

## Announcement, February 2022: Jonathan Watkins steps down as Director of Ikon, Birmingham



After nearly 25 years, Jonathan Watkins, Ikon Director, has announced he is stepping down from the role in October 2022. As the flagship contemporary art institution of the UK's second city, Ikon's worldwide reputation and international outlook was developed under Watkins' directorship.

Since joining in 1999, he has continued Ikon's commitment to making the very best in contemporary art available to all by maintaining its policy of free entry. The ethos of Ikon's founding artists, namely striking a balance between excellence and accessibility, still endures; Ikon now welcomes over 200,000 visitors each year, with over 75% of its audience aged between 16 to 44.

Ikon is known for its strong exhibitions of UK and international artists, commissioning of major public artworks, and a public programme imbedded in the local community. Over the years Ikon has placed a curatorial emphasis on artists hailing from Birmingham, such as Hurvin Anderson, Vanley Burke, Ruth Claxton, John Walker,

Gillian Wearing and Osman Yousefzada. At the same time, Watkins has showcased emerging international talent, including Marjolijn Dijkman and Nástio Mosquito, and more established figures such as Georges Adeagbo, Francis Alÿs, Carmen Herrera, Beatriz Milhazes, On Kawara and Giuseppe Penone.

In 2015 he oversaw Ikon's 50<sup>th</sup> year celebrations and established the Ikon Investment Fund, safeguarding Ikon's future programming and commissioning of new work. Recent commissions include work by emerging artists Betsy Bradley and Abdulrazaq Awofeso.

Watkins has also instigated a dynamic off-site programme, challenging conventional notions of how and where art can be seen. This has featured, among others, Katharina Grosse, Ann Veronica Janssens, Tadashi Kawamata and Cornelia Parker. Initiatives include its *Slow Boat*, a canal boat curated by the Ikon Youth Programme since 2010, and an artists' residency programme at HMP Grendon.

In 2005 Ikon introduced historical exhibitions to assert the contemporary relevance of art from the past. Such interventions in the programme will culminate this year in an exhibition of landscape sketches by Edward Lear and the first ever UK show of work by Renaissance artist Carlo Crivelli. The latter is the result of Watkins winning the inaugural Ampersand Foundation Award granted for the realisation of a "curatorial dream".

Watkins joined Ikon following roles as Director of Chisenhale Gallery, London and Artistic Director of the 1998 Biennale of Sydney. Whilst leading Ikon's programme he has also enhanced the gallery's profile through his curatorial work for major exhibitions abroad including the Shanghai Biennale (2006), Sharjah Biennial (2007), Beijing *Documents II* (2010), Guangzhou Triennial (2013) and Manif d'art 9 Quebec City Biennial (2019). He curated the Iraq Pavilion for the Venice Biennale in 2013. Following his departure, Watkins will continue working as an independent curator on international art projects, whilst remaining an important advocate and patron of Ikon.

**Visiting Ikon:** Entry is free. For more information on current opening times and visiting guidelines please visit [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small or Muskeen Liddar on 0121 248 0708 or email [r.small@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:r.small@ikon-gallery.org) or [m.liddar@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:m.liddar@ikon-gallery.org)

Social Media - Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery  
Links: [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)

## Note to Editors:

1. 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](http://ikon-gallery.org)
2. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
3. 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](http://artscouncil.org.uk)