

Vladimír Kokolia

Epiphany

4 July – 9 September 2018



Vladimír Kokolia, *Looking at Ash Tree* (2016). Oil on canvas. Courtesy the artist.

Ikon presents the first UK exhibition of work by Vladimír Kokolia, the renowned Czech artist who established himself on the international circuit at Documenta 9, 1992. A combination of new and recent paintings, plus drawings and installations, the show exemplifies an intensely experimental attitude that distils abstraction from everyday experience.

Central to Ikon's exhibition are a selection of Kokolia's paintings, produced in the small Moravian village Veverské Knínice where the artist lives and works, inspired by his rural surroundings. Paintings such as *Apple Tree* and *Looking Into The Crown* (both 2013) 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. Key to understanding Kokolia's artistic practice is his awareness of the possibility of epiphanies, seemingly unremarkable events that give rise to a kind of weaving of wonder:

"I usually paint some snapshot, some distinctly illuminated scene I glimpse somewhere, even peripherally, and which then remains in my head. It tends to have a differing measure of concreteness and resolution, but it always carries light in a unique way ... My paintings may look like lianas, mazes, or winding footpaths but they have a source somewhere else. Their mesh is nothing but a screen through which the image percolates during the painting process."

A large number of fragile figurative ink drawings by Kokolia are on display for the first time after more than thirty years in storage. Produced in an atmosphere of suppression and depicting grotesque stories of cruelty, weakness and the wretchedness of human endeavour, these early works acquired a sense of political commentary. *Big Series 1, 2 & 3* (1983-84) show the human figure struggling for a glimpse of meaning in absurd circumstances:

"I am fascinated by the gulf between the utter matter-of-factness with which we accept our daily routines and the obvious senselessness of it all." Vladimír Kokolia

Kokolia regards ordinary life as a source of astonishment. To this end, he wants the attention for his exhibition to be upon the visitor rather than the artist. Kokolia asserts that the right place for an image is not on a white wall but rather 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 new installation *Light Agent* (2018) he employs flashing lights to leave the visitor with an 'after image' of what they have just seen, whilst using a 'wallpaper effect' in *Branch* (2018) in which he invites viewers to build up the depth dimension of the image. Lastly 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.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, including texts by Jonathan Watkins, Ikon Director and Miroslav Ambroz, independent curator and art historian. The exhibition is supported by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in London.

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: Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery

Links: ikon-gallery.org

Note to Editors:

1. **Ikon exhibition opening: Wednesday 4 July, 6-8pm.**
2. Vladimír Kokolia was born in the former Czechoslovakia in 1956. As a teenager he experienced the Prague Spring, an era of political liberalisation and cultural emancipation, which was brought to a brutal end in August 1968 when the Soviet Union and other members of the Warsaw Pact invaded. For the next two decades the country was plunged into isolation behind the Iron Curtain as the Communist Party introduced a programme of censorship, especially in the arts, and a ban on 'politically subversive' exhibitions, films, publications and concerts.

Against this background Kokolia earned his MA in Fine Arts from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague in 1981 and his early works quickly attracted attention, in particular an extensive series of ink drawings. In the mid 1980s Kokolia also became involved in the underground music scene, joining the alternative rock trio E, for whom he wrote lyrics and performed as lead singer – the group became legendary and played extensively throughout Western Europe.

After the fall of communism, Kokolia became the first laureate of the Jindřich Chalupecký Award – the most prestigious Czech prize for artists under 35 – which was presented to him by Václav Havel, who incidentally initiated the award. This was followed by a six-month residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts (USA). In 1992 he was named professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague.

Although he views himself primarily as a painter, he is also known for other activities: soil composting, writing essays, giving lectures, participating in public debates, and holding workshops and performances. He has published several books, and was the subject of a feature-length documentary film. In addition to his artistic activities, he is also a qualified instructor of traditional taijiquan of the Chen family and maintains a family homestead, about 200km from his workplace in Prague, which involves gardening, working in the woods and home cooking.

