for nearly five decades. Having studied at St. Martin's School of Art and the Royal College of Art in London, Fulton set out to walk in wilderness regions throughout the UK and elsewhere in the world.

Much of his work has been done in the Far East and in the towering mountains of Nepal. His photographic and typographic works are included in numerous museum collections

throughout the world. At the age of 70, he continues his work in the out-of-doors the way other artists function in their studios as painters and sculptors. Occasionally Fulton will organize a “communal walk” in conjunction with an exhibition as he did on September 9, the day following his opening at the Josée Bienvenu Gallery in West Chelsea. In such walks, the point is to focus on aspects of nature that are normally unseen in an urban environment.

When he began to work in the 1970s, Fulton decided that he would take a single photograph during each of his walks as a point in time or representation of a duration, even if the walk lasted for several days. This later changed as Fulton no longer limits himself to a single photograph, but instead emphasizes writing in a small notebook inscribing statements or words that reflect his thoughts, perceptions, and experiences. Later these words work themselves into a walk piece in which the purpose or feeling of the walk takes on a greater significance, alluding to the notion that nature today exists within the realm of the social, political, and economic aspects of our everyday life. At the same time, Fulton wants to emphasize his closeness to nature, in contrast to alienation, and to point the way to a multicultural experience. This becomes essential to his experience as he climbs in the Himalayas with Sherpa people from the region. The Sherpa are fully aware of unexpected dangers related to the depletion of oxygen or the loose formation of a rocks on a sharp incline.

The current exhibition typically presents photographs taken on various walks or alternatively represents a typographic montage of words that coincide with his experience during a walk. For example in the black and white photograph, ROCA I (2006), a caption accompanying the photograph reads BOULDER. The description follows in block letters: A FIFTEEN DAY WALKING JOURNEY ON PAVEMENT ROADS AND TRACKS FROM AND TO CABO MAYOR AT SANTANDER BY THE ATLANTIC COAST VIS RIBADESELLA JOU DE LES BOCHES PICOS DE EUROPA POTES

LIEBANA SIERRA DE PENA LABRA AND FONTIBRE DURING THE SEVENTH DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH SPAIN 2006.

Similar to a Robert Ryman painting where all the materials used in the painting are listed in reference to the title, Fulton explicitly describes the conditions of his 15-day walk using the original Spanish to designate the various locations. In another photographic document, MELTING ICE. NO TRAILS (1999), he follows the same procedure.



Hamish Fulton, CHINESE ECONOMY TIBETAN JUSTICE TIBETAN FREEDOM SILENCE A GUIDED AND SHERPA ASSISTED CLIMB OF MOUNT EVEREST USING BOTTLED OXYGEN ARRIVING AT THE 8850 METRE SUMMIT ALONG THE NEPAL TIBET BORDER ON THE MORNING OF 19 MAY 2009 49th DAY OF EXPEDITION VIA NEPAL, Vinyl and paint, 102 x 105.5 in

While I would understand this approach as “conceptual.” the artist prefers to call what he does “Land Art.” In Europe one difference between “Earth Art” and “Land Art” is that the former is generally understood as the work of artists, whereas the latter is more connected with architecture and design. Fulton’s use of the term suggests that he shows no trace of an intervention in relation to what he does other than becoming engaged with the landscape during the process and time he is there.

Some of the more recent work by Fulton, also shown in the current exhibition in New York, involves typographical works placed directly on the wall with vinyl and paint. Probably two best examples of this would be his walks in Tibet that include GOOGLE CHAMPA TENZIN (2007) and CHINESE ECONOMY TIBETAN JUSTICE TIBETAN FREEDOM SILENCE (2009). The second (more recent) work is based on “a guided and Sherpa assisted climb of Mount Everest using bottled oxygen arriving at the 8850 metre summit along the Nepal Tibet border on the morning of 19 May 2009 [the 49th day of the expedition].”

The text is composed of notes made by the artist and later given their sequential context. There is nothing dogmatic or intentionally political in these works other than the raw thinking that occurs in the process of walking, or in this case, climbing to the peak of Everest “with bottled oxygen.” This suggests that the walk is not merely a hike in the wilderness, but the containment of excruciating psychological and physical endurance. Such effort brings the political reality of Tibet to the forefront of thinking as a reality inextricably bound to the artist’s experience within the conditions of nature that he is perennially in the process of confronting. **WM**

*Link:* <http://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/hamish-fulton-walking-artist/3522>