

Britta Marakatt-Labba *Under the Vast Sky* 23 February – 29 May 2022



Britta Marakatt-Labba, *Gárjjat/The Crows* (1981 and 2021).
Embroidery. 65 x 135 cm. Courtesy collection of the artist.

Ikon presents the first UK exhibition by renowned Sámi (Swedish) artist Britta Marakatt-Labba (23 February – 29 May 2022).

Under the Vast Sky features embroidered pieces by Marakatt-Labba for which she is best known, including panoramas chronicling the history, culture and cosmology of the Sámi, the Indigenous population of the northernmost parts of Scandinavia. These are combined with other art forms to demonstrate the wide range of her practice. Her work overall strikes a balance between the vernacular, the domestic, the intimacy of daily life, and urgent issues of our time such as climate change and terrorism.

Britta Marakatt-Labba is above all a storyteller. For over four decades she has produced work centred on “an enduring and unending articulation, endorsement and dissemination of Sámi culture – past, present, and future, vernacular, spiritual, material. The ability to affirm, pronounce, tell, share and advocate this heritage and its ongoing transformations, and still acknowledge the colonial wounds and confront centuries of oppression.” Jan-Erik Lundström, curator, *Under the Vast Sky*

Ikon's exhibition includes key works such as *Garjját/The Crows* (1981 and 2021), where Marakatt-Labba's stitches bring forth a compelling allegory referencing the protests of the late 1970s against hydropower expansion, in which the artist herself was involved. The crow has long been a symbol of authority to the Sámi, a creature that grabs everything it can, and in *Garjját* the birds fly across the protesters in Alta (Northern Norway), but on landing they are transformed into police officers. Last year she replicated the work in its entirety, with one new addition – a Sámi flag in the hands of one of the protesters.

In *Under the Vast Sky*, sweeping panoramic works such as *Čullon meahcci/Felled Forest* (2020-21) articulate environmental concerns whilst embroideries such as *Máilmmiávus/Cosmos* (1999-2000) consider Sámi mythology and cosmology. Others focus on intimate and individual moments of daily life. In *Gávnnadeapmi I/The Encounter I* (2012) we see two figures sitting close together, fishing in an entirely white and blue environment with their catch nearby. *Gávnnadeapmi II/The Encounter II* (2012) depicts another pair playfully teasing their dogs. Marakatt-Labba's visual vocabulary incorporates the natural landscape, the seasonal cycles, the movements of the reindeer and symbolic items like the *ládjogahpir* – the Sámi women's curved hat – to skilfully and evocatively portray the Sámi way of life.

The exhibition also includes a video with sound and sketches for *Historja/History* (2003), Britta Marakatt-Labba's epic tableau narrating the history, the spiritual world, the land, landscape, and everyday life of the Sámi people. Another major work, *Dáhpáhusat áiggis/Events in Time* (2013) is concerned with more recent history. An installation, it includes a number of flour sacks – introduced to the Sámi communities by the Nazi occupation – used as canvases to convey a stark and stylised vision of the 2011 Utøya terror attack. The artist's forays into other media also include small sculptures which give three-dimensional form to figures from embroideries, and the inclusion of sound – especially the *yoik*, a traditional way of singing – in several recent works.

The exhibition is curated by Jan-Erik Lundström, former director of the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, Karasjok, Norway, and Bildmuseet, Sweden, with Jonathan Watkins, Ikon Director. It is accompanied by a programme of public events and a full-colour publication, including texts by Jan-Erik Lundström, Jonathan Watkins and Linnea Axelsson, Sámi (Swedish) poet.

Ikon's exhibition by Britta Marakatt-Labba follows a number in the gallery's programme featuring Indigenous women artists, including Meryl McMaster (Canada, 2019-20), Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce (Australia, 2020-2022) and precedes a presentation by Japanese Ainu artist Mayunkiki (9 September – 13 November 2022).

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 or m.liddar@ikon-gallery.org

Visiting Ikon: Entry is free. For more information on current opening times and visiting guidelines please visit ikon-gallery.org

Social Media - Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery
Links: ikon-gallery.org

Note to Editors:

1. This exhibition has been organised in partnership with Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Canada.
2. Biography: Britta Marakatt-Labba (b 1951) is a North Sámi artist, living and working in Badje-Sohppar/Övre Soppero in Swedish Sápmi. Marakatt-Labba studied at the HDK Academy of Design and Crafts in Gothenburg, Sweden, but grounds her art equally in the duodji practices of Sámi crafts and art, learned through her upbringing. With embroidery as her principal medium, the artist works with textile art, collage, sculpture, and installations. In addition, she has also engaged in ecumenical clothing design, scenography and book illustration. Marakatt-Labba was a member of the influential and legendary Mázejoavku, Stockholm/Sámi Artist Group during its existence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. She exhibits internationally with recent projects in USA, Finland, Norway, and Nepal and her art is collected by national and regional museums, such as Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; the North Norwegian Art Museum, as well as many additional public institutions and private collectors.
3. Please note all dates are subject to change, in particular as a result of Government announcements relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. 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

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1. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
2. 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