

Exhibition Guide

A Very Special Place Ikon in the 1990s

18 June – 30 August 2021

Introduction

Ikon presents *A Very Special Place: Ikon in the 1990s*, an exhibition of works by 40 artists who featured in the gallery's programme at John Bright Street during 1990 – 97 and its current premises in Brindleyplace until 1999. The title *A Very Special Place* is from a visioning document produced at the time, imagining Ikon's future.

With Elizabeth Macgregor as Director, Ikon's outlook was increasingly international with a particular emphasis on the Americas and Australia. She resisted the fashion for "Young British Artists" in favour of an eclecticism ranging from abstract painting to overtly experimental practices. Throughout the exhibition are examples of painting, photography, video and installation that were characteristic of the 1990s.

Reception

A film documenting **Antoni Miralda's *The Honeymoon Project (1986 – 92, at Ikon spring 1991)*** is displayed opposite Ikon's reception desk. Its idea was to "marry" the Christopher Columbus Monument in Barcelona to the Statue of Liberty in New York. An eternity ring for "Miss Liberty" was co-produced by the artist in the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham and filled with rings donated by people across the UK. Nearby, **Adrian Piper's** video, ***Please, God (1990)***, features footage of girls joyfully dancing for the camera. Slowly moving text expresses apprehension about the treatment they might receive as adults.

First Floor

Gallery 1 features **Gordon Bennett's *Suprematist Painting II (Purity) (1993)***. Its white cross on a white background references the work of Russian avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich, whilst the text – etched in red – conveys his predicament as an Australian Aboriginal artist forced to deal with racial stereotypes. **Juan Davila's** paintings similarly address social issues and cultural identities. The four large letters of this square canvas spell SIDA, the Hispanic acronym for *síndrome de inmunodeficiencia adquirida*, or AIDS, addressing the politically charged media discourse around the HIV/AIDS epidemic at the time.

Basil Beattie's large-scale painting ***Imagine If (1993)*** featured in his solo exhibition at Ikon in 1994. The work contains blocks of colour and a grid, painted on an oblique angle with energetic brushstrokes. Nearby, **Edward Allington's** work ***Decorative Forms Over the World (1996)*** reveals the artist's fascination with classical architecture; from its conservation in museum collections to its use in cheap reproductions.

Entering **Gallery 2**, we encounter a large, untitled painting by American artist **Ellen Gallagher**. Layers of black oil paint, built up to achieve a highly reflective surface, are overlaid by repetitive forms in silver enamel paint. Close inspection reveals these to be exaggerated lips – a recurring element in Gallagher's work – addressing African American stereotypes. Repetition also features in **Permindar Kaur's** installation ***Fallen (1995)*** with soft toys reminiscent of childhood. **Felicity Allen's** photograph ***Baby II (1989)*** was included in the thematic exhibition *Mothers* (1990), which explored the experience of motherhood.

Pure blocks of colour characterise **Callum Innes'** paintings, which have variations in tone and texture due to the application of turpentine. An ordered repetition of geometric forms referencing the modernist grid is also found in Anglo-Canadian artist **Lisa Milroy's** paintings. The deserted streets and seemingly empty buildings in her paintings of twentieth century architecture in Finsbury Square, London, and traditional Japanese houses in Kyoto, are as calm as they are unsettling.

Suzanne Treister was drawn to kitsch – where everything is an imitation, copy or recording of something else – and the virtual worlds of video games. **Picassoids Video Game (1989)** pays homage to the Cubist painter with a set of highly imaginative, pixelated characters. **John Yeadon** uses engraving to tell the story of Blemmyae; a mythical headless man rumoured in Greco-Roman times to inhabit remote parts of the world. Yeadon's etchings document the encounters of "Blind Bifford Jelly" as he travels around the British Isles, the coastal geography of which is also referenced in **Tania Kovats' Peninsula** and **Little Vera (both 1998)**.

