

List of Works

Apfelbaum's exhibition has an elemental character – with the galleries transformed into “an erupting rainbow volcano experience!” – systematised as follows:

1. Sun Targets

Snaking around all the walls of the first floor, a frieze of yellow and orange stripes foils a line of more than a hundred unique ceramic targets. Each named after a planet or constellation, the repetition of the target pattern gives way to the apprehension of a single obsessive visual trait. Whilst they can be read as references to abstract artists, such as Kenneth Noland, Poul Gernes, Jasper Johns or Eva Hesse, they also nod to folk art, dart boards or the circular irrigation patterns seen in aerial views of the American Midwest.

2. Life Spirit

A wall commemorating forty years of the gay pride flag serves to concretise the colour chart used throughout the exhibition. The original flag, hand-dyed and machine stitched by Gilbert Baker in San Francisco in 1978, had eight stripes each associated with a particular object: Hot pink (for sexuality), red (life), orange (healing), yellow (sunlight), green (nature), turquoise (art), indigo (serenity harmony) and violet (spirit). It was in manufacturing that the eight stripes were reduced to six (the hot pink dropped whilst the blue and turquoise were mixed) giving Apfelbaum license to play with the poetics of colour (with turquoise changed here to dark green).

3. Halfpipe

In 1972 Gene Davis painted the streets outside Philadelphia Museum of Art for a work titled *Franklin's Footpath*. Apfelbaum lifts the vertical stripe directly from Davis as something to be looked at and walked on. Titled *Halfpipe*, the room speaks to skateboarders who perform tricks on a ramp that curves at both ends. In the opposing corners are two characters, a snake and a bird, derived from Fraktur art of the Pennsylvania Dutch who incorporated Christian symbolism, related to the Garden of Eve, into legal documents.

4. Squiggles

In 1997, Apfelbaum participated in a group exhibition titled *Woven in Oaxaca* at the A/D Gallery in New York. Five years ago, she reconnected with the Mexican workshop, sending them her contemporary designs to be made into rugs using traditional dying and weaving techniques. Working with the fabricators opens up an alternative colour system, specific to Huichol art in Mexico, that is continually shaped by spiritual and commercial forces.

5. Headline and Kneelines

There is a history of beading, related to the religious practice of rosary, that Apfelbaum invites into the installation. Like *Sun Targets*, she has made the beads over a period of time using different clays – terracotta and porcelain, natural and coloured. The glazed spheres function as weights on strings that, hung centimetres apart, visually reference the weaving loom. Whilst referring to spirit or ley lines, *Headline* and *Kneelines* literally correspond to the height of the viewing body.

