

Sheela Gowda 16 June - 3 September 2017



Sheela Gowda, *It Stands Fallen* (2015), Installation GallerySKE, Bangalore, Fabric, Metal, Cotton rope, Image Courtesy: The Artist

Ikon presents an exhibition of new works by Indian artist Sheela Gowda, running from 16 June until 3 September 2017.

Born in Bhadravati, India in 1957, Gowda studied Painting at the Royal College of Art during the 1980s under the eminent British figurative artist Peter de Francia. Her practice subsequently developed to include installations in more abstracted configurations. As a response to the political situation in the early 90's, Gowda's work became more material based, whilst eschewing didacticism. In a recent interview the artist explains:

"I don't believe that you can be a good artist by having a list of things that you want to say. I think this is a recipe to make bad art. Not because there is something wrong in being specific. Art is not about giving opinions in black and white terms. It is nuanced through a visual language that is also determined by the material and medium".

Although Gowda's installations are expansive in the exhibition space, she avoids the term 'site specific', explaining instead that the works "anticipate, counter or are inspired by the space to begin with; the elements could take on other variants in other spaces". The result is a dialogue between what the artist finds in the gallery, and ideas and observations informed by her experience of living in Bangalore. A very large city in South India, Bangalore is keen to take its place in a globalised world, especially through its industrial embrace of information technology.

Drawn to the meditative aspect of making by hand and of process, the artist acknowledges local skills and craftsmanship by employing these methods herself; the pieces evoke a subtle symbolism through the poetic treatment of everyday materials. The idea of the 'handmade' is adopted in the use of materials such as incense and cow dung, though Gowda explores meanings that deviate from their traditional use. Mediated found images also form part of her repertoire of works, as well as recycled industrial materials, such as tar drums.

A new work in Ikon's exhibition sees the artist source sheets of flattened metal drums - often used to transport tree resin or oil - to recycle into 'Bandlis': metal bowls, used extensively in the Indian construction industry to carry concrete slurry, sand and other building materials. Each sheet is cut by hand into 8 circular parts that are then pressed in hand-operated machines into shallow bowls. The process itself yields forms that the artist foregrounds.

"The Bandli, however humble its connotations, belongs to the best of Indian design, and as a tool it says a lot about society. It could, for example, never be a European tool. In Europe the wheelbarrow, the counter tool to the Bandli - speaks about how to stress the limits of manpower, however dependent of the person pushing it. Bandli and wheelbarrow have two completely different concepts of efficiency. The wheelbarrow is more like a basic machine simulating a mule, while the Bandli seems to grow together with the worker lifting it on her head.

Obviously a Bandli has to remain small, it seems to be more at peace with possibilities and natural efficiency of any human anatomy, and it can be so because there is an abundance of anatomically normal people waiting to be employed. Its form already tells that human labour is available easily and that the concept of time here allows many small steps instead of a few big ones. The Bandli is the needle's eye through which the substance of even high-rise buildings of Bengaluru has passed."¹

The exhibition at Ikon will be accompanied by a publication, including an essay by writer and academic Anthony Downey.

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Emma Gilhooly or Milly Carter Hepplewhite at Pelham Communications on 020 8969 3959 or email emma@pelhamcommunications.com or milly@pelhamcommunications.com

1. Quote from artist Christoph Storz – in conversation with Sheela Gowda

Social Media Handles:

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Note to Editors:

1. Ikon exhibition opening: 16 June 2017
2. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. www.ikon-gallery.org
3. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. For the latest news and events follow @ikongallery on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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IKON

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0121 248 0708 / www.ikon-gallery.org
Open Tuesday-Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm / free entry
Registered charity no. 528892

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