

## Introduction

The Cranford Collection began for me years ago with the idea of telling a story. But it was just that – an idea. Twelve years on, I could not have imagine how engaging, how physical, how personal, the process would have proved. The idea was to create a collection that would have a public role and public responsibilities, supporting artists, both emerging and more established. In this way, the Collection has taken on a life of its own, and has explored contemporary art practices we could not have imagined in its modest beginnings.

The greatest revelation has been the opportunity to live with several curated installations of the art in our home. Very soon we realised that this was the best opportunity for people to see the Collection at work, and to set the challenge of what was possible within a domestic setting – a question so many collectors ask of themselves as they develop their collections.

Every eighteen months or so we have turned the house completely upside down, and brought in an entirely new installation, sometimes a hundred works at a time. People speak about living with art, but this is so much more. We have learned to live with it and live around it. Everything changes, and as much as we learn more about the collection as we spend time with it, we also have learned to live differently in our home each time. We inhabit different parts in different ways. The art changes everything.

And one never hears about when a work is removed from its installation. This book marks last year's installation, and now that we have already moved onto the next, I still miss Jeff Wall's *Dressing Poultry* in the dining room. It took us two days and a removed window to get it in, and now dinner isn't the same without it. Bridget Riley's masterpiece *Cadence 9* seemed to grow over time in perfect harmony with the light and the view from the window over Regent's Park. Also Louise Bourgeois' *Maison: the house within the house*. And we miss Mike Kelley's *Snakeskin Studloaf*, perched on a grand 18<sup>th</sup> Century commode. There was humour and pleasure to it, like so much of what happens in the Collection.

The house always has stories to tell.

Muriel Salem

May 2012

## Everything starts from the middle of the house and works outwards...

### 1. Somewhere around the Drawing Room

Everything starts from the middle of the house and works outwards. It is about the possibilities of relationships between works. Of course this is always the case, but in the house it is particularly tested because of the conventions of this drawing room. There is so often an expectation of what you should find in a place like this.

An installation such as this can bring together works that would not otherwise become neighbours in the museum; it does not follow a chronology or an overt theme. It's a complex web of interconnecting ideas. But where to begin? Perhaps with Bridget Riley's *Cadence 9*, which anchors everything in the room, but also seems to allude to the park outside of the window. It's not deliberate, just one of those happy accidents that occurs with the hang. 'Cadence 9' is not a landscape, and yet here we might make that association. After all, landscape is what we call a painting when we feel uncertain about what it resembles; we seek a formal horizon by way of reassurance. Abstraction, on the other hand, is what we call a painting when words fail us.

Historically, abstraction took many different and sometimes disconnected paths. The instantly recognisable form of the Riley sets up relationships with other artists of very different historical backgrounds and strategies. It's permissible in the house, unlike in more formal installations, to step outside of history in order to understand it. Take the willful juxtaposition with Mary Heilmann, for example. Here are two counter-voices to the dominant history of muscular, male abstraction. The history of modernism, and of American art in particular, was about strong men, and its legacy included orthodoxies coming out of everything from Abstract Expressionism to Minimalism. Mary Heilmann's work could not be more combative against that particular history. Heilmann and Riley were grappling with something intellectually, albeit through very different means. Riley did so perhaps most famously as our greatest living colourist, but Heilmann shares the same level of seriousness, even splashed in punk, acid colours. From colour theory to antithesis.

Michael Krebber's paintings mediate the history of European painting, which equals the *burden* of European painting, the debt and obligations. The problem with history is that you need it in order to have a place in it, and then you need to fight against it to survive. Krebber is the guilty conscience of European painting. He pushes it in opposing directions, often critically. At the same time he is incredibly painterly. These two works belong to an extended series, and are highly strategic and candidly confessional. Like much of his practice, they test the limits of painting. They are not about how much you can put into the painting, but how little. Krebber is incredibly important as an anchor figure for his generation, and over the years he has also come to play that role in this Collection.

