



- 1 Chaplet, 2007
Printing ink, artist's fingerprints
- 2 DNA Gate, 2008
Oak, 24 carat gold leaf
- 3 Angels and Aeroplanes, 2008
Wool
- 4 Hiatus, 2008
Photograph (Lambda print)
- 5 DNA Kiss, 2008
Lipstick

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A collaboration between Arnolfini, Camden Arts Centre and Modern Art Oxford. This is the first of three exhibitions over three years shared by the three organisations.

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Introduction to the exhibition

Mircea Cantor

The Need for Uncertainty

Galleries 2,3,4

13 September - 9 November 2008

**FOR EXHIBITION LAYOUT PLEASE
SEE THE PLAN ON THE BACK OF THIS
GUIDE.**

As an artist, Mircea Cantor responds to contemporary issues, be it the treatment of Romanian immigrants living in different countries, or the visible transformation of cultural traditions in eastern Europe, and in particular in Cantor's native Romania following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989.

Rather than illustrating these issues and risking oversimplification, he uses objects, materials and processes and their poetic associations to think

around issues. In doing this, many other ideas are raised. The artist's intention is to express opposition to the simplification of concepts for the sake of ease and accessibility. As the title of the exhibition suggests and Cantor's remarks confirm: 'There is an inflation of the value of certainty; we need the opposite'.

In **GALLERY 2, CHAPLET** is made from the artist's fingerprints, using ink. Like the artist's signature, this drawing asserts his presence in the gallery space. It also marks the boundary of the space, a point emphasised by his representation of barbed wire.

In **GALLERY 3** there are three works, which create a magical feeling together: a golden gateway, a flying carpet and a magical forest – all powerful references to objects and places as well as mythical imagery and incidents.

All these works result from Cantor's visit last year to the region of Maramures in northern Romania. The majestic oak gates carved with protective symbols that mark the entrance to important houses are a feature of the area (you can see some examples in the exhibition catalogue). In recent years many of the gates have been sold and dismantled as it seems that the oak makes wonderful parquet floors, but new gates are also being produced.

DNA GATE is a lifesize replica of a Maramures gate, carved by woodcarver Vasile Barsan. The carver and the artist have both signed the work by carving the outline of their hand on the back. The 24 carat gold leaf covering, as specified by Cantor, endows the gate with a presence we might associate with a religious icon, a fairytale or perhaps a rite of passage ritual. Cantor has superimposed a graphic representation of the DNA strand over the symbol of 'the tree of life'. Cantor sees a resemblance between the motif of interconnecting ropes carved into the traditional gates and the double helix of the DNA molecule.

For Cantor, the DNA strand symbolises both the desire for certainty and what he describes as 'the continuation of tradition' in another form. As they usually mark the entrances of important houses in the region, walking through this gold leaf covered gate, would mean passing through and under symbols of aspiration and continuity.

As well as woodcarving, Maramures is known for its woven patterned carpets. Cantor is fascinated by these processes and in all his works the processes are clear, whether carving, thumbprinting, applying gold leaf or weaving.

Cantor designed the composition of **ANGELS AND AEROPLANES**, using traditional, symbolic decoration such as flowing water, wolves teeth, the sun and the moon and commissioned one of Maramures's most established weavers, Victoria Berbecaru. Like the addition of DNA strand and gold leaf on the gate, here he has embellished the rug with angels and aeroplanes, neither of which are found in traditional designs but, like the carpet itself, are able to fly.

The photograph is of a forest in the same region. **HIATUS** depicts a wooden sculpture added on to, or growing out of, a tree. It's the only one of its kind in this densely packed wood. Made from the same material, but of a different form altogether, it is part of but also out of place in this scene.

The shape is based on wool spindle decorations made by shepherds and used by women to spin wool. When in use, the spindles are in constant vibration. The title of the work suggests Cantor has stopped this movement. The pause might be short, before something new and unexpected occurs, but in this photograph the parasite looks like it is there to stay.

For each of these works, Cantor has combined something everyday or traditional with something magical and allegorical. Traditional symbols and the DNA strand imply a transfer of knowledge – be it handed down via craft and experience or through the genetic codes of ancestors. The DNA symbol is simplified, but what it represents is complex. Are we made up of our communities and our own traditions or a sequence of protein molecules?

GALLERY 4 contains a further work referencing both mythical ideas, beliefs and personal DNA. For **DNA KISS**, 12 women made DNA strand drawings by kissing the wall to leave lines of lipstick prints. Each strand is made by a different woman and each woman represents a different star sign. Like the thumbprints in **CHAPLET**, lip prints and ways of kissing are different for each person. Each also leaves a trace of DNA. Which is a better indicator of that person's individuality – their kiss, their DNA or their star sign?

Throughout Mircea Cantor's exhibition there are works that draw attention to the traces left by us and by others and in each work highlights how difficult it can be to interpret these traces. They might be the artist's own traces, the DNA of our ancestors or the traditions of others, but in each case Cantor's considered use of processes and materials highlights the poetic and political associations of his choices.

Please ask a Steward if you have any questions. Further information about Mircea Cantor's art and ideas can be found in the Reading Room on the Second Floor. Open Tue - Sun 12.00 - 6.00pm.

There are free tours of the exhibitions at 2.00pm each Saturday.

A catalogue for the exhibition is available from Arnolfini Bookshop priced £14.95.

ART/FUN, an activity pack for the exhibition, is available from Arnolfini Bookshop priced £1.00.