



Artist's Map of the Exhibition

@VladimirKokolia Tweets, 2013-15

What we see of things is what they reflect. What stays inside them is their own business.

A thing that has no name, and also parts that do not have a name, is invisible to us.

Invisible relationships in an image? Isn't this a contradiction? I don't know, but they constitute the image.

On every painting is painted a viewer. They take up half the image.

An image appears all at once, but we look at it piece by piece, as if the entire image was not originally visible.

To paint what is seen is always modern. Even in an extreme situation, let's say at the end of the world, a person does what they can but in the end they only stare at an image.

I could not find anyone who had something to say about a painting. I had to find my own words. Today, I'm looking for someone who could view an image without saying anything.

A painter should be able to see space as a flat plane. The viewer should be able to see a flat plane as space.

Originally, I loved shape, then expression, then meaning, story, surface, aperture, view, point, thing, fidelity. Today, it is light that completely enchants me.

A picture is not a paltry derivation of reality. On the contrary, reality truly tries to be a picture! Of course, it will succeed only rarely.

Self-expression? Who cares about myself? I am concerned about yourself expression.

A good viewer looks at a bad picture, a bad viewer looks at a good picture — the result is the same. And then a perfect viewer looks at a perfect picture.

I make a living with stains.

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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.

Exhibition supporters

This exhibition is supported by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in London.

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Exhibition Guide

Vladimír Kokolia

Epiphany

4 July — 9 September 2018

Second Floor Galleries and Tower Room

Ikon presents the first UK exhibition of work by Czech artist Vladimír Kokolia (b.1956). A combination of old and new drawings, paintings and installations, the exhibition offers a snapshot of Kokolia's visual art practice, exemplified by an intensely experimental attitude that distils abstraction from everyday experience. It occurs during various anniversaries in the Czech Republic, including the centenary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 and fiftieth anniversary of the Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968.

A large number of fragile figurative ink drawings by Kokolia are on display for the first time, after more than thirty years in storage. *Big Series* (1983-85) show the human figure struggling for a glimpse of meaning in absurd circumstances. Produced during the final years of the Iron Curtain – when the Communist Party reinforced its censorship of the politically subversive arts as part of a programme of 'Normalisation' – the drawings depict grotesque stories of cruelty, weakness and the wretchedness of human endeavour.

In 1992, Kokolia established the studio of experimental graphics at the Academy of Fine Arts, Prague, where he continues to work as professor and vice president, whilst living in Veverské Knínice, a small Moravian village, located 200 km south east of the capital. His paintings, including *Birch* (2002) and *Branches Of Ash In Backlighting* (2016), reflect his fascination with trees, in particular their constantly changing shapes and the way light travels through leaves. Kokolia is tireless in his observation of this motif,

breaking the image down into discrete stains of colour. He writes:

I look up into the crown of a tree and try to not identify it. It is easiest when I suppress the human compulsion towards incessant labelling. And so instead of leaves I glimpse only after-shapes in the background. I try to notice this background, its shape. The background thereby jumps to the foreground, and the immediate environment establishes itself as the new background. This creates visual hierarchies: at the forefront are a few leaves, then a ring of leaves on a twig, then an entire branch, a ring of branches, the entire crown of the tree. I hope that through the tree I will eventually see the forest.

Key to understanding Kokolia's artistic practice is his awareness of the possibility of epiphanies, seemingly unremarkable events that give rise to a sense of 'wonderment'. He asserts that the right place for an image is not on a white wall but in the viewer's visual field, and through his exhibition at Ikon he hopes to produce a new moment of understanding for each visitor. In the installation *Light Agent* (2018), he employs flashing lights to leave the visitor with an 'after image'. His experiments in the visual field are further revealed in another new work in Ikon's Tower Room, in which multiple camera obscura projections blend the outside world with the picture plane.

In case the last thing you ever see is a treetop, a booklet containing exercises in looking, is freely available in Ikon's Resource Room. We get a strong sense of the social dimension of Kokolia's work. In 1984, he became part of the alternative rock group E, in which the artist performed with a silver tape over his eyes. The records, bearing his texts and drawings from *Big Series*, are part of a vast archive of essays, interviews and "koans" – paradoxical anecdotes used in Zen Buddhism – freely published by the artist online.



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