

Showcase: *A Gift to Birmingham* 23 March – 3 April 2022



Ikon showcases photographic documentation of migrant communities in Birmingham, by renowned photographer Vanley Burke in collaboration with Migrant Voice and University of Birmingham. *A Gift to Birmingham* is open 23 March – 3 April, free entry.

The exhibition features seventeen portraits of members of Migrant Voice, a migrant-led national organisation with a hub in Birmingham. For Vanley Burke, it was important to portray participants in their natural environments, including their homes, community centres and parks, across the inner-city. Each image tells a story of migration, either recent or long past, with subjects accompanied or alone. Displayed together, the photographs present a portrait of Birmingham as a superdiverse city,

with residents from many parts of the world. The exhibition tours to Saathi House, Aston and everyone photographed by Burke will receive a printed copy.

Before being photographed each participant was interviewed, by researchers from the School of Education, University of Birmingham, on their experience of living and working in Birmingham. The discussions included both positive experiences, of the city's resources and infrastructure, and more challenging aspects such as the limited interaction between migrant and host communities, as well as the need to shift attention from children's academic attainment towards greater cultural understanding in schools.

The best thing about living in Birmingham is that you can access anything, including transport, education and libraries.

Migrants create their own neighbourhoods, while the host communities 'migrate' to other parts of the city.

If a child doesn't understand why someone is wearing a hijab, have a discussion about it. Don't tell them they can't ask.

Through these interviews, photographic documentation, exhibition co-curation and the creation of school resources, this six-month collaborative research project has considered the role of artists, educators and activists in challenging assumptions about migration and breaking down institutional and intercommunal barriers. Ikon has, in collaboration with Dr Reza Gholami, University of Birmingham, used the materials to create a set of schools' packs (Key Stages, 1, 2 and 3) for teachers and students to openly discuss sensitive issues and directly address conflict. Designed by artist educator Haseebah Ali, they include critical questions - on subjects of race, language, culture and religion - and creative exercises, allowing learners to express their identities. The schools' packs will be available to download for free from Ikon's website in late March.

I moved from Luton to Brum to seek a better life, some people just take a longer route to get to the same destination, there is more that unites us than divides us. Salman Mirza, Birmingham Network Worker, Migrant Voice

The showcase at Ikon, and the schools' packs, also include a film produced by Migrant Voice which raises awareness of the difficulties experienced by those migrating to and within the UK. These resources are intended for practical application, in dismantling of hostile environments and creating safe spaces, to promote an anti-racist agenda within and beyond the classroom.

In addition, on Wednesday 30 March, 6-7.15pm, Vanley Burke takes part in a free event with three Birmingham artists – De'Anne Crooks, Linda Stupart and Osman

Yousefzada – on *The role of the artist in public life*. The speakers share their different approaches to artmaking with and for Birmingham's communities. Chaired by John Eng Kiet Bloomfield, Senior Programme Curator, Wying Arts Centre, this event responds to a provocation by Skinder Hundal MBE, Director of Arts, British Council. The event takes place at Ikon Gallery and will also be live-streamed. For more information visit ikon-gallery.org

Over the past six months, the NICE-B project has enjoyed a fruitful and impactful partnership with Ikon. Our collaboration has enabled us to work together with renowned artists and organisations such as Vanley Burke and Migrant Voice, as well as with Birmingham's communities, to explore and address social and educational issues of central importance to the city and the wider country. Our co-produced digital education packs are a key outcome of our ongoing collaboration and will be a useful resource to the city's schools and policy makers as they continue to battle social and educational disparities. This exhibition is a fantastic way for people learn more about, and engage with, our work. Dr Reza Gholami, Deputy Director of the Centre for Research in Race and Education, University of Birmingham.

A Gift to Birmingham was commissioned as part of the 'Non-formal Intercommunal Education in Birmingham (NICE-B)' project, led by Dr Reza Gholami.

Press launch: Wednesday 23 March, 2-4pm. Join us to view the showcase and meet the artist, partners and participants. RSVP: Muskeen Liddar, 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

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

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

Note to Editors:

1. Vanley Burke is often described as the 'Godfather of Black British Photography': an artist, photographer and curator whose archive, surveying the Black British experience, is held at the Library of Birmingham. His exhibition, *At Home with Vanley Burke*, took place at Ikon Gallery in 2015.

2. Migrant Voice is a migrant-led national organisation building a community of migrant voices to speak for themselves and call for justice for all. They put migrant voices at the centre of the migration debate by developing the skills and confidence of migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees across the UK. migrantvoice.org
3. The 'Non-formal Intercommunal Education in Birmingham (NICE-B)' project brings Birmingham's diverse communities, schools and non-formal educators together to think innovatively about using education to break down intercommunal barriers and foster empathy and collaboration. In doing so, it aims to have a positive impact on education in the city. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/education/research/projects/nice-b.aspx>
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 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
5. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
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