

IKON

IKON ANNOUNCES 2026 ARTISTIC PROGRAMME

Ikon, Birmingham's internationally acclaimed contemporary art gallery, announces its exhibition and education programmes for 2026. Established as an artists-led alternative space in the Bullring in 1964, Ikon remains free for everyone and committed to showcasing the very best of British and international art.

Exhibitions

Ikon Gallery's 2026 exhibition programme celebrates innovation, resilience, and cultural dialogue through three major shows. **Break the Mould** (25 March – 6 September) concludes Ikon's craft exhibition trilogy with a focus on ceramics, transforming the gallery into a space for experimentation and public engagement. Running concurrently, **Angela de la Cruz: UPRIGHT** (25 March – 6 September) presents rarely seen works and a new commission with Birmingham Royal Ballet, exploring the human body and the tension between strength and fragility. Later in the year, Ikon hosts the first major UK survey of **Balraj Khanna** (30 September – 21 February), tracing five decades of abstract painting shaped by migration, memory, and the natural world. Together, these exhibitions demonstrate Ikon's ongoing commitment to showcasing diverse practices and fostering conversations that resonate locally and globally.

Off-site

Ikon's 2026 off-site programme extends its reach locally and internationally through two major projects. At the Library of Birmingham, **What are the odds? Ikon Creative Health** (21 January – 28 June) explores the role of art in health and care systems. Later in the year, Ikon contributes to the global stage as Melanie Pocock, Artistic Director (Exhibitions), joins the curatorial team for the **Bangkok Art Biennale** (29 October 2026 – 28 February 2027). Under the theme **Angels and Mara**, the Biennale brings together artists from Thailand and beyond, including Htein Lin, Mahtab Hussain and Guy Gunaratne who have previously exhibited at Ikon, to reflect on resilience and contradiction in a fractured world.

Education

Ikon's **BCU Tuesdays** partnership with Birmingham City University enables the gallery to open to the public every Tuesday, providing opportunities for outreach with regional secondary schools. This complements programmes of **Creative Education**, with school, college and university partners, and **Creative Health**, informing policy development at Birmingham City Council's Public Health Division. With funding from Freelands Foundation for three years (2024-2027), **Ikon Youth Programme** (IYP) continues to activate a converted narrowboat,

Slow Boat, as an alternative art school. Ikon's **Art in Prisons** takes place across three contexts with funding from local authority and charitable trusts.

For more information, press visits, high-res images and to request interviews please contact:

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EXHIBITIONS

BREAK THE MOULD

25 MARCH – 6 SEPTEMBER 2026

IKON GALLERY



Jack Ky Tan, *A Ceremony for the Unborn Future* (2025)

© Courtesy the artist. Photo by Zula Rabikowska

Ikon presents **Break the Mould** - the final chapter in a trilogy of exhibitions exploring craft, art school pedagogies and contemporary art practice. This concluding instalment centres on ceramics, celebrating clay as a medium of experimentation and process-based practice.

Running from **25 March to 6 September 2026**, **Break the Mould** brings together a dynamic cohort of ceramicists, including [Jack Ky Tan](#), [Halima Cassell](#) and [Roo Dhissou](#), for a series of residencies. The residencies are organised in partnership with the **University of Staffordshire** and supported by **local ceramic studios in Birmingham**, transforming the gallery space into a vibrant laboratory for exploration and public engagement.

Break the Mould also explores how the craft and medium of clay can speak to the future – through commemorative pottery focused on disaster ceramics, sustainable practices that reuse construction waste spoil, and gift economies in which clay is shared among colleagues or strangers.

This exhibition is generously supported by Jerwood Foundation and Freelands Foundation.

EXHIBITIONS

ANGELA DE LA CRUZ: UPRIGHT
25 MARCH – 6 SEPTEMBER 2026
IKON GALLERY



Angela de la Cruz, *Still Life With Table* (2000), oil on canvas, wood, 90 x 105 x 100 cm
© Courtesy the artist. Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Thomas Schulte

Ikon presents rarely seen works by acclaimed artist Angela de la Cruz alongside a new commission developed in collaboration with **Birmingham Royal Ballet**.

