

Press Release Victoria Miro Gallery

Idris Khan

2 – 30 September 2006

Private View, Saturday 2 September, 6 – 8pm

Victoria Miro Gallery is delighted to present the first UK solo exhibition by London artist Idris Khan. This exhibition runs in conjunction with the presentation of Khan's first film installation, *A Memory...after Bach's Cello Suites*, a project jointly commissioned by Victoria Miro Gallery and inIVA, where it will be screened from 13 September until 22 October 2006.

In this new body of work, Khan re-photographs and digitally layers a sequence or series of pictures in an enigmatic play of appropriation and re-creation. His photographs possess characteristics more akin to drawing or painting and are presented as a kind of photographic palimpsest, animated by the accumulative intervention of the artist's hand. The influence of early proponents of the modern typology movement, Karl Blossfeldt and later, Bernd and Hilla Becher, has strong resonance in the work of Idris Khan. At one remove from typology, Khan collapses and condenses series of images to create work that proposes new visual and conceptual terms to consider and distill historical photographic practice. According to the artist, his work offers 'a playful emblem of our own departure from the corpse of photography, burdened with what the Futurist Anton Giulio Bragaglia once referred to as its "glacial reproduction of reality".'

Fascinated by the images, practitioners and theoretical writings that have influenced the history of photography, the artist has recently moved beyond the subject of photography to literature and music. *Struggling to Hear...After Ludwig van Beethoven Sonatas*, 2005 condenses sheets of music from Beethoven's piano sonatas to a single composite image. The work poignantly considers Beethoven's personal frustration with the deterioration of his hearing. Musical notes coalesce in a dense blur of abstract movement and chart their own rhythm across the page in an attempt to be heard. Offering a visual replication of the composer's frustration, Khan suggests that the memory of music – its idea, shape and image - became more essential to Beethoven than its sound.

An enlarged page of multi-layered text from one of Freud's key psychoanalytic works forms the photograph *Sigmund Freud's 'The Uncanny'*, 2006. The image challenges the viewer to digest all the essay's words in one glance. As the artist describes: 'it's kind of a fantasy and a nightmare rolled into one - the wish fulfillment of apprehending a whole book in an instant, but the fear and anxiety of never being able to understand what the book wants to tell us'. Beneath the shadows of the text two images emerge – Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and *The Virgin and Child with St Anne*. In his book Sigmund Freud discusses these paintings with reference to the 'Vulture fantasy' - claimed to be da Vinci's first visual memory as a child. In this fantasy da Vinci describes a vulture sweeping down onto his chest and pecking into his mouth. Freud interprets this reference as a manifestation of the erotic relations between mother and child: "My mother pressed countless passionate kisses on my lips". The mouth, often rendered as an enigmatic smile, is a potent feature of da Vinci's female figures and has, for viewers, long produced the most powerful and

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confusing effect. In Khan's 'The Uncanny' a deep dark void draws the viewer into the image, echoing what historical writers and poets have written about this smile: 'she who seems to smile seductively, now to stare coldly and soullessly into the void.'

Returning to photography's historical archives, Khan's body of work entitled, *Rising Series.... After Eadweard Muybridge 'Human and Animal Locomotion'*, 2005 looks back to early scientific experimentations with photography. This series of five platinum prints borrow images from Muybridge's sequential motion studies of human and animal form. Khan's intimate works, both in scale and subject, realise an aesthetic and narrative quality far removed from the scientific pedigree of Muybridge's research. Creating an unequivocally pictorial aesthetic, the choreographed movements of these human subjects, now seemingly suspended between the present and the afterlife, evoke the Victorian fascination with the spiritual and metaphysical possibilities of photography.

Khan affords similar treatment to the photographs of plant segments collected by pioneering 19th century photographer Karl Blossfeldt. Some 6,000 plants were captured on film as a pedagogical record in Blossfeldt's book, 'Art Forms in Nature', as he sought to expound the principle that 'nature is our best teacher'. Khan's ghostly *Blossfeldt.... After Karl Blossfeldt 'Art Forms in Nature'*, 2005 belies its natural origins and solicits a psychological mood and relationship with the work, formerly extracted by Blossfeldt's meticulous documentation of characteristic, detail, pattern and texture of nature.

A Memory... after Bach's Cello Suites, 2006

This September, Idris Khan will premiere, *A Memory... after Bach's Cello Suites*, a film installation jointly commissioned by inIVA and Victoria Miro Gallery. The film is a natural progression of Khan's photographic practice, using digitally layered imagery and the sounds of cellist Gabriella Swallow playing Bach's *Six Suites for the Cello Solo* to produce a film that evokes a new kind of vision through transformative repetition of sight and sound.

inIVA

13 September – 22 October 2006

Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 6pm

inIVA, 6-8 Standard Place, Rivington Street, London, EC2A 3BE

The project is supported by The Arts Council of England and Esmée Fairbairn

Born in Birmingham, England in 1978 Khan now lives and works in London. He achieved an MA in Fine Art at the Royal College of Art in 2004 and received the 2004 *Photographer's Gallery Prize*. Solo exhibitions include a show at the prestigious Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco in 2006, *Future Focus* at The Q Gallery, Derby in 2001 and *Courts* at City Gallery, Leicester in 2000. His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including the British Council exhibition, *To be continued...* at the Helsinki Kunsthalle, Finland, *Regeneration – 50 Photographers of Tomorrow* an international touring exhibition presented by the Musée de L'Elysée Laussane, *Photography 2005*, Victoria Miro Gallery, *Photo Paris* presented by the Photographers Gallery in 2004 and *Arrivals*, Pumphouse Gallery, London also 2004.

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open Tuesday to Saturday
10am to 6pm, admission free
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tubes, Old Street and Angel

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