Habitat, that will spin alarmingly at variable speeds suggesting, Richman hopes, both the lights of the funfair but also a sense of danger.

The third installation will be quite different. He plans to set a contemplative atmosphere by channelling a narrow duct of light from a skylight and showing his own short film, bounced off a mirror on to a screen of soft translucent material – in reference to the Jewish practice of veiling mirrors when there has been a 'death in the family. The content of the film is poignant and follows Richman's recent experience of clearing out the family house after his father's death.

The main images are photographs of his now dead relatives in their prime, collaged against film of cherry blossom and of a swan building its nest among industrial detritus on a canal side in London's Hackney. The message is of mourning, celebration and renewal: as the swan perseveres in adversity, the fractal blossom brings new growth, and the generations are continued.

Richman is also showing paintings for the first time. When he quit rock show lighting, he went back to college in 1988 to study painting but quickly started introducing light into his work. By the time he graduated, he had shifted completely to light installations.

While the installations at Rhodes + Mann refer to his childhood, the watercolours draw on his 30 years spent in the capital. His subjects are urban street patterns and patterns found in tower blocks. Richman's interest in fractal repetition is evident in the street grid patterns and windows of buildings.

At the same time, his agent Dominic Berning is also showing more domestic-scale pieces, such as his Bookspaces and Ladders, and hosting window installations and a roof piece of four tubes of light.

The solo show follows a series of collaborations with architects and developers on public art. This began when architect and developer Roger Zogolovitch commissioned Richman to do a light installation for a building he was about to convert to apartments. Plenty more have followed in the past 10 years. As well as the "tremendous canvas" of the waste energy plant, there was the translucent blue and violet facade at Abingdon police station with BDP, the Anvil arts venue with RHWL, an intervention on Bethnal Green Bridge and last year, Bristol's Millennium Beacons, and a light tower in the atrium of Southampton's West Quays Shopping Centre, where Richman overcame his natural dislike of shopping malls and the "globalisation of the high street".

"I'd like to think on a good day that that particular piece provides a bit of a heart. I've long been interested in urban installations and how with a simple intervention you can transform a space."

He cites his Bloom installation with architect Niall McLaughlin at RIBA's Fused exhibition as one of his most fruitful collaborations. It was something of a blind date, but the two hit it off and came up with illuminated rows of translucent cloches that filled the room, apart from the marble edges of the floor, forcing people entering the room to inhabit the space differently from how they would normally. Mirrors on the walls let passers-by see the work without entering the forbidding building.

"Martin's good to work with; he's full of ideas but he gives a lot of space to the other person. It would be difficult to say which of us did what," says McLaughlin.

Plenty more collaborations with architects followed: winning RSA Art for Architecture awards for work with Allford Hall Monaghan Morris on a London school, and another with landscape architects Gross Max. Now Richman is working on a project with Bennetts Associates on the Hampstead Theatre at Swiss Cottage to incorporate his illuminations in the fabric of the new building and, with Gustafson Porter, on the design of the landscape.

While obviously in his element working with light, Richman, ever receptive to new opportunities, does not rule out further twists and turns in his career while still finding time for his family, and his hobbies of "physical abuse and cultural activity".

"One of the things about being an artist is that you're always open to possibilities," he says. And while he may be a man with a past, he's clearly a man very much with a future ■

Martin Richman – Come To Light, 15 November–21 December, Rhodes + Mann, 37 Hackney Road, London E2 7NX, T 0207 729 4372, and at Dominic Berning Fine Art, 1 Hoxton Street, London N1 6NL, T 0207 739 4222