

EXHIBITION GUIDE

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EXODUS CROOKS: WE NEED 2 TLK

4 JULY - 2 NOVEMBER 2024

"I was fascinated by the printed matter in the Stuart Hall archive, the fact that it was so present, so significant to Hall's research. He kept magazines, pamphlets, programs, you name it. He kept notebooks, filled with his notes and even some drawings. I have observed we have, for the most part 'gone digital'. We are not so invested in printed materials anymore, which is significantly more considerate of our ecology and environment. But it also means we have become solely dependent on the intangible, the wireless free space to communicate and document our lives." - Exodus Crooks

Ikon and University of Birmingham present *We need 2 tlk*, a new moving image installation by Midlands-based artist Exodus Crooks as part of *AI FUTURES* at The Exchange, the University of Birmingham's city centre venue in Centenary Square.

Commissioned by Ikon and University of Birmingham, with support from Birmingham-based Vivid Projects, Exodus has explored public perceptions of AI and reflections on media and technology as outlined in the work of celebrated Jamaican-British academic and cultural theorist Professor Stuart Hall (1932–2014). Produced in collaboration with movement artist Chelsea Gordon, the artwork considers how developments in communication shift our behaviour in conversing with others. *We need 2 tlk* focuses on the haptics and gestures present in everyday phone use and the processing of information from the eye, brain and hands.

The QWERTY keyboard is the most popular and widely used keyboard layout on smartphone and electronic devices. Other layouts include QWERTZ and AWERTY. From the mid-90s to the 00s, the T9 keypad (which stands for text on 9 keys) was used on mobile phones to send messages with repeated strokes of a single key to select a desired symbol. The QWERTY layout, in most but not all cases, generally involves the use of both hands to manoeuvre across the width of a screen to have a conversation.

Two films, presented in portrait to imitate the average smartphone screen, show a pair of hands in motion, the fingers bending and flexing as if typing on an invisible mobile phone keyboard [1,2]. Exodus set a series of prompts for three participants to capture the shift in speed, intensity of movement and positioning of their hands and fingers when typing about various topics. Having typed their responses, the devices were removed from the participants' hands to reveal the gestures that remained. Gordon, who acted as a critical partner and facilitator in directing the participants to think carefully about what their hands were doing and why, used these exercises to form the basis of a performance captured in the two films.

The moving image installation comprises 13 second hand mobile phones displayed horizontally to form a QWERTY keyboard [3]. Each device displays two-to-three keys of an iPhone on-screen keyboard. Subtly, over a period of time, the key arrangement is distorted: each letter or symbol alternates between the Apple font SF Pro and a handwritten letter. The use of handwritten text in the digital space symbolizes markers of humanity in message-based communication. In trying to understand how to differentiate between predicted AI-generated text and human script, Exodus has used scanned images of letters written with Indian ink to express the presence of the artist. *We need 2 tlk* explores how we, as humans, talk to one another and how AI mines and mimics human behaviour.

Exodus Crooks is a British-Jamaican multidisciplinary artist, educator and writer whose practice centres the relationship with self. Observing the results of fractious domesticity, despair and passion, their art tends to appear as questions of self-actualisation and the role that religion and spirituality play in that journey to enlightenment. Based between the Midlands and North Jamaica, their art exists alongside their educational role. With themes of care, tenderness and reimagination at the core of their practice, Exodus uses gardening, text, filmmaking and installation to further explore indigenous thought.

Chelsea Gordon is a movement artist interested in existence as performance, curating atmosphere and algorithms in dance. Through the posing of new and existing questions, Chelsea's practice considers repairing the relationships we have with our own bodies and prioritises the participation of intergenerational community within dance. In 2023, Chelsea was invited to be in residence in Cologne, Germany for CROWD Dance and later studied at Brighton's Screen and Film School, preparing them to direct movement for film and live performance. Their experience in movement direction, project realisation and refinement can be seen in their work as an Assistant Choreographer for Encore East, as Movement Director for Exodus Crooks' live performance at the National Gallery, London, and their newly commissioned film installation as part of *AI FUTURES* at The Exchange, commissioned by Ikon, Birmingham and University of Birmingham.

