

# IKON

## Exhibition Guide

### ***The Aerodrome***

#### **An exhibition dedicated to the memory of Michael Stanley**

12 June – 8 September 2019

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Michael Stanley, Curator of Ikon before becoming Director of Milton Keynes Gallery and then Modern Art Oxford, who died tragically in 2012. Co-curated with David Austen and George Shaw and structured loosely on Rex Warner's novel *The Aerodrome*, a book that made a great impression on Stanley, it includes many of the artists he worked with, all of whom held him in great affection and regarded him as one of their own.

*The very presence of the aerodrome on the hill, the very sound and sight of the machines crossing and recrossing our valley, seemed somehow to have dissipated the cohesion of our village and to have set up a standing threat to our regime.*

Warner's *The Aerodrome*, written during World War II, is an allegorical novel whose young hero is faced with the disintegration of certainties about his loved ones and with a choice between the earthy, animalistic life of his home village and the pure, efficient, emotionally detached life of an airman. It imagines a bleak, man-made landscape and is full of the psychological effects of modern technological, social and environmental change.

### **First Floor Galleries**

We first encounter Stanley's own work, *Chair falling* (1995), a looped Super 8 film of a chair endlessly collapsing. Anya Gallaccio's *preserve 'beauty'* (1991-2003) evidences a similar ephemerality with 1300 gerbera flowers pressed behind panes of glass, that decay during exhibition. An ever-changing sky is captured in John Constable's *Study of Clouds* (1822), one of Stanley's favourite paintings. This room provides immediate insight into the exhibition, of artists' work in different media, and a sense of nothing being fixed.

Throughout the central space we see various periods and styles of painting that include imagery of machines, for ploughing the fields and traveling by air, effectively outlining the modernity seen in Warner's novel. Stanley read these as works of science-fiction, for instance Kristian Ryokan presents "portals, objects that may physically or psychologically take you somewhere, they transport and transcend" whilst Shezad Dawood offers "forays into new territories and ideas".

In 2003, Stanley curated an exhibition of George Shaw's work, of an unpopulated post-war landscape, at Ikon. The reality of life within modern housing estates and new towns is documented in Phil Collins' *free fotolab*, set up in Milton Keynes in 2004, as a service to develop other people's photographic films in exchange for the image rights. The resulting composite image reveals intimate moments of people in their homes and communities. Two years later, Hayley Newman's *MKVH* (2006) took local

residents on a 39 hour drive around Milton Keynes, ending when their coach ran out of diesel. Stanley exhibited these works at MK Gallery, where he also commissioned drMM Architects to erect a seven storey tower, giving new perspective on the town's planning.

Films screened nearby include Adrian Paci's *Per Speculum* (2006), in which we see an idyllic landscape with a group of children, which soon becomes fractured. For Stanley this work is a direct reflection of the artist's experience of fleeing his wartorn homeland, resulting in an "all-embracing relationship with the whole of humankind." Paul Ramírez Jonas' *Longer Day* (1997) is an attempt to make a summer day longer as he drives west into the sunset, racing against the dying light. In Stanley's words, a "sense of futile endeavour pervades the work and an almost perverse celebration of 'failure', as the unwritten history of technological progression provides a platform for the discussion of much broader concerns such as time, memory and loss."

The presence of Jean-Luc Moulène's luminous painted rock, titled *For Michael* (2012), underscores the dedicatory tone of the exhibition. The two portraits in this space, one of a named figure by Jenny Saville, the other an abstract feeling by Hayley Newman, captures the closeness of Stanley to his family and the artists he worked with.

## Second Floor Galleries

Boyd & Evans' *Ocotillo Wells Airfield CA* (2016), chosen by the artists to reflect the overall theme of the exhibition, is in Stanley's words "a slightly unnerving, all-consuming, alien-like landscape." The location of John Gerrard's computer animation is Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa, and we watch this scenario as if it happens in the local time-zone. In the adjacent gallery we see Langlands & Bell's *Frozen Sky* (2000), a data projection of spiralling airport codes used in global travel.

The relationship between communities and their locality is captured in Stephen Willats' *Person to Person, People to People* (2007), in which residents reflect on the design choices, gardens, graffiti and rubbish that define their estate. For Abraham Cruzvillegas, who grew up in Mexico City, the urban environment provides the necessary materials for idiosyncratic constructions that are a response to everyday needs.