3. **Associated Event – Symposium: *Small Nations and Global Identities: Czech Questions* Thursday 5 July, 10am-6pm, free, booking essential.**
This event considers the formation of modern Czech identity in the arts, politics and media in European and global contexts. It includes an exhibition tour with artist Vladimír Kokolia and a keynote presentation by Professor Milena Bartlová, Faculty member of Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design, Prague. Organised by Dr Marta Filipová and Professor Matthew Rampley, University of Birmingham.
4. 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

5. 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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Vladimír Kokolia, *Roads and Doors* (1986). Oil on canvas. Courtesy the artist.



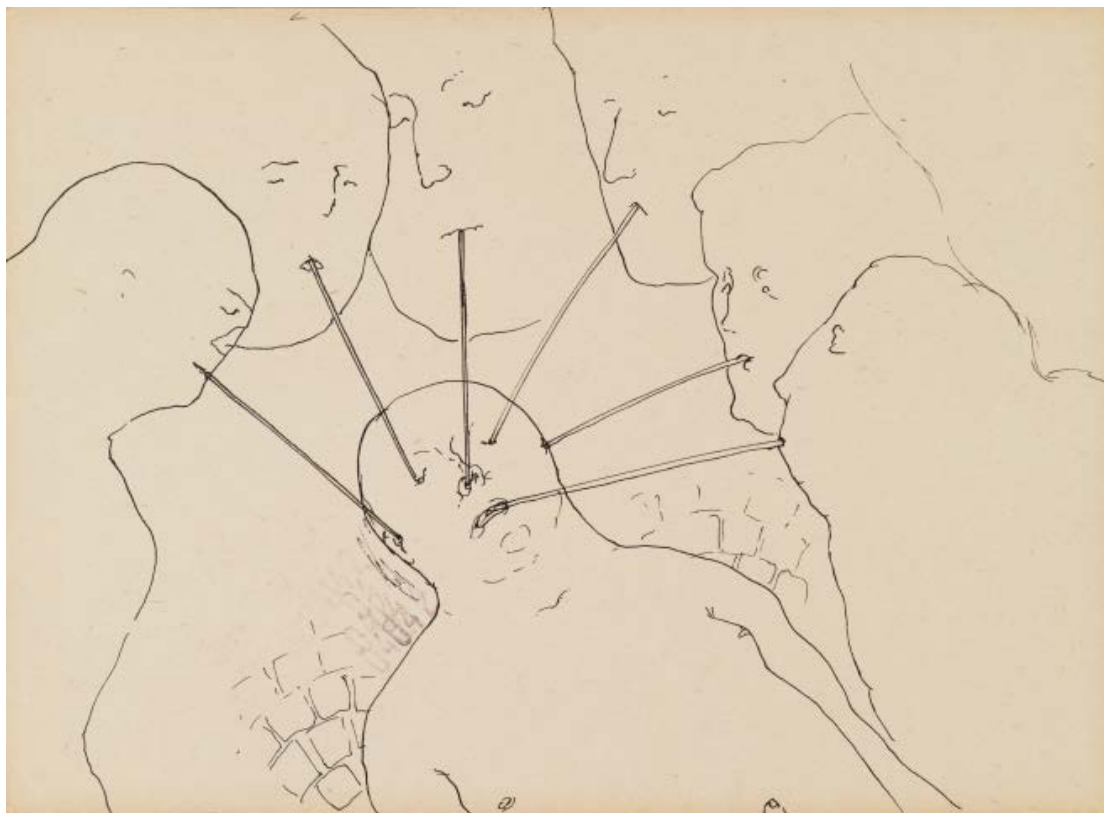
Vladimír Kokolia, *Crown* (2014). Oil on canvas. Courtesy the artist.



Vladimír Kokolia, *Big Series*₁ (1983). Ink on paper. Courtesy the artist.



Vladimír Kokolia, *Big Series*₁ (1983). Ink on paper. Courtesy the artist.



Vladimír Kokolia, *Big Series 1* (1983). Ink on paper. Courtesy the artist.