

## Ikon awarded £210,000 to take art into the Black Country

Ikon has been awarded £210,000 by Arts Council England to bring art to the Black Country.

The funding has been awarded as part of Arts Council England's £45 million Strategic Touring Programme, which supports arts venues to tour their work so more people can experience and enjoy it.

The funding allows Ikon to undertake a three year programme, *Black Country Voyages*, involving the renowned *Slow Boat* - a converted canal boat measuring 72 feet in length. *Slow Boat* will travel the Black Country's industrial canal routes from Smethwick to Stourbridge, Sedgley to West Bromwich and Birchills to Aldridge.

Ikon Youth Programme - a group of 15-19 years olds with an interest in visual arts - will be particularly involved in the project, assisting in crewing the boat and leading activities. Ikon will also work with other organisations including Writing West Midlands, Flatpack Film Festival, local authors, photographers, artists, libraries and schools including the RSA Academy in Tipton.

The tour will feature artist-led workshops, on-board performances, writing workshops and book design, amongst other activities. People who encounter *Slow Boat* on its journey will also have the chance to be involved in influencing the development of the programme, contributing their thoughts and ideas.

**Peter Knott, Area Director, Arts Council England**, said: "This is great news for Ikon and the Black Country. Ikon's *Slow Boat* takes great art right in to the heart of local communities in a non-traditional way. But what will be really exciting about *Black Country Voyages* is the connections Ikon will be able to make with existing arts groups and local people, giving them the opportunity to shape the future of the tour."

**Jonathan Watkins, Director, Ikon**, said: '*Black Country Voyages* will be a wonderful adventure for the young people taking part in Ikon's Youth Programme, participating artists and audiences alike. The canals in this region are under-appreciated, but for Ikon they are an extraordinary network joining the dots of local communities that will be new audiences for the very best contemporary art.'

**ENDS.**

**Notes for Editors:**



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WEBSITE. [www.ikon-gallery.co.uk](http://www.ikon-gallery.co.uk)  
Ikon Gallery is a registered charity no. 528892

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2010 and 2015, we will invest £1.9 billion of public money from government and an estimated £1.1 billion from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.  
[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

Ikon is an internationally acclaimed art museum situated in central Birmingham. Housed in a magnificent neo-gothic school building, it is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. It offers free entry to all. The gallery programme features artists from around the world. A variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom.  
[www.ikon-gallery.org](http://www.ikon-gallery.org)

**Ends.**

**Note to Editors:**

1. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 6pm. Admission is free.
2. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
3. For more information, images and interviews please contact Helen Stallard on 0774 033 9604 or email [h.stallard@ikon-gallery.co.uk](mailto:h.stallard@ikon-gallery.co.uk)