



FOOTBALL AND RELIGION: TALES OF HOPE, PLAY AND PASSION



Ed Merlin Murray, Yasmin Abukar Football Card, 2022

Football and Religion: Tales of Hope, Play and Passion

A mixed media exhibition with illustrated works by Ed Merlin Murray

Aga Khan Centre Gallery
10 Handyside Street
London N1C 4DN

Exhibition dates:
2 September – 4 December 2022

Roundtable Panel Discussion:
1 September, 6pm

Exhibition Viewing:
1 September, 7pm

*** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ***

The Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC) and the Aga Khan Centre Gallery are delighted to present *Football and Religion: Tales of Hope, Play and Passion*, an exhibition exploring the relationship between football and religion and how the two often overlap in both expected and unexpected ways. The show celebrates football's ability to champion social causes, promote marginalised voices, and create opportunities for inclusion and diversity in ways no other sport can.

The exhibition centres around a series of new artworks created by visual artist, illustrator and animator, Ed Merlin Murray. These include a series of short animations presented as an immersive installation across three walls of the gallery. These animations depict interviews with male and female football players, describing their journeys and relationship between football and religion. The players selected are from across the world and at different stages of their careers; from Aska Nasir, a 17-year-old south Asian player in the early stages of her career, to Cheikhou Kouyaté, a Senegalese professional footballer who plays for Premier League club Crystal Palace and Linvoy Primus MBE, an English former professional footballer who played for Portsmouth and Charlton Athletic FC.

Ed Merlin Murray has also created portraits of players in the form of traditional football cards presented as a football team. This unique team also includes portraits of Dr Zafar Iqbal, Head of Medical at Crystal Palace FC, Hannah Finlayson, Club Co-ordinator at Abresham Girls FC and Matt Baker, Director of Sport Chaplaincy UK.

The phenakistiscope offers an interactive element to the exhibition. Developed in 1833 and regarded as the world's first GIF creator, it is a revolving turntable piece that reveals a moving image when it is filmed. Murray has perfected his use of this unusual technology to present striking moving imagery best appreciated through a camera lens.

Contextual historical and contemporary narrative is provided by important collaborations with a variety of organisations and specialists in the field of football through a selection of books, magazines and newspaper articles, relevant objects, and artefacts. These include the loan of items from the National Football Museum in the form of a song sheet for the FA Cup final including the hymn *Abide with me* and a cigarette card of a player who was devout Christian and refused to play on Good Friday and Christmas Day throughout his career.

Continuing the link between historical references and modern-day life is archival material on the infamous Netty Honeyball. Also referred to as Nettie J. Honeyball, she was the founder of the British Ladies' Football Club, the first known women's association football club, and one of their players until spring 1895. This will be shown alongside *A Woman's Game: The Rise, Fall and Rise Again of Women's Football* by Suzanne Wrack, published June 2022. As the English women's football team, the Lionesses, won the Euros in front of one of the largest audiences ever this summer, this exhibition seeks to shine a light on how far women's football has come internationally.

Dr Mark Doidge Principal Research Fellow in the School of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Brighton has written a short piece on the social history of football and religion, which provides another viewpoint on the exhibition theme.

Other reference material includes the *Shire Book* on the Jewish Museum's *Four Four Jew: Football, Fans and Faith* - a major exhibition in 2014, shown alongside Professor Anthony Clavane book *Does Your Rabbi Know You Are Here?* and articles on current issues around race, identity and inclusion.

There will be something for everyone; from eye-catching immersive illustrated animations to interactive art and a host of inspirational media that allow visitors to delve into the subject as much as they wish.

Esen Kaya, Gallery Curator at the Aga Khan Centre says:

'It has been such an interesting journey curating this exhibition. I have had the pleasure of working with amazing colleagues across the Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC), various partner organisations and professionals across the football world.

When Professor Leif Stenberg asked me to curate this exhibition, I immediately thought we could depict the personal journeys of a few male and female football players through animation and other mixed media – I wanted their stories to inspire others. I wanted to work with artist and illustrator Ed Merlin Murray for a while. So, I immediately knew his urban and skilful style of illustration and animation was a perfect fit for this exhibition.

As the title suggests, the exhibition is about stories of hope, passion and play and how these elements are entwined in the lives of the players and professionals we had the pleasure of working with.

I imagined the exhibition appealing to a broad audience – young people, who might be passionate about football and dream of reaching the heights of success to individuals to those who may be pleasantly surprised by the empowering stories from around the world. Those who may appreciate the conversations around football, religion, inclusion, diversity, and identity have been around a for decades. And the exhibition's historical references illustrate how they have shaped where the game is today.

Our gallery is a modest size space, so this is by no means a survey exhibition but instead it provides a glimpse into multi-layered connections and complexities between football and religion. Researching this subject has opened a whole new world for me, especially as my career has largely been focused on the fine art and visual art sector. I have been humbled by the generosity of spirit shown by the many inspirational individuals I have met and with whom we have collaborated, not least, the National Football Museum, the Jewish Museum, Crystal Palace Football Club, Christians in Sport, and Sports Chaplaincy UK to name a few.

It was important the exhibition included a contemporary and historical narrative so there is something engaging for all age groups. Audience engagement is always an important factor when I'm planning exhibitions. People must be able to relate to what's on show, feel inspired and have a variety of take-aways from it too – even for those who might not have football in their lives,

might just take away a moment of magic from experiencing Ed Murray's contemporary illustrations and animation. Exhibitions come to life when the gallery is full of visitors, so I hope many people will come and be inspired by Ed's work and the many stories of hope, passion, and play.'

