Press Release
30 January 2016

The ICA celebrates its 70th Anniversary


Front row left to right: Jasia Reichardt (curator / former ICA Assistant Director 1963-71), Alison Myners (Chair ICA Council), Prem Sahib (artist, exhibited solo ICA 2015), Betty Woodman (artist, exhibited solo ICA 2016).

Photo credit: Maryam Eisler, courtesy of ICA.

This commemorative photograph marks the 70th Anniversary of the Institute of Contemporary Arts to the day. Edouard Léon Théodore Mesens, Roland Penrose and Herbert Read called the first ever meeting of the ICA at 23 Brook Street on 30 January 1946. Those attending included key figures from the post-war British art world, including ICA patron Peter Watson, experimental film-maker Jacques Brunius, G.M. Hoellering, manager of The Academy Cinema in Oxford Street, and Peter Gregory, Lund Humphries chair and director of The Burlington Magazine.

The formative ICA passionately believed that London urgently needed a space for the promotion and discussion of the contemporary arts at an international level. The ICA would go on to become the birthplace of Pop Art, Op Art and Brutalist Architecture, as well as becoming home to the Independent...
Group. Francis Bacon, Jake & Dinos Chapman, Damien Hirst and Richard Prince all presented their first institutional solo shows at the ICA. The American abstract expressionists exhibited there, Picasso loved it and Marcel Duchamp was a regular visitor.

In the 60s, the ICA became a centre for London’s counterculture, startling audiences with screenings of Yoko Ono’s film ‘Bottoms’. In the 70s, the Institute developed close links with Punk, headlining bands like The Clash for the first time while courting controversy with Cosey Fanni Tutti and the exhibition ‘Prostitution’. During the 80s, it presented sensational works by the likes of Laurie Anderson, Robert Mapplethorpe and Gerhard Richter. John Currin, Marlene Dumas and Steve McQueen, as well as leading YBAs, staged their earliest shows at the ICA, while Cerith Wyn Evans tore the gallery walls down and Tino Sehgal staged three solo-exhibitions over as many years. The ICA talks programme continues to provoke, while the ICA Cinemas remains committed to supporting international film festivals, as well as independent cinema and artists' film.

Each of the figures pictured in this commemorative photograph has made a critical contribution to the ICA’s extraordinary legacy along the way, and some members of the group have shared their stories about their connection to the ICA.

“Basically I’m just a fan!” – Alexandra Shulman

“The ICA means experiment, courage and community. It’s very much owned by London, by the artists who live and work here, and the community who are involved in art and culture.” - Sadie Coles

“It’s a great living breathing arts centre, as it should be!” - John Maybury

“The ICA is a bit like your parents: you grow up with your parents, you occasionally wander off and think “I’m going to do my own thing, I’ve had enough of this”, but you always come back and see them. I have a warm relationship with the ICA. You expect it to treat you well, and it always does.” - John Akomfrah

“It’s one big family.” – Prem Sahib

Forthcoming 70th Anniversary celebrations will take place later this year in Hong Kong and New York. Also marking their anniversary, the ICA look forward to releasing special artist editions by Neïl Beloufa, Zhang Enli, Cary Kwok, Prem Sahib and Chris Succo across the year.

To help celebrate the 70th Anniversary further, the ICA have put out a call to members for any further stories or archive material from the ICA’s illustrious past, in order to record the ICA’s incredible history. Any material should be shared with archives@ica.org.uk.

Follow and tag the ICA’s 70th Anniversary news on social media using #ICA70

With thanks to photographer Victoria Erdelevskaya.

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Notes to Editors

About ICA
Founded in 1946, the ICA seeks to embrace the urgency surrounding contemporary art and culture. Continually looking forward, the ICA lays claim to extraordinary legacy, being home to the Independent Group, as well as playing a pivotal role in the development of Pop Art, Op Art and Brutalist Architecture. It charted the course of Punk, Performance, Independent Cinema and Young British Art, while showcasing numerous international artists, from Yoko Ono to Gerhard Richter. The ICA has always supported interdisciplinary practice, encouraging artists to experiment and explore unresolved ideas. Comprising film screenings, exhibitions, talks and events, the ICA Programme can be experienced at our base on The Mall, via our website and social media, or as 'Off-Site' projects at alternative venues, nationally and internationally. The ICA has a longstanding fascination with the evolution of Pop culture in our mass digital age. ica.org.uk

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