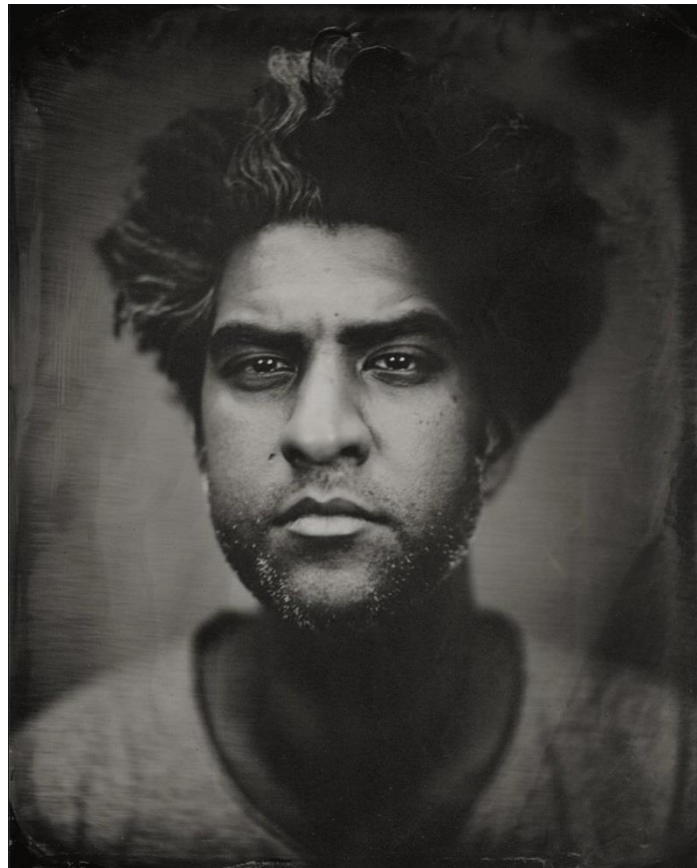


IKON

Ikon Gallery, 1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / www.ikon-gallery.org
Open Tuesday-Sunday, 11am-5pm / free entry

Black Country Voyages *The Auspicious Journey* Summer 2016

- Converted canal boat tours the Black Country with a project that engages young people with local arts, heritage and cultural organisations
- Mahtab Hussain, lead artist for 2016, presents *The Auspicious Journey* – a body of work about the mass displacement of people in Kashmir, Pakistan in the 1960s, due to the construction of the Mangla Dam. This led to the establishment of new communities in the Black Country.
- Call out for stories from people affected by the Mangla Dam construction
- Summer events include Sandwell and Birmingham Mela, Smethwick; a week-long series of free clay workshops in Small Heath; Birmingham Mela, Cannon Hill Park; and an Instameet, Brindleyplace.



Portrait of Mahtab Hussain (2016) by Keliy Anderson-Staley. Tintype photography process.

Ikon's *Black Country Voyages* (2014–2017) is an art programme for local people, involving members of the Ikon Youth Programme (IYP). It takes place on board a canal boat, lent by Sandwell Council.

For 2016, Mahtab Hussain is the lead artist for *Black Country Voyages*, converting the boat into *The Auspicious Journey*, a story of mass displacement of people in Kashmir, Pakistan in the 1960s due to the construction of the Mangla Dam. This led to the establishment of new communities in the Black Country.

The construction of the Mangla Dam, across the Jhelum River, between 1961 and 1967, resulted in over 280 villages and towns of Mirpur and Dadyal being submerged and over 110,000 people being displaced. Some of those affected were given work permits for Britain by the Government of Pakistan, with many making their way to find work in the Midlands or the North West. The canal system was the bloodline of industry for the Black Country and it was here many migrants came to find work.

Working with clay and traditional photography, Hussain will make work about people affected by the dam construction. He places emphasis on water as the common denominator – the community was displaced by water, transported by water from Pakistan, and employed to work with water.

Mahtab Hussain would like to speak to people who have moved to the Black Country as a result of the Mangla Dam construction or whose family was affected in some way. He is keen to record and share their stories, and to take photographic portraits which will become part of his work with *Black Country Voyages*. If you or anyone you know has a story to share please contact Claire Bird, Learning Co-ordinator, Young People's Programme, on 0121 248 0708 or email c.bird@ikon-gallery.org

During the summer Hussain hosts creative workshops for visitors to interact with *Black Country Voyages*. The events include the Sandwell and Birmingham Mela, Smethwick (Saturday 16 & Sunday 17 July); a week-long series of free clay workshops in Small Heath (Saturday 23 – Friday 29 July); Birmingham Mela, Cannon Hill Park (Sunday 31 July); and an Instameet, Brindleyplace (Saturday 6 August). In addition *Black Country Voyages* attends a number of canal festivals and events over the summer.

