

IKON

Ikon Gallery, 1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / www.ikon-gallery.org
Open Tuesday-Sunday, 11am-5pm / free entry

Kan Xuan

6 July – 11 September 2016



Kan Xuan, *Kanxuan! Ai!* (1999). Video, sound, 1'22", single channel. Film still courtesy the artist and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins/Habana.

Ikon presents the first UK exhibition by renowned Chinese artist Kan Xuan (born 1972, Anhui province). It will comprise a wide selection of single screen video pieces made since the late 1990s. Refreshingly unpretentious and economical in style, with familiar subject matter, they exemplify a profoundly philosophical approach to human existence.

Kan's work is often based on personal experience, and she herself sometimes features, as in the early video *Kanxuan! Ai!* (1999) in which she is seen dashing through subway tunnels shouting her own name, as if searching for herself, and then answering in the affirmative, "Ai!". She is moving against a tide of heaving humanity, at once anxious,

funny, romantic, whilst making a clear political statement, exemplifying the plight of an individual in the face of a totalitarian mass.

Kan Xuan left her hometown, Xuancheng in southern Anhui province, in 1993 to study at the China Academy of Arts, Hangzhou, with influential teachers Geng Jianyi and Zhang Peili. She began working with video after arriving in Beijing in 1998, subsequently enrolling at the RijksAkademie Amsterdam where she “learned to communicate with people, not just as a person in a community, but as an artist. I learned to be more interested in other people ...through [my] work.” She returned to live in Beijing in 2009.

Other works from the late 1990s / early 2000s convey the personal as physical. *Looking, looking, looking for...* (2002) traces the movement of a spider across two naked bodies, young, lithe, one male, one female. We are pushed and pulled between feelings that arise from such sensuality and arachnophobic tendencies while identifying with the oblivious creature, simply seeking a place to hide. In the same year, Kan Xuan made *A persimmon*, in which she passes a piece of ripe fruit between her hands, reducing it to a juicy pulp in the process, thus combining lusciousness and cruelty. The artist explains “The narratives of my work are sometimes contradictory, sometimes overlapping. The overlaps also generate contradictions, just like two pieces of glass stuck together by water, fragile yet inseparable. The contradictions or overlaps in my works derive from personal experiences and [considering things from different] angles.”

A happy girl (2002) on the other hand is wonderfully straightforward. Made soon after Kan Xuan arrived in Amsterdam, it shows an empty sculpture pedestal in a pleasant leafy garden, suddenly occupied by the artist, naked and dancing. The playful freedom of her movement suggests sheer joy, found both in herself and in her circumstances. Kan Xuan made a number of works during her time in Europe that similarly convey feelings of liberation and an exciting voyage of discovery. At the same time, she was becoming increasingly preoccupied by the effects of globalisation and its economic impact, both in China and the West, in particular for those who do not enjoy political power. She saw the widening gap between rich and poor as symptomatic of notions of true value becoming lost – reflected in works such as *Garbage* (1999) and *Island* (2006-2009).

Since returning to China, Kan Xuan has embarked on a number of large scale installations, focusing on aspects of Chinese history. Not created in denial of modern life, instead they embody an attempt to understand a heritage that is as vital as it is ignored today. She has travelled extensively in China making dozens of short documentary films:

“Through the study of history, I remain at distance with the maddening life in current China. It’s not an escape, but a separation that enables me to feel more from daily life.”

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue, including text by Shanghai based writer Lu Leiping. The exhibition is supported by Galleria Continua, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins/Habana and W. Wing Yip and Brothers Foundation.

Social Media Handles:

Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #KanXuan #IkonGallery

Note to Editors:

1. Ikon exhibition opening: Wednesday 6 July, 6-8pm.
The exhibition will be accompanied by a programme of public events, for full details visit www.ikon-gallery.org
2. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and 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. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. www.ikon-gallery.org
3. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. For the latest news and events follow @ikongallery on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).
4. For more information or high-res images please contact Rebecca Small or Emily Luxford at Ikon on 0121 248 0708 or email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or e.luxford@ikon-gallery.org

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Continued overleaf



Kan Xuan, *A happy girl* (2002). Video, sound, 1', single channel. Film still courtesy the artist and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins/Habana.



Kan Xuan, *Looking, looking, looking for...* (2002). Single channel sound video, 2' 42". Film still courtesy the artist and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins/Habana.



Kan Xuan, *Garbage* (1999). Video, sound, 11', single channel. Film still courtesy the artist and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins/Habana.



Kan Xuan, *Island* (2006-2009). 4-channel video installation. Film still courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins/Habana.