

Cranes (and cities), Scores (and things): on the work of Hannah Dargavel-Leafe

Cranes (and cities)

The crane is often used as a device in journalism, a way of setting a short-hand measure for the growth of a city. A correlation is suggested between the number of cranes and the vibrancy and growth of the city, the rapidly changing city is assumed to be one that is more alive. This measure does not always work. There are images and films of the King Abdullah Financial District in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia when it was under construction. At its most intense stage there were over 300 cranes in use, the effect is unsettling, the cranes begin to merge in to each other. In short, they stop seeming like functional structures and take on a different condition, one in which building and crane mutate. The task they are meant to perform is lost in the image they unintentionally create.

In the series of 'Crane Motifs' there is a mutation of a more pared back kind. The source is immediately recognisable as that of the modular component parts of the crane tower – but things have also considerably changed. The viewer may be unaware of the difference between a gantry, straddle or tower crane, they may even be unaware of when it is best to choose a luffing crane over a hammerhead or flat top; regardless of the lack of specific knowledge the form is still familiar. The 'Crane Motifs' as art works have a complex relationship, they are individual works, yet also connected and part of a series. Although the crane structures are individual works they are rarely shown that way. They occupy the space with other works and even the space they occupy is both part of, and separate to, the work. This possibly relates to the process of making, images are digitally set and re-worked towards the final form they eventually take. The crane in the city has no such fluidity, without a site there is no crane, it requires temporary foundations set in concrete and solid though they are, they only allow it to complete the task in hand. It is the same state for the 'Crane Motifs', their place seems temporary, they look ready to move on, as though they might re-form themselves at any moment. The materials encourage this reading. The 'Crane Motifs' have a slightness and delicacy about their form, the concrete they rest upon is more substantial. The concrete works as an 'island' structure, the edge is sharp and falls away quickly leaving the work potentially precarious. The concrete island is more of a wasteland, the city has been removed. The concrete crust gives nothing away in terms of location – though it might hint that everything is built on the same anonymous base. Although buildings exude a feeling of permanence, this only comes with a high degree of maintenance. Ideas of precariousness, transition and flux have a strong relationship to time and this comes across strongly in the work.

Scores (and things)

The premise of a musical score is a simple thing. It is the (written) document which sets the essential structure of a composition. It is the work, it is its core, but it is not everything, it needs the performer to complete the process (albeit temporarily, just for the duration of the work). There is a sequential order to these things: the composer composes, the publisher publishes, the performer performs and the audience...well, the audience does not get the privilege of their own verb. The fact they do not, and the implications of what that might mean, may be of use in relation to the following work. The 'Score Drawings' are the document of an action that has already taken place (or they could be a model for a future action). The actions also relate to ordinary, everyday gestures and things. We may decide to call it a performance, yet with such ordinary subjects we may also decide we do not wish to. The drawings formalise the act of doing something, some of these things are quite distinct, others not.

As a country Switzerland already holds a convincing popular perception of being somewhat less than dynamic. For the village of Ermatingen, to be deemed as the most boring was something of an achievement in a place where standards are seen to be meticulously high. As a way of making use of the boring label it was decided to hold an event, one which might subvert their sleepy identity. The choice of event for their re-definition was stone skimming, not because it was a radical activity in itself, but because it was something people often did when bored. 'Score for Skimming Stones' could provide an interesting model, it is more of a summation than an individual document. It is meant as an average, though for most it would be an ideal. With 'Score for Skimming Stones' there is precise work for something which is prone to imprecision, the inconsistent external elements are an integral part of the work.

The gap from stone skimming to yawning is not so substantial. The yawn is a surprisingly consistent thing and the drawing captures its essential dynamic, it evenly expands to its peak then quickly subsides. Once the yawn begins, its end is almost inevitable. It also has an element of contagion. Seeing or hearing a yawn sets a reciprocal response in the viewer or listener. Even thinking, reading about or looking at a drawing of a yawn can have the same effect. The interest of the work, perhaps, is also to do with what is not there, the careful control which exists in the drawing may not be present in the actual actions themselves. The works seem determined to void themselves of emotion, the gap they establish is an important space in which to consider; the question of what is left for the viewer. 'Score for a Wine Glass' could be a technical exercise in relation to form; the repeated patterns of circles might also be from the bottom of the glass, this depends on what context the viewer decides to insert. If it is the imagined table of a pub in the midst of a slow afternoon, then the meaning shifts – the repeated marks could be boredom, agitation or a number of other things. Equally a yawn may just be a yawn, but it is also tempting to dwell on what else it might be. Jean Paul Sartre writes a good description of a yawn in *Nausea*, it is a yawn that is so intense it produces tears, it is the 'deep, deep boredom, the deep heart of existence'. This may not be the yawn of everyone, with the drawing the viewer will choose what to fill in, what it is they decide to focus upon.

As the works exist in a minor state of flux, they encourage a gap to be filled, another interpretation to be made. In this way, they have a multiple existence, that of drawing, score, instruction, document; the choice helps to determine what might be made of the work.

Dr. Steven Gartside.

Commissioned by The International 3 on the occasion of Small connecting part, Hannah Dargavel-Leafe's solo exhibition at The International 3 28th June – 31st July 2014.

Copyright Dr. Steven Gartside and The International 3.