

Stuart Whipps

Why Contribute to the Spread of Ugliness?

30 November 2011 – 5 February 2012

Ikon presents an exhibition of new works by British artist Stuart Whipps (b.1979), a selection of photography and video exemplifying the changing nature of cultural value.

The major work here, *Why contribute to the spread of ugliness?* (2011), centres on the 487 boxes of archived paperwork of architectural firm the John Madin Design Group, stored in Birmingham Central Library. A multi-screen slide projection combines three strands of subject matter: the archival boxes, their contents (printed materials relating to Madin's projects and the construction industry between the 1950s and 1970s) and the buildings to which they refer.

The architect John Madin (b. Moseley, Birmingham, c.1925) active in Birmingham for over 30 years, designed many buildings that defined Birmingham as a modernist city, since pulled down or under threat of demolition. Organisations such as the 20th Century Society have campaigned without success to have some of his buildings listed for their historical importance. Birmingham Central Library, the largest civic library in Europe and considered by some to be the defining monument to post-war brutalist architecture in Britain, is due to be demolished in 2013. Besides this building, Whipps focuses on archive material relating to Madin's former *Birmingham Post and Mail* printworks and the Queen's Square shopping centre in West Bromwich, amongst many others.

In 1964, Madin made a tour of North American libraries whilst preparing his designs for the new Birmingham library. Whipps retraced his steps, visiting The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, New Haven; The Donnell Branch of The New York Public Library and The Detroit Public Library. New photographs of these buildings, their interiors and the collections form another vital part of the exhibition, making a visual reconnection between parallel and simultaneous histories.

In a similar vein, *England and the Octopus. Britain and the Beast.* (2011) reflects on the town of Blaenau Ffestiniog in North Wales, a former quarry town at the geographical centre of Snowdonia National Park. When the Park's borders were created in 1951 the grey slate waste tips that surround Blaenau Ffestiniog prevented its inclusion, a decision made in part by the eccentric architect of Portmeirion, Clough Williams-Ellis. This new two channel video installation contains new film footage of Blaenau Ffestiniog, with a Welsh-language script sourced from texts written or edited by Williams Ellis.



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Ikon Gallery is a registered charity no. 528892





This exhibition, supported by Birmingham Library and Archive Services, Arts Council England and Birmingham City University, is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with essay by Birmingham novelist Catherine O'Flynn.

Ends.

Note to Editors:

1. A selection of images is shown below.
2. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 6pm. Admission is free.
3. Ikon Gallery is a registered charity and receives core funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon. Registered address: 1 Oozells Square, Birmingham B1 2HS.
4. For more information, high-res images and to arrange an interview with the curator please contact Helen Stallard on 0774 033 9604 or email h.stallard@ikon-gallery.co.uk

Cont.

	<p><i>Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, 001</i> (2011)</p> <p>Stuart Whipps</p> <p>Medium Format Slide</p>
	<p><i>Detroit Public Library, 006</i> (2011)</p> <p>Stuart Whipps</p> <p>Medium Format Slide</p>
	<p><i>JHDM, 534</i> (2011)</p> <p>Stuart Whipps</p> <p>Medium Format Slide</p>
	<p><i>Detroit Public Library, 001</i> (2011)</p> <p>Stuart Whipps</p> <p>Medium Format Slide</p>