



Polly Apfelbaum and Graham Parker are pretty in pink at Birmingham's Ikon Gallery

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Graham Parker performing at Ikon during the opening of Polly Apfelbaum's exhibition *Waiting for the UFOs* (a space set between a landscape and a bunch of flowers)

Polly Apfelbaum describes her current exhibition at Birmingham's Ikon Gallery as "an erupting rainbow volcano experience". It fills two floors of galleries with a rigorously-orchestrated extravaganza of eye-poppingly vivid spaces and objects, including painted walls, rugs, drawings, ceramics and dangling beads.

This vibrant exhibition goes under the characteristically suggestive and multi-referential title of *Waiting for the UFOs* (a space set between a landscape and a bunch of flowers), which combines a song by the 70s rocker Graham Parker with the Surrealist René Magritte's definition of a garden. It may not seem an obvious marriage but in the richly idiosyncratic imagination of Apfelbaum, Magritte's ability to bring "an alien perspective to the everyday" chimes with Parker's recalling of the "empty spaces of the American landscape and the obsessed marginal characters out there in the desert waiting for flying saucers".

[She's like a rainbow ... #pollyapfelbaum #waitingfortheufos @ikongallery #rainbow](#)

A post shared by [Louisa Buck](#) (@loubuck01) on Sep 19, 2018 at 10:04am PDT

At the opening on Wednesday (19 September) there was great excitement—especially from the artist—as the main man himself was in attendance to give voice to these marginal characters. Armed with an acoustic guitar, Parker belted out a live version of *Waiting for the UFOs* to the private view crowd, delivered whilst standing in front of Apfelbaum's rainbow *Life Spirit* wall, which commemorates 40 years of the Gay Pride flag. Never mind that Mr P had revealed earlier on that he always thought it was the “worst song” on his 1979 album *Squeezing Out Sparks*, he gave the number his all and was mollified by being allowed to play material from his soon-to-be-released album *Cloud Symbols*.



Polly Apfelbaum, Graham Parker (wearing his bead) and the artist Jeff McMillan. Courtesy of Louisa Buck

However, despite their slight musical differences, both artist and musician were in much closer accord on matters chromatic, with each revealing their very special and particular relationship with the colour pink. At Ikon, Apfelbaum has not only made a point of re-inserting the “hot pink” stripe—apparently in the colour of sexuality in Gilbert Baker's 1978 original—into her *Life Spirit* wall—but she also divulged that she had specially requested that the printers of her exhibition catalogue do a double run on the pinks for the requisite density of the hue. For his part, Parker divulged that hot pink was also the colour he had chosen for of the vinyl version of his new album. Then, to seal their rosy relationship, Apfelbaum presented Parker with his own bespoke pink ceramic bead—although in a rather more decorously delicate pastel shade. Pretty in pink, indeed.

Waiting for the UFOs (a space set between a landscape and a bunch of flowers) is on show at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, until 18 November