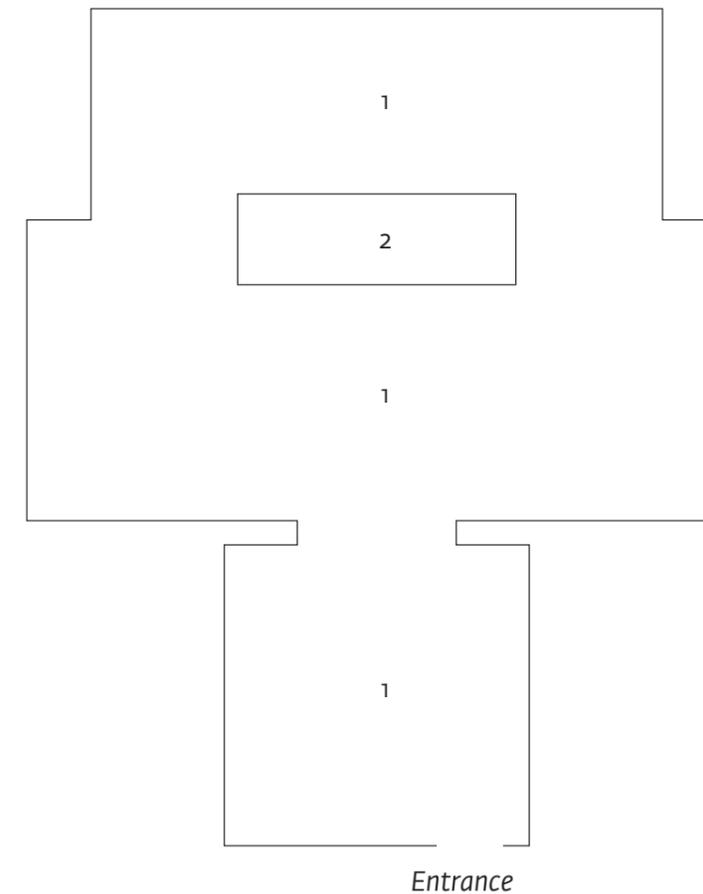
6. Targets

The fluid relationship between art and design, hand and machine, is formalised in *Targets*. A grid of concentric circle drawings is reflected in the Oaxacan woven rugs, like puddles, on the floor. The installation recalls the paintings, textile designs and fashionable interiors of Sonia Delaunay as co-founder of Orphic Cubism, an art movement that focused on geometry and colour in Paris in the early twentieth century.

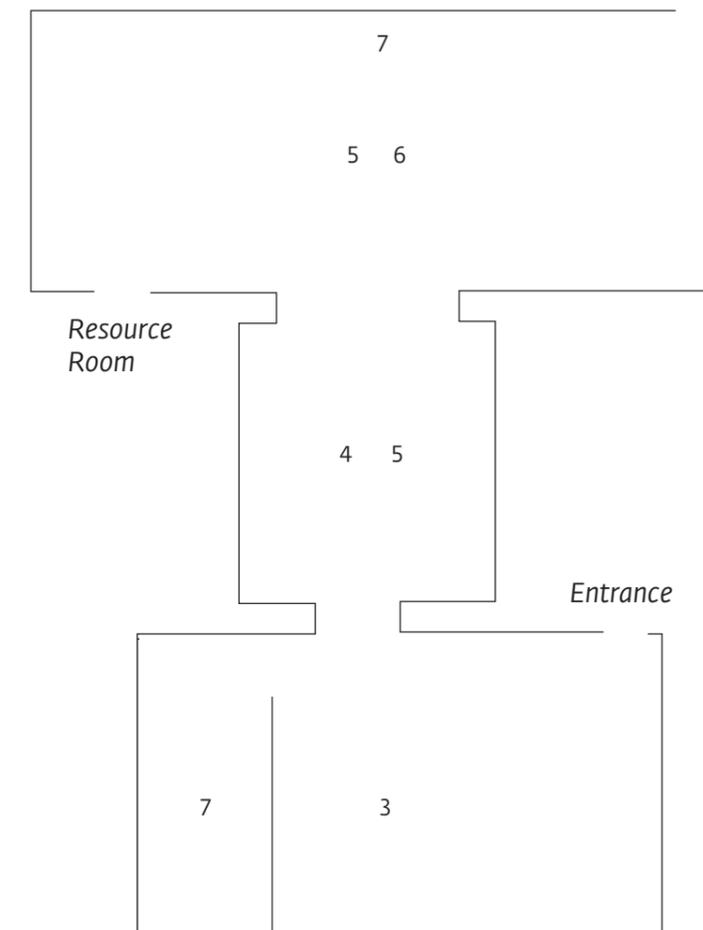
7. Wallflowers (Mixed Emotions)

Framed by the bead curtains and rugs, this sculpture was originally installed by Apfelbaum at the Amy Lipton Gallery, New York in 1990. It marks the moment the target entered her practice. She uses the same paper flowers which, over time, have lost their vibrant colour and glitter. Apfelbaum has carefully pinned the flowers in a mandala-like pattern. Here we see the garden, implicit within the exhibition title, made literal.

