

Writing for the Kitchen

There is a painting in the kitchen. It has been hung there with a mixture of hardened cement, water and sand. It cannot be moved. Its position is permanent. Its presence definitive. The painting is an intruder.

The painting has pushed its way into a world of difficult detail. Kitchens tend towards chaos. Every centimetre of space is contested by a swollen proliferation of stuff. The laminated surfaces, corners and bevelled edges. The electrical outlets, attendant appliances, their snaking black cords, the switches smudged with foodstuff. The hinges, handles and boxes that are ushered back and forth from the mass of cupboards that loom on every wall and lurk underneath every counter.

The painting, an image frozen in time, has settled into a restless and crowded scene. The kitchen intrudes into the painting.

The kitchen is the most important space in the house. For that reason it is also the most frustrating. Every kitchen is a product of compromise, a tremulous détente brokered between the bounded and finite character of space and the madness of a world built upon the promise of the unending accumulation of material things. There is never enough space. There is far too much space.

This mess of necessity and pleasure intrudes into the painting. The painting fights back. It drags the kitchen into the frame, a planetary-body dragging in everything that falls within its orbit. The entire shifting, restless life of the kitchen is devoured. A domestic scene consumed and incorporated in a ravenous act of three-dimensional collage.

What does it mean to live with art? More to the point: what might it mean to live within art?

A kitchen is not unlike the stomach; it exists to serve. It is a space of consumption, digestion, and expulsion. In a kitchen, matter is pliable. Water is variously a solid, a gas and a liquid. Gas ignites, transforming into dancing rings of flame. Acids bubble and froth. Odours explode, waft and cling. We would like to offer a definition that is applicable to both the stomach and the kitchen: an interior in which matter is transformed and energy is extracted and put to use. We would also like to extend this definition to the painting itself.

This is what we know: the painting will have to contend with dirty dishes and the rest of it, but the kitchen will have to contend with the painting, too. This is how it should be. The painting is not precious. It has no need for a clean and sanctified space. In spite of its quietly geological fixity, the

painting gives the impression of having blown in through an open window: stray papers in a gust of wind, bits of trash swept up and flattened against a wall. The image is built up like a forum of interlocutors, a common and inclusive scene that extends out from the painting and includes the banal and everyday misfits of the kitchen in which it resides.

Tom Melick & Ivan Ruhle, 2016

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