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Ikon Gallery
1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / ikon-gallery.org / free entry
Open Tuesday-Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-4pm
Registered charity no. 528892

Haroon Mirza

year zero

World premiere: Wednesday 16

December 2020, 8pm GMT



Left: Sarah-Jane Lewis performing as part of *year zero* by Haroon Mirza (2020). Costume by Osman Yousefzada.
Right: Haroon Mirza, *year zero* (2020).

Ikon announces the world premiere of *year zero* (2020), a new audiovisual artwork by British artist Haroon Mirza.

Taking place on Wednesday 16 December 2020 at 8pm GMT via Ikon Gallery's YouTube account, *year zero* is a new commission by Ikon, with Art Fund support. The work is part of Mirza's 'modular opera' series, composed by him and realised in collaboration with musicians, a singer and designer. Produced during the COVID-19 lockdown, it is inspired by the widely

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circulated smartphone footage of Italians singing from their balconies and windows at the start of the pandemic, their small but rousing balcony performances capturing a collective sense of optimism and unity.

Using sci-fi to navigate a new global order, Mirza in his 'modular opera' focuses on two central narrative elements: a pandemic causing a state of lockdown in major cities globally and a shaman reconnecting with natural forces and ancient practices.

Part recital, part voice experiment, *year zero* is performed by vocalist Sarah-Jane Lewis and accompanied by an electronic score performed by musician Jack Jelfs. Among other elements, the work also features a performance by Alessandro Ravasio, a musician based in Bergamo, the Italian city most severely impacted by the first-wave of the pandemic.

The central element of the work documents an evening performance by Lewis in the residential courtyard where Mirza's studio is located. This recital was programmed by Mirza's studio (hrm199) for his neighbours in the building during the UK's second national lockdown in November 2020. Filmed by both Mirza and audience members from neighbouring apartments, the footage focuses on Lewis who wears a costume of gold lamé and electric blue body paint designed by Osman Yousefzada for a previous performance at the Lahore Biennale 2020.

For this commission I was somehow compelled to think about a very local community and how we can connect to another community elsewhere through music, performance and storytelling. I saw it as an opportunity to both develop the fictional narrative of my modular opera but also bring something meaningful to being at home. As I developed the piece it became very much about breathing – the unconscious process we do at all times yet take for granted. Breathing has been the focus of so much attention in 2020.

Haroon Mirza

Haroon Mirza participates simultaneously in Ikon's exhibition *Faster Than Ever* (4 December 2020 – 14 February 2021), created as a result of the challenges faced by the gallery due to the pandemic. *year zero* follows Mirza's major retrospective exhibition at Ikon in 2018 and also builds on the ongoing collaboration between Mirza and Osman, whose first solo exhibition was held at Ikon, also in 2018.

Haroon Mirza's exhibition at Ikon was a highlight in our gallery programme. Covid-19 has since shifted our focus outdoors and into virtual space, where necessity is embraced as a source of inventiveness by artists and audiences alike. This impulse is epitomised by Haroon's new operatic project, engendering a sense of community paradoxically through our shared experience of locked-down isolation. Music is the unlocking key. Jonathan Watkins, Director, Ikon

Ikon's presentation of *year zero* is supported by Cafe OTO, Media Partner. Ikon's public programme features a number of events including a panel discussion organised in response to *year zero*, for more information please visit ikon-gallery.org

To watch the premiere of *year zero* please subscribe to [Ikon Gallery on YouTube](#). The screening is free to watch, please consider making a donation to support the gallery. *year zero* will be available via Ikon's YouTube account until 14 February 2021.

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For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact:
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Social Media:

Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube:
[@ikongallery](#) [#IkonGallery](#) [#HaroonMirza](#) [@hrm199_outputs](#) [@artfund](#)

Links:

ikon-gallery.org

Note to Editors:

1. Born in London in 1977, Haroon Mirza studied at Goldsmiths, University of London and Chelsea College of Art and Design. He has exhibited widely in the UK and abroad and was awarded the Silver Lion for a Promising Young Artist at the 2011 Venice Biennale. Selected solo exhibitions include at: Ikon Gallery (2018/19), Ballroom Marfa, Marfa, TX, USA (2018), Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK (2017), Nam June Paik Art Center, Seoul, South Korea (2015) and Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland (2015).
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. ikon-gallery.org
3. Admission to Ikon Gallery is free. For opening times and the latest news and events visit ikon-gallery.org and follow [@ikongallery](#) on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Ikon is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
4. Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. In response to Covid-19 Art Fund has made £2 million in adapted funding available to support museums through reopening and beyond, including Respond and Reimagine grants to help meet immediate need and reimagine future ways of working. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by the 159,000 members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year. In a unique edition of the prize for 2020, Art Fund responded to the

