

IKON

Ikon Gallery
1 Oozells Square Brindleyplace
Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / ikon-gallery.org
free entry / donations welcome
Registered charity no. 528892

MALI MORRIS

CALLING

20 SEPTEMBER – 22 DECEMBER 2023

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham and off-site locations



Mali Morris, *Second Stradella* (2016). Acrylic on canvas, 198 x 214 cm. Image courtesy the artist.

This Autumn, Ikon presents a major solo exhibition by British artist Mali Morris. *Calling* (20 September – 22 December 2023) includes nearly 30 works from the last 25 years and documents a notable change in Morris' artistic practice from the late 1990s when she considered new painterly directions. Morris's first solo exhibition was held at Ikon Gallery, John Bright Street, in 1979 and she now returns to Ikon, Brindleyplace, in 2023 to transform the gallery's spaces into fields of colour and light.

Mali Morris has been exploring the possibilities of abstract painting for over 50 years. Her recent paintings create visual arenas, where colour moves through space and space moves through colour. Glowing circles call to each other through painted structures that are both fluid and geometric. Opacity and translucency are important, as are the ways the touch of a brush or other

implements can open up a painting's virtual depth. Freedom, ease, pleasure and wit co-exist with rigour and decisiveness.

Morris' earlier work belongs to a painterly tradition including Abstract Expressionists such as Hans Hofmann, Adolf Gottlieb, Gillian Ayres and Helen Frankenthaler, that itself developed from the example of earlier modernists including Milton Avery, Albert Marquet and Henri Matisse. *Calling* features paintings by Morris from the past 25 years. Morris's *Clearings* paintings, begun at the end of the 1990s, mark a break from the tradition of gestural abstraction, setting the stage for her work up to the present. In the *Clearings* Morris worked by removing (or 'clearing') layers of paint to reveal previously painted layers below. These works allowed Morris to achieve new ways of structuring pictorial space in her work, to find the luminosity she searches for.

One of the early *Clearings*, *Pink Blue Cleared* (1999) is amongst the most simplified paintings Morris has ever made, while *Peeps* (2005-6) shows the *Clearings* moving to a greater complexity. Morris painted over the irregular patchwork of saturated colour of a failed painting, adding and removing paint in controlled yet impulsive gestures until she achieved a lively balance between the field of creamy striations and the orbs of pink and yellow that float ambiguously within it. *Flotilla* (2007) makes the underlying grid of *Peeps* explicit and shows her employing the spatial ambiguities of the *Clearings* at a more public scale: the circles positioned within *Flotilla* appear suspended at different depths from the picture surface and are drawn to and repelled from each other by hard-to-gauge tensions; yet the overall result is clear and luminous. After 2014 Morris moved away from the premises of the *Clearings*, extending their lessons while continuing to rethink her visual language. The lively checkerboard colour of *Second Stradella* (2014) merges a grid and a spiral motif in a manner reminiscent of Matisse's famous *The Snail* (1953). *Crossing* (2014) and *Line Dancer* (2016) return a more direct form of gesture. The most recent painting in the exhibition, completed this year, is from her *Colour Go Round* series. The complex central motif of the *Colour Go Rounds* seems to be made from squares of coloured paper, dropped almost at random onto the picture surface, a conceit that allows Morris to explore layering, opacity and translucency and fresh, vibrant colour with her characteristic wit and light touch.

Calling is curated by independent curator and writer Sam Cornish, author of the monograph *Mali Morris: Painting*. Published by the Royal Academy (2019), with a foreword by Mel Gooding, art critic, writer and curator. Available at Ikon Shop and [online](#).

In 2022 Mali Morris was commissioned to design a group of thirty-three banners to hang above London's Bond Street. Morris has donated twelve of these banners to Ikon, to display on the front exterior of the gallery during her exhibition and off-site at regional art schools to raise awareness of art education. The motif explored in Morris' banners relate to her painting on canvas, *Rain In Durango II* (2015), included in Ikon's exhibition.

Morris has a keen interest in poetry and was a trustee of Poetry London. To compliment her exhibition, Ikon hosts an evening of poetry readings by two of Morris' favourite poets, Liz Berry and Martha Kapos, on Friday 13 October. Free, booking essential.

For more information, press appointments, 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: @ikongallery #IkonGallery @ace_national @aceagrams @ace_midlands @bhamcitycouncil

Notes to Editors:

- Mali Morris** was born in North Wales in 1945, studied Fine Art at the Universities of Newcastle upon Tyne and Reading, and was elected to the Royal Academy of Arts in 2010. Her first solo exhibition was held at Ikon Gallery, John Bright Street, in 1979. Since then, she has exhibited widely and internationally, with more than forty solo exhibitions in Europe, America and Japan, most recently at Hales New York in 2022. In 2019 Morris held a solo exhibition of works on paper in the Royal Academy's Tennant Gallery and curated a parallel exhibition drawn from the Royal Academy's collection. Morris was Senior Lecturer in Painting at Chelsea School of Art from 1991-2005. From 2019 - 2020 she was Professor of Painting at RA Schools. In 2021 she was shortlisted for the David and Yuko Juda Foundation Award. Public collections holding Morris's paintings include, Arts Council England, British Council, Contemporary Arts Society, Fitzwilliam Cambridge, Government Art Collection, Pallant House, Royal Collection, Whitworth Art Gallery Manchester, and Museum of Wales Cardiff.
- 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 is open Wednesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm. Free entry, donations welcome. Ikon is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, and Birmingham City Council. ikon-gallery.org
- Arts Council England** is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 we will invest over £440 million of public money from Government and an estimated £93 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. www.artscouncil.org.uk.
Following the Covid-19 crisis, the Arts Council developed a £160 million Emergency Response Package, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. We are also one of the bodies responsible for administering the Government's unprecedented Culture Recovery Fund of which we delivered over £1 billion to the sector in grants and loans. Find out more at www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19.
- Birmingham City Council** is the local government body responsible for the governance of the City of Birmingham, UK. It is the most populated local council area in the United Kingdom (excluding counties) with 101 elected councillors representing over one million people, in 69 wards. The council headquarters are at the Council House, Victoria Square in the heart of the city centre. The council is responsible for running nearly all local services, with the exception of those run by joint boards. For more information visit www.birmingham.gov.uk