Guest curated by Carolina Grau, the exhibition focuses on de la Cruz's concern with the human body and the realities of everyday survival. Her sculptural paintings – such as *Still Life with Table* (2000), featuring canvas stretched over collapsed domestic structures, and *Bloated III (Blue)* (2012), composed of hammered metal – capture the physical dimensions of de la Cruz's body and emotional relationships between strength and fragility.

Through evocative object-based narratives, de la Cruz captures life's shifting conditions: from the joy of music in *Upright Piano* (1999) to the vulnerability of *Transfer* (2010–12). These figurative associations invite reflection on resilience, adaptation, and the human condition.

Angela de la Cruz (born 1965, La Coruña, Spain; lives London) has been experimenting with the language of painting and sculpture for more than thirty years. She was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2010, and this marks her **first solo exhibition in the UK outside of London**.

The exhibition is generously supported by Henry Moore Foundation and Ikon Benefactor Jonathan Wearing.

EXHIBITIONS

BALRAJ KHANNA

30 SEPTEMBER 2026 – 21 FEBRUARY 2027

IKON GALLERY



Balraj Khanna, *New play* (1984). Acrylic and sand on canvas, 180 x 180 cm
© Estate of Balraj Khanna. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary

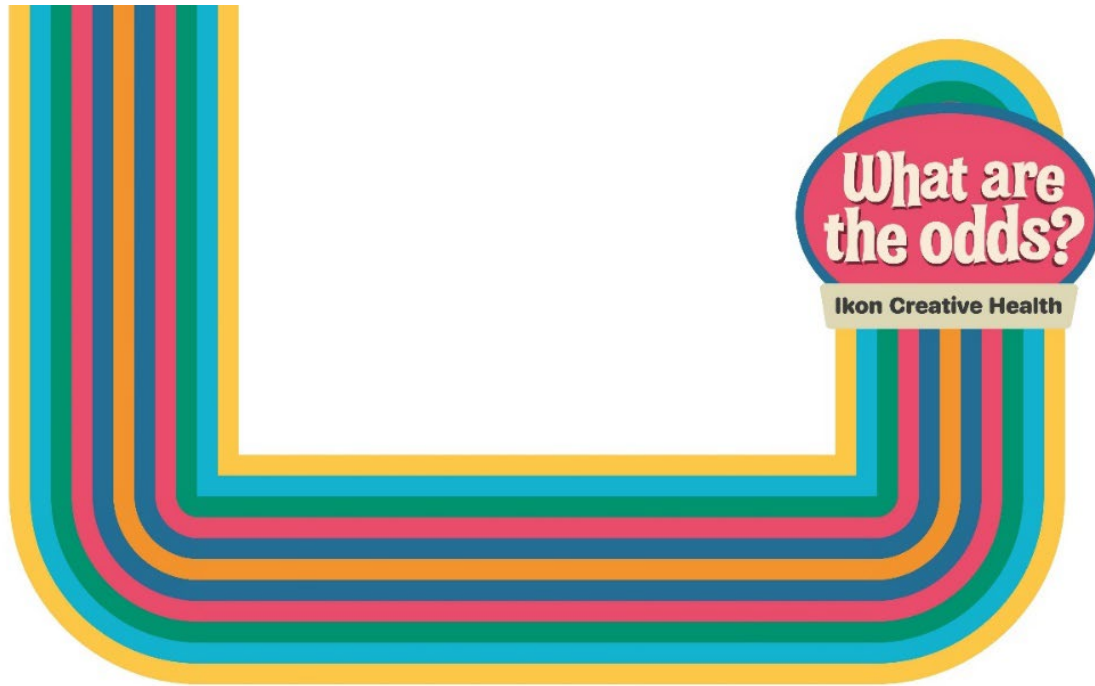
In autumn 2026, Ikon presents the **first major survey exhibition of artist Balraj Khanna** (1939-2024). Coinciding with the 25th anniversary of Khanna's landmark commission for **Birmingham Hippodrome Safety Curtain, *Astral Dance*** (2001), the exhibition traces the evolution of Khanna's unique vision of abstraction, shaped by his youth in the Punjab region of India, life in post-war Britain, and fascination for the natural world.

