

# IKON

Ikon Gallery  
1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS  
0121 248 0708 / [www.ikon-gallery.org](http://www.ikon-gallery.org)  
Open Tuesday-Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm / free entry  
Registered charity no. 528892

## Oliver Beer

### 15 March – 4 June 2017



Oliver Beer *Silence is Golden* (2013) © Oliver Beer

Ikon presents the most comprehensive exhibition to date of work by British artist Oliver Beer. Through film and sculpture, with a strong emphasis on sound, it exemplifies a preoccupation with both the physical properties and emotional value of objects, paradoxically with a focus on emptiness and absence. The exhibition also features a new video piece commissioned by Ikon, comprising of drawings by 2,500 local school and pre-school children.

Since graduating from the Ruskin School of Art in 2009, British artist Oliver Beer has exhibited at the Centre Pompidou and Palais de Tokyo, Paris, on numerous occasions, at the Biennale de Lyon and Villa Arson, Nice; and in America, where he has shown at MoMA PS1 and the Watermill Center, New York. He was awarded the Daiwa Art Prize in 2015, resulting in two solo shows in Tokyo, and *Call to Sound*, a site-specific composition for Kilic Ali Pasa Hamam – a historic Turkish bathhouse – was acclaimed as a highlight of the Istanbul Biennial in 2016.

A number of recent works have involved a selection of vessels to create idiosyncratic musical instruments as installations. The empty space within each vessel has its own musical note at

which it resonates, and so contributes to a symphony of natural frequencies, with microphones feeding back into looping sound systems. This idea is explored further in *Making Tristan* (2016), consisting of pots, vases and other readymade vessels singing out of their emptiness to achieve the "Tristan Chord" – the ground breaking chord from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, marking the shift from tonal harmony to modernist atonality.

Sharing the same space as *Making Tristan* are the three glass spheres of *Silence is Golden*, each containing an actual-size gold replica of one of the ossicles of the middle ear, either the hammer, the stirrup or the anvil. These little bones, are seductively visual – gold attracts our attention like no other material – whilst being embedded in cold, crystal silence.

Throughout the exhibition, embedded in the gallery walls, are Beer's 'dissected' objects – halved long-ways, lying flush, they become drawings of themselves. A lightbulb, a camera, a long stemmed smoking pipe – each lacks a third dimension, and so is empty, with any pictorial space that they might have occupied being absolutely compressed. This 3D/2D translation is poignant in respect to *Oma's Kitchen Floor* (2008), Beer's work resulting from accumulated traces of human movement on a wall-mounted linoleum surface. As the artist explains, "*Oma was the name I called my grandmother. She put the lino down in the 1960s and over four decades her feet gradually wore through the decorative pattern. Over the years marks appeared in front of the oven, the sink, the front door, where she turned around in front of the fridge, where she sat at her table shuffling her feet. Like a drawing made over forty years, these worn patches describe half a lifetime of movement.*"

In this vein, the lengths of old train rail (from Lyon's SNCF station) in Beer's *Highway* (2014) are metaphorically transporting. Polished to reveal the patinated traces of countless journeys – the movement of steel wheels on steel that have taken the weight of passengers on their way – they reveal individual existences, each with their own stories, origins and destinations. This readymade, ready-used, sculpture stands as a memorial to lives that have sped by – an acute angle, pointing downwards to the absence that is the ultimate destination for each and every one of us. Not parallel, they take us quickly to a vanishing point.

There are a number of video pieces in the exhibition, in various ways featuring songs and the human voice. *Mum's Continuous Note* (2013), for example, is a touching portrait of the artist's mother, a subtle celebration of the beauty of sound. She seems to be singing a continuous note without catching her breath for three minutes while explaining, through subtitles, a method of circular breathing, and the emotive potential of the harmonies she creates with the aid of a miniature blue guitar.

At the heart of this exhibition is *Reanimation (I Wanna Be Like You)*, (2017) – a "re-animation" of a scene from Walt Disney's *Jungle Book*. 2,500 Birmingham children, from early years until the age of 13, were asked to draw a single film still. Played in order of the children's ages, the resulting animation thus becomes increasingly "grown up"; frame by frame the scribbles of infants progressively give way to the increasingly lucid drawings of children and then adolescents. This work touches on the inexorable passage of time – through a time-based medium – in order to develop our consideration of what it is like to be human.

