

HORROR IN THE MODERNIST BLOCK 25 November 2022 – 1 May 2023



*Ho Tzu Nyen, The Cloud of Unknowing (2011).
HD projection, 13 channel sound, smoke machines, floodlights, show control system.
Courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.*

Artists: 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, Ismael Monticelli, NT, Amba Sayal-Bennett, Seher Shah, Monika Sosnowska, Maria Taniguchi, Abbas Zahedi.

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 dystopias. Ikon presents new and recent work by 20 UK and international contemporary artists that explore the relationship between architectural modernism and horror.

The exhibition takes Birmingham as its starting point, a city renowned for its brutalist architecture. It unpacks 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 the architecture of Ikon's galleries and neo-gothic building, the exhibition takes viewers on a journey that highlights how the design and features of a building can shape not only our movement and perception, but also our deepest fears.

The exhibition begins on Ikon's First Floor Galleries with a film zone. Projected in a timed sequence, the works play with the anticipation of horror films, leading viewers around the darkened space. **Maria Taniguchi's *Mies 421 (2010)***, a film showing various viewpoints of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion, is followed by a new version of ***Slow Violence (2018/22)*** by **Kihlberg & Henry** and **NT's film *BRUTAL (2022)***, shot around the modernist estates of Druids Heath and Aston New Town in Birmingham. ***The Cloud of Unknowing (2011)*** by **Ho Tzu Nyen** is an epic tableau of a housing block in Singapore engulfed by a mysterious cloud.

Audiences then enter a light-filled space with photography by **Karim Kal. *Entourage (2017)*** and ***Sol (2021)*** reveal debris, graffiti and concrete ballasts in walkways of housing estates in Paris and Lyon, showing these passageways as sites of transgression and control. A new, suspended mobile work by **Richard Hughes, *Lithobolia Happy Meal (2022)***, and **Shezad Dawood's** tapestry ***The Directorate (2019)*** – which depicts an eerie, vacant view of the modernist pool adjoining the former US Consulate in Karachi, Pakistan – show how the materiality and politics of modernist relics haunt the present. Key examples of modernism are also explored in **Seher Shah's** etchings, ***Unit Object (sculpture garden)***, ***Unit Object (gate)*** and ***Unit Object (landscape view) (2014)***, with their reference to Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation. Architecture is further explored through a display of images selected by the 20 exhibiting artists and catalogue contributor, artist **Stuart Whipps**.

At the heart of the exhibition is an engagement with the psychological and emotional impact of modernist architecture. **Abbas Zahedi's *Exit Sign (2022)*** and **works in Ikon's glass stairwell** form a poignant response to the fire that took place at Grenfell Tower, London in 2017, killing 72 people including Zahedi's friend and fellow artist, Khadija Saye. Zahedi's manipulation of health and safety signage and intervention in the gallery's architecture seeks to turn this transitional area into a space of pause, reflection and communal mourning.

Works by five women artists in Ikon's Second Floor Galleries continue to unpack the affective dimension of modernist architecture. **Seher Shah's** screen prints ***Notes from a City Unknown (2021)*** pair abstract evocations of architecture in New Delhi, India, with texts by the artist recalling histories and memories of violence and erasure. **Ola Hassanain's** sculpture ***An Early Road Before a Modern One (2022)*** and video ***The Line That Follows (2022)*** recall the destruction of indigenous settlements in Khartoum, Sudan, under British colonial rule, and how this paved the way for Soviet-inspired architecture in the city. ***Espace vaincu, Énergie contrôlée (Vanquished space, Controlled energy) (2022)*** by **Laëtitia Badaut Haussmann** transforms a 6-metre-wide niche into a "para-architecture" reminiscent of modernist sets in horror films, where female characters frequently fall victim to patriarchal violence. Sculptures and drawings by **Amba-Sayal Bennett** referencing architectural maquettes and masterplans merge digital and analogue techniques, and paintings and drawings by **Firenze Lai**, with their cocooned and corralled figures, evoke the alienating social consequences of concrete urbanism in cities like Hong Kong.

The exhibition culminates in large-scale works that conjure the striking yet brutal nature of modernist constructions. ***Spaghetti Junction (2022)*** by **Ismael Monticelli** draws parallels between legacies of brutalism in Birmingham and Brasília, the federal capital of Brazil designed by Oscar Niemeyer. Comprising a mural, hung paintings and sculptures, the wall installation contains

historical references to medieval bestiaries, labyrinthine motorways and Egyptian pyramids. Polish artist **Monika Sosnowska** creates sculptures from construction materials such as steel beams, concrete, reinforcing rods and pipes. These elements – the solid and rigid foundations of buildings – are manipulated and warped, taking on an independence in which their former functionality is implied yet defunct. Sculpture by **Simon & Tom Bloor**, imagined by the artists as “modernist street furniture cobbled together from the scraps of urban ruins”, doubles as seating for audiences.

In Ikon’s Tower Room, a new work by **Ruth Claxton** consists of sculptural forms coated with the light-reflective paint used on high-vis workwear and road signs. Light levels and movement affect the work, creating an intense dynamic between the audience and the enclosed architecture. Off-site at Midlands Art Centre on 2 April 2023 is a screening of **Diego Marcon’s** award-winning short film **Monelle (2017)**, which combines techniques of structural cinema, CGI animation and the backdrop of the Casa del Fascio in Como, Italy.

An in-person and online programme of public events takes place throughout the exhibition including **Plum Pudding: Boot House (2022)**, a performance-lecture by **Stuart Whipps** at Perry Common Library in March 2023; and **Pipework (2022)**, a series of group performances by **Robert Cervera** and students from Royal Birmingham Conservatoire in May 2023.

A fully illustrated exhibition catalogue accompanies the exhibition, with essays and texts by Melanie Pocock, Ikon Curator; Lucy Mounfield, Assistant Curator; Stuart Whipps, artist; and Joshua Comaroff, architectural historian and designer. The catalogue, designed by Fraser Muggeridge Studio, will be published in 2023 and available to purchase from Ikon Shop.

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

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small by email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

Social Media Handles - Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: [@ikongallery](https://www.instagram.com/ikongallery) [#ikongallery](https://twitter.com/ikongallery)
Links: ikon-gallery.org

Notes to Editors:

1. Biographies for all artists are available [here](#).
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 Education Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. ikon-gallery.org

3. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. For the latest news and events follow @ikongallery on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).
4. 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