In The House of My Father (1997) is a close-up photographic image of **Donald Rodney's** hand, in which sits a sculpture of a house. The latter was constructed from skin removed from Rodney during surgery for sickle cell anaemia. The work addresses his sense of family and identity as a British-born artist whose parents had emigrated from Jamaica, as well as mortality and illness. In **Rose Finn-Kelcey's God Kennel – A Tabernacle – (Model) (1992)** a model house hangs upside down from a ceiling, creating an uncanny situation. In 1994, Rodney and Finn-Kelcey collaborated on the exhibition *Truth, Dare, Double-Dare...*. Their collaboration, which was intense and painful for both artists, is summed up in the **sound work in Ikon's stairwell** (accessible from the Second Floor).

Second Floor

In **1989**, American artist **Marth Rosler** displayed **Housing Is A Human Right** on the Spectacolor, an animated-light sign in Times Square, New York, highlighting the nation's poverty and housing crisis. Its presentation in Ikon's glass stairwell – formerly the exterior of a school building – reflects this public location.

On entering **Gallery 4**, we see **To Return (RTM) Airmail Painting No.103 (1993)** by Chilean artist **Eugenio Dittborn**. The six paintings were folded and sent abroad to the destinations recorded on the adjacent envelopes. Each painting contains a historical subject – including the body of a nineteenth-century British sailor found frozen in the Arctic. The poetics of the body also featured in paintings presented at Ikon in the 1992 exhibition *Bruised*. **Alison Turnbull's The Echoing Green (1990)** captures such figurative associations.

For **Mark Wallinger**, the class structure of British society was a major preoccupation. In the video installation **Royal Ascot (1994)**, the Queen and Prince Philip occupy a horse drawn carriage on four different occasions, regally waving to other racegoers. With a syndicate the year before, Wallinger had bought a racehorse and called it **A Real Work of Art (1993)**, thereby drawing comparisons between the speculative worlds of racing and the art market. The British daily newspaper provides the material for **Amikam Toren's Of the Times** series. Having pulped a copy of The Times and applied it to the canvas, Toren retained the date – Monday March 19th, 1990 – in the work's title.

The social and political significance of sport is further explored in **Keith Piper's Four Corners, a Contest of Opposites (1995)**. Each box illuminates an image of an American boxer from the twentieth century; Jack Johnson (1878 – 1946), Joe Louis (1914 – 1981), Muhammad Ali (1942 – 2016) and Mike Tyson (1966 –). Reminiscent of stained-glass windows, the figures are labelled with a noun related to justice: consternation, conciliation, contravention and confirmation.

In **Gallery 5**, **Yinka Shonibare's** photograph, *Diary of a Victorian Dandy (1998)*, references the satire of William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* (1732 – 34). Shonibare inserts himself as the black protagonist who, through a series of debauchorous acts, disrupts the social order. The grid of vibrant watercolours in Brazilian sculptor **Lucia Nogueira's** *Two into One Won't Go (1993)* has a powerful and ritualistic quality enhanced by the felt that almost conceals it. Colour was also important to American artist **Nancy Spero**, whose work *Carnival (2000)* draws on classical and modern sources in order to assert a lively feminism. Her exhibition featuring depictions of Celtic goddesses of fertility was held on this floor when Ikon opened at Brindleyplace in 1998.

Prior to his solo exhibition in 1995, Argentinian artist **Victor Grippo's** work was included in the 1990 group show *Transcontinental*, which challenged misconceptions of Latin American art as being traditional or folkloric. In **Gallery 6**, Grippo's *Tables of Work and Reflection (1978 – 94)* is an installation of school furniture, dim electric lighting and natural materials that evidence his concern with the relationships between art, science and everyday life. His interest in human consciousness is revealed in the quotes written on the table-tops.

