

HORROR IN THE MODERNIST BLOCK

Laëtitia Badaut Haussmann
Simon & Tom Bloor
Ruth Claxton
Shezad Dawood
Ola Hassanain
Ho Tzu Nyen
Richard Hughes
Karim Kal
Kihlberg & Henry
Firenze Lai
Diego Marcon
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NT
Amba Sayal-Bennett
Seher Shah
Monika Sosnowska
Maria Taniguchi
Abbas Zahedi

Ikon presents *Horror in the Modernist Block*, an exhibition featuring new and recent work by 20 UK and international contemporary artists.

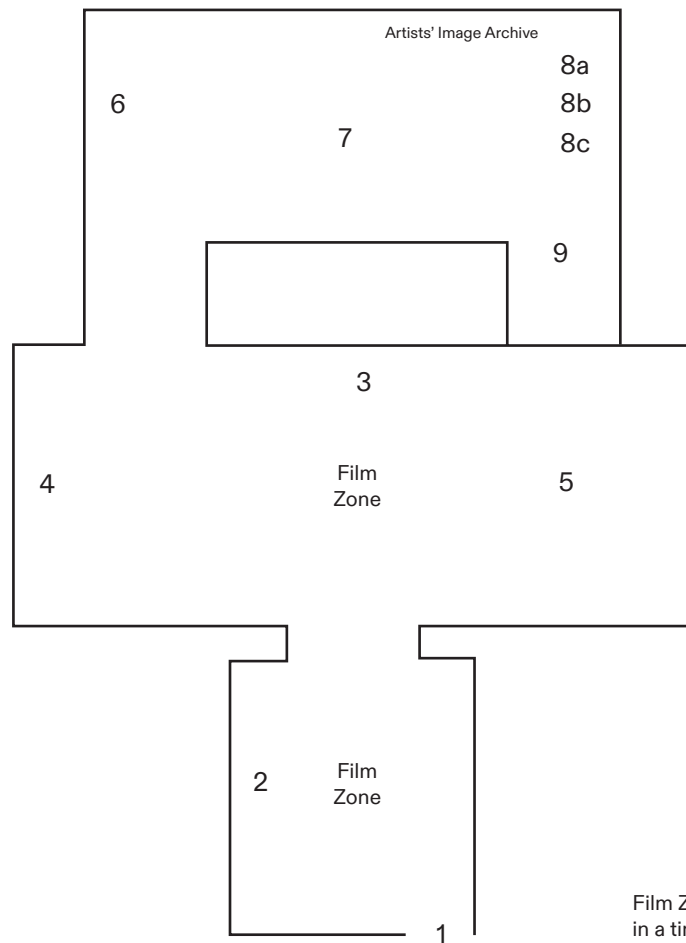
Modernist architecture is often associated with the horror genre. In fiction and film, high-rise towers, concrete estates and glass pavilions form the backdrop to terrifying stories of dystopia.

The exhibition takes Birmingham as its starting point, a city renowned for its brutalist architecture. It explores the troubled histories and legacies of modernist buildings through film, photography, sculpture, installation, painting, drawing and printmaking. Artworks in the exhibition link horror tropes (suspense, darkness, fear) with qualities of modernist design, and the real violence and trauma of its construction and destruction. Configured in dialogue with Ikon's neo-gothic architecture, the exhibition takes viewers on a journey that highlights how the design of a building can shape our movement, perception and fears.

The exhibition begins with a film zone in Ikon's First Floor Galleries. Projected in a timed sequence, the video installations play with the anticipation of horror films, leading viewers around the darkened space. Audiences then enter a light-filled gallery, which alongside artworks contains an archive of architectural references selected by the artists and catalogue contributor Stuart Whipps. Works displayed on Ikon's Second Floor Galleries touch on the psychological, emotional and political impact of modernist architecture, its depiction in horror films, and the striking yet brutal nature of modernist constructions.

The exhibition and public programme is supported by Fluxus Art Projects, Embassy of the Netherlands, Freelands Foundation, Italian Cultural Institute and The Modern Institute.

