

Exhibition Guide

10 September – 9 November 2014

Lee Bul **First and Second Floor Galleries**

This is the first UK solo exhibition of works by Korean artist Lee Bul (born 1964) showcasing drawings, sculptural pieces and large scale installations. Originally studying sculpture at Hongik University, Lee Bul graduated in 1987, the same year that South Korea declared itself a democracy after almost 35 years of military dictatorship. Lee Bul says living under such tyranny “taught me to distrust any kind of totalising ideas and claims to absolutes – aesthetic or otherwise”.

Lee Bul’s work in the 1980s was predominantly performance-based, exploring gender, the body and human desire for perfection. The monstrous full-body soft sculptures she wore anticipate her later *Cyborg* sculptures which refer to biotechnology, robotics and classical ideals of beauty.

More recent work has explored architecture and the failure of utopian ideas, drawing on modernism and the experience of totalitarianism within her native country.

After Bruno Taut (Devotion to Drift) (2013) is a new commission, inspired by modernist architect Bruno Taut (1880–1938) and his glass architectural fantasies. The use of elaborate decorative elements, suspended materials such as metal chains, glass and acrylic beads are, in Lee Bul’s

words, “meant to interject an element of social reality into the work”, alluding to the impoverished South Korean female workers who earned their living making beaded necklaces up until the 1980s. They symbolise the kind of social and gender inequality that persisted through the imposition of modernism, often overlooked by utopian visions.

Mon grand récit: Weep into stones ... (2005) is part of a series, the title translating as ‘my grand narrative’. Here Lee Bul is referencing both Jean-François Lyotard’s definition of postmodernity as ‘the end of grand narratives’ and Thomas Browne, a seventeenth century English polymath, whose quotation “Weep into stones ...” is a meditation on mortality. The piece contains an elevated highway and miniature buildings, including an upturned model of Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia and a high rise office block where Lee once had a studio. The whole structure seems fragmented and fragile in its construction, embodying a chaotic tendency despite attempts to achieve order and stability.

Bunker (M.Bakhtin) (2007/2012) resembles a dark mountainous island. Recorded sounds are evocative and transporting whilst the title refers to Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). His theories on the evolving, social nature of language – with its emphasis on polyphony, multiple and often competing voices – takes us to the conclusion that all we can hope for are complex, fragmented narratives and meanings.

In this vein, Ikon’s second floor galleries have been transformed by Lee Bul into environments that are visually intriguing and immersive. *Via Negativa* (2012) is a labyrinth that confuses our sense of space through faceted and highly reflective surfaces. An analogy for the human mind, in Lee Bul’s own words, “it makes

the viewer feel uncomfortable and self-conscious ... seeing their fragmented selves ...", culminating in a small chamber with two-way mirrors where one is caught up in an infinity of self-images.

The large-scale *Diluvium* (2012) fills two galleries, its undulating plywood floor destabilises the viewer and the space is filled with a proliferation of studio drawings, studies, maquettes and experimental pieces, giving insight into the evolution of Lee Bul's carefully developed artistic proposition.

In conjunction with Ikon's exhibition, the Korean Cultural Centre UK in London presents a new version of the work, titled *Diluvium* (13 September – 1 November 2014). www.kccuk.org.uk

Yinka Shonibare MBE

Ikon Ikon: 1990s

Tower Room, Second Floor

Born in London in 1962 Shonibare grew up in Lagos, Nigeria and was a student at Goldsmiths College before being included in the acclaimed *Sensation* exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1997. His exhibition at Ikon in 1999 was seminal. *Five Under Garments and Much More* (1995), is an early suspended installation. Each piece mimics the structured corsetry of aristocratic period dress, but the dramatically enlarged proportions and exuberant textiles explore issues of identity, authenticity and globalisation. Shonibare explains "I like the contradiction between so-called African textiles and Victorian colonial dresses ...they are a perfect metaphor for the construction of identities or culture."

The Tower Room is only accessible via a number of steps.

Gillian Wearing

Dancing in Peckham

Off-site exhibition

Fletchers Walk, Birmingham B3 3HJ

This performance self-portrait from 1994 shows the artist dancing for 25 minutes to music only she can hear in a shopping arcade in south London. Her observation of a real situation is recreated here by adopting a particular persona. Ikon's screening is situated in a local equivalent, Fletchers Walk, and is presented to coincide with the unveiling of Wearing's *A Real Birmingham Family* sculpture outside the Library of Birmingham.

Fletchers Walk is a 5 minute walk from Ikon, towards New Street station.

Visit the Resource Room where you can find a selection of books, audio and film.

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