Off-site

Shelagh Wakely

Rug for CBSO Centre

On permanent display at CBSO Centre

Berkley Street, Birmingham B1 2LF

Spotlight tours (30 minutes):

7 July: 11am, 12pm, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm

10 August: 11am, 12pm, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm

Booking essential

Visit [Ikon's website](#) for details

Maxine Walker: *UNTITLED*

Exhibition, Midlands Arts Centre

24 May – 30 August 2021

Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham B12 9QH

Monday to Sunday, 9am – 9.45pm

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   [ikongallery](https://www.ikon-gallery.org)

Ikon Gallery, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2HS

0121 248 0708 / ikon-gallery.org

Open Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 5pm

Free entry, donations welcome

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I K O N

Víctor Grippo

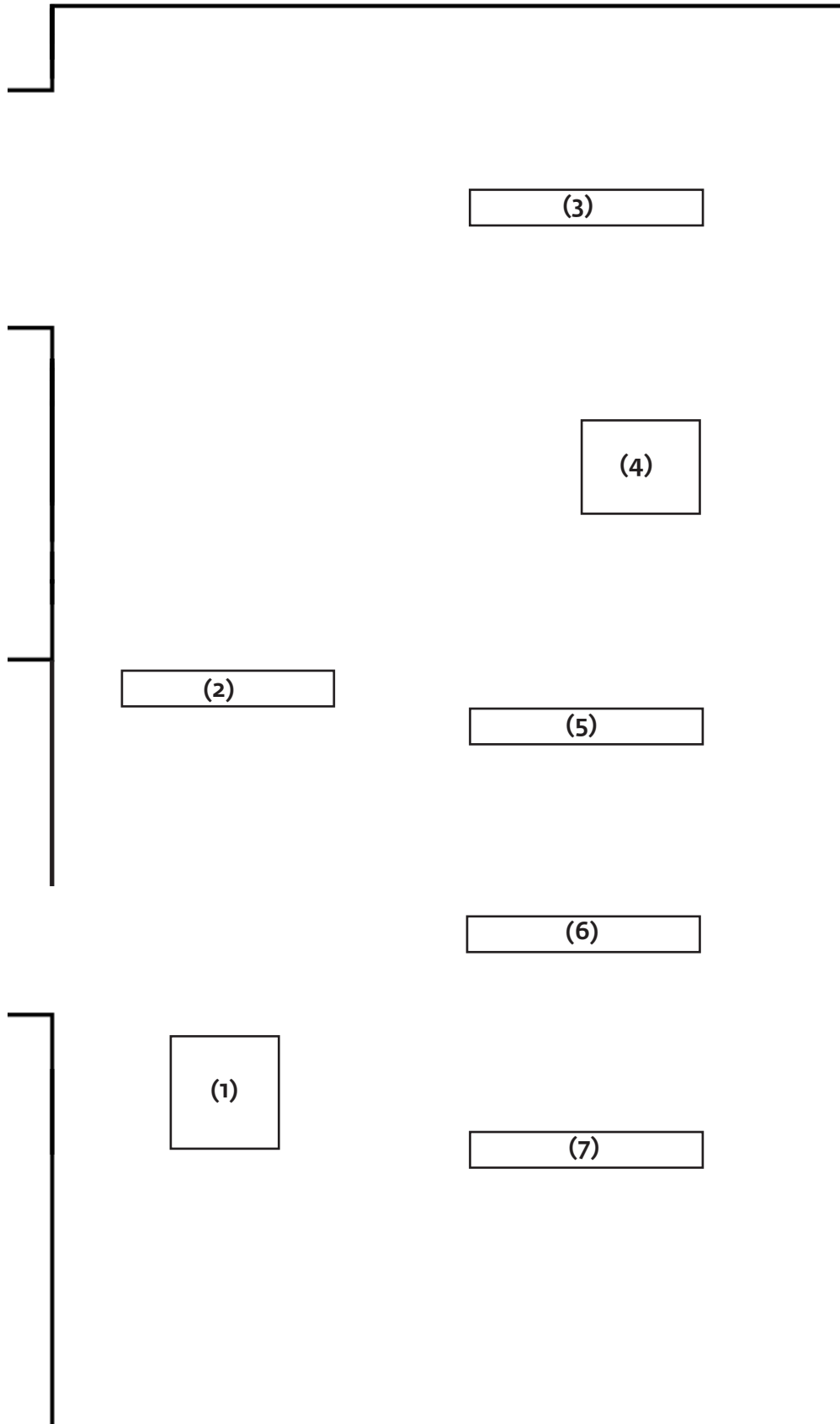
Tables of Work and Reflection, 1978–94

7 wooden desks with chalk and marker pen, clay, handkerchief,
beans, stones, mirror, lights and fishing line

Overall display dimensions variable

Tate: Presented by the Latin American Acquisitions Committee

2005



(1)

La mesa está vacía pero en sí misma contiene.

[Victor Grippo]

The table is empty but it has, in itself, the ability of containing.

[Victor Grippo]

(2)

Un domador

"No encuentro a quien contarle que en la rodada de esta tarde he muerto."

Jorge Calveti (Poeta)

A Tamer

"I cannot find whom to tell that while I was falling this afternoon I died."

Jorge Calveti (Poet)

(3)

"Allí donde la tierra tembló una vez, lo más probable es que vuelva a temblar"

S[ímon] Gershanik (Sismólogo)

"That land that was shaken once, it is bound to be shaken once more"

S[ímon] Gershanik (Sismologist)

(4)

Sobre esta table, hermana de infinitas otras construidas por el hombre, lugar de unión, de reflexión, de trabajo, se partió el pan cuando lo hubo; los niños hicieron sus deberes, se lloró, se leyeron libros, se compartieron alegrías. Fue mesa de sastre, de planchadora, de carpintero...

