

EXHIBITION GUIDE

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ANGELA DE LA CRUZ UPRIGHT

25 MARCH – 6 SEPTEMBER 2026
SECOND FLOOR GALLERIES

Ikon presents *UPRIGHT*, an exhibition of rarely seen work by artist **Angela de la Cruz** that explores her enduring concern with the human body and the realities of everyday survival. Guest curated by Carolina Grau, it gathers key pieces from 2000 to now and a new commission developed with **Birmingham Royal Ballet**.

Born in 1965 in La Coruña, Spain, and based in London, Angela de la Cruz has been experimenting with the language of painting for thirty years. Since she began, she has attempted to redefine the boundaries of the medium, focusing on painting as an object and in terms of what it can represent. She has developed a distinctive approach that gives her paintings a sculptural quality, blurring categories of painting and sculpture and using each one interchangeably, depending on what she wants to express and the needs of each work.

The presence or absence of the body has always been central to de la Cruz's art. She sees the stretcher as an extension of her body and often uses the measurements of her figure for the dimensions of her work. Her experience with paint is physical, embodying life changes and the society in which we live.

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Jonathan Wearing

**GALERIE
THOMAS
SCHULTE**

The title of the exhibition, *UPRIGHT*, implies to stand up straight, but also to be a vertical part of a structure that supports other parts. It explores the performative nature of de la Cruz's art, inquiring into the tension between movement and stillness. Just as the body suffers from the bounds of mortality, de la Cruz's work represents an exposed materiality, highlighting the emotional relationship between strength and fragility, the beautiful and the broken.

Sculptural paintings capture the physical dimensions of de la Cruz's body, inviting reflection on resilience, adaptation and the human condition. ***Still Life with Table (2000) [1]*** comprises a black canvas roughly stretched over collapsed domestic furniture. This striking piece was one of her first works to address volume, mass and weight. Nearby is ***Limp (Brown) (2000) [2]***. Inspired by Spanish picaresque literature,¹ the painting appears to have harmed itself by inserting another painting into its structure to remain upright. Composed of hammered metal, ***Bloated III (Blue) (2012) [3]*** evokes being on the verge of something, or the liminal state between one form and another.

Other works appear precarious, vulnerable and unprotected. In ***Transfer (White) with Armchair (2011) [4]***, de la Cruz leaves a trace of the volume of her body suspended between two poles. The elegant white installation reflects an eternal moment of waiting, when one is unable to do anything and necessarily depends on others.

In the final gallery, the artist depicts familiar situations in humorous and figurative terms through relationships between objects. ***Upright III (Leg Chair) (2002) [5]*** consists of a chair

1. Spanish picaresque literature is a genre of prose fiction that first emerged during the Spanish Golden Age (late 15th to late 17th century). Satirical in tone, it often follows the adventures of a cunning individual who suffers from a physical deformity and survives on the fringes of society.

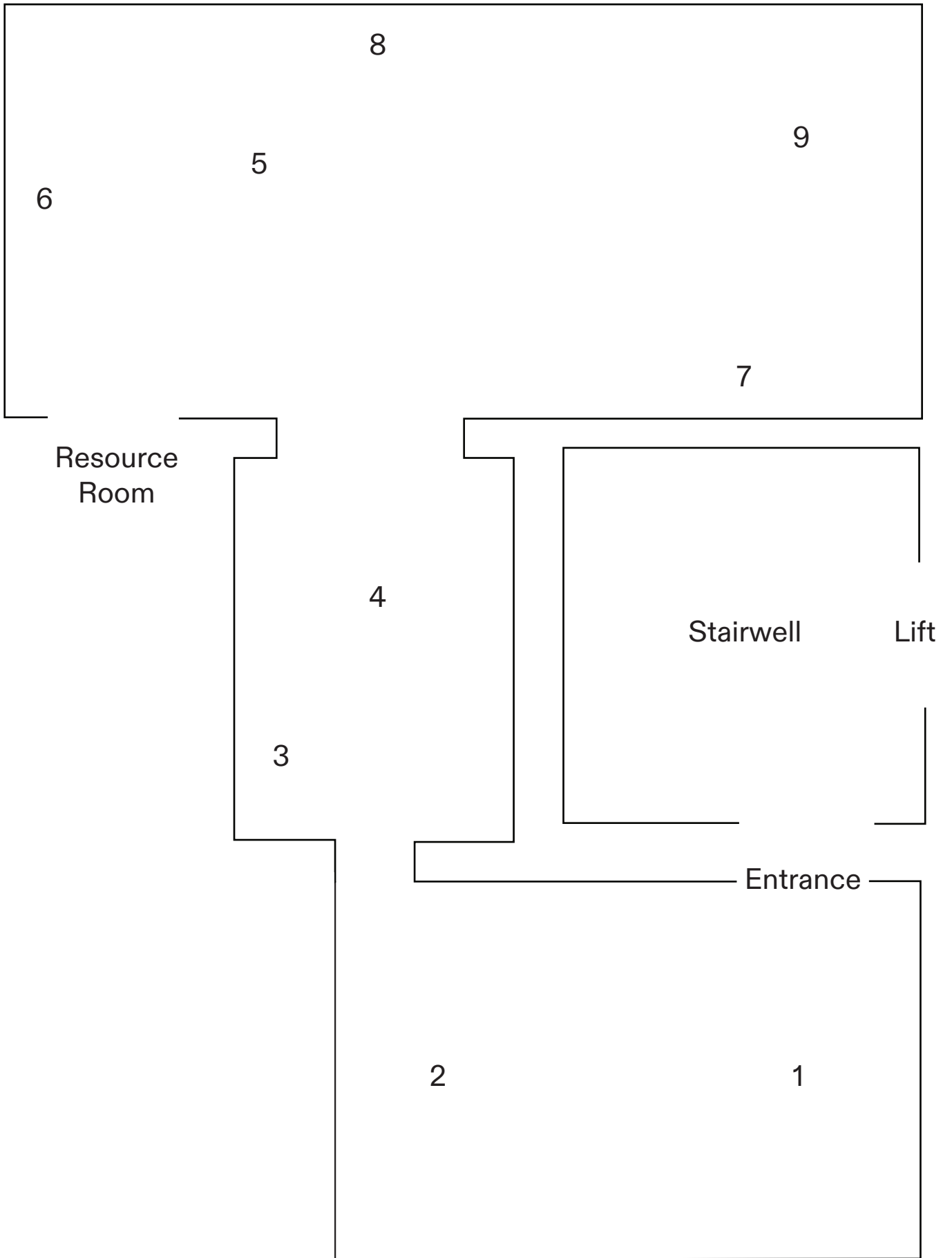
with one leg missing, but which manages to stay upright by sitting on a stool elevated by wooden 'heels'. In ***Reach (Red / Black) Two Parts (2002) [6]***, a painting succumbs to the weight of another which climbs up on it to reach higher. Recalling divides between public and private space, the bound surface of ***Shutter (Red) (2017) [7]*** evokes the feeling of finding refuge in a hidden place.