As you look around the room, you start to realise who has been influenced by whom. But influence in a complex, contemporary world doesn't flow in just one direction. Rachel Harrison, for example, couldn't be a sculptor without Mike Kelley, whose work sits opposite hers. But equally she wouldn't be making the art she does without Mary Heilmann. There's a personal connection between them as well, but Heilmann makes you realise how painterly Harrison's work is. It's just as much about what's on the surface as the actual form. Harrison looked at all of those 'blokes' in American art, just as Heilmann did, and she flips the debt very elegantly. The Mike Kelley and the Harrison are also closely connected, but it's a bit of a false reassurance. They are almost too close to each other. In a strange way, the Mike Kelley work could almost be a work by Rachel Harrison.

More connections – there are always more connections. Between Krebber and Albert Oehlen, for example. Oehlen's *29* is a very tough painting. Again, the path through to Heilmann is inevitable, with its affinity for unmodulated, acidic colour, and attitude over form. Then Richard Prince's *My Boyfriend Married a Girl*. Somehow this work seems retro. But why? Did all paintings look like that in the '50s? They did and they didn't. There are details in it that are really great that you might miss in a larger context. (The house is great for picking up details in works..) There is a list of Prince's jokes. It's like his Greatest Hits. They are not fundamentally part of the composition but more like working notes. A painting working itself out as a painting, more tentative than expressive.

What keeps moving backwards and forwards between these paintings - Krebber and Oehlen from Germany, Prince and Pettibon from the US - is a cross-fertilisation between European and American abstractions and figurations. Crossed references and crossed wires. No one is immune and nothing is made in isolation.

And between them all there is this work that we can't avoid, and one of the great coups of this installation: Sarah Lucas's *Fuck Destiny*. As we watched a beaten-up fake leather sofa being carried into the house, we couldn't imagine that this sculpture would play the game of being an artwork in the way it does. The idea of putting a work like this in the centre of the room, where a sofa ought to be, produces a nice slippage of expectation. We have taken the furniture out in order to put this furniture in. It disrupts the normal, comfortable way of doing things. But we have learned over the years that the house is infinitely accommodating, and the Collection plays with expectation. It's hardly polite. When *Fuck Destiny* was shown in the New Museum's *Unmonumental*, a pivotal exhibition that attempted to define what sculpture is today, it felt very different. It was a critique of form and an explicit gesture against lazy monumentality. Here the work comes back into the very domestic context that it is attempting to undo. It is as if the room has gone wrong. What makes something like this really interesting is its context. Installations in this room are often about relationships between the art and the furniture. And people learn to live with the art, without the comforts they might expect. Form and function are easily blurred - a Franz West can look like a coffee table or Francis Upritchard's figures

are accommodated by a sideboard, which in turn negotiates Sol Lewitt. The house at work. The house at play?

## **2. Somewhere around the Mezzanine**

The perfect location for illustrating such oppositions is the mezzanine, which unwittingly became a negotiation between male representations and female ones. The installation began as an attempt to find a way of showing Louise Bourgeois' *Maison*, and, despite its substantial presence, it contrasts with the Thomas Schütte, a very subtle Carl Andre, almost unnoticed in the corner, and the Matthew Barney that appropriates the Man in Black, that iconic representation of maleness. There's a Freudian battle being played out here, for sure, both in terms of the subject matter of the works and the forms they inherit.

Cornelia Parker's *A Side of England* appears almost as a three-dimensional painting, hung in close relation to the wall behind it. Parker inherits something of Bourgeois, not just as a woman artist but as an artist who makes work that contains histories even within their materials. It is important that she retrieved the chalk from Beachy Head. There is magic, an aura, which comes from those elements. In the Bourgeois piece this aura is almost overwhelming. Bourgeois has spoken of the collection of mirrors contained within the work, for example, as the very mirrors that once reflected her mother's face. You feel that she was collecting those all her life in order to make this piece. There is a complexity that you can never quite get to the bottom of. As much as she is telling you a painful story, it is as unknowable as it is visually explicit.

