

IKON

Exhibition Guide

Ignasi Aballí o-24 h
24 May – 16 July 2006
First Floor Galleries

Ikon presents the most comprehensive exhibition of work by Spanish artist Ignasi Aballí. Born in Barcelona in 1958, Aballí trained as a painter, originally making figurative work with conventional materials including paint, brushes and canvas. Increasingly dissatisfied by the restricted language of painting, during the early 1990s he started to make works that were 'conceptual' in nature. "Little by little", he explained in a recent interview, "I stopped trying to represent beauty and started to use conceptual elements in which the idea was more and more important and the fact of painting was less and less."

Two themes began to emerge in his work: the first being his interest in recording the passing of time, which he endeavoured to capture using unconventional methods, for example, the corrosive action of sunlight on a surface as it streamed through his studio windows, or gathering up the accumulation of dust, a mixture of everything which has been eroded, on his studio floor. Aballí also became fascinated by the traces people or objects left behind and this is evident in the work at the entrance to the first floor galleries, entitled *People* (2000-2005). Consisting of shoe scuff-marks on the curved wall, it suggests that a queue of waiting individuals once present, has now moved on. The scuffs are traces of actions that occur, usually thoughtlessly, as people wish for time to go by. As this work is about an absence of people, so *Books* (2000), is about an absence of books. What we see instead is a set of bookshelves, the shelves bowed by the weight of the books they once supported. While in *Library* (2002), we see a photograph of shelved books, obscured by translucent sheet of polythene. The spines of the books are therefore made illegible and more abstract, and an action that should be very straightforward – selecting a book from the shelves – becomes impossible.

Another type of abstraction occurs in *Lists* (1997–2005), where Aballí demonstrates his obsession with collecting and arranging information. He selects data – names, statistics, sums of money, percentages – from the daily papers, which he cuts out,

re-orders and groups, displaying the final 'lists' as collages on the gallery wall. By isolating these bits of information from their original contexts, Aballí encourages our identification with a bigger, more generalized idea: "An image in which numbers of the dead appear without any reference is an abstraction of death."

Much of Aballí's work reflects his pre-occupation with the limitations of painting, often in an ironic or slightly sceptical way. *Waste* (2001), comprises a number of opened cans of industrial white paint, informally arranged on the floor. Close inspection reveals that the cans are not full – but, on the other hand, the paint has not been used. In fact, it is slowly evaporating – exposed, but untouched. Paint is the raw material from which artworks are made but there is no evidence of a painting in the gallery. It is as if the painting is still yet to be created, although this paint will never be used to make a painting.

Big mistake (1998–2005), by contrast, involves the meticulous coverage of a black square, painted directly on the gallery wall, with thousands of Tipp-ex brush strokes. The black square – an abstract shape – is now barely visible, reduced to a geometrical ghost.

Aballí continues erasing, deleting or obliterating information in a number of other works: *Correction* (2001), involving a mirror covered in Tipp-ex, and another piece entitled *Waste* (2001), which consists of A4 sheets of paper covered with blocks of computer printing ink, applied until the cartridge runs dry. *One year* (2004) is a photograph of all the pages in a diary, screwed up – the dates made unreadable – collected together to represent an accumulation of time which has passed.

Nearby, there are two video pieces. *Disappearance* (2002) is a sequence of images that feature individuals with their faces obscured through a mixture of blindfolds, balaclavas, goggles and gasmasks, amongst others. *Revelations* (2005), on the other hand, records the process of printing snapshots in a photo lab. These images, made by anonymous individuals, spill out of the machine, depicting traces of places, people and past times. Although we, the viewer, were not present at these events, we can identify them as situations we may have experienced.