

IKON

Ikon Gallery
1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / www.ikon-gallery.org
Open Tuesday-Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm / free entry
Registered charity no. 528892

Francis Alÿs *Knots'n Dust* 20 June – 9 September 2018

Curated by Marie Muracciole



Francis Alÿs, *Tornado*, 2000-2010. Milpa Alta, Mexico City. Video, colour, 40.00 min. In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Felix Blume and Julien Devaux. Courtesy the artist.

Ikon presents a solo exhibition by Belgian-born, Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs (born 1959, Antwerp). Organised by the Beirut Art Center, it is an outcome of Alÿs' long-term interest in current affairs in the Middle East, his frequent travelling to that part of the world – especially Iraq and Afghanistan - in order to arrive at an authentic artistic response to his direct experience.

Featuring new work in a mix of animation, drawing, film, painting and photography, the exhibition is a reflection on the notion of turbulence, from simple instability to chaos, from a meteorological phenomenon to bigger geopolitical pictures, from a simple knot in the hair to an ascending spiral. Knots represent links and bonds, as well as resistance and binding.

Visitors enter the exhibition through *Tornado* (2000-2010), a video projection which records Alÿs' chasing of "dust devils" in attempts to get inside them, with camera in hand to film their motionless eyes. The drama of such an action is compelling: the jolting imagery, the sound of the wind in and around the tornadoes only serve to compound a sense of danger, something the artist is prepared to endure before arriving at monochromes of dust, abstracting him from the outside world.

This work formally corresponds to an installation of hundreds of drawings, suspended in space at the centre of the exhibition. Here we find *Exodus 3:14* (2013-2017), a projected drawn animation in an endless loop, portraying a young woman tying a simple knot in her long hair which then undoes itself. The soundtrack is a simple song, a kind of melodious chant for a gesture of self-absorption in which someone is at once engaged and detached. The drawings occur to us as the stills required to produce the three minutes and fourteen seconds of the film, physically illustrating a recurring theme in Alÿs work, the massive disproportion between effort and result, between work and labour. As Marie Muracciole, curator of the exhibition, explains, "*Exodus 3:14* activates a game of opposite actions: mêler et dé mêler, arranger et déranger, faire et défaire, drawing and erasing, etc. Untangling knots is the only thing a machine is unable to do. Knots request and epitomise the work of the hands."

Other works by Alÿs are located around the installation of drawings, in order to exemplify further the proposition of the show. For example, on a video monitor we see *Do, Undo* (2008), another looping film in which Alÿs flicks through papers with the words 'Do' and 'Undo' back and forth. The complementary nature of coalescence and dispersal and Sisyphean repetition are suggested as essential to the human condition, and an actual knotted rope hanging from the ceiling nearby, falling into a tangled mass on the floor, likewise has philosophical connotations in this context. A number of small landscapes, oils on canvas, on the surrounding walls literally spell out what is on the artist's mind, being inscribed with Spanish and English words such as *Turbulencia* (Turbulence), *Resistencia* (Resistance) and *Puro Desorden* (Pure Disorder).

As a commission for the Beirut Art Center, Alÿs made a number of photographs that are available here as postcards to take away. They reveal the impact of a sandstorm, bringing yellow dust from neighbouring countries where the soil is no longer fixed by roots and plants, instead becoming unstable and volatile after years of conflict.

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For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small or Emily Luxford on 0121 248 0708 or email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or e.luxford@ikon-gallery.org

Social Media Handles:

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Links

www.ikon-gallery.org

Note to Editors:

1. Ikon exhibition opening: Wednesday 20 June 2018, 6-8pm.
2. *Knots'n Dust* was first shown at Beirut Art Center (31 January – 22 April 2018).
3. Francis Alÿs has had solo exhibitions at MoMA (New York), Tate Modern (London), Dia Art Foundation (New York), MACBA (Barcelona) and has exhibited in many group shows and biennials. He was awarded the Blue Orange Prize in 2004, the Vincent Award in 2008 and BACA-laureate prize in 2010.
4. Marie Muracciole is an art critic, writer and independent curator based in Beirut and Paris. She has been Head of Beirut Art Center since February 2015.
5. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity 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. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. www.ikon-gallery.org
6. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. For the latest news and events follow [@ikongallery](#) on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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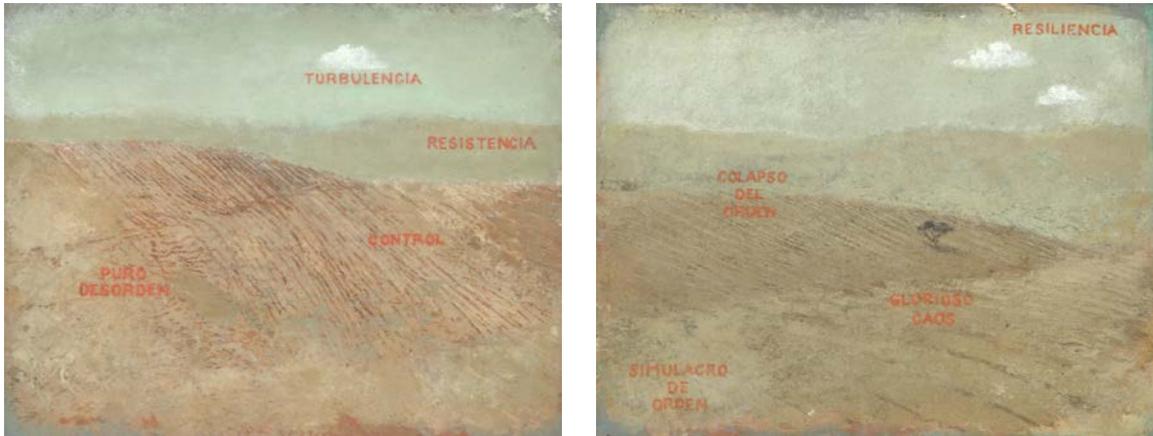
Francis Alj's, *Tornado*, 2000-2010. Milpa Alta, Mexico City. Video, colour, 40.00 min.
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Francis Alÿs, *Studies for Exodus 3:14* (2013-2017).
Animation drawings, pencil on paper, 26.5 x 32 cm each. Courtesy the artist.



Francis Alÿs, *Studies for Exodus 3:14* (2013-2017).
Animation drawings, pencil on paper, 26.5 x 32 cm each. Courtesy the artist.



Francis Alijs, *Untitled*, 2008-2010. Oil and pigments on wood, 14 x 18.5 cm.
Courtesy the artist.



Francis Alijs, *Untitled*, 2010. Study for *In a given situation*. Pencil and oil on tracing paper, 32 x 24 x 2 cm. Courtesy the artist.