

of a conviction the artist himself had called for in his *Ten Commandments* (1948) on the practice and theory of filmmaking, in which he proclaimed:

*You will refuse to direct a film if your convictions are not expressed.  
You will not show monotonous sequences without perfect justification.  
You will not substitute words for images in any way.*

These neatly articulate a ground-breaking aesthetic, irreverence and unique humour, as well as an innovative approach to film-making and a commitment to science which keep Painlevé's work relevant today.

### Find out more

Bellows, A., M. McDougall and B. Berg (2000) *Science is Fiction: The Films of Jean Painlevé*, the MIT Press and Brico Press

*Science is Fiction: The Films of Jean Painlevé* (2013) [DVD] BFI

Search 'Archives Jean Painlevé' on YouTube

### Oliver Beer

Through film and sculpture, with a strong emphasis on sound, British artist Oliver Beer's practice exemplifies a pre-occupation with both the physical properties and emotional value of objects. Since graduating from the Ruskin School of Art in 2009, Beer has exhibited at the Centre Pompidou and Palais de Tokyo, Paris, at the Biennale de Lyon and Villa Arson, Nice; and in the United States, at MoMA PS1 and the Watermill Center, New York. He was awarded the Daiwa Art Prize in 2015, resulting in two solo shows in Tokyo. His performance *Call to Sound*, a site-specific composition for Kilic Ali Pasa Hamam – a historic Turkish bathhouse – was acclaimed as a highlight of the Istanbul Biennial in 2015.

It is fitting that Ikon presents the most comprehensive exhibition to date of work by Oliver Beer. The artist's first presentation in a public gallery in the UK, *Training*, was shown at Ikon in 2010. In 2011 Ikon commissioned *Pay and Display*, where Beer worked with singers from Ex Cathedra to create a live sound performance and film at Pershore Street Car Park in Birmingham. This commission is part of the artist's ongoing *Resonance Project*, in which Beer uses the human voice to trigger buildings to resound as giant architectural instruments. Tapping into the sonic frequencies of the car park, Beer composed a six-part score for the singers to harmonise with the architectural structure. *Outside-In* (2012) is one of Ikon's permanent works, installed in a window of Ikon's reception space, looking out onto Oozells Square. The delicate form in crystal is fitted into a window pane like an ear trumpet, inviting visitors to listen to the narrow currents of air, space and sound that come and go between interior space and the world outside.

A number of Beer's works involve using a selection of vessels to create peculiar musical instruments within his installations. The empty space within each vessel has its own musical note at which it resonates. Beer has developed his own technique for revealing these frequencies using microphones and a feedback loop system, creating harmonies

from the natural frequencies of the empty spaces within the objects. This idea is explored in *Making Tristan* (2016), consisting of pots, vases and other readymade vessels including his grandmother's chamber pot and a ceramic butcher's pig sing out of their emptiness to achieve the "Tristan Chord". This ground breaking chord from Richard Wagner's opera, *Tristan and Isolde*, is a famously unstable sound that changed the course of western music.

In the same gallery as *Making Tristan* are the three glass spheres of *Silence is Golden* (2013), each containing an actual-size gold replica of one of the ossicles of the middle ear; the hammer, the stirrup and the anvil. These little bones are seductively visual – gold attracts our attention like no other material – whilst being embedded in cold, crystal silence.

At the heart of this exhibition is *Reanimation (I Wan'na Be Like You)*, (2017) – a 're-animation' of a scene from Walt Disney's *Jungle Book*. 2,500 Birmingham children, from early years until the age of 13, were each asked to trace and reinterpret a single film still. Played in order of the children's ages, the resulting animation becomes increasingly 'grown up'; frame by frame the scribbles progressively give way to the increasingly lucid drawings of children and then adolescents. This work points to the passage of time – through a time-based medium – drawing us to consider what it is to be human.

Set in the gallery walls throughout the exhibition are Beer's 'dissected objects', halved long-ways, lying flush with the plaster, objects that have become drawings of themselves. A lightbulb, a camera, a long stemmed smoking pipe – each lacks a third dimension, and so is empty, with any pictorial space that they might have occupied being absolutely compressed.

This 3D/2D translation is poignant in respect to *Oma's Kitchen Floor* (2008), Beer's work resulting from accumulated traces of human movement on a wall-mounted linoleum surface. As the artist explains:

*Oma was the name I called my grandmother. She put the lino down in the 1960s and over four decades her feet gradually wore through the decorative pattern. Over the years marks appeared in front of the oven, the sink, the front door, where she turned around in front of the fridge, where she sat at her table shuffling her feet. Like a drawing made over forty years, these worn patches describe half a lifetime of movement.*

In this vein, the lengths of old train rail (from Lyon's SNCF station) in Beer's *Highway* (2014) are metaphorically transporting. Polished to reveal the traces of countless journeys – the movement of steel wheels on steel that have taken the weight of passengers on their way – they reveal individual existences, each with their own stories, origins and destinations. This readymade, ready-used sculpture stands as a memorial to lives that have sped by – an acute angle, pointing downwards to the absence that is the ultimate destination for each and every one of us. Not parallel, they take us quickly to a vanishing point.

