

IKON

Exhibition Guide

Olafur Eliasson with Boris Oicherman
Your Uncertainty of Colour Matching Experiment
26 July – 17 September 2006
Second Floor Galleries

Ikon presents the first exhibition in the UK by Olafur Eliasson since his acclaimed installation in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, *The Weather Project* in 2003. Born in Copenhagen in 1967, Eliasson studied in Denmark before moving to Germany, where he considers his studio in Berlin as a 'laboratory'. Here, working with a number of assistants, ideas are tested and various aspects of natural phenomena, such as light, water, wind, pressure and temperature, are examined and challenged. His large-scale installations, both in galleries and outdoor locations, create situations that require the viewer to reflect critically upon and re-interpret their understanding of the environment and their place within it.

Eliasson is also interested in how institutions such as galleries and museums tend to promote conventional ways of seeing through their interpretative activities. To counteract this, the mechanisms of his work are often openly revealed, with a strong emphasis on experimentation.

The focus for Eliasson's Ikon exhibition is the nature of the perception of colour, intended to raise questions about our awareness of the external influences that determine how and what we see. Displayed in the first gallery is the *Colour Spectrum Series* (2005), 48 framed photogravures* which span the complete range of colours visible to the human eye, from red, through to orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Displayed in sequence around the gallery walls, according to this spectrum, each hand-made print is inked by a master craftsman, who blends the colours 'by eye' to achieve the subtle effect. The graduation of tone in each print, rather than a solid block, conveys the variation in definition of a particular colour.

According to Eliasson, as different people experience colour differently, influenced by their feelings, opinions and surroundings, colour is very much a cultural construction. He states, "the experience of colour is a matter of cultivation. As much

as the senses and perception are linked with memory and recognition, our relation to colour is closely derived from our cultural habitat: the Inuit have one word for red, but thirty for various whites.”

Eliasson and Boris Oicherman have collaborated to transform the central galleries into a colour laboratory, commissioned by Ikon especially for this exhibition. Oicherman, a scientist at the University of Leeds, was impressed by the seriousness of Eliasson’s practice and proposed that the two work together on a project, in order to quantify relative perceptions of colour.

This installation is an intimate space, painted in a neutral grey tone to ensure there is no colour interference, and illuminated with dimmed artificial light. Visitors are invited to use advanced colour-matching equipment and participate in the experiment, measuring their own visual sensations. A telescope-like tube reveals a semi-circular shape, representing the ‘standard’ yellow or blue, which becomes a circle when the colour is matched through the manipulation of controls. The collected data is analysed daily by Oicherman and the results of each person’s ‘colour matching experiment’ are updated electronically, contributing to large-scale grids of light, projected onto the walls of the gallery.

The use of the possessive pronoun ‘your’ in the titles of many of Eliasson’s installations communicates his preference for engaging us directly, emphasising his interest in our position in relation to the artwork. He says, “the museum and exhibition scene too often makes the public passive, instead of stimulating them. I always try to turn the viewer into what’s on show, make him/her mobile and dynamic.” Eliasson and Oicherman encourage gallery visitors to interact with the scientific equipment they have installed in an experiment constantly evolving through the exhibition.

* A photomechanical process invented in 1879 for fine printing. An image is transferred to a copper plate which is chemically etched. For each print the plate is hand-inked.