A self-taught artist, writer, and curator, Khanna witnessed the Partition of India in 1947 before relocating to London in 1962. A road accident in 1965 led to a period of recuperation in France, where he began creating abstract paintings inspired by the forests of Metz. At Ikon, rarely seen works from the 1960s will be shown alongside paintings from the 1970s that explore diasporic identity and postcolonial politics. Mixed media works from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s will highlight Khanna's innovative painting technique and his vibrant visual language of organic and geometric forms.

This Balraj Khanna exhibition is made possible by lead supporter Bagri Foundation, with additional support from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Jhaveri Contemporary and the Balraj Khanna Estate.

OFF-SITE

WHAT ARE THE ODDS? IKON CREATIVE HEALTH
21 JANUARY – 28 JUNE 2026
LIBRARY OF BIRMINGHAM



What are the odds? Ikon Creative Health, graphic (2025). Image courtesy Foka Wolf.

What are the odds? Ikon Creative Health – an exhibition at the Library of Birmingham – explores the role of art in supporting health and care systems.

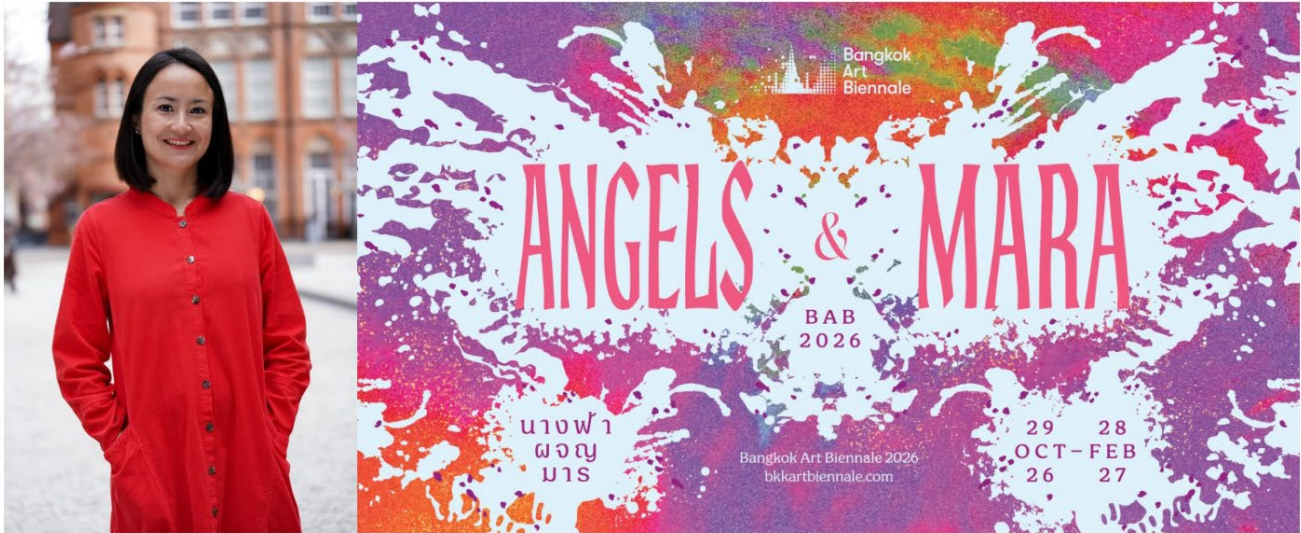
Based on Ikon’s collaborative research with visual artists, academic and charity partners, ***What are the odds?*** reflects a range of lived experience from diversity in infant feeding to ageing and dying well. The exhibition’s graphic identity – designed by Birmingham-based artist Foka Wolf – plays on a 1970s ‘game of life’ TV show aesthetic, simulating a journey through the different institutions that define a life course.

Curated by Regan McDonald, **Public Health Research Officer**, and Linzi Stauvers, **Artistic Director (Education) at Ikon Gallery**, exhibiting artists include Sally Butcher, Jaskirt Dhaliwal-Boora, Feeding Chair, Foka Wolf, Niki Gandy, Ayesha Jones, Vic Moyosola & Sadie Barnett.

The exhibition is generously supported by an Art Fund Reimagine Grant, Ikon Investment Fund and Birmingham City Council. Exhibition interpretation is formed in partnership and consultation with Birmingham City Council, Public Health, Changing Our Lives, Living Well Consortium and University of Birmingham.

