

The Telegraph

Magic films that immerse you in poetry

EXHIBITION

PHILIPPE PARRENO

SERPENTINE GALLERY

I HAVE never known time pass so quickly in an exhibition. Arriving inside French-Algerian filmmaker Philippe Parreno's first British show, you are guided from room to room by voices, music, moving images and beautifully realistic falling snow. You leave 45 minutes later feeling different about the world.

The exhibition consists of four main rooms, each one wired up to transform itself into a cinema as you walk in. The films are short – the centrepiece lasts just seven minutes, and when the vast screen fills an entire wall you are almost immersed in the scenery. Entitled *June 8, 1968*, the film recreates the train journey that carried Robert Kennedy's body from New York to Washington three days after he was shot dead.

It is Parreno's style to use well-known subjects to lure people into his films. With the Scottish artist Douglas Gordon in 2006, he co-directed a film about the footballer



Wonderfully realised: 'Invisibleboy' opens the door into a new world

Zinedine Zidane, a silent movie in which 17 cameras recorded his every move during a match, and produced an engrossing portrait of a man absorbed in his craft. The result was less a story of Zidane than a study of what it means to be a modern hero.

In this way, Parreno unpicks the shallow surface of celebrity TV culture and digs down to uncover grand narratives and poetry. In *June 8, 1968*, Kennedy is never

referred to: the thousands of people who lined the railway tracks become the film's subjects. They stand silently, with their arms hanging at their sides as if weighed down by the gravity of the event.

As with all Parreno's films, which are compositions in light, it is the landscape and the atmosphere that tell the story; in this instance, an intensely crisp late afternoon light, a blue sky and the heavy, repetitive chug-chug of

the train, which was slowed down to half its normal speed.

Among the other films, *Invisibleboy* (2010) attempts to enter the imaginative world of a Chinese immigrant boy who sees giant monsters. It's wonderfully realised, with a great silvery fish-head in the tank of the restaurant below his apartment, and other dark intruders who ingrain themselves on your psyche.

But what lingers is the fluid experience of moving through the gallery. After each showing there is a conspicuous, thoughtful silence, before the lingering crowd gravitates towards the next space.

The highlight is the central room, which has been designed like a grand atrium, but arranged like a stage with nowhere to sit. The film positions the audience on the train rolling down the tracks on June 8, 1968, and the people who stand at the track's edges look up at you. Are you the audience or are they? The magic of Parreno's work lies in the childish feeling it awakens in you that your life could be as lovely as a film.

CRATING ★★★★★

Florence Waters