

# *As Exciting As We Can Make It: Ikon in the 1980s*

2 July – 31 August 2014

A survey of Ikon's programme from the 1980s, *As Exciting As We Can Make It* is a highlight of Ikon's 50th anniversary year and includes the work of Rasheed Araeen, Art & Language, Sue Arrowsmith, Kevin Atherton, Terry Atkinson, Gillian Ayres, Vanley Burke, Eddie Chambers, Agnes Denes, Charles Garrad, Ron Haselden, Susan Hiller, John Hilliard, Albert Irvin, Pieter Laurens Mol, Mali Morris, John Newling, Hugh O'Donnell, Dennis Oppenheim, Cornelia Parker, Sean Scully, Terry Shave and John Stezaker.

This comprehensive selection of paintings, sculpture, installation, film and photography, much previously shown at Ikon, reviews a pivotal decade through the lens of a major regional gallery; a gallery that at the time was one of a small number of public spaces in the UK specialising in contemporary art.

The decade coincided with the rise of postmodernism a fast-moving zeitgeist that chimed in with broader cultural shifts in Britain, in particular the politics that evolved under the premiership of Margaret Thatcher. There was the famous return to figurative painting; a shameless appropriation that saw artists 'pick and mix' from art history, non-western art and popular culture; and an enthusiastic re-embrace of Dada and the challenge to notions of self contained works of art through the increasing popularity of installation.

Ikon had a reputation by the end of the 1980s as a key national venue for installation. Oppenheim's extraordinary work *Vibrating Forest* (1982), made from welded steel, a candy floss maker and unfired fireworks, will return to Ikon for the exhibition, alongside Hiller's *Monument* (1981), a combination of park bench, audio recording and 41 photographs of memorial plaques now in the collection of Tate. Charles Garrad's *Monsoon* (1986) subjects a small building, set out as restaurant somewhere in South East Asia, to theatrical effects of thunder and lightning in order to conjure up an environment which is extraordinarily evocative and transporting.

At the same time, Cornelia Parker will show a suspended piece in Ikon's Tower Room comprising a circle of squashed silverware corresponding to *30 Pieces of Silver* (1988), a major work from her early career, commissioned by Ikon and also in the collection of Tate. A kind of critical response to monumental floor-based sculpture, it also characteristically conflates ideas of preciousness and perceived cultural value with traces of a traumatic event.

John Stezaker's series of *Five Collages* (1978) coupling soft-core pornography and romantic love photo-stories will be on display. Renowned for his smart conceptualism and use of appropriation through collage, Stezaker was arguably the first postmodernist to show at Ikon. Photographs by Vanley Burke, an artist from Birmingham concerned especially with black communities and culture in the UK, depict worship in a local church, family weddings and birthdays.

*As Exciting As We Can Make It* is an opportunity to consider and celebrate the achievements of Hugh Stoddart and Antonia Payne, Ikon's directors during 1978 – 1989 who both demonstrated rare ambition in the face of local and national adversity. So too all the artists they worked with, many of whom either were appreciated at the time for their significance, or have since gone on to enjoy deserved recognition.

The culture and politics of the 1980s and its influence will be the focus of a related public programme, including artists' talks and film screenings. A major publication accompanies *As Exciting As We Can Make It*, including an essay by Ikon's current director, Jonathan Watkins, and contributions from Hugh Stoddart and Antonia Payne.

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of David Prentice (1936 – 2014), a founder artist of Ikon.

#### **Note to Editors:**

1. Following on from *The Best Things in Life Happen Accidentally* (2004) and *This Could Happen to You* (2009) - surveys of the 1960s and 1970s respectively – *As Exciting As We Can Make It: Ikon in the 1980s* is the third chapter in an ongoing account of art shown by the gallery since it opened in 1964.
2. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 6pm. Admission is free.
3. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
4. For more information, high-res images and to arrange an interview with Director Jonathan Watkins please contact Sophie Campos or Emma Gilhooly at Pelham Communications on 020 8969 3959 or email [sophie@pelhamcommunications.com](mailto:sophie@pelhamcommunications.com) or [emma@pelhamcommunications.com](mailto:emma@pelhamcommunications.com)

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