## **3. Slowing Down**

These works take time. The neuroscientist David Eagleman is working on a theory of speed. His notion is that speed is not as regular as the second hand on a clock: tick, tick, tick. He cites those moments when you think that you are going to die and time appears to slow down. Or the perfect example of a museum guard who accidentally nudges a Ming vase off of its pedestal. The guard reported that it seemed to take an age to fall, but of course it took just a moment. Or is that expanded experience of time more substantial than we know how to articulate? Eagleman thinks that clocks are the fiction and that time is more elastic. So, too, the work of art can speed you up or slow you down. We've always thought that way in relation to installations in the house. When you live with art for a period of time, when you can sit in front of a work or move through it, the scales of time are very different. It's not a consistent change of pace; an installation sets up poly-rhythms of attention. There are works that are as exciting as a kind of snapshot, while others evolve and unfold over a lifetime. It is about the possibility of different versions of an encounter. There are so many histories, so many time scales, being told in this installation.

#### 4. Further Down

Another history is the one contained in the group of Martin Kippenberger posters in the basement. They make up such an important body of work for the history of the Collection. The work, *O.T. Maniac*, is about how the artist looks at other things, his relationships, where he was. Kippenberger made posters like other people write diaries. What is great about him is that he does it and moves on, does it and moves on, does it and moves on, again and again. They are not at all pretentious. It's interesting that the word 'maniac' is in the title of the work, as there is a kind of mania in the piece and the making of it. Just continuing, doing anything, trying anything; it doesn't matter if it doesn't work out. And the 'authorship' is often in the name of another artist's work. We haven't included the Collection's great Kippenberger paintings in this installation, but the posters are every bit as important, as they tell so much about the artist and about that attitude.

#### 5. Working out

There is a link to Georg Herold's *Lost in Tolerance*, also in the basement, that also connects back to other things going on in the house. And, with its boxing gloves it is a perfect provocation for the gym! A key figure who connects us to Kippenberger, Oehlen and Kriebler, he is subverting any expectations of what you might find in a proper art vitrine. It plays on that museum structure in a very rough, understated way. If Herold subverts his history, his neighbour in this room, Martin Boyce, references arch Modernism as a form of inevitable return. Forms return as a cultural echo or resonance. But again, placed here, they take on an illusion of functionality. Form and function as categories are tested here. But there is another medium, almost a category of its own; the prop. The installation invites us to consider how a prop is a different thing from a sculpture or a readymade. A prop is more real than real, because its only purpose is to illustrate a point and to be that thing. But it is also residual. The viewer comes to it often after the event, after the fact. Increasingly there is some very interesting art being made that is prop rather than just sculpture. When you think of a theatrical prop, its purpose is to create the illusion of the object that it is not. But we have always lived with the idea that sculpture was the thing in itself. When we start to look at artists, such as John Bock, who constructs props for performance, we have a very different expectation of what this object might do. His objects here are residual, after the fact. And Cindy Sherman's *Untitled 419*, like much of her work, is full of props that deliberately look like props.

#### 6. Dining In

Back upstairs we encounter Herold again. His untitled painting has the appearance of something willfully dumb, but it is so intelligent in the way that it knows what the job of

painting is. Putting the bricks above the fireplace in the dining room is more than provocative; it disrupts the space. The painting creates a new type of illusion in the way it defies gravity. It goes where a painting should go, with all the expectation, so that the fireplace becomes an extra frame for a work. There is an inevitable tension of a painting that is always about to fall apart. In this room, there are all sorts of other tricks that emphasise this classical repertoire. The tapestries by Gabriel Kuri, for example. They are precisely the medium you would expect in a grand dining room. The scaled replicas of ephemeral, almost invisible materials, of something out of nothing, produce an elegant tension between the expectation of a 'grand subject' and the painstaking reproduction of credit-card receipts.

Jeff Wall's *Dressing Poultry* provides a similar immovable presence through a subject far removed from its debt to art-historical composition. It is there because it is a history painting. It feels like Goya. And, of course, the tasteless joke is that the chicken pluckers are in front of the people eating their chicken at the dining room table. Viewed over time, in this room, more than any other, a beauty emerges from the grotesque. This is a work that you need time with. Wall insists on sustaining the illusion that it is a snapshot but it is highly constructed. There is so much detail that you cannot begin to discern accident from design. Cindy Sherman always wants to show you that she has constructed the scene; you always see the join. But with Jeff Wall, even though books tell you that he constructs his scenes, you just can't believe it, such is the intensity of the encounter with the image. You feel like he has happened upon something, but at the same time you cannot help but read it as a history painting. History paintings occupy different time scales or even different perspectives in the same canvas.

