

Exhibition Guide

Jacques Nimki *The Magic of the East*

27 July – 18 September

Tower Room and Eastside

Jacques Nimki's work is inspired by wild flowers. The artist spends much of his time outdoors in his search for various weeds – the 'outsiders of the plant world', which thrive in neglected places. When he finds a specimen, he records the details, noting where the weed was found, its official and unofficial names, appearance and any other information – whether absurd, factual, humorous or completely fictional. With the careful attention of a Victorian botanist, he picks a sample for pressing and, if possible, collects the seeds for propagating. He does this in his studio under artificial lighting, cultivating crops of extremely robust and healthy plants, safeguarding future generations of wild flowers.

Nimki is a meticulous observer, and as well as cataloguing his findings in a deliberately unscientific way, he records them through delicate drawings, creating an intricate, lace-like effect of fine lines. In this way, Nimki literally draws attention to the value and beauty of what is usually an unwanted and often ignored feature of our urban landscape. He calls these works *florilegiums*, meaning 'flower book', in reference to the seventeenth-century books that recorded collections of flowers and plants in particular gardens. At this time, new plant species were appearing in Europe as a consequence of the increase in travel through trade and colonisation. It became fashionable for wealthy aristocrats and royalty to grow unusual or exotic plants, their gardens becoming status symbols and public displays of power and influence. Nimki encourages us to re-evaluate our perception of 'weeds', by elevating them through their inclusion in his *florilegiums*.

The artist is interested in how weeds are used, both now and in the past; their ability to attract and encourage wildlife, their culinary and medicinal uses. In Birmingham he has focussed his attention on Eastside, the former industrial district at the edge of the city centre, which is currently being re-developed into a 'cultural quarter'. In an effort to preserve the vegetation in Eastside, he has conducted a survey of the area and has created a database of weeds, which will be available for gallery visitors to view in Ikon's Resource Room, in the second floor galleries.

Nimki is also enthralled by the folklore and superstition surrounding wild plants, highlighting their magical properties and therapeutic use. He draws attention to the way that contemporary society has overlooked this element of well-being and the potential to transform ourselves using weed recipes and potions. The artist has transformed Ikon's Tower Room into a magical space filled with wild flowers, decorating the walls with the *florilegiums* sourced from his Eastside mapping expedition. In this space he will conduct 'magic consultations', which can be pre-booked by gallery visitors. At other times, visitors are encouraged to make use of the magic ingredients provided in Ikon's Resource Room, to concoct their own spells. Nimki emphasises the educational and participatory potential of his work and is leading a series of 'weed tours' and events, open to the public, during August, both in Eastside and Brindleyplace (see below).

Jacques Nimki was born in 1959 in Mauritius. He lives and works in London.