### Find out more

Cage, J. (2009) *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Marion Boyars Publishers

Cox, T. (2014) *The Sound Book*, W. W. Norton

## Associated Events

**Talk: Jewellery and Modernism**  
**Birmingham School of Jewellery**  
**82–86 Vittoria St, Birmingham B1 3PA**  
**Tuesday 4 April, 5–6.30pm – FREE**  
**Booking essential**

Join writer and lecturer Simon Bliss of the University of Brighton for a discussion about the visual representation of jewellery from the late 1920s to the 1940s. Bliss examines the way jewellery was mediated through film and photography in the inter-war period in relation to the Modernist and Surrealist contemporaries of Jean Painlevé.

**Artist Talk: Oliver Beer in Conversation with Jonathan Watkins**  
**Thursday 18 May, 6–7.30pm – FREE**  
**Booking essential**

Join Oliver Beer in conversation with Ikon Director Jonathan Watkins as they discuss key themes and ideas behind his work. The galleries will be open between 5–6pm for visitors to enjoy the exhibition before the talk.

**Adult Practical Workshop:**  
**Fish-rubbing and Octopus Prints**  
**Friday 19 May, 6–8pm**  
**£15 per person, payable in advance**  
**Booking essential, limited capacity**  
**All materials provided**

Join artists Eleanor Morgan and Sam Curtis and make fish rubbing prints using the Japanese printing technique of Gyotaku. Learn the history, skills and materials of fish rubbing, the method of preparing an octopus and have the opportunity to create your own fish prints to take home.

## Exhibition Supporters




Oliver Beer's exhibition is supported by the Henry Moore Foundation, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac and the Ikon Investment Fund.

### Find out more

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

If you have any questions about the exhibition please ask the Information Assistants in the gallery.

### Stay in touch

Subscribe to our e-bulletin at [www.ikon-gallery.org](http://www.ikon-gallery.org) and find us on    [ikongallery](https://www.instagram.com/ikongallery)

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Open Tuesday – Sunday  
and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am–5pm  
Free entry, donations welcome

# IKON

## Exhibition Guide

**15 March – 4 June 2017**

### Jean Painlevé

This is the first solo exhibition of work by the French filmmaker Jean Painlevé (1902–1989). This exhibition presents a number of the artist's seminal films exploring marine life, alongside a selection of photographs and jewellery, demonstrating his passion for making science accessible. Painlevé's exploration of marine life, punctuated by music, narration and imagery commanded the respect of many renowned artists working in 1920s Paris, including the Surrealist artist Man Ray, Alexander Calder and Sergei Eisenstein. His career spanned the twentieth century although his influence is still felt in contemporary art practice.

His intense enthusiasm for his subject matter led him to invent all kinds of equipment for filming. In order to shoot scenes underwater, he encased his camera in a custom designed waterproof box, fitted with a glass plate. In his 1935 essay, *Feet in the Water*, he described how he went about getting the footage he required:

*Wading around in water up to your ankles or navel, day and night, in all kinds of weather, even in areas where one is sure to find nothing, digging about everywhere for algae or octopus, getting hypnotised by a sinister pond where everything seems to promise marvels although nothing lives there. This is the ecstasy of any addict.*

Painlevé's pioneering science films often focus on a single organism, capturing crucial moments in their life cycles. He uses the medium of film-making to condense and expand the duration of the activities in order to demystify processes of the natural world.

In *L'Hippocampe (The Seahorse)* (1934) the artist draws attention to the way in which male and female seahorses share childbirth. The abdomen of the male has a pouch into which the female lays her eggs and once the eggs are fertilised, it is the male who nourishes them and, in time, gives birth in a way reminiscent of human labour. As Painlevé explained:

*The seahorse was for me a splendid way of promoting the kindness and virtue of the father, while at the same time underlining the necessity of the mother. In other words, I wanted to re-establish the balance between male and female.*

Following the success of *L'Hippocampe (The Seahorse)* Painlevé launched a range of film merchandise jewellery. Bracelets, necklaces, dress clips and earrings were designed by his partner Geneviève Hamon and sold in chic boutiques and the department store Printemps in Paris, displayed here with Hamon designed wallpaper.

Painlevé often took a cross-disciplinary approach to film-making. He worked with visual artists and commissioned composers, including electronic music pioneers Pierre Henry and Francois de Roubaix, to use sound and image in imaginative ways, but without compromising the scientific dimension of his work. In *Acera or The Witches' Dance* (1978) Painlevé commissioned composer Pierre Jansen, who only needed to see the film once before developing his score. The soundtrack perfectly suits the behaviour of the hermaphrodite mollusc. Although the creatures are blind and devoid of any cognitive capacity, their poetic dance reveals their mating rituals, where they float towards their would-be partners.

Many of his subjects – such as his focus on sea urchins and molluscs – would normally have been considered unworthy of attention, but it was their weirdness, the surreal moments of their familiar yet strange actions that seemed to appeal to the artist. Not soft and cute or Disney-like, but uneasy and wonderful in equal parts – his films embodied a challenge to conventional bourgeois values – with a courage born out



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