

## Exhibition Guide

**Jürgen Partenheimer *Discontinuity, Paradox & Precision***

**2 April – 18 May 2008**

**First Floor Galleries and Tower Room**

Born in Munich in 1947, Jürgen Partenheimer has developed an artistic practice that is extraordinary for its breadth. This exhibition, his first in the UK, comprises new and recent painting, works on paper, sculpture and a musical collaboration with Irish composer, Kevin Volans (b. South Africa, 1949).

On entering the exhibition, a post-modern versatility is apparent. Paintings are juxtaposed with drawings and exquisite ceramic pieces. However, the synergy and effortless dialogue between such art objects negate any reading of Partenheimer's practice as 'multi-disciplinary' in a traditional sense. Through the use of different media, Partenheimer invites us to reflect on the diversity of relationships that exist between material phenomena and how it impinges on our daily lives.

The series of drawings entitled *Reforzate* (2005) hints at the experience of negotiating unfamiliar spaces and places. Motifs suggestive of barriers float into view; strangely known yet unrecognisable forms are seemingly caught in moments of flux; networks of pale lines resonate, appearing to shift the surface from one state of being to another. In this way, Partenheimer's images don't describe particular moments but instead tell us something of what was felt, projecting a sensation as opposed to denoting an experience.

His sculptures and ceramic work also retain this sense of fluidity, playing with our sense of recognition. Containing echoes of a functional object, reminiscent of a vase once seen or a jug once held, each resists simple representation to become almost imagined things, hovering around reality. In fact, Partenheimer once described himself as a "cartographer of the imaginary world", charting the realm of day dreams, the spaces in between seeing and anticipating, faith and indisputable fact.

Similarly other series, such as works on paper entitled *O.T. (Fulgur Oscuro II)* (2006) or paintings *Carmen* (2006–7), can be seen to allude to both musical composition

and the rhythm of speech. Here, the artist orchestrates delicate layers of colour and linear forms to the point where the resulting image almost dissolves, caught at the point of transition between materiality and immateriality, a poetic sensitivity established through patterns of repeated phrases.

Such a formal dynamic provides a poignant context to the collaboration between Partenheimer and Volans. The composer on the other hand, talks of his music being derived from the language of visual art. He describes images created by sound, the solid forms that emerge in one's mind when listening to a great piece of music and thus his input into this project could not be more fitting.

Inspired by both the three interlocking gallery spaces that make up Ikon's first floor and the three artistic disciplines – drawing, painting and sculpture – undertaken by Partenheimer, Volan's new commission involves three ensembles. These, with strings, wind and piano / percussion, but without a conductor, play simultaneously at different speeds whilst keeping time using a digital stopwatch. During live performances at Ikon, by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, the audience is drawn from one space to the other; otherwise, the music, previously recorded, emanates from *Sound Sculpture* (2008). Musical passages overlap, with phrases repeated, the tone or colour and rhythmic sequences corresponding to graphic sensibilities in Partenheimer's work. The music suggests the condition of pure sensation, 'the grammar of dreams'. In turn, Partenheimer also presents a new sound work, *Voices* (2008), located in Ikon's Tower Room. Here, four voices are heard simultaneously, whispering quietly in German, English and Portuguese; the layers of sound that they create in this otherwise empty space enhancing possibilities of imaginative activity whilst referencing the different cultures to which the artist alludes in his text-based work.

The interweaving of ideas and art forms, characteristic of Partenheimer's work, is extended into his concurrent exhibition at Perrott's Folly, one of Birmingham's most historic landmarks. Built in 1758 by John Perrott, this building supposedly inspired local resident JRR Tolkien to write *The Two Towers*, the second book of his *Lord of The Rings* trilogy. For Partenheimer, the tower operates as 'axis mundi', an upright extension between heaven and earth, also giving rise to a consideration of architecture as sculpture. By climbing the long spiral staircase, viewers encounter six rooms, a vertical string of wunderkammer, or magic chambers, each containing a single work, pervaded by the sound of Kevin Volans' music.

In its entirety, *Discontinuity, Paradox & Precision* represents a composite work of art, a 'gesamtkunstwerk' where Partenheimer achieves a wonderful harmony between distinct means of artistic expression.