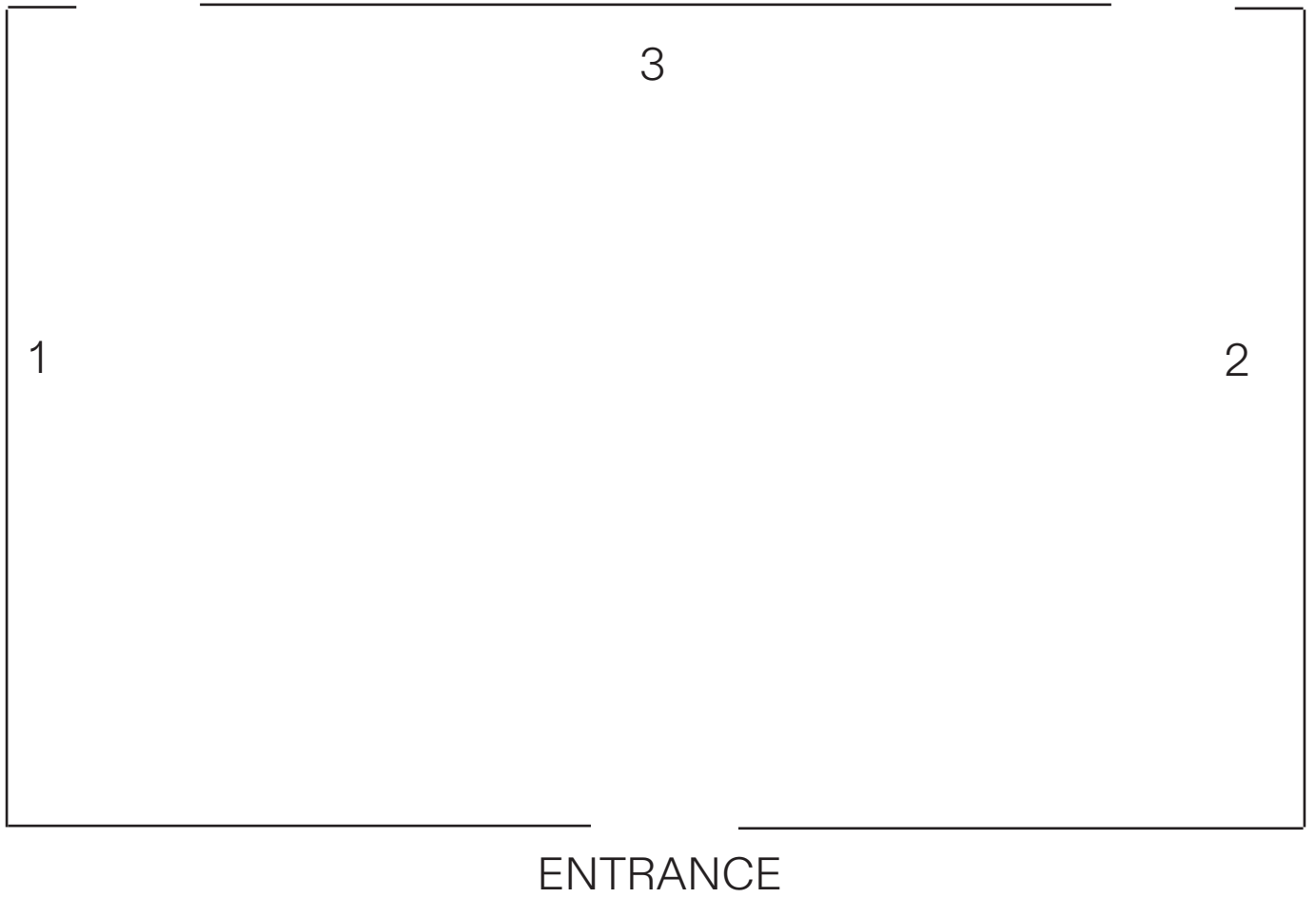
AI FUTURES runs from February to November 2024 at The Exchange and invites audiences to join the University of Birmingham on a journey into the brave new world of artificial intelligence. AI has the power to transform industries and enhance lives, yet it raises concerns about job displacement, privacy and security. Through a programme of exhibitions and events, vital questions are explored through the lens of University research.

The Stuart Hall Archive Project is a new research project that expands public understanding and engagement with the work of celebrated Jamaican-British academic and cultural theorist, Professor Stuart Hall. The archive will be fully catalogued by the Cadbury Research Library team over the course of the project, which is split into three main strands: Conjectures, Readings and Dialogues.

This new commission is supported by University of Birmingham and Ikon Investment Fund. It is the latest in a series of collaborations between Ikon and The Exchange, including Foka Wolf, *Why Are We Stuck in Hospital?* (2023) and Vanley Burke, *A Gift to Birmingham* (2022-23).

We need 2 tlk is presented as part of Ikon's 60th anniversary year. It follows Exodus Crooks' exhibition *Epiphany (Temporaire)* at Ikon Gallery (9 February – 21 April 2024), commissioned by Ort Gallery and International Curators Forum (ICF), and curated by Orphée Kashala.

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