FIRST FLOOR



Film Zone – The film installations are shown in a timed sequence.



1 **Abbas Zahedi** ***Exit Sign* (2021)**

Customised exit sign, steel chains and eye bolts, 40 × 40 × 10 cm.

This work was produced in response to the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire, where residents lost their lives after being advised not to leave the burning building. The exit sign, emblematic of systems of rules that govern daily life, is juxtaposed here with steel chains which reference Islamic rituals of lamentation and mourning.



2 **Maria Taniguchi** ***Mies 421* (2010)**

Single-channel video, black and white, sound, 4:06 minutes.

Mies 421 is a slideshow of black and white photographs that Taniguchi took when visiting Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion. With each click, there is a sudden change of viewpoint and surface detail. The accelerating soundtrack and ambiguous narrative create what Taniguchi describes as an "accidental horror film", in which the modernist pavilion becomes the stage for an invisible threat.



3 **Kihlberg & Henry** ***Slow Violence* (2018–2022)**

HD video, colour 5:1 sound, 16:10 minutes.

A flat in central London forms the backdrop for a dialogue about "slow violence": an insidious, gradual process of manmade environmental change. Utopian images of urban developments, construction sites and instructive texts intercut the speech of characters, building the film's tense atmosphere.



4 **NT**
BRUTAL (2022)

HD video, stereo, 10:42 minutes.
New commission by Ikon.

Birmingham's inner-city housing estates are filmed at night and accompanied by a sinister score. It becomes apparent that the horror here is not in the buildings depicted, but in the voyeuristic and imposing 'cultural gaze' with which the viewer is forced to identify.



5 **Ho Tzu Nyen**
The Cloud of Unknowing (2011)

HD video, colour, 5.1 sound,
synchronised smoke machine,
28:28 minutes.

This video installation centres on a dilapidated housing block in Singapore where residents are gradually engulfed by a mysterious cloud. The characters are "ghosts", based on the artist's reimagining of the block's former inhabitants.



6 **Karim Kal**
Entourage 7, Rillieux-la-pape (2017)

Inkjet print on baryta paper,
laminated on dibond.

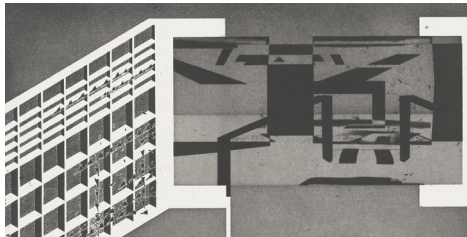
This photograph is part of series with a focus on walkways and underpasses of housing estates in Lyon, France. A combination of high flash and strong exposure highlights their enclosed architecture, graffiti and debris, framed by a never-ending expanse of darkness. For Kal, these neglected and often stigmatised spaces are sites of transgression and control.



7 **Richard Hughes**
Lithobolia Happy Meal (2022)

Cast polyester resin and
fibreglass, steel rod, acrylic and
enamel paint, trampoline parts,
540 × 300 × 254 cm

A 17th century folk tale about a lithobolia, or 'stone throwing devil', is referenced in this new work by Midlands-based artist Hughes. Lumps of simulated concrete rubble are shaped as Chicken McNuggets and suspended from the ceiling, alongside a central axis resembling a space hopper.



8 **Seher Shah**
Unit Object (sculpture garden) (2014)

Etching, 53 × 62.5 cm,
edition of 20.

b ***Unit Object (landscape view) (2014)***

Etching, 53 × 62.5 cm,
edition of 20.

c ***Unit Object (gate) (2014)***

Etching, 53 × 62.5 cm,
edition of 20.

A series of three etchings depicting forms that echo the distinctive facades of the Unité d'Habitation (Housing Unit) typology developed by the architect Le Corbusier.