OFF-SITE

BANGKOK ART BIENNALE - *ANGELS AND MARA*
29 OCTOBER 2026 – 28 FEBRUARY 2027
BANGKOK, VARIOUS VENUES



Melanie Pocock, 2024. Photography by Ayesha Jones; Bangkok Art Biennale 2026: *Angels and Mara*
© Bangkok Art Biennale Foundation.

Melanie Pocock, **Artistic Director (Exhibitions) at Ikon Gallery**, is part of the curatorial team for the **5th edition of the Bangkok Art Biennale (BAB)**. She joins a distinguished group of curators including **Prof. Dr. Apinan Poshyananda** (Chief Executive and Artistic Director, BAB), **Adulaya Hoontrakul** (Director, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre), **Rémy Jarry** (Lecturer, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok; Adjunct Professor, Catholic University of Paris), and **Kulapat Yantrasast** (Founder and Creative Director, WHY Architecture).

As the world trembles with wars, terrorism, environmental crises, and political divides, humanity is caught within the blurred boundaries of right, wrong and in between. In this fractured reality, opposites coexist —compassion with cruelty, truth with distortion. Set in Bangkok (Krung Thep, the City of Angels), BAB 2026 becomes a stage for artists from Thailand and around the world to reflect on the struggles, contradictions, and resilience of our time.

The first list of artists includes [Htein Lin](#) and [Mahtab Hussain & Guy Gunaratne](#), whose work featured in major exhibitions at Ikon in spring 2025.

BAB 2026 is organised by the Bangkok Art Biennale Foundation in collaboration with [Thai Beverage Public Company Limited \(ThaiBev\)](#) with the support of public and private sectors.

EDUCATION

CREATIVE EDUCATION



Left image courtesy Ayesha Jones with Pinc College (2025). Right image courtesy Will Kew (2025).

In 2026, Ikon partners with universities to create opportunities for children and young people to learn about the cultural and creative industries. On **BCU Tuesdays**, school and college students are welcomed to Ikon Gallery for interactive workshops, delivered in collaboration with the Birmingham City University's (BCU) Schools Outreach Team. These sessions introduce Key Stage 4 and 5 learners to the breadth of creative study opportunities at BCU, from Fine Art to Fashion, Photography and Arts Education.

At The Exchange – the former municipal bank in Centenary Square – Ikon presents **Sunsets, Food and Friendship** (26 November 2025 – 22 February 2026), an exhibition of young people's photography focused on the importance of culture, heritage and identity in shaping a sense of self and belonging. The project forms part of Researching Educational Partnerships (REPS), led by **Reza Gholami**, Professor of Sociology of Education at University of Birmingham.

Ikon Gallery welcomes all educational groups and offers tours and workshops, and free online resources including activity packs, detailed in 2025-26 School Offer.

EDUCATION

IKON YOUTH PROGRAMME SLOW BOAT 2024 – 2027



Still from Remember Nature (2025). Film by Harun Morrison, Umama Hamido and Ikon Youth Programme.

With funding from [Freelands Foundation](#) for three years (2024-2027), **Ikon Youth Programme** (IYP) activates a converted narrowboat as an alternative art school. The group of young people, aged 16-21, has developed a regional canal route which explores the rich art school heritage of Birmingham and the West Midlands. Each year, **Slow Boat** travels 150 miles of canal network, with stop offs in Wolverhampton, Tipton, Stourbridge, Halesowen and Coventry.

In 2026, IYP will collaborate with artist **Laurie Ramsell** and **Modern Clay** – a cooperative ceramics clay studio based in Digbeth – in responding to Ikon's exhibition **Break the Mould**, which explores craft, art school pedagogies and contemporary art practice.

Against a backdrop of growing social media usage, IYP collaborates with other youth groups to channel their voices, alleviate anxieties and raise awareness of justice issues.

EDUCATION

ART IN PRISONS



Simon Harris working in the studio at HMP Grendon (2025). Image courtesy Tom Bird.

Ikon's *Art in Prisons* programme involves artist residencies in three prisons: HMP Grendon and HMP Spring Hill in Buckinghamshire, and HMP Birmingham.

