

# IKON

## Exhibition Guide

**Damián Ortega *Being***

**7 September – 20 October 2007**

**Ikon Eastside**

*Being* is an exhibition by Mexican artist Damián Ortega consisting of new work commissioned by Ikon. Characteristically engaging with the nature of everyday life, the condition of sculpture and geo-political concerns, Ortega manipulates familiar objects and materials, transforming them into poetic, often humorous works of art.

This exhibition has developed out of the artist's research into Birmingham's local industry and manufacturing heritage. Whilst visiting the inner-city district of Digbeth, he was struck by the huge rolls of copper sheeting that were being processed until earlier this year in factories in the vicinity of Ikon Eastside. Particularly attracted by the physical properties of copper – its flexibility, ability to hold its form, rich colour and propensity to tarnish dramatically – as well as the wealth of associations triggered by this metal, as a conductor of power and heat, and a symbol of energy, Ortega has created a trilogy of sculptures from a single cylindrical form.

In *Being*, the copper rolls appear to have mutated organically into quasi-architectural forms, reminiscent of futuristic cityscapes while retaining something of their essence as commodities or raw materials. Gleaming and opulent, they extend upwards into high towers, collapse into undulating skylines and unravel into labyrinthine structures. These monumental works fuse ideas of this city's industrial past with its aspiration, suggesting constant evolution and change. Ortega thus resists the condition of sculpture as one of static objects, encouraging instead an understanding of substance as dynamic. He describes his interest in the atomic composition of the metal, indeed of all things, as something constantly in motion: "objects are in process, are being."

*Being* is a work in three parts, a framework regularly used by Ortega as a way of signalling a more open and fluid proposition than a single object or oppositional pairing might suggest. His infamous *Cosmic Thing* in which he dismantled a Volkswagen Beetle, piece by piece, and suspended it from the ceiling in an exploded form was but one part of 'The Beetle Trilogy'. Although always playful, his work is analytical, to some extent betraying his professional origins as a political cartoonist.