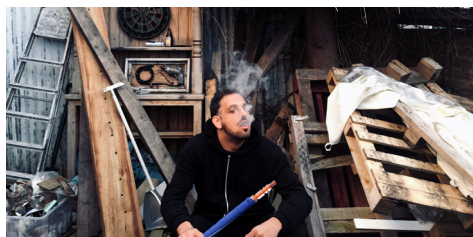
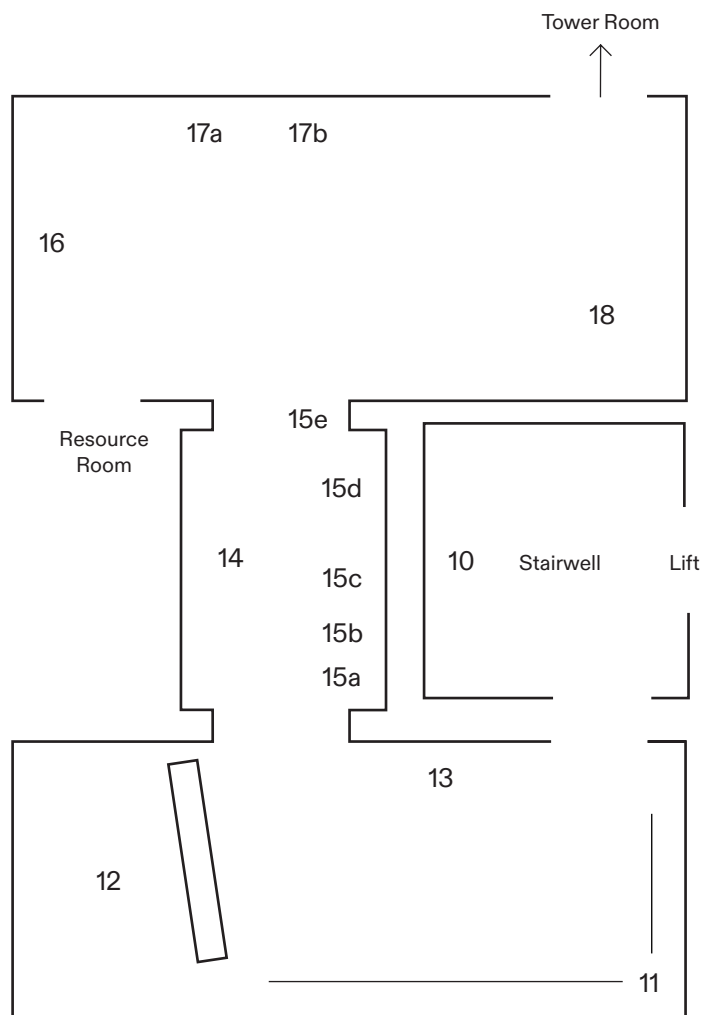


9 **Shezad Dawood**
The Directorate (2019)

Tapestry in teak artist's frame;
wallpaper, frame: 159 × 116 cm.

The tapestry depicts an eerie, vacant view of a modernist swimming pool adjoining the former US Embassy (which was downgraded to a consulate in 1966 and eventually abandoned) in Karachi, Pakistan. For Dawood, growing up in Karachi, the site served as a means of access to American culture and a physical reminder of the power dynamics at play in the post-colonial period. The speckled wallpaper references not only the materiality of the former US Embassy, but also Pakistan's modernist aspirations through the failed attempt at producing export grade terrazzo flooring in the 1950s.

SECOND FLOOR



- 10 **Stairwell**
Abbas Zahedi
Artist with Pipe (2015–2022)
 Inkjet print on dibond, with custom aluminium frame, 40 × 60 cm.

In this photographic portrait, Zahedi is caught blowing a cloud of shisha smoke surrounded by found objects and salvaged building materials in an intimate urban setting. The effect is one of subtle incongruity; Zahedi is interested in the ‘othering’ effect that surroundings have on the people that live in them, further explored in *Exit Sign* (2022).



- 11 **Seher Shah**
Notes from a City Unknown (2021)
 Portfolio of 32 screen-prints on paper in custom box, 23 × 30.5 cm.

Stark monochrome geometric prints are paired with text; the shapes suggest the contrast between lit areas and deep shadows cast by sculptural architectural forms. The paired texts reveal the city of New Delhi as a backdrop for personal tragedy and sectarian violence.

