

Exhibition Guide

2 July – 31 August 2014

***As Exciting As We Can Make It* *Ikon in the 1980s* First and Second Floor Galleries**

As Exciting As We Can Make It is a survey of Ikon's programme during the 1980s. A comprehensive selection of painting, sculpture, video, installation and photography, it is a look at recent British art history through the lens of a major regional gallery.

Ikon's directors during the 1980s – the 'Thatcher Years' – were Hugh Stoddart (1978–1981) and Antonia Payne (1981–1989). Despite difficult circumstances, especially cuts in public funding, they were remarkably ambitious and managed to transform the gallery into an institution that was becoming more global in its outlook, whilst being engaged with local communities.

The 1980s was a defining decade and in art this was manifested through the emergence of postmodernism, a decisive break with conventional notions of cultural progress and a wilful 'pick and mix' approach to art history, non-western art and popular culture. It was epitomised by the early work of John Stezaker, shown at Ikon, a series of smart collages that combined found soft-core pornography with romantic photo-stories. Later, we see a similar kind of appropriationism in the work of Art & Language and Rasheed Araeen.

At the same time, internationally, there was an enthusiastic re-embrace of Dada

– signified especially by the use of the 'readymade' – and the challenge to notions of self-contained works of art through an increasing popularity of installation art. Artists who made installations at Ikon included Bernard Bazile, Max Eastley, Ron Haselden, Susan Hiller, Dennis Oppenheim, Cornelia Parker and Richard Wilson. In this exhibition, there are drawings that relate to much larger works by Haselden, Hiller and Wilson, and a small suspended piece that is like a detail from Cornelia Parker's installation, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, commissioned by Ikon in 1988. On the other hand we have Oppenheim's *Vibrating Forest* (1982) in its entirety, complete with unfired fireworks and a functioning candyfloss machine, and *Monsoon* (1986/2014), by Charles Garrad, an extraordinarily evocative piece inspired by the artist's travel in South East Asia. A recording of a Max Eastley sound piece, *Installation No. 3* (1979), meanwhile plays in the wooden stairwell.

Video art was often shown at Ikon during the 1980s. Tamara Krikorian, Ian Breakwell and Kevin Atherton were prominent British exponents and seminal works by them can be seen here, often problematising the medium through overt reference to television viewing.

Video and installation co-existed with an assertive return to the traditional art form of painting, especially in the style of neo-expressionism. Figurative and painterly, it is most clearly exemplified here in the work of Terry Shave. Other painters favoured by Ikon were more inclined to abstraction and included Gillian Ayres, Albert Irvin, Mali Morris, Hugh O'Donnell and Sean Scully.

Ikon's place in the cultural life of Birmingham and the wider region was clearly demonstrated not only through the inclusion of artists such as Art & Language, Terry Atkinson and John Newling, but also

through an acknowledgement of cultural diversity, and a concerted effort to properly represent black artists and others of ethnic minorities. Ikon was one of the first British galleries to show the work of photographer Vanley Burke, who arrived from Jamaica in the 1960s, as well as those from The BLK Art Group, based in nearby Wolverhampton, including Keith Piper, Donald Rodney, Marlene Smith and Eddie Chambers.

This decade also saw a sharp increase in the number of women artists showing at Ikon. *Sculpture by Women* (1983) was a group exhibition, including Cornelia Parker, emphatically making the point that there was "a new confidence on the part of women to make sculpture ... [and] that this has brought about a range of new attitudes towards the process of making." On an earlier occasion Shelagh Cluett's elegant bronze pieces were shown at the gallery. These women artists and others shown here, including Sue Arrowsmith, Gillian Ayres, Mali Morris, Susan Hiller and Tamara Krikorian, were thus signalling another major cultural shift that occurred in the 1980s.

Cornelia Parker

Ikon Ikon: 1980s

Tower Room, Second Floor

In 1988 Ikon commissioned artist Cornelia Parker to make *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, an installation of hundreds of silver-plated objects flattened by a steamroller and then suspended in a formal arrangement 30cm above the gallery floor. As part of our *Ikon 50* programme, we present *Thirty Pieces of Silver (exhaled)*, a more recent version of Parker's original. She has observed that "Silver is commemorative, the objects are landmarks in people's lives", and so this piece provides us with food for thought as we celebrate Ikon's 50th anniversary.

The Tower Room is only accessible via a number of steps.

Marko Mäetamm

Love

Offsite exhibition

Fletchers Walk, Birmingham B3 3HJ

A short video by acclaimed Estonian artist Marko Mäetamm is inspired by his family life. Set in the kitchen of his apartment, we see him expressing his undying love to his wife while she busily attempts to prepare a meal. With occasional appearances of their children, the wife becomes increasingly hampered by her husband's comically animated romantic advances.

Fletchers Walk is a 5 minute walk from Ikon, towards New Street station.

As Exciting As We Can Make It: Ikon in the 1980s is supported by the John Feeney Charitable Trust and the Owen Family Trust.

Visit the Resource Room where you can find a selection of books, audio and film.

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