First Floor Galleries



Second Floor Galleries



Kate Groobey
Pure Pleasure

19 September — 18 November 2018

Second Floor Tower Room

Pure Pleasure (2018) by British artist Kate Groobey is a celebration of female pleasure. Consisting of video, dressed mannequin and a painting, this installation is as joyful as it is philosophical, informed by the artist's feminist observations on art history. There are many, mainly male, artistic precedents for Groobey's nudes in landscapes, a tradition she acknowledges and revels in. The videos feature her dancing as different painted characters against landscape backdrops, accompanied by happy homemade soundtracks, as she embraces the complexity of sexual politics with a life enhancing spirit. Kate Groobey won the Daiwa Foundation Art Prize in 2018, the first woman in the history of the award.

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Ikon Gallery
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Open Tuesday – Sunday
and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am–5pm
Free entry, donations welcome

Ikon is supported using public funding by Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.

Associated Events

The Apple

Wednesday 17 October, 6.30–8pm

£5, includes a kitsch apple cocktail

Booking essential, age guidance PG

Selected by Polly Apfelbaum, *The Apple* (1980), is a science-fiction, biblical musical written and directed by Menahem Golan. Curator and writer Glenn Adamson describes the film as “in a word, kitsch; and a perfect illustration of Susan Sontag’s provocative definition of camp as ‘seriousness that fails.’”

SEN Creative Clay

Wednesday 31 October, 10am–12pm, 6+

year olds

£5 per child, booking essential

Join ceramic designer maker and tutor Wendy Tournay for this accessible creative clay workshop for families with special educational needs. Explore the exhibition before the gallery opens and then create your own clay tiles inspired by the work of Polly Apfelbaum.

Creative Clay

Wednesday 31 October, 1–3.30pm, 6+

olds

£5 per child, booking essential

Ceramicist Wendy Tournay leads an experimental workshop using clay, tools and coloured slips, helping you to make your own clay tiles inspired by the work of Polly Apfelbaum.

IKON

Exhibition Guide

Polly Apfelbaum

Waiting for the UFOs (a space set between a landscape and a bunch of flowers)

19 September — 18 November 2018

First and Second Floor Galleries

Ikon presents a major exhibition of predominantly new work by internationally renowned New York-based artist Polly Apfelbaum (born 1955). Featuring large-scale colourful installations comprising textiles, ceramics and drawings, Apfelbaum's practice is framed within wider sociological and political contexts, and the legacy of post-war American art.

The exhibition takes its title from the 1970s song *Waiting for the UFOs* by British singer-songwriter Graham Parker - recalling the vast empty spaces of the American landscape and the obsessive marginal characters who anxiously anticipate extraterrestrial visits - conjoined with the surrealist René Magritte's definition of a garden: “a space set between a landscape and a bunch of flowers”. Making particular reference to his extraordinary landscape painting *The Plagiarism* (1940), the idea of appropriation is explored further through Apfelbaum's characteristic use of allusion and quotation, blurring the conventional line drawn between popular culture (or craft) and high art.

Apfelbaum's practice illustrates a sensitivity to site, scale and architectural setting. At Ikon she perceives the gallery space as a landscape, to be populated by both her work and visitors to the exhibition, as she explains:

It's important to me that people have to move through the work so the spectator activates it and participates in the experience. As you move through the installation, perspective, light and parallax are constantly changing the way you see the work in space.

Placing emphasis on the essential formal qualities, especially colour and texture, Apfelbaum asserts the importance of popular culture and craft activity. Her use of various stained and dyed fabrics and glazed ceramics is both beguiling and refreshing in its offering of simple pleasures. In this way, the artist subtly assumes a political and feminist position, challenging pomposity, notions of entitlement and hierarchies in cultural practice, to promote egalitarianism.

The exhibition is supported by the Henry Moore Foundation and is accompanied by a catalogue including essays by Glenn Adamson and Alhena Katsof, a limited edition tray and tea towel, and an exhibition poster, plus a public programme of talks and events.

Another exhibition by Polly Apfelbaum, titled *Happiness Runs in a Circular Motion*, is open until 10 February 2019 at Belvedere 21, Vienna, Austria and is curated by Stella Rollig.



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