

## Crowds & Riots

This series comprises four large-scale photographs depicting significant gatherings of people, each pertaining to specific transitional moments from Vancouver's history. The photographs were created in the same manner as motion pictures, using either purpose-built sets or real locations and casting, dressing, and preparing actors for each historical period. Separate images were composited together to form each image. Digital photography was employed for its immediacy in working on set, as well as its chromatic and geometric stability for image assemblage. In the case of *Abbott and Cordova, 7 August 1971*, for example, fifty different photographs are brought together to depict a complex, tableaux-like setting that is made up of nine separate scenes.

Chronologically, we can view the depictions in each photograph as follows: In *Powell Street Grounds, 18 January 1912*, we see police cordoning off a small crowd and singling out key individuals. The image relates to the city of Vancouver's efforts to outlaw public gatherings in response to increased activities associated with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), who were stirring up gatherings on matters of unemployment and the distribution of wealth. With the photograph *Ballantyne Pier, 18 June 1935*, Douglas has re-created a key moment in which police are engaging with protesting, unionized longshoremen. Using the backdrop of Vancouver's abandoned sugar refinery, we witness a small group being divided and arrested, just one scenario of many where over a thousand had been involved in agitations against their dismissals and replacements by scab workers. The photograph *Hastings Park, 16 July 1955* illustrates about forty people who are ostensibly cropped from a larger crowd of leisurely observers at the race track, all condensed together into a group of unwitting consumers. And *Abbott and Cordova, 7 August 1971*, which exists as a public installation today in the very location it references, depicts one corner of the Downtown Eastside riot, negligently provoked by the police themselves in response to a mild gathering of youth and hippies in a "smoke-in" organized by the then-alternative newspaper *The Georgia Straight*.

While three of these four images depict clashes between police and crowds, all of them illustrate the formation of individuals into groupings by internal and/or external forces. Further, in composing and establishing the scenarios, actions, and details of each image, Douglas has applied his study of photographs from different periods, as well as, where available, film footage, newspaper clippings, police reports, affidavits, interviews with observers and participants, and other archive materials.

When speaking about this series, Douglas references the paradigmatic images produced by journalistic documentation of the Battle of Cable Street in London in 1936. Careful comparison between the *Crowds & Riots* series and these photographs reveals many powerful influences in the manner of individuals and bodies as they are compressed into groups, whether wishing to or not. It is thus clear that with all four photographs, Douglas has been highly alert to the appearances and behavior of crowds: the manner of their organizing, construction, and positioning has been mimicked in great detail, from the positioning of heads, hats, and hands on shoulders in *Powell Street Grounds* to the nuanced relations between bodies on the stands depicted in *Hastings Park*.

In all, the photographs are constructions of historical memory—through a rigorous and complex process—into an image that, as the artist states, “consolidates hearsay,” as well as facts and key research, into pictures that activate topical reflection and discussion, not only upon the conditions of these historical moments, but also upon the conditions of sociopolitical gatherings and groupings in our own time, influenced by today’s inner and outer forces.