

# IKON/60

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

## DION KITSON

### *RUE BRITANNIA*

10 MAY – 8 SEPTEMBER 2024

IKON GALLERY & OFF-SITE COMMISSION, J.W. EVANS  
SILVER FACTORY



Left: Dion Kitson, *Smoking Quills* (2023). Cigarette butt with feather. Image courtesy the artist. Photo by Steve Russell Studios.  
Right: Dion Kitson at J.W. Evans Silver Factory. Image courtesy English Heritage. Photo by Tom Bird.

Ikon presents the first major solo exhibition and an ambitious off-site commission by British artist Dion Kitson in partnership with English Heritage.

Kitson grew up in Dudley (b.1995) in the heart of the Black Country and studied at Birmingham School of Art. Incisive, enterprising and laced with sharp wit, Kitson's artistic practice dissects British class and identity, reshaping its visual hallmarks and traditions across sculpture, installation, film and found objects. Kitson's work is both playful and provocative, providing a candid account of the everyday and the banality of life. Joe Lycett, comedian, painter and television presenter, writes in his essay for the exhibition catalogue that Kitson "*understands the state of our nation better than anyone, and why it is the way it is: funny, and beautiful, and dumb.*"

The visual environment of Kitson's exhibition at Ikon draws on the artist's experiences of growing up in Dudley, a market town which prides itself as the birthplace of the industrial revolution and, as such, is replete with ruination - a metaphor for the wider state of British towns. Visitors to *Rue Britannia* are invited into the architectural installation *Council House of Kitson* (2024), which

recreates both the façade and interior of his father's house, who's living room was also pebbledashed.

In contrast with the large-scale pebbledash installation, *Ode to Rubbish Mountain* (2022) is a miniature recreation of the iconic landfill pile that was removed from Brierley Hill in the Black Country in 2016 after a 5-year local battle to have it removed. It is also an ode to the train model-making hobbyists, subverted to document local authority affairs. The artist delights as much in the local news frenzy created by the waste and its clearance as the dust pile itself. A real BT Openreach greenbox is attended by a 'waxwork' 3D printed engineer, kneeling to a shrine dedicated to communication. His presence is uncanny, as though you might blink-and-miss the artifice. Kitson's lifelong fascination with the royal family comes to expression through another 'waxwork' of a young Prince. Facing the floor, the figure is genuinely haunting, taking its form as a collective memory made corporeal.

Visitors to the exhibition can play on a functional pool table, as Kitson brings the staple of the British pub into the gallery space. Elsewhere, he shows a series of prints created from scratched bus stop windows, a form of found drypoint etchings. Slung from a suspended telegraph wire are the unmistakable ruby slippers of Dorothy. *The Wizard of Oz* - a whimsical, trippy and yearning tale of searching for the way home - is a key reference point for Kitson and a self-portrait as the Tin Man also appears in his installation at J.W. Evans Silver Factory. A further work, *Backs against the wall* (2024) comprises 10 solid silver cast remote control backs, mounted on the wall, teasing Kitson's trail of silver interventions in his parallel off-site installation.

The artist's kinetic sculptures include an adorned easy chair, portraying an aged Elvis caught in the trap of Brexit, bedecked as 'the king' and gyrating on an automated mechanism. A school table with rulers laid out like a music box plays the tune of *Rule, Britannia!* on a loop – a hubristic swansong of empire.

### ***Silver Lining* at J.W. Evans Silver Factory**

Through *Silver Lining*, an off-site commission for English Heritage, Kitson honours a lost industrial past, utilising new technologies to create sculptural interventions in a former silver factory, celebrating the history and popular culture of Birmingham and the Black Country. In 2008, English Heritage acquired the J.W. Evans Silver Factory in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter which began as a cottage industry in 1881. The workshops are preserved in situ, containing thousands of dies for the manufacture of silverware; the entire factory's working equipment; and the workers' ephemera, magazines and posters. Kitson sets up a dialogue between the heritage of the museum and Ikon, a contemporary art gallery celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Kitson, whose practice includes designing and making jewellery, spent time working at a local silversmiths, learning processes and techniques similar to those of the factory workers. At J.W. Evans, Kitson introduces new sculptural works into the preserved site: a selection of silver pieces, including ashtrays, are placed among the original moulds; in the former Director's office a Newton's cradle made from laughing gas canisters is perched on the office desk; a hammer, apparently bent through telekinesis is found among tools; as is a Frosty Jack cider bottle cast in

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metal and a silver heroin spoon. Visitors also meet an array of characters, from The Tin Man of Oz to a cut-out figure of a footballer from Kitson's beloved Wolverhampton Wanderers, centred in a room still covered in old football posters and newspaper cuttings from the factory's workers; fading remnants of glories gone by. An empty cupboard is transformed by Kitson into a cabinet of curiosities, filled with deflated footballs resembling oversized jewels of baroque proportions. These interventions by Kitson, characterised by a dark humour and melancholic poetry, link directly to the artist's chosen title for his Ikon exhibition: *Rue Britannia*.

The exhibition and off-site installation are accompanied by a fully illustrated publication, the first monograph dedicated to Kitson, featuring an original essay by comedian Joe Lycett. A selection of Kitson's original jewellery and designed accessories are available from Ikon Shop, including his internet viral Cigarette Scarf and Monster Munch ring.

Tours of J.W. Evans Silver Factory are available to book, for more information visit [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)

This exhibition is supported by English Heritage, The Foundation Foundation and Ikon Investment Fund and is presented as part of Ikon's 60th anniversary year.

**For more information, press appointments, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small by email [r.small@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:r.small@ikon-gallery.org) or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.**

@ikongallery #IkonGallery @DionKitsonStudio @EnglishHeritage @ace\_national @aceagrams @ace\_midlands @bhamcitycouncil

Notes to Editors:

1. **Dion Kitson** was born in 1995 in Dudley, West Midlands, United Kingdom. Kitson studied Fine Art at Birmingham School Of Art, graduating in 2020. He has exhibited in group shows in the UK since 2015, and while studying at Birmingham School of Art he won the Ede & Ravenscroft Award Academic Prize, the ACS Studio prize, The Mike Holland Award and The Tate Prize. Kitson has shown work in over 50 exhibitions both nationally and internationally, representing the West Midlands through works made in response to his hometown, while recently creating and opening a contemporary art gallery, *FW Bargins* in a Midlands town centre in collaboration with the artist Foka Wolf. [dionkitson.com](http://dionkitson.com)
2. **J.W. Evans Silver Factory** was established in 1881 as J. W. Evans Silversmiths. The surviving historic factory is one of the most complete in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. Behind a frontage of four terraced houses lies a lost industrial world showing the changing fashions and fortunes of silverware through one remarkable family business. The workshops retain their original drop stamps and fly presses, and the space is packed with thousands of dies, presses, stock and records. The factory was rescued by the charity English Heritage in 2008, who now offer guided tours of the site on select days.
3. **English Heritage** cares for over 400 historic buildings, monuments, and sites - from world-famous prehistoric sites to grand medieval castles, from Roman forts on the edges of the

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- empire to a Cold War bunker. Through these, they bring the story of England to life for over 10 million people each year. Registered charity no. 1140351. [english-heritage.org.uk](http://english-heritage.org.uk)
4. **Ikon** is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art gallery, situated in Birmingham's city centre. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024. It is an educational charity with free entry for all 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. Ikon aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)
  5. **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.
  6. **Arts Council England** is the national development agency for creativity and culture. ACE have set out their strategic vision in *Let's Create* that by 2030 they want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 ACE will invest over £467 million of public money from Government and an estimated £250 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.
  7. **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](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk)

