

Mixed media with sound, 2005.

Dimensions:
 Wall-mounted part 150 cm high by 110 cm wide.
 Free-standing tripod 130 cm high located 100 cm from wall, placed centrally.

Explanatory Notes

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a poem describing a journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise bringing together, within an elaborate structure, a vast range of people and incidents - historical, legendary and mythological. His frank descriptions pull no punches when it comes to explaining to the reader why these people are found in the places they are - his system of punishments and penances is illustrated by specific references to the deeds of contemporary rulers, religious leaders and the like.

The range of his vision inspired artists and poets after him. The audacity of his 'naming and shaming' appealed to poet Ezra Pound in his reworking of Dante's scheme, the *Cantos*. Pound makes, at times, caustic references to politicians and businessmen of his own era. In the visual arts William Blake and Botticelli both directly illustrated passages from the *Commedia* and the poem continued to inspire artists, not least because Dante's visions were so vividly imagined.

My project, begun here with *In Memoriam R.B.*, is to take up the material of the *Divine Comedy* but rather than replicate its details, or even modernise its references, it adopts the poem as a mythological text in its own right to use as a springboard for personal visions. *In Memoriam R.B.* developed from the ground up to a point where I could link it in to episodes in the *Inferno*, coalescing a group of references into one vision.

The work grew physically from the remains of a piano - a Reichmann Berlin upright - and began to take on the characteristics of a chimerical beast - perhaps an angel. In the *Inferno* the gates of the city of Dis are guarded by three Furies. Medusa, with her head of snakes, bars the way to the pilgrims until an angel appears and opens the gates. Christ performed this function after his Crucifixion, and there is more than a suggestion of crucifixion in my piece. Furthermore, the musician-poet Orpheus traveled to the underworld to regain his dead wife: his presence is felt in the lyre and the sound of stroked piano strings we hear.

This tripod angel encapsulates all of these references in a single form. This was not planned but arose from the process of



making the piece and in gathering the materials.

The backdrop, ripped off from Gustave Doré (himself the most thorough, albeit unimaginative, illustrator of the *Commedia*) and defaced with digital paint, depicts a landscape scarred by acid rain where the 'drips' are melting the image. The pattering of raindrops, such a compelling sound in the real world, is here transformed into a machine-like array of clicks, confounding the mysterious beauty of Orpheus' lyre.

The tripod form of the beast was suggested by the camera tripod (not illustrated here) onto which I mounted the bowl and mirror. The bowl seemed to belong there and the mirror suggested itself when I considered that Perseus avoided being turned to stone by watching Medusa in the reflection in his shield. The bowl has a suggestion of a chalice.

It is in these moments of 'fitness', when the ingredients appear to have been made for each other, that the process of assemblage becomes poetic.