

## TRUEFAITH

It is no exaggeration to say that the work of the British photographer and art director Trevor Key still resonates today, five years after his untimely death. For a start, Key's own handwriting is responsible for the distinctive Virgin logo, which now reaches literally millions every year via aircraft, trains, condoms, pension plans and soft-drink cans. Beyond that, Trevor Key's work as the in-house art director at Virgin Records during the 70s led to iconic pop music imagery from Mike Oldfield's chart-topping *Tubular Bells* sleeve to the withdrawn, litigious Sex Pistols/Jamie Reid v American Express imagery. Set against the sanitised sleeves of modern music marketing, Key's simple, graphic Virgin work still shines like a beacon from record-store racks. ◀ But it is for his distinctive 'Dichromat' images – conceived with friend and long-term collaborator Peter Saville – that Key is celebrated here. The flower images reproduced on the following pages represent the start of an unfinished series Key worked on from 1987 to 1988, while other photographs shown stem from Key and Saville sleeve art for New Order which was produced at around the same time. ◀ A few of Trevor Key's flowers were exhibited briefly in Lyon in 1988, although these were just part of a much larger flower project that was never to be completed. They represent perhaps the pinnacle of Key's 'Dichromat years' – a time where the photographer was pretty much silkscreening with light, utilising what he tagged 'structural masks' to create striking images of the basic structure of things. Compare Key's flowers with those of Irving Penn or Robert Mapplethorpe and the contrast is striking. Trevor Key's vision of nature is all about surface and about shape. He found a real resonance in raw structure and managed to create apparently heavenly silhouettes that also seemed strangely primal and very of-this-earth. ◀ It is perhaps worth considering that this Dichromat work followed a couple of years of Yves Klein-inspired soul searching by the Key and Saville team. 'By 1985 we weren't interested in recycling other imagery or movements in our work any more,' reveals Saville, 'we looked towards nature and almost wanted to reflect the triumph of absolute nothingness. I'd got Trevor to just photograph metal for New Order's *Brotherhood* sleeve in 1986. I'd got very existential and I couldn't get to grips with anything much beyond nature at that time.' From the triumph of nothingness came the triumph of absolute existence – shape, form, solidity, structure. 'I was sitting in my car in Notting Hill one night,' says Saville, 'and this leaf just drifted down, framed perfectly in my windscreen. I phoned up Trevor straight away and said, "we've got to do a leaf image".' ◀ The process that Trevor Key invented for his Dichromat images had a certain hit or miss factor. It wasn't until his 'structural masks' were peeled away that Key knew what he was getting, and so a sort of Warhol-ness kicked in as he and assistants created hundreds of variations. Just one or two would then be selected from the dozens of potent results. From flowers and leaves, the Key and Saville partnership progressed onto targets and cherubs and eventually to pharmaceutical pills (very pre-Damien Hirst). ◀ The Dichromat work came to a halt when Peter Saville moved temporarily to LA in the early 90s – presumably taking any New Order commissions with him – and ended for good when Trevor Key died suddenly in 1995. His trademark photographic process survived, though, through his talented assistant Toby McFarlan Pond, who reprised the distinctive Key style as part of a tribute CD sleeve for the Manchester club Renaissance. It is via McFarlan Pond's other still-life photography projects (see *Pop*, *Arena Homme Plus* and *The Face*), that the relentless innovation of the Trevor Key studio further resonates today.



TEXT BY ASHLEY HEATH

(i), (iii), (iv), (vi) & (vii) ALL PART OF THE FLOWER SERIES OF DICHROMATS; (ii) SLEEVE ART FOR THE COVER OF NEW ORDER'S BLUE MONDAY REMIX; (v) ONE OF A SERIES OF IMAGES FOR THE TRUE FAITH ALBUM COVER. ALL BY TREVOR KEY/ PETER SAVILLE 1986-1989