During 2014-2017 *Black Country Voyages* navigates canal routes connecting Oldbury, Smethwick, Stourbridge, Walsall, Tipton, Dudley, Wolverhampton and Wednesbury. The programme includes events and exhibitions at multiple locations along the way inspired by the heritage and natural environment of the Black Country, organised in collaboration with local arts, heritage and educational organisations.

Black Country Voyages is supported by Arts Council Strategic Touring, Canal & River Trust and Sandwell Council.

For more information visit www.blackcountryvoyages.org or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.
Facebook: [blackcountryvoyages](https://www.facebook.com/blackcountryvoyages) Twitter: [@bcvoyages](https://twitter.com/bcvoyages) [#blackcountryvoyages](https://twitter.com/blackcountryvoyages)

Notes to Editors:

1. British social commentary artist, **Mahtab Hussain** (b. 1981), uses photography to explore the important relationship between identity, heritage and displacement. His themes have developed through long-term photographic research and been articulated into a visual language that challenges the prevailing concepts of multiculturalism.

While seeing his practice as an exchange between the artist and sitter, Hussain believes in placing considerable emphasis on the empowerment of the sitter, and in doing so, creates portraits that force a vital interaction between sitter and viewer. www.mahtabhussain.com

2. The Nottingham based gallery, **New Art Exchange**, commissioned Mahtab Hussain in 2014 to create a body of work in the surrounding locality, Hyson Green. Hussain went on to create *The Commonality of Strangers* a powerful series of portraits with text, which explored the important relationship between identity, heritage and displacement resulting from migration. It uncovered truths rarely seen or heard in the public realm.

The exhibition was launched in Favara, Sicily, at Farm Cultural Park, (FCP) on 24th June, the day Britain woke to the realisation it had voted to leave the EU. Poignantly, this will be the first time *The Commonality of Strangers* is exhibited in Europe. This is a historic moment as New Art Exchange defies Brexit twinning with Farm Cultural Park in Sicily, Favara for an exhibition which tells the personal accounts of people from across the world. www.nae.org.uk

3. Full event details for Black Country Voyages, summer 2016:

Sandwell and Birmingham Mela

Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 July – FREE

Victoria Park, High Street, Smethwick B66 3NT

Join Ikon and Mahtab Hussain at the Sandwell and Birmingham Mela, Europe's biggest Asian music festival. Enjoy dance, food, music and traditional arts and craft.

www.birminghammela.com

Black Country Voyages, The Auspicious Journey

Saturday 23 – Friday 29 July, 11am–4pm – FREE

Wavereley Canal Basin, Small Heath, Birmingham B10 0DQ

Access to canal towpath from Anderton Road

Black Country Voyages visits Small Heath for a week of free clay workshops to launch artist Mahtab Hussain's project *The Auspicious Journey*. These events are family-friendly and open to all ages. No need to book, just drop in.

Birmingham Mela

Sunday 31 July – FREE

Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham B13 8RD

Mahtab Hussain and Ikon Youth Programme host a stall at Birmingham Mela which celebrates the diversity of the South Asian community through its culture, food, sport, art and entertainment.

Instameet – *Black Country Voyages*

Saturday 6 August, 11am–2pm – FREE

Brewmaster Bridge, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2JB

Booking essential, limited capacity

Ikon holds an Instameet with IGersBirmingham onboard our canal boat *Black Country Voyages*. Come and document our new project for 2016 and explore the Worcester and Birmingham Canal during a short boat trip.

Black Country Voyages, The Auspicious Journey

Wednesday 17 – Sunday 21 August 2016, 11am–4pm – FREE

Neptune Health Park, Sedgley Road, Tipton, DY4 8PX

Access to the tow path on Owen Street

Please check the website nearer the time for exact location

Black Country Voyages visits Tipton for five days of clay workshops with artist Mahtab Hussain for his project *The Auspicious Journey*. These events are family-friendly and open to all ages. No need to book, just drop in.

4. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed art gallery situated in central Birmingham. Housed in a magnificent neo-gothic school building, it 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. 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.

5. Ikon Youth Programme (IYP) is a group of young people, aged 16–21 years old, who share an interest in visual art. Meeting regularly at Ikon, participants are encouraged to devise creative projects, establish links with other youth groups and share their opinions about a range of topics. www.ikon-gallery.org/iyp

6. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free.

7. For the latest news and events follow @ikongallery on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

8. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.

9. For more information, high-res images and to request an interview with the artist please contact Rebecca Small or Emily Luxford at Ikon on 0121 248 0708 or email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or e.luxford@ikon-gallery.org

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Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon. Registered charity no. 528892

Continued overleaf



Map of Mangla Dam, located on the Jhelum River in the Mirpur District of Azad Kashmir, Pakistan.



Black Country Voyages