For her new commission, de la Cruz has been in conversation with **Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB)** regarding their performance of Sir Peter Wright's production of *The Nutcracker*. She was interested in the idea of the nutcracker figure getting broken and fixed again. This resonates with how ballerinas break in their new pointe shoes to soften them, so that they adapt to their feet and become flexible. ***Blister (2026) [8]*** reflects on these aspects of *The Nutcracker* and the ballerinas' process, as well as de la Cruz's violent interventions in which material is physically ripped and torn. Playing with rigidity, elasticity and resilience, the artist challenges the convention of the perfect square by deforming its flat surface, unleashing it into three-dimensional space. During the exhibition, **BRB artist Olivia Chang-Clarke** will present an original choreography in response to de la Cruz's work.

Another key piece is ***Upright Piano (1999) [9]***. To make the work, de la Cruz joined and restrung a whole piano with the bottom part of another so that it can only be played while standing up.² Throughout the exhibition, professional musicians will activate the work with performances. These include interpretations of the original score composed for *Upright Piano* by Neill Quinton.

2. In the original orchestral score of *The Nutcracker* (1892), composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is noted for using a celesta, a percussion instrument which resembles an upright piano.

GALLERY MAP



LIST OF WORKS

1. *Still Life with Table* (2000)

Oil on canvas, wood

2. *Limp (Brown)* (2000)

Oil on canvas

3. *Bloated III (Blue)* (2012)

Oil on aluminium

4. *Transfer (White) with Armchair* (2011)

Oil on wood, armchair, plastic chair

5. *Upright III (Leg Chair)* (2002)

Mixed media

6. *Reach (Red / Black) Two Parts* (2002)

Oil on canvas

7. *Shutter (Red)* (2017)

Oil and acrylic on aluminium

8. *Blister* (2026)

Acrylic on aluminium and canvas

9. *Upright Piano* (1999)

Mixed media

All works courtesy the artist and
Galerie Thomas Schulte

EXHIBITION SUPPORTERS

This exhibition is generously supported by Henry Moore Foundation, the Embassy of Spain Office for Cultural & Scientific Affairs, Acción Cultural Española (AC/E), Jonathan Wearing and Galerie Thomas Schulte.

FREE DIGITAL GUIDE

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EVENTS

Exhibition Tour with Dr Esther Windsor

Wednesday 27 May, 2–3pm

Free, suggested donation £5. No need to book, just drop in

***Upright Piano* performances**

Friday 24 April, 2.30–3pm

Saturday 23 May, 2.30–3pm

Friday 26 June, 2.30–3pm

Saturday 18 July, 2.30–3pm

Friday 28 August, 2.30–3pm

Free, suggested donation £5. No need to book, just drop in

Angela de la Cruz in conversation with Carolina Grau and

Mariana Lemos

Saturday 13 June, 4-5pm

£3, booking essential

Book your place on our website ikon-gallery.org.



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