.....
Edward Merlin Murray, visual artist, illustrator, and animator, says:

'I am very pleased to have this opportunity to have my first solo exhibition in a London gallery. Particularly as that gallery is the Aga Khan Centre Gallery within the beautiful Aga Khan Centre - a very special place. I haven't exhibited work in the real world very much over the last few years so am looking forward to seeing this work within a gallery context.'

This project is very different to anything I've done recently [and indeed ever], and the nature of the football and religion theme has presented a unique set of challenges. In a way I am a strange choice for the job of artist on this show, as I grew up hating the idea of football and everything to do with the sport (as an autistic boy, team sports were a mystery to me, and being forced to play at school bred only resentment) and I am a fairly devout atheist. However, since my own childhood I have gone on to produce a football loving son of my own, which has been a window into the potential beauty of the sport. I now have a lot of love for the game.

The interesting thing about this show, from my perspective as the artist, is that I have been able to make such a range of work. From portraits of the interviewees, in dip pen / bamboo pen and ink, to 17 1/2 minutes of digital animation, to a phenakistiscopic analogue animation presented on a constantly rotating turntable, the work is extremely varied and has been a delight to work upon.'

.....
Wiebke Cullen, Head of Collections, National Football Museum, says:

'We are delighted to lend objects to the Aga Khan Centre Gallery for their upcoming exhibition around Football and Religion. It is very important to us that our objects and their stories reach a wide audience, especially as a national museum. Loans like this one enables our collection to be enjoyed by visitors that we cannot reach in our own galleries.'

.....
Matt Baker, National Director for England & Pastoral Support Director in English Football, Sports Chaplaincy UK, says:

'Faith and football have always been an important part of my life and I consider it a privilege to have been able to combine these two passions for so many years. It is therefore a real honour to be invited to be a part of the Football & Religion Exhibition both to share my experiences and also learn from others with similar aspirations.'

.....
Dr Mark Doidge, Principal Research Fellow in the School of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Brighton, says:

'For me, football should be for everyone. The shared celebration or commiseration is something that can unite all fans and players. Football has a troubled history of accepting difference and being part of this exhibition is an opportunity to reinforce the aspects that unite us, rather than divide us'.

.....
Karishma Inayat, Gligit-Baltistan Girls Football League:

'Being part of The Football and Religion exhibition by AKU in London is not only special for me, but for my community as a whole. I am representing a region that lacks basic facilities yet encourages its daughters to play football and break the patriarchy. It is an opportunity for me to be around like-minded people who love football and are willing to change the world through the power of sport. The platform will enable me to be the voice of girls who play football despite facing challenges and ignite in them a hope that one day, they too will be able to achieve their milestones.'

For press information, please contact Albany Arts Communications:

Mark Inglefield
mark@albanyartscommunications.com
t: +44 (0) 20 78 79 88 95; m: +44 (0) 75 84 19 95 00

Carla Von Der Becke
carla@albanyartscommunications.com
t: +44 (0) 20 78 79 88 95; m: +44 (0) 79 74 25 29 94

Notes to Editors:

About Ed Merlin Murray

Ed is a freelance artist, illustrator and animator with a prolific personal practice. His work is primarily rooted in drawing, usually using analog media, but in recent years he has moved into animation, and creates various types of work using both digital and traditional methods.

His commercial work is often found in the world of music, with album covers, tour posters, and music videos created for a variety of artists across the world. He has also illustrated books and book covers.

Ed is a recent graduate of the Graphic Design & Illustration BA at the University of Cumbria in Carlisle, and a recipient of the D&AD 'Ones to Watch 2020' award. His personal work is focused largely on human consciousness and the brain, often portraying his own life in dealing with mental illness (Ed is bipolar), and is informed by current thinking in the world of neuroscience.

This personal work has met with global acclaim, having been covered by such top art and design blogs as Hi Fructose, Juxtapoz, and Colossal.

Ed published his first book of drawings, *Mysterium Conscientia*, in 2019, which set out to illustrate the inner workings of the human mind. A follow up is due in 2021. He also has an ongoing printmaking practice, producing limited editions of both screen prints and Lino cuts.

About AKU-ISMC

AKU-ISMC was established in 2002 in London and celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2022. As a leading institute in the study of Muslim cultures, encourages critical thinking to help address the complex challenges within Muslim contexts around the world. A research-driven, non-denominational organisation, AKU-ISMC produces internationally recognised research, education, and outreach, of which the exhibition is an excellent example. It also advances the mission of AKU which is part of the global umbrella organisation Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN).

About Aga Khan Centre Gallery

Aga Khan Centre Gallery is located at the heart of King's Cross' Knowledge Quarter, the Aga Khan Centre Gallery sits on the ground floor at the Aga Khan Centre, London. The Aga Khan Centre is a place of education, insight, and cultural exchange and is home for three organisations: Aga Khan Foundation (UK), Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, and The Institute of Ismaili Studies. The Aga Khan Centre Gallery is home to a changing programme of exhibitions and events that aim to create a better understanding of Islam and Muslim cultures, past and present.


The gallery programme will connect with the work of the three main organisations within the centre. It will also connect with the wider Aga Khan Development Network, Aga Khan Trust for Culture and Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. The Aga Khan Centre Gallery aims to significantly contribute to the cultural offer across London as well as nationally and internationally.

Opening times:

Mon-Sun

10am-6pm

www.agakhancentre.org.uk/gallery

 @agakhancentregallery

 @AKCgallery

www.aku.edu/ismc

 @akuismclondon

 @AKU_ISMC

 @aku-ismc



AGA KHAN CENTRE
GALLERY



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
(International) in the United Kingdom
Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations