



Urban Chiaroscuro

An exhibition of recent work by Emily Allchurch

9th October – 10th November 2007



Emily Allchurch, *Urban Chiaroscuro 4: Rome (after Piranesi)*,
backlit transparency, 116.4 x 81.5 cm (edition of 4) - 164 x 117 cm
(edition of 4), 2007.

The Directors of Frost & Reed Contemporary are pleased to announce the latest London solo show by young British artist Emily Allchurch, who has already established an international reputation with her unique photographic reconstructions of celebrated masterpieces restaged in a contemporary idiom. Whilst retaining the format of backlit transparencies, this exhibition marks the unveiling of a whole new body of work derived from the master Italian etcher Giovanni Battista Piranesi's (1720-78) acclaimed series, *Carceri d'Invenzione (Imaginary Prisons)*, first published 1749-50.

Although inspired by the architecture of Rome, these remarkable etchings are all imaginary capricci. The resulting sinister prison fantasies with their boundless space, impossible structures and spatial paradoxes were seen by many as a commentary on the restrictive social order of his time. For *Urban Chiaroscuro*, Allchurch has reconstructed seven plates from the series, fragment by contemporary fragment, from photographs of very real

architecture found in London, Rome and Paris today. Like Piranesi's originals, there is evidently a subtext to her series, offering a visual meditation on contemporary urban existence, and specifically a suggestion of the claustrophobic climate of fear – and indeed the prevalence of the technology of surveillance.

As with the Allchurch's previous series, each piece is created using her well-established technique of sifting through many hundreds of her own photographs, identifying and selecting what is required and digitally splicing them to fashion a seamless and *apparently* visually faithful reconstruction of the original work. It is on closer inspection that the story unravels. Pendulum lighting is replaced by 360° CCTV cameras, alarms and Tannoy systems, wooden staircases by escalators and flyovers, and the barely outlined figures by lone pedestrians, reflections and shadows. The walls and floors are littered with graffiti and detritus with street signs vainly attempting to impose order and control.

'Chiaroscuro', from the Italian meaning 'clear dark', echoes the contradictions working within these works. These visions of the city appear claustrophobic and threatening; these are places where nature is excluded and yet simultaneously the viewer is shown high vaulted spaces without apparent limits, through which the imagination can wander. Strong contrast creates highlights and shadows, injecting light into murky paranoia-ridden chambers. And of course, the illumination of a lightbox further intensifies the dramatic allusion inherent in the work.

Each piece is given a dominant colour which reflects the city it represents, from the yellow brick of London, to the rich sienna of Rome and the stone white hues of Paris. Individual works form a hybrid of the vibrant architectural heritage found in each city. From London, a journey which takes you from the imposing architecture around the City of London and the Ministry of Defence, to the Jubilee line on the Underground; in Rome a synthesis of ancient and modern from Castel Sant' Angelo, to the Fascist style of EUR suburb and the immense modern housing estate of Il Corviale; and in Paris from the order and grace of Haussmann's boulevards, to riverside bridges and contemporary design at La Villette and Institut du Monde Arabe.

A fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by Nigel Warburton accompanies the exhibition.

For further information and/or visual material, please contact Sandrine Janet on 020 7839 4645.

**The gallery is open
Monday – Friday 10am – 6pm
Saturday – 11am – 3pm
Tube: Piccadilly, Green Park**