With generous funding from the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, **Simon J. Harris** focuses activity on painting and printing in the HMP Grendon studio where Ikon will showcase the results of his residency (17 April–15 May 2026). Artist **Jessica Ostrowicz** runs evening workshops from a dedicated space in the Buckinghamshire open prison with a grant from the Rothschild Foundation, culminating in an exhibition at Discover Bucks Museum (4 March – 19 April 2026). A consortium of funders – Birmingham City Council (Public Health), William A. Cadbury Charitable Trust and The 29 May 1961 Charitable Trust – support twice weekly sessions in Birmingham's inner-city prison where resident artist **Niki Gandy** is creating new work for What are the odds? Ikon Creative Health (21 January – 28 June 2026).

In 2026 Ikon is taking part in an exchange programme with Agder Kunstakademi, an autonomous art school in Agder Prison, Norway, instigating a transnational conversation with artists, curators, prisoners and prison staff.

FUNDING

Ikon is a registered charity and is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. This core grant goes towards the gallery's running costs, enabling Ikon to provide free entry. The exhibition and education programmes, and off-site projects across the city, are primarily paid for through fundraising activity. Ikon raises money through venue hire, Ikon shop, trusts and foundations, corporate patrons and sponsors, international funding sources and the generosity of those visitors and supporters who make a donation.



MAJOR PARTNERS 2026

Agder Kunstakademi, ai. gallery, Art Fund, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham City University, Birmingham Hippodrome, Birmingham Hospice, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Changing Our Lives, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Discover Bucks Museum, Freelands Foundation, Henry Moore Foundation, HM Prison and Probation Service, In Certain Places, Jameel Arts & Health Lab, Library of Birmingham, Living Well Consortium, Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, Modern Clay, Paul Mellon Centre, Rothschild Foundation, The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust, The Ampersand Foundation, University of Birmingham, University of Staffordshire, William A Cadbury Charitable Trust.

SECTOR PARTNERS

PLUS TATE aims to support the development of the visual arts across the UK, and to foster a climate where exchange and partnership can flourish. Joining together to exchange ideas, knowledge, skills and resources, as well as programmes and collections, the Plus Tate partners, along with and facilitated by Tate, broaden and deepen engagement in modern and contemporary art across the country.

CULTURE CENTRAL is a collective voice and development agency for culture and the creative industries in Birmingham and the wider region. Culture Central is committed to developing and leading projects, alongside other leadership bodies in the city region, that have the potential for a positive impact on the sector and on the region.

BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET is the United Kingdom's leading touring ballet company performing a range of traditional, classical and heritage ballets as well as ground-breaking new works with the aim of encouraging choreographers of the future. The Company's Director since January 2020 is the internationally renowned Carlos Acosta. They standardly perform at Birmingham Hippodrome for approximately ten weeks of the year and the remainder of the year tours throughout the United Kingdom and overseas. On average, the Company performs 100 shows a year nationally and internationally.

CORPORATE PATRONS

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LEAD BENEFACTOR

ai. gallery

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IMAGES

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. **Ikon Gallery**, 1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS. 0121 248 0708 / ikon-gallery.org Open Tuesday-Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm. Free entry, donations welcome. Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon. Registered charity no. 528892.
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 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's first home was in a glass-sided kiosk in the Bullring shopping centre, a 'gallery without walls'. Since then, Ikon has had a number of venues around the city centre and in 1998 moved to its current premises in Brindleyplace, converting a Victorian school building into a contemporary art gallery. Ikon now welcomes around 200,000 visitors a year to the Gallery and off-site projects. From a humble start, Ikon has grown to establish a worldwide reputation as one of the most international art institutions in the UK. In recent years, exhibiting artists have hailed from Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Australia and Sweden, in addition to homegrown talent including Vanley Burke, Ayesha Jones, Farwa Moledina, Maryam Wahid and Foka Wolf. Ikon has played a key role in the development of many artistic careers – Hurvin Anderson, Antony Gormley, Carmen Herrera, Beatriz Milhazes and Cornelia Parker all had important exhibitions here.

3. **Ikon Shop** is Birmingham's only specialist art bookshop, stocking a range of books, cards, artists' limited editions, magazines and gifts. All profits from Ikon Shop support Ikon Gallery's charitable artistic and educational programme. shop.ikon-gallery.org
4. Ikon is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, and Birmingham City Council.
5. **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

6. **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
7. Please note all dates and details are subject to change, for up to date information and high-res images please contact Pelham Communications or Ikon.