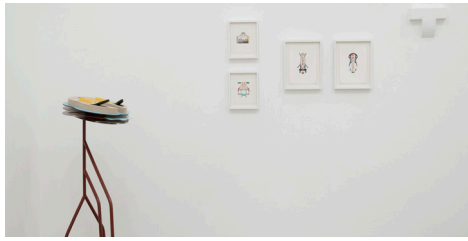


- 12 **Laëtitia Badaut Haussmann**
Espace vaincu, Énergie contrôlée (Vanquished space, Controlled energy) (2022)
 Vinyl, paint, screen-print, lacquered and painted wood, carpet, glasses, water, gin, metal, mirror, light, photography, sound, 35 minutes (looped), 6071 × 474 × 268cm

A 6-metre-wide niche is transformed into a “para-architecture” (something that resembles architecture) reminiscent of modernist sets in horror films, in which female characters frequently fall victim to patriarchal violence.



- 13 **Ola Hassanain**
***The Line That Follows* (2022)**
 4k video with archival footage montage, duration 11:52 min.
***An Early Road Before a Modern One* (2022)**
 Beech wood embroidery hoop with black and white print on fabric, 150 × 200cm.
 New works by Ola Hassanain explore how spaces in Khartoum, Sudan have been impacted by the imposition of modernist architecture, and its effects on human experience and behaviour.



- 14 **Amba Sayal-Bennett**
 Amba Sayal-Bennett's works are experiments with space and form. Sculptural pieces are made from materials cut by a CNC machine and based on computer-aided-design (CAD) models. Her drawings are at once abstract and organic; shapes that look like they have been rendered in CAD software but are hand-drawn.



- 15 **Firenze Lai**
 a ***Union* (2022)**
 Watercolour and gouache on paper, 31 × 41 cm.
 b ***Living and Living Room* (2020)**
 Watercolour and ink on paper, 31 × 41 cm.
 c ***System #1* (2019)**
 Oil on canvas, 100 × 80 cm.
 d ***Information Center* (2018)**
 Oil on canvas, 110 × 110 cm.
 e ***Alignment (Pattern)* (2017)**
 Charcoal on paper, 23.8 × 31.7 cm.

In Lai's paintings and drawings, human figures are often depicted as physically at odds with their surroundings. For example, in *Union* (2022), a receding corridor is cut off from a heavy ceiling that bears down on a cluster of statuesque figures. Much of Lai's work explores the effects of politics and urban infrastructure on the human body and psychology.



- 16 **Ismael Monticelli**
***Spaghetti Junction* (2022)**
 Blue triangle painted on wall; acrylic painting on canvas wood, papier mâché objects, 634 × 638 cm.
 New commission by Ikon.
 Ismael Monticelli's new commission for Ikon draws parallels between Birmingham's Gravelly Hill Interchange, commonly known as Spaghetti Junction, and Brasilia's Tesourinhas, or Scissor Junction. Scenes in the paintings reference medieval bestiaries and the violence of modern utopias.



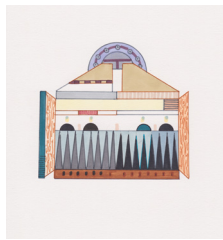
- 17 **Karim Kal**
 a ***Entourage 1, Lyon/La Guillotière* (2017)**
 Inkjet print on baryta paper, laminated on dibond, 150 × 250 cm.
 b ***Sol 2, Noisy-le-sec* (2021)**
 Inkjet print on baryta paper, laminated on dibond, 120 × 90 cm.