## **7. From Floor to Floor**

There's another negotiation of time and perspective in Andreas Gursky's *Nha Trang*. You know that the Gursky constructs an impossible fiction, an impossible perspective. You know that manipulation has gone into the image to the extent that it produces a new way of seeing the world that couldn't be seen before, despite the familiarity of the visual components. Gursky and Wall are often lumped together, but ideologically they are very different, even if their paths cross technically. Gursky's work is far from a snapshot. It is all of those individual elements embedded in a single image. There are multiple layers of time and activity. Think about these photographs in relation to a very different generation of photographer like Wolfgang Tillmans. With *Einzelganger III*, upstairs in the master bedroom, you can't help but think of Tillmans as an abstract painter. It is incredibly subtle, where the medium forms the subject of the work in the same way that paint itself is the subject of an abstract composition. The thing about Tillmans is that he can make snapshots, landscapes, intimate portraits, and magazine shoots, and he can make 'high' art through these unique pieces, and through more complex installation configurations. He doesn't have any hang ups about the different levels of entry into the

image. But when you consider the large-scale abstract pieces, you can't help but see them as highly sophisticated, painterly things.

And perhaps Glenn Ligon's *Stranger* 23 is something of a bridge between monumental abstraction and another form of history painting. But like many works in the Collection, it's part of an alternative history, and a departure from the received notion of American painting. (Of course, Ligon's subversive history has forced its way into the received lineage, enjoying a retrospective at the Whitney, and even hanging in the Obama White House.) Reading it insists upon seeing two perspectives. First, at a distance, where you think that the artist is sharing in the history of American abstraction. Thereafter, an intimate perspective, where you realise that it is not about a whole series of other narratives. There's a superficial similarity to Richard Prince. On the surface Ligon looks like the same kind of artist, working with texts and repeated references, but there are very different agendas. Ligon succeeds here on both a micro- and a macro-level. He has produced the logical aesthetic legacy of all those blokey painters, but draws you *in*. You have to come closer...

There are many instances of this play of scales and perspectives in the house. From the monumental ambition of Keith Tyson's *Double Totem* to the serial imagery of Guyton/Walker's *Untitled*, both works offer mechanisms of studio practice as a means of continuity. There's no 'logic' to Tyson's art machines, but there is a process, as it works through the forms of painting in the configuration laid out on the wall. Guyton/Walker, on the other hand, inherit an 'un-anxious' legacy of reproducibility. They keep making, screening, printing, making.

But there are quieter corners in the house. Whoever does most of the washing up is likely to benefit most from the Raoul de Keyser above the kitchen sink. You see de Keyser's influence in the work of so many younger artists. *Study for 'Meeting'* hovers between figuration and abstraction. Subtle gestures. A hang like this enables you to signal that de Keyser is an important figure in relation to the others. He is an artists' artist in many senses. It is interesting, then, that it takes the people who are influenced by him to rewind the history.

And more histories... Michael Fullerton's painting of Muriel Salem is his first commissioned portrait. He has found a beautiful solution to the commission, which is to show Muriel in three representations - as a little girl, as a young teenager and as her own mother, using images drawn from family photo albums. There's always a blurring of authenticity in Fullerton's portraits. It took two or three years, and many more abandoned paintings, for it to feel so complete. It is not so much about resemblance, but about an artist entering into a collection of memories and images that belong to the 'sitter' (although that isn't the right term here). In terms of the Collection - the extent to which Muriel is present in it and the extent to which the Collection has its own life - the portrait achieves a perfect balance. The Collection provoked Michael to make a portrait, but his solution isn't about vanity likenesses. It's more complex and rich in terms of the layers of

time that he embeds into the work. It is a brilliant provocation to anyone who wants to talk about portraiture within a collection, and about the way that a collection itself might become a type of self-portrait. A reflection of desires and tastes and stories accumulated over time. In many ways, it is a perfect example of how works of art enter the Collection. It becomes integral to the Collection's history to such an extent that it will always be read in relation the other works that surround it.

More than the sum of its parts.

Andrew Renton

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*Note: This text evolved out of a conversation with Muriel Salem, Thom O' Nions and Bethany Childs in April 2011. I am grateful to them for many of the ideas discussed here.*