ENDS

## Social Media Handles:

Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery

## Note to Editors:

1. Ikon exhibition opening: 15 March 2017, 6-8pm.
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](http://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 Sam Skillings, Head of Communications (Maternity Cover) or Emily Luxford, Communications Assistant at Ikon on 0121 248 0708 or email [s.skillings@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:s.skillings@ikon-gallery.org) or [e.luxford@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:e.luxford@ikon-gallery.org)



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Oliver Beer *Oma's Kitchen Floor* (2008)  
Linoleum, 511 x 350 cm, Collection of the artist.  
Image © Oliver Beer



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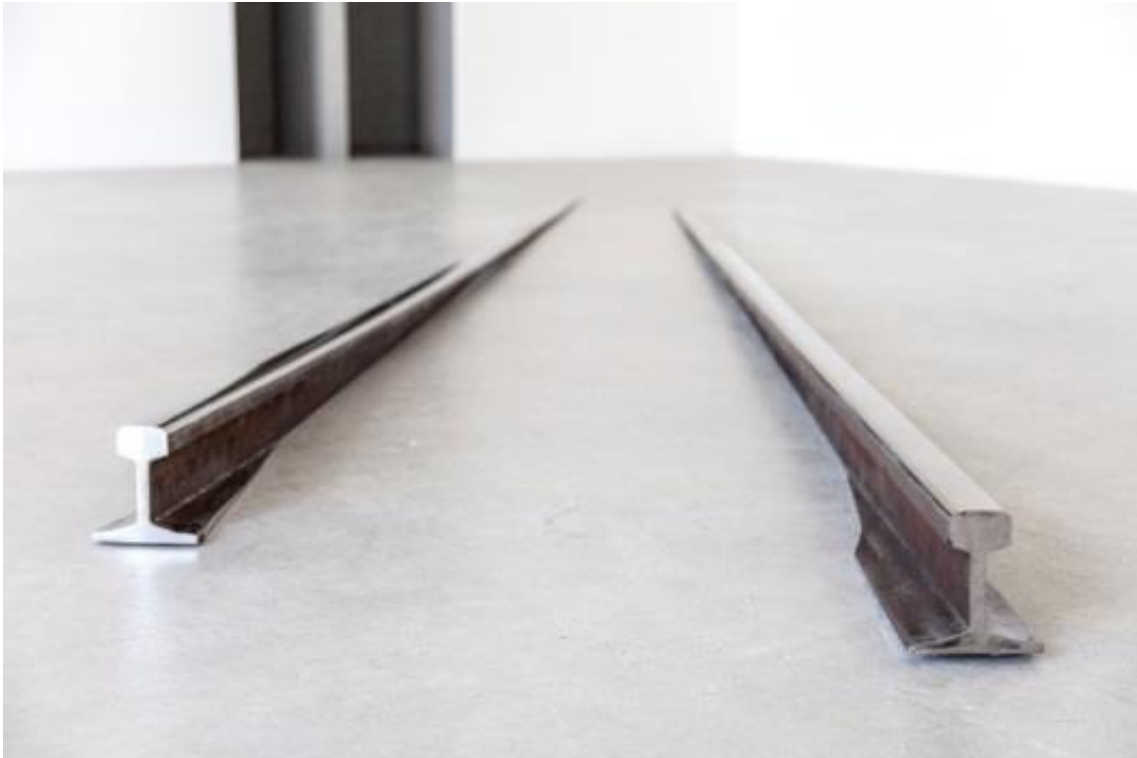
Oliver Beer *Silence is Golden* (2013)  
24 carat gold, lead crystal spheres. Diameter 9 cm, 13 cm, 16 cm Image © the artist



Oliver Beer *Mum's Continuous Note* (2012) Video, duration 2'50" Image © the artist

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Oliver Beer *Highway* (2014) Polished train rails  
Two parts, each: 600 x 15.3 x 15 cm. Image © the artist



Artist Oliver Beer with school child from St George's CE Primary, Birmingham  
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