

Betsy Bradley *Chasing Rainbows*

3 December 2021 — 13 February 2022



Left: Betsy Bradley, *Ultrasonic* (2020). Acrylic on muslin, 150x110cm. Courtesy the artist.
Right: Betsy Bradley, *Kensho* (2020). Acrylic on voile, 30x21cm. Courtesy the artist.

Ikon presents the first major solo exhibition by Midlands-based artist Betsy Bradley, *Chasing Rainbows*, running 3 December 2021 — 13 February 2022. A significant achievement for the artist before she turns 30, Bradley colours Ikon's upper galleries with her gestural paintings which evolve into large-scale sculptural, and suspended, forms recalling functional and playground objects. The show explores Bradley's approach to painting as a life force that traces "the dance between thought and action".

Bradley's meditative practice is rooted in mark-making, surprise and play. Always intuitive, her inspirations come from what she describes as "miraculous everyday phenomena", such as the incidental colours of a patinated billboard or the rainbows reflected through the glass of her front door. Driven by impulsive gestures, Bradley celebrates chance as a means of freeing her artistic process and the viewer's experience. Inspired by Eastern and Western traditions of Wabi Sabi,

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Arte Povera and Mono-ha, she explains: “I see my work as an invitation to the present moment – an escape as well as a grounding – which enables the viewer to let go.”

At Ikon, Bradley presents recent paintings made of voile and organza: translucent fabrics which dissolve the distinction between image and environment, inviting the play of light. Flashes of neon acrylic dart across the works, glowing with intensity. Experimenting with materials, she draws upon found objects and reclaimed fabrics to create her painting supports, improvised structures and the mark-making brushes themselves. Here, dust sheets are transformed into canvases, and discarded wooden slats become giant painterly tools when tied to dust pans.

Moving through the galleries, viewers encounter oversized, three-dimensional works made in dialogue with Ikon’s architecture: materials are suspended from the ceiling, stretched from wall to wall, or draped across hanging trapezes. Regarding painting as an adaptable, uninhibited form, she animates the surface and encourages a level of interactivity between viewer and artwork. For example, Ikon’s middle gallery showcases a large, suspended canopy which seemingly floats across the space. Reimagining the gallery ceiling as a painterly sky, its translucent fabric invites light and shadow to play with the work, creating transient sensory moments for the viewer. Meanwhile in the first gallery Bradley replaces an entire partition wall with a voile painting, offering faint glimpses of movement as bodies move either side of the space.

Within this vein, Bradley also invites contemporary dancers to respond to the artworks through a series of performances in the gallery. Taking place throughout the exhibition, the dancers’ movements emulate both the fluidity of painterly and material gesture, as well as Bradley’s own process in the studio, oscillating between impulsive outbursts and quiet contemplation. Beyond Ikon’s building, Bradley works on Ikon’s Slow Boat with Ikon Youth Programme (IYP), envisioning the boat as a consistently changing surface; a space that embraces the fun and freedom of process rather than a finalised object.

Having studied her MA Fine Art at Birmingham School of Art, Birmingham City University from 2017-2018, Bradley emerges as a contemporary painter whose practice is one of ongoing evolution. Jostling with the conventions of painting by refusing to consider its limitations as a medium, her works reveal the sculptural potential of the canvas and foreground the value of artistic instinct. Curator Melanie Pocock expands: “Betsy Bradley is among a new generation of young women artists taking up the mantle of painting. The bold, yet sparing, strokes of her paintings demonstrate a maturity beyond her years. The range of work in her exhibition at Ikon – sculptural pieces, large and small-scale works – evidences the breadth and versatility of her fast-evolving practice.”

A publication will accompany the exhibition featuring full-colour documentation alongside a conversation between Betsy Bradley and curator Melanie Pocock. Designed by multidisciplinary practice Burgess & Beech, whose previous partners include Turner.Works, the Zabludowicz Collection and Jerwood Makers Open, the publication is supported by Emerson Press. Bradley will also produce original screen prints and a limited-edition tote bag available via Ikon Shop.

The exhibition is supported by the Ikon Investment Fund.

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact

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Social Media Handles:

Instagram, Twitter and Facebook:

@ikongallery #ikonGallery @betsy_bradley #ChasingRainbows #BetsyBradley

Links:

ikon-gallery.org

betsy-bradley.co.uk

Note to Editors:

1. Betsy Bradley (b.1992, Bath) lives and works in Rugby, UK. She studied BA Painting at Brighton University, followed by MA Fine Art at Birmingham School of Art, Birmingham City University and the Turps Correspondence Course. Bradley has exhibited across the UK including: Coventry Biennial 2019 with New Art West Midlands, Coventry; Eastside Projects, Birmingham; The Artist Project Space, Bristol; QUAD, Derby and Grand Union, Birmingham.
2. Please note all dates are subject to change, in particular as a result of Government announcements relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. 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. ikon-gallery.org
4. 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](#).
5. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. ACE support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, ACE will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. artscouncil.org.uk