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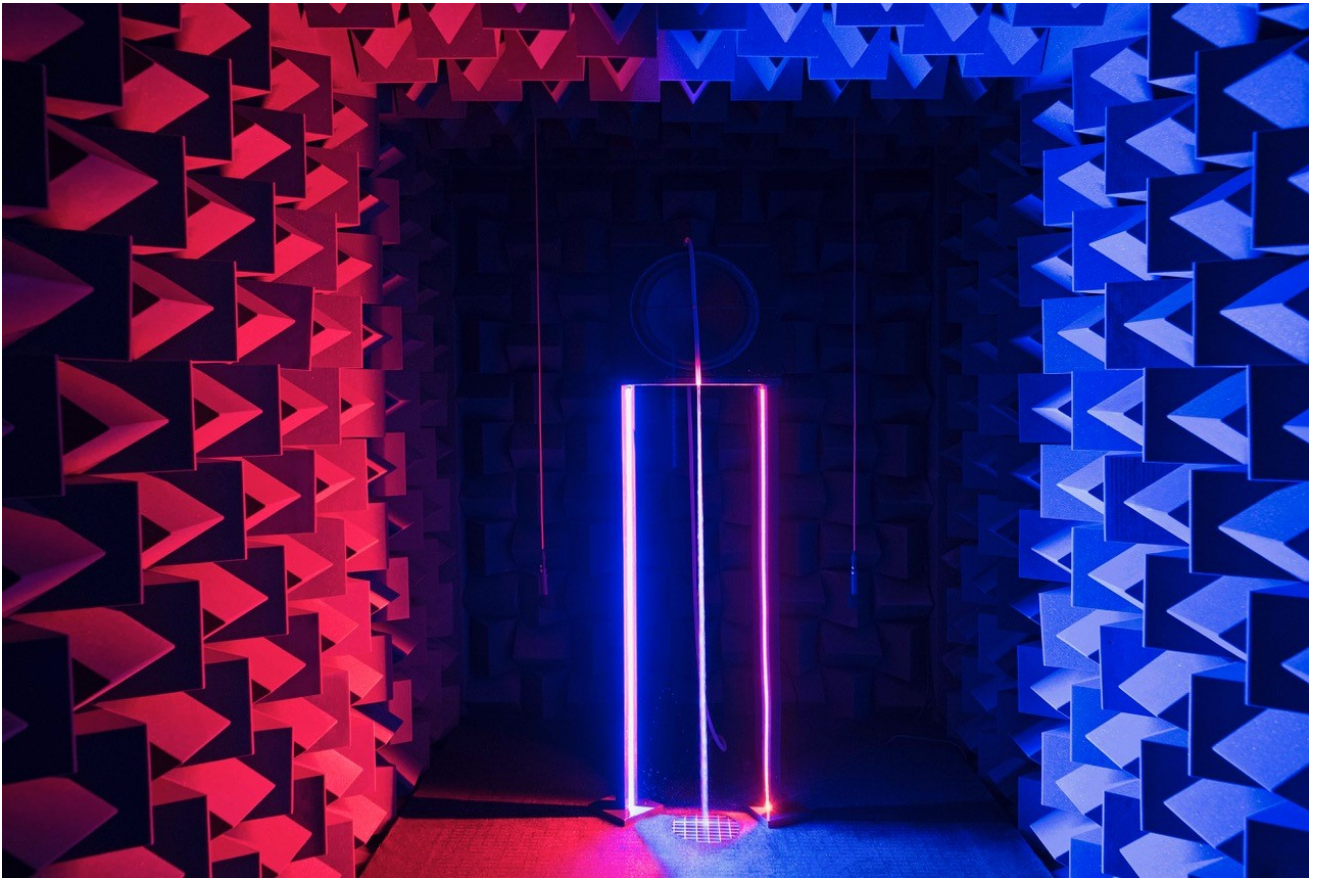
unprecedented challenges that all museums are facing by selecting five winners and increasing the prize money to £200,000. The winners are Aberdeen Art Gallery; Gairloch Museum; Science Museum; South London Gallery; and Towner Eastbourne. artfund.org

5. Cafe OTO is a live performance space and cafe in East London, providing a home for creative new music that exists outside of the mainstream with an evening programme of adventurous live music seven nights a week. Cafe OTO also hosts an extensive, ever-expanding catalogue of digital releases, featuring recordings from the venue alongside specially curated labels with strong ties to OTO's programme and some long out of print releases. cafeoto.co.uk
6. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. ACE support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual 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 2018 and 2022, ACE will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. artscouncil.org.uk



Haroon Mirza & Jack Jelfs at CERN, Photographer Sophia Bennett. Courtesy hrm199

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Haroon Mirza, *Dancing with the Unknown* exhibition at Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen, 2018, installation view.
Courtesy of hrm199.