Aquí se rompieron y arreglaron relojes. Se derramó agua, y también vino. No faltaron manchas de tinta que se limpiaron prolijamente para poder amasar la harina.

Esta mesa fue tal vez testigo de algunos dibujos, de algunos poemas, de algún intento metafísico que acompañó a la realidad.

Esta table, igual que otras, y la transubstanciación de

Victor Grippo, 1978/1994

On this board, sister of countless others built by man, place for union, reflection, and work, bread was broken, when there was some; children did their homework, tears were shed, books were read, happiness was shared. It was a tailor's and a carpenter's table and also an ironing-board. Here clocks were broken

and repaired.

Water was spilt; as well as wine. Ink stains were not missing and were neatly cleaned so that flour could be mixed.

This table perhaps witnessed some drawings, some poems, out of some metaphysical intention that accompanied reality.

This table, as others, and the transubstantiation of

Victor Grippo, 1978/1994

(5)

"La sociedad niega la especie y reniega del hombre si no propone hacer de cada ser un individuo íntegro y de cada individuo un artista"

Elías Piterbarg (Pensador)

"Society denies the species and renounces the man if its aims are other than each human being's becoming into a man of integrity and then into an artist"

Elías Piterbarg (Thinker)

(6)

Resistencia de materiales

"Un material experimenta, en el sitio de contacto con otro, un estado de tensión triaxial. Las tensiones principales están en el centro del área de contacto."

Ingeniero [Arturo] Guzmán

Materials' resistance

"Any material experiments, at the point it contacts another, a state of triaxial tension in the center of which main tensions can be found."

[Arturo] Guzmán, Engineer

(7)

De cómo templar un trozo de acero

Cubrir el acero con sal y raspaduras de pezuña de caballo

Calentar al rojo cereza

Sumergir rápidamente en agua fría

"How to temper a piece of steel"

Cover the steel with a pinch of salt and grated horse hoof

Heat it until it reaches cherry red colour

Immerse quickly into cold water

[Victor Grippo]