

IKON SLOW BOAT: STOKE-ON-TRENT APRIL – MAY 2025



Nicola Shipley, Director of GRAIN Projects, with staff and students from Pinc College at Middleport Pottery, Stoke-on-Trent. Photo courtesy Ikon.

Ikon is pleased to announce *Slow Boat's* visit to Stoke-on-Trent in partnership with GRAIN Projects. Taking place throughout April and May 2025, *Slow Boat's* programme of activity involves artists and photographers, education partners and arts organisations, with a focus on engaging young people in North Staffordshire. The programme includes a free creative workshop on Saturday 10 May at Etruria Trent and Mersey Canal Visitor Moorings, Stoke-on-Trent, open to all.

Funded by Freelands Foundation until 2027, Ikon *Slow Boat* is a heritage narrowboat that has been converted into a 'floating art school', introducing young people aged 16-21 to the rich arts and crafts heritage of the Midlands. Creative sessions involve different making practices including ceramics, glass, printmaking, photography, silversmithing and textile weaving. Led by Ikon Youth Programme (IYP), it offers a space where young people can be themselves, experimenting with the idea of an artistic identity, individually and as a collective.

Ikon's ongoing commitment to art education, through programmes including Slow Boat, are an encouraging example to the sector. Slow Boat provides a radical space for education, literally taking it out of the gallery itself and into the communities it serves. We are delighted to be supporting it and excited by what it's achieving." Dr Henry Ward, Director, Freelands Foundation

With support from the Canal & River Trust's Stoke-on-Trent team, *Slow Boat* tours the Trent and Mersey Canal and the Caldon Canal, making key stop-offs at Trentham, Middleport Pottery, Etruria, Westport Lake and Stockton Brook Waterworks, a Victorian pumping station. Led by GRAIN Projects, the programme explores Stoke-on-Trent's industrial heritage and natural environment through a contemporary lens, with activities blending ceramics with photography, film-making and collage.

ASSOCIATED EVENT

***Slow Boat* creative workshop. A Canalside Arcana with artist Anna Francis.**

Saturday 10 May, 11am-2pm. Free entry. No need to book, just drop in.

Onboard *Slow Boat*, Etruria Trent and Mersey Canal Visitor Moorings, Stoke-on-Trent

Slow Boat hosts free creative activities including collage as part of *A Canalside Arcana*, the launch of a new public art trail by artist Anna Francis. No need to book, just drop in. Open to all ages, children must be accompanied at all times. For more information visit ikon-gallery.org

During this time, Ikon and GRAIN Projects work with regional artists onboard *Slow Boat*. Artists include Louise Adams, David Bethell, Stephen Burke, Anna Francis, Anthony Hammond, Ruby Nixon, Becky Nunes and Juneau Projects. Local arts organisations Appetite and The Portland Inn Project also utilise the workshop space onboard the boat to continue their important work with local communities. By using *Slow Boat* as an activity hub and exhibition space GRAIN Projects continue its tradition of working beyond the boundaries of a museum or gallery building.

"GRAIN Projects are delighted to collaborate with Ikon to bring Slow Boat to Stoke-on-Trent for the first time. The space enables so many creative and learning opportunities in an inspiring environment and highlights and commemorates the heritage of North Staffordshire during this important centenary year for the city. Passing through Etruria, Middleport and Stoke town during the spring months, hosting artist-led workshops and activities, is a unique and wonderful way of celebrating the city and its artists and communities." Nicola Shipley, Director, GRAIN Projects

Ikon's Slow Boat programme has been an important part of the gallery's outreach work for more than a decade, and we're delighted that its next voyage will take them to Stoke-on-Trent, during the city's centenary year celebrations. Slow Boat's tour will spotlight the rich cultural heritage and natural environment providing opportunities for artists and young people in the Midlands to experiment with creative practice in the unique context of a floating art school. Working alongside cultural organisations GRAIN Projects, Appetite and The Portland Inn Project, Slow Boat is another great opportunity for local people to access great art on their doorstep." Peter Knott, Midlands Area Director, Arts Council England

Slow Boat's programme in Stoke-on-Trent is focused on engaging with regional youth groups and organisations who provide invaluable opportunities to young people in the city, including

Middleport Matters, YMCA and the City Learning Trust. Education partners, such as Staffordshire University and Pinc College, also utilise the boat as an alternative space for study, offering a new perspective of these post-industrial towns. Alongside this programme, Ikon Youth Programme (IYP) visit Stoke-on-Trent to explore the local arts ecology, rich crafts heritage and canal network.

Ikon Youth Programme and *Slow Boat* are supported by Freelands Foundation.

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: @ikongallery #IkonGallery @ace_national @aceagrams @ace_midlands @bhamcitycouncil @grain_projects @freelandsfoundation

Notes to Editors:

1. For more information about **Ikon Youth Programme** and ***Slow Boat*** visit ikon-gallery.org/education/ikon-youth-programme
2. **Ikon** is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art gallery, situated in Birmingham's city centre. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon celebrated its 60th 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 international and local artists working in a variety of media, 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
3. **Ikon** is open Tuesday – 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.
4. **GRAIN Projects** is an arts organisation dedicated to commissioning, facilitating and delivering ambitious, engaging and high-quality photography projects, commissions, events and exhibitions. GRAIN is a hub, network and platform for contemporary photography, working collaboratively with artists and communities to create positive change and ensuring that people from every walk of life can express themselves. Our activities enable people to develop skills and to influence change. We increase participation through high quality projects that explore identities, histories, stories and place and in our work we create a space of care, consideration and community. GRAIN is led by GRAIN Projects CIC, a unique and collaborative arts organisation, supported by Arts Council England and Birmingham City University. grainphotographyhub.co.uk
5. **Freelands Foundation** believes art is central to a broad and balanced education, and a right for everyone. They are driven by a conviction in the vital role of learning and making to

foster creativity, resilience, criticality and problem-solving that empowers and equips us for the future. As the Foundation approach their tenth anniversary, they resolve to strengthen their work with teachers, students, schools, universities, artists and cultural organisations. freelandsfoundation.co.uk

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. artscouncil.org.uk
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 birmingham.gov.uk

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