



Ian Kane and Eric Cruikshank

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by Gina Wall

The work of Eric Cruikshank and Ian Kane demands quiet contemplation: the stillness of the pieces invites a reception which is responsive to their respective sensibilities. Their scale is modest, the colouration intense yet restrained: these works are silently beautiful. But how might such modest works hint at the sublime? One answer to this question is in their reading, the notion that the work is more than what it is; the work offers a space of encounter which, by its very nature, is a space of difference. This way to the sublime does not take its lead from traditional notions of what we might call the Romantic sublime, but from careful thought about how the reading of these works opens difference: in short their writerly possibilities.

To talk of the writerly in relation to the practice of these two artists certainly does not imply that the work is *conceptual* in the strictest sense of the word. Cruikshank and Kane make resolutely visual work, yet it is also the unapparent which is activated in the space in which they are installed, articulating mutual encounters in the in-between. Although there are aspects of the architectural in the practice of both artists (indeed Cruikshank sometimes takes the geometry of vernacular architecture as a starting point in the genesis of a painting), the work of neither artist is representational. In Cruikshank's case the spaces between the paintings as in *Painting Number 1* the 'splits', articulate the relation between the works and the wall syntactically. These absences and gaps that are opened between his paintings are reprised in Kane's floor piece *For Agnes*.

In this work, the hairline gap between the component parts is a significant aspect of the sculpture. The piece sits on the floor, but we might ask is it *there*, in front of us? In fact, these pieces are wholes comprised of two parts, a found object and a cast of its imaginary other: a phantom in resin. These broken concrete slabs are remade, completed by the artist in fine softly coloured resin, which references the delicate palette of specific works by the great American painter Agnes Martin. Although one might argue that these works have an undeniable presence, each fabricated section of the work is an iteration of one in a set of possible completions of the found object: the artwork itself is the sum of these possibilities. Therefore, the artwork is not *there* on the floor, rather it articulates possibility: the artwork is potentiality comprised of possible others.

These possibilities in making are echoed by the possibilities of reading and re-reading the work. Kane and Cruikshank's works inhabit four dimensions: they instigate a durational reading; the works can only be encountered over time. In many ways the *poesis* of the work, that is, in Umberto Eco's terminology the work's purpose as opposed to its *aesthetic*, is to literally move the viewer. As Cruikshank himself writes of his drawings:

Continuing from sequences of works completed in America, multiple layers of delicate translucent paper are pinned to the gallery wall, with the physical movement of the viewer having a physical bearing on the drawings. As the paper shifts independently, the forms sketched out on each sheet blur and renegotiate themselves with each pass of the spectator. (Cruikshank, 2010)

As the viewer moves about the gallery Cruikshank's drawings are gently disturbed, causing the leaves to palpitate gently, opening spaces between; soft inhalations which stir the drawing from fixity. The translucent sheets hang in space awaiting the spectator, as the paper moves the leaves coalesce to form new images by drifting softly in and out of focus. The image is mobile; it persists only in a permanent state of flux. This mobility opens the work to a performative encounter, that is, an engagement which could be understood in terms of both the work and the viewer being remade with each 'pass'. It is an incitement to differential readings, which constitute the work in ways that exceed its apparent form or object hood.

This said, the object hood of Kane's *Seeing is Believing* is a tacit reminder that to hold the object in one's gaze, to literally objectify it, is to believe that the suzerain gaze is intimately linked to knowing. However, Kane writes of this piece that it:

...has at its core knowingness and unknowingness. We know what the red covers but we also do not know. We see but we do not allow ourselves to believe. (Kane, 2011)

The red resin, which looks like freshly dipped sealing wax, carefully inscribes a line around the fragment of cement. We can infer the material qualities of that which lies below the red resin from the uncovered fragment. But, as Kane points out, we know yet we do not know. We see and we think we know, we do not allow ourselves to believe our unknowingness. As soon as we accept our unknowing our command of the work is suddenly disrupted.

We must also consider this work in relation to Kane's floor pieces, and Cruikshank's paintings, which insist on between-ness. The viewer is caught between the work, therefore, the perspective that successive viewers take on the work is of the utmost importance. In *The Open Work* Umberto Eco writes:

The form of a work gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood. (Eco, 1989:3)

There is more than a hint of Nietzschean perspectivism at play here. What Eco wants us to understand is that the differential readings which constitute the work render it in exhaustive and therefore aesthetically valuable. The merit of the work is in its multiplicity of possible readings rather than the physical properties of that quiet little object before us. In this sense the aesthetic value of the work grows out of the multiple perspectives which it encourages: the *aesthetic* results from the *poesis*.



The artwork and the viewer activate the unapparent which lends the work an otherness, a sense of estrangement from itself. This resonates with the concept of the textual sublime. If we take that the possibility of meaning in language arises from difference, it follows that meaning functions in the play of difference between words. However, those differences are never apparent. As Barbara Johnson writes:

A text's difference is not its uniqueness, its special identity. It is the text's way of differing from itself. And this difference is received only in the act of re-reading...Difference...is not what distinguishes one identity from another. It is not a difference between...It is a difference within. Far from constituting the text's unique identity, it is that which subverts the very idea of identity, infinitely deferring the possibility of adding up the sum of the text's parts or meanings and reaching a totalised, integrated whole. (Johnson, 1981:166)

However, as Johnson shows us, the difference of the text from itself is only articulated in its re-reading. That is to say, the work differs from itself as a *result* of its reading. And this is the way to the sublime for these pieces: not through awestruck wonder but through experiencing and re-experiencing works which in difference are *other than themselves*. We can take this to be a kind of Duchampian *infra-thin* whereby the imperceptible changes of the object over time and its successive readings constitute the difference and the sublimity of the work. The textual sublime subverts any notion that the work can ever be totalised: each time these pieces are encountered they are differed which offers up a succession of openings.

References

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