- 18 **Monika Sosnowska**
***Tower* (2019)**
 Steel, paint, 168 × 220 × 215 cm.
 The contorted form of *Tower* draws direct inspiration from the structures of pioneering Russian engineer, Vladimir Shukhov (1853–1939). The complex legacy of Soviet-era modernism is married here with Sosnowska's interest in social memory, industrial processes and psychological space.



a



b



c



d



e



h



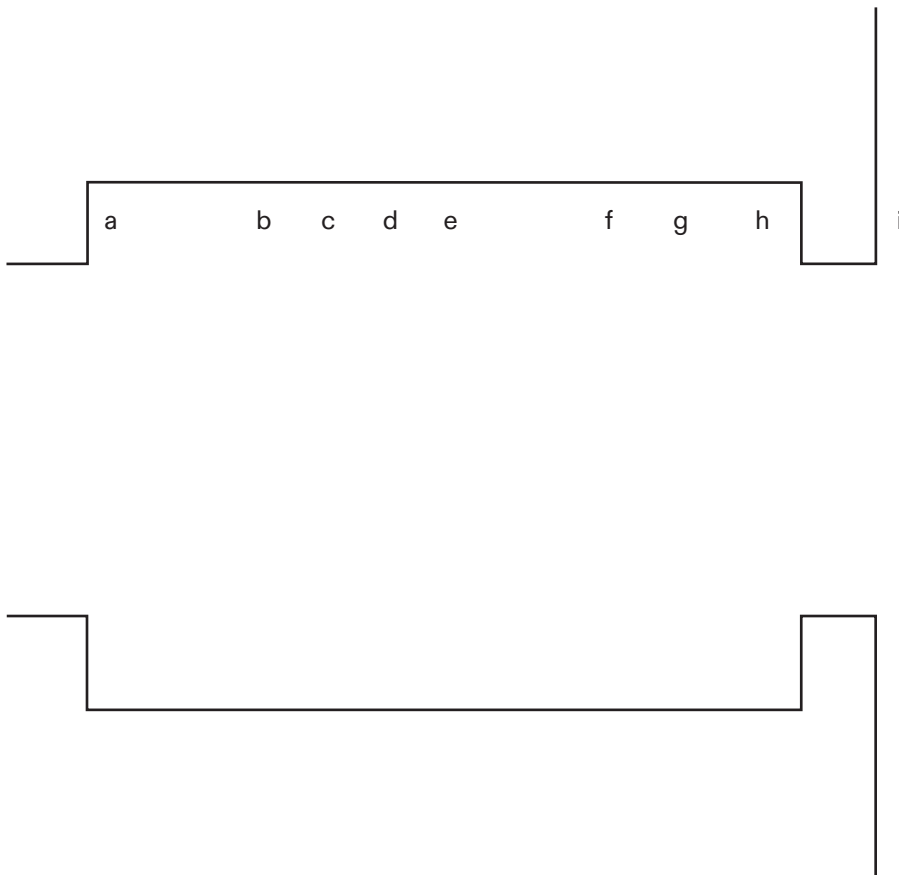
i



f



g



14

Amba Sayal Bennett

a

Carus (2020)

Powder coated mild steel, chemiwood, MDF, resin, velvet, magnets, 133 × 43 × 64 cm.

b

King Horn (2019)

Ink, pro-marker and graphite on paper, 21 × 14.8 cm.

c

Soja (2019)

Ink, pro-marker and graphite on paper, 21 × 14.8 cm.

d

Ex-run (2020)

Ink, pro-marker and graphite on paper, 21 × 29.7 cm.

e

Temp (2020)

Ink, pro-marker and graphite on paper, 21 × 29.7 cm.

f

Ova (2022)

Powder coated mild steel, 30 × 47 × 76 cm.

g

Daro (2022)

Powder coated mild steel, fabric, PLA, 30 × 29 × 4 cm.

h

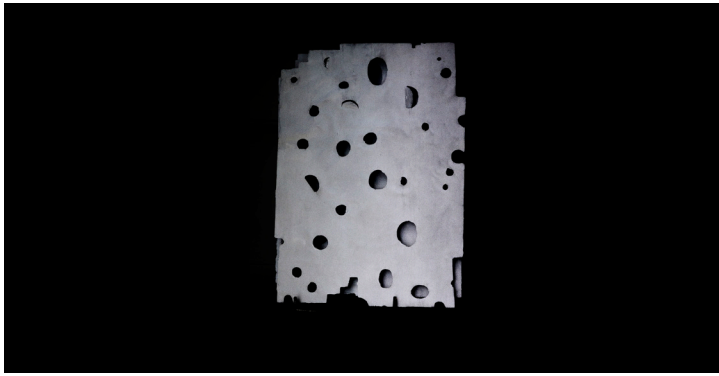
Aperture (2020)

Powder coated mild steel, silk, 96 × 22 × 11 cm.

i

Fennec (2020)

Powder coated mild steel, 33 × 19 × 0.6 cm.



