ENG

Imogen Stidworthy

STILL LIFE BABEL

31 October - 13 December, 2025

Imogen Stidworthy, STILL LIFE BABEL, 2025, video still

AKINCI is proud to present the solo exhibition STILL LIFE BABEL by Imogen Stidworthy (1963, London). Her sculptural installations and films are shaped by verbal and non-verbal forms of voicing, happening through sound, body, spatial and temporal relationships. Through being with, listening, participating in and sometimes staging situations with others, she traces different registers of communication between the individual and the many, self and others. "My work grapples with the impossibility of glimpsing language from the outside. What happens to language and sense-making in encounters with unfamiliar or unknowable forms of voicing? What different forms of relationship and understanding emerge between languages?" Stidworthy presents a new body of work including the installation *STILL LIFE BABEL* (2025), bronze casts of reeds and digital photographs of straw, with *Iris [A Fragment]* (2018), shown in The Netherlands for the first time.

The *STILL LIFE BABEL* (2025) installation carries three voices and a video sequence of tiny straw structures, projected over a pool of petruleum oil.

"The house of language had no windows. You could see neither in nor out. Resignedly you spun around in the dust and ashes of your own making until the moment you figured out that it was an open house – open at the top." - Wouter Kusters in *STILL LIFE BABEL*

In 2022, the artist's mother spoke in tongues, in a state of 'delirium' during a life- threatening health crisis. Later in hospital she talked about what she had experienced. In 2018, Bag Man (someone who carries their life with them in shopping bags) talked to the artist about words, communication and flourishing in the city park where Stidworthy was installing *Dialogues with People*.[1] In 2025, Dutch Philosopher Wouter Kusters spoke about how he exscaped from the house of language, drawing on his experiences of psychosis and philosophy.[2]

Each voice in the installation embodies being between psychic states and the realities they produce. Structures of language and straw hold together in fragile ways. Values are inverted. Meanings drift or flip from familiar reference points, and voices are paths into the world and world making.

Iris [A Fragment] (2018) figures Swedish therapist Iris Johansson. She was non-verbal until the age of twelve and spent much of her childhood in the 'real world', or *Out*. Her father, and later she herself, worked tirelessly to help her connect with herself and others in the 'ordinary reality'. She studied the gestures and behaviour around her and in the cinema and practised them in front of the mirror for hours, "to become ordinary". Iris learned to write when she was thirty years old and has since written several books[3], but as she says, "I am still autistic and part of me will always be non-verbal."

"I turn around slowly and see Iris sitting where she sits. Her body becomes by itself an independent thing. She becomes essence. And I myself and the essence can leave the immaterial body and be between it and the material body sitting on the swing." - from *Iris [A Fragment]*

Iris [A Fragment] developed through time spent with Iris in Dahab, Egypt and Fagersta, Sweden between 2017 and 2018. It probes encounters between material and immaterial worlds through Iris' autistic perception and non-verbal being, states we may embody or connect with in ourselves, opening to different spheres of reality.

Iris [A Fragment] exists as an installation and a screen work. In the exhibition STILL LIFE BABEL it is presented as a screen work.

Biography

Imogen Stidworthy (1963) is based in Liverpool (UK). Her work has been exhibited internationally in numerous exhibitions at ao. Hannover Kunstverein and Salzburg Kunstverein (2024); Survival Kit 11, and LCCA, Riga (2020); Bergen Assembly (2019, 2013); Suzhou Biennial (2016); Sao Paulo Biennial (2014); Busan Biennial (2012); and Documenta 12, Kassel, DE (2007); and solo shows at, ao., Museum Dr Guislain, Gent, BE (2022); Netwerk, Aalst, BE (2019); Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, DE (2018); Imperial War Museum, London (2015); AKINCI, Amsterdam (2013, 2009, 2005), and Matts Gallery London (2026, 2011, 2003). She curated two large-scale group exhibitions for her two-stage curatorial project engaging with the threshold of language: 'In the First Circle' at the Tapies Foundation, Barcelona (2012) and 'Die Lucky Bush' Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, (MuKHA, 2008). Imogen Stidworthy completed her PhD 'Voicing on the Borders of Language' at Lund University (SE) in September 2020. For 2023-24 she was awarded a Gray Center collaborative research fellowship at Chicago University, with philosopher Aaron Schuster and anthropologist William Mazarella. She has won or been shortlisted for numerous awards, most recently being shortlisted for the Freelands Award 2023 and winner of the inaugural David and Annely Juda Award Special Prize, in 2018.

Bibliography

[1] *Dialogues with People,* solo exhibition at Kunstverein Stuttgart, 2018.
https://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/program/2019/exhibitions/imogen-stidworthy-dialogues-with-people/
[2] Wouter Kusters, Extracts from 'Filosofie van de Waanzin' (Lemniscaat, 2015, translated and published 'A Philosophy of Maddness', MIT press 2021).
[3] *Iris [A Fragment]* includes excerpts read by Iris Johansson from her book 'A Different Childhood' (Inkwell Productions 2012).