IKON

Exhibition Guide

On Kawara *Eternal Return*
26 July – 17 September 2006
First Floor Galleries

Born in Japan, near Nagoya, On Kawara has lived in New York for many years. He is resistant to publicity; never attends the openings of his exhibitions, dislikes being photographed and will not give interviews to the media. Instead he distils his everyday life into a number of ongoing artworks that record the simple fact of his own existence. This is fascinating in a contemporary art world that often promotes artists as celebrities.

This exhibition features a selection from Kawara's *Today Series*, consisting of Date Paintings, a long-term project begun in 1966 and still continuing. A Date Painting is essentially a painting of the date on which it was made. The artist uses a combination of text and numerals to represent the date. The language of the text refers to the geographic location where it was painted, with the exception of places such as Japan, where the Roman alphabet is not used (here the artist resorts to Esperanto). If the piece is not finished by midnight that day, it is destroyed. Each painting in this exhibition was made on a Sunday, one from each year since the beginning of the *Today Series*, ironically conveying the idea of Kawara as a 'Sunday Painter', someone who paints as a hobby.

The craftsmanship involved in the production of a Date Painting is extraordinary. Kawara begins by carefully applying four coats of acrylic paint onto a rectangular, pre-stretched canvas. Each layer of paint is allowed to dry and is rubbed down in preparation for the subsequent coats. The outlines of the text are meticulously drawn and then filled in with white paint, using tapered brushes, a ruler, set square, blade and brush for dusting. A considerable amount of time is spent eliminating imperfections, making tiny adjustments to the outlines and fine-tuning the overall composition.

Each Date Painting is registered in a journal with details of its size, colour and date, and finally stored in a cardboard box specially made to size. On the lid of the box

is a label with the corresponding date and often it contains a newspaper cutting from the same day as the Date Painting. Examples of the boxes can be seen in the Resource Room on the second floor.

The artist has painted over 2,000 Date Paintings and calculates that he has spent approximately seven years exclusively in the process of making them, regarding it as a form of meditation. Almost immediately, they become the painted traces of days in the past and accumulate a kind of archive that speaks subtly of human mortality.

This selection of Date Paintings was first made for *Consciousness. Meditation. Watcher on the Hills*, the solo exhibition of a wider range of work by Kawara presented at Ikon in 2002. It then toured around the world in a clock-wise direction – through France, Switzerland, Germany, Thailand, Singapore, Korea, New Zealand, Mexico, Canada and Peru – thus reinforcing the idea of the artist's preoccupation with the passage of time – until spring 2006. Each subsequent year on the tour was marked by the addition of another Sunday Date Painting. The original selection of thirty-eight paintings is now installed here in exactly the way it was four years ago, with the exception of the extra four, those dating from 2003–06.

An illustrated publication, with text by Jonathan Watkins, accompanies the exhibition and is available from Ikon Shop for £2. The catalogue for Kawara's previous exhibition can also be purchased from Ikon Shop for £20.