In the next gallery, Phoebe Unwin's *Machine in the Garden* (2018) is a painting of equipment in a landscape, albeit broken and overgrown. Likewise, Roger Hiorns covers a redundant engine with copper sulphate to make it appear 'other worldly'. Siobhan Hapaska's *Earthed* (2018) questions the idea of a sacred place, playing with the idea of the sanctuary lamp found in Catholic churches. She does this by replacing the traditional white light with a rotating emergency services beacon.

As Director of MAO, Stanley transformed the loading bay, connecting the gallery to the street, into the Yard. This is where Tom and Simon Bloor's *Hit & Miss* (2010-19) was first installed as "somewhere between a garden park and interior lobby". Here the bench can be used to watch archival footage of Stanley with the artist Lonnie Holley, who he visited prior to the exhibition at Ikon in 2004, where his "labyrinthine yard at Harpersville reveals a magpie-like instinct to collect and to hoard; an impulse to salvage scrap metal once for economic necessity is now appropriated for the simple pursuit of making art."

In Elizabeth Magill's painting we see more built environments. Stanley admired her artistic process, most notably the way "she pours, bleeds and rubs swathes of colour into the surface of the canvas, a process that continues until she 'discovers' a latent image". Similarly, he celebrated Polly Apfelbaum's "fallen paintings", demonstrated here in an installation of textiles and beads titled *Shades of White* (2019), being a colour worn in mourning in different cultures.

Symbols of death repeat throughout the gallery, including Thomas Houseago's *Moonage Owl* (2018) and David Austen's *Fallen Man* (2013), in which a figure takes on the form of an aeroplane or crucifix, looping us back to the dystopian imagery of *The Aerodrome*, in which there is a division between spiritual and secular institutions.

In the Tower Room we find Linder Sterling's *Salt Shrine* (1997), which featured in Stanley's first exhibition, *Epilogue*, in an abandoned school in Widnes, the town in which he grew up. The installation was destroyed with the demolition of the building and is recreated here with the actual crucifix from the original installation.

## Entrance/reception

To emphasise Stanley's commitment to work outside of the dedicated art space, Ikon's reception is remodelled to represent the Yard at MAO.

One of Stanley's first offsite projects took place at Tabley House, an eighteenth century property in Cheshire, where he commissioned Richard Woods to install this faux wood panelling as a conscious subversion of stately culture.

Michael Sailstorfer's *Clouds Birmingham* (2019), which hang over Ikon's reception, play on the idea of thresholds as places of "flight, movement and displacement [...] infused with a poetic and humorous sensibility."

The use of sound to claim space is demonstrated in Marcus Coates' video *Out of Season* (2000), in which a solitary Chelsea fan repeats various songs from the 1970s surrounded by a leafy woodland. Every half an hour Susan Philipsz's *Ziggy Stardust* (2001) plays throughout Ikon over the PA system.

Keith Wilson's *Puddle* (1999) was originally proposed by Stanley whilst working for the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in offering "all the usual puddle-related benefits (reflections, splashes, etc.) as well as costs (potential wet feet, splashes, etc.)". The work was rejected by Preston Council, however was subsequently realised in Birmingham and is now installed outside Ikon's main entrance.

## Associated Event

**Committed Curating:**  
***The achievement of Michael Stanley***  
**Monday 22 July 2019, 2.30pm – 6.30pm**  
**£3, booking essential**

Artists, curators and writers share their personal experiences of working with Michael Stanley. They consider the development of his curatorial approach through his programming at various venues – The Harris Museum, Compton Verney, Ikon, MK Gallery and Modern Art Oxford – distinguished by a close involvement in the production of new work, and an insistent pushing at the boundaries of space dedicated to art. Alongside archival footage of Stanley, speakers include David Austen, Paul Luckraft, George Shaw and Jonathan Watkins.

## Stay in touch

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Ikon Gallery  
Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS  
0121 248 0708  
[ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)

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

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*The Aerodrome* is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by Ikon and Modern Art Oxford, featuring essays by artists David Austen, George Shaw, Carrie Stanley and Jonathan Watkins, Director, Ikon.