TOWER ROOM

Ruth Claxton, *Here I am, waiting* (2014–22)

Plaster, foil, rebar, retroreflective pigment.

Birmingham based artist Ruth Claxton presents a site-specific installation consisting of sculptural forms coated with light-reflective paint typically used on high-vis workwear and road signs. Please enter the installation alone. Three ways to see:

1. Move around. Look.
2. Turn on your phone's torch, hold it at eye level. Look.
3. Take a picture with your camera with flash on. Look.

Please note the Tower Room is only accessible via a number of steps. The installation can still be viewed from the platform.



RECEPTION

Richard Hughes

***If Socks Aren't Pulled Up Heads Will Roll* (2009)**

Glass reinforced polyester, iron powder, polyurethane and acrylic, 301 × 62.5 × 28 cm.

At first glance, the sculpture looks like it has been made with found items; a football skewered to a rusting outdoor lamppost. However, the work has been fabricated to look like real-life objects. This playful use of materials encourages viewers to re-evaluate the value of deteriorating urban infrastructure.



SEATING

Simon & Tom Bloor, *How to live in a city* (2022)

Concrete, polystyrene, wood, paint, fixings. Four parts, each approximately 46 × 180 × 66 cm. New commission by Ikon. Four sculptural works by Birmingham based artist duo, Simon & Tom Bloor can be found across both floors of Ikon's galleries, doubling as seating. Referencing materials (concrete) and aesthetics associated with architectural modernism such as linear form, the sculptures appear to have been assembled from the ruins of modernist buildings.



OFF-SITE

Film screening and Q&A with Diego Marcon

and Christopher Beanland

Sunday 2 April 2023, 3.30–6.40pm, Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham

Monelle (2017), 13:56 minutes.

Directed by Diego Marcon.

Smooth Talk (1985), 1 hour 32 minutes.

Directed by Joyce Chopra.

A screening of Italian filmmaker Diego Marcon's short film *Monelle* (2017) is followed by a Q&A with Marcon and author Christopher Beanland (*Concrete Concept – Brutalist Buildings Around The World*, 2016). Together they discuss Marcon's artistic practice, his interest in Italian fascist architecture, cinema and the horror genre. The afternoon includes a feature screening of *Smooth Talk*, a 1985 film selected by Marcon starring Laura Dern as a 15-year-old teen who is approached by a mysterious and dangerous stranger.

ASSOCIATED EVENTS

Spotlight Tour with Ola Hassanain

Friday 21 April, 1–1.30pm

Free, no need to book

Join Ola Hassanain in Ikon's Second Floor Galleries as she discusses her work, *An Early Road Before a Modern One* (2022) and *The Line That Follows* (2022).

Exhibition tour with Lucy Mounfield

Friday 28 April 2023, 2–3pm

Free, book tickets online

Join Lucy Mounfield, Assistant Curator at Ikon, for a tour of the exhibition.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A fully illustrated exhibition catalogue accompanies the exhibition, with essays and texts by Melanie Pocock, Acting Artistic Director, Exhibitions and curator of *Horror in the Modernist Block*; Lucy Mounfield, Assistant Curator; Stuart Whipps, artist; and Joshua Comaroff, architectural historian and designer. The catalogue, designed by Fraser Muggeridge Studio is available to purchase from Ikon Shop.

Order from Ikon Shop online and in store.

Special exhibition price: £15.

LEARNING

Ikon welcomes school groups and offers free online resources, activity packs, tours and workshops.

For more information visit Ikon's website.

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