

Desire Lines

When I think about unanimity, I think about something I heard once about making salad. You need a generous person to add the oil, a wise person to put in the salt, a stingy person to add the vinegar and a patient soul to toss it. Elemental harmony. What if you were able to do all of this just as one person? It reminds me of something Helen Frankenthaler once said about making paintings, 'I'd rather risk an ugly surprise than rely on things I know I can do'. She was cool with however her salad turned out, because for her, it was in the act of the doing that inspired kinship with the stuff she was making. When I asked artist Mary MacDougall what it was that propelled her work for her latest show, *Ceramic Papers*, at Reading Room, Narm/Melbourne, she said, "I'm just wanting to draw, whatever the outcome." The crispness in how she said it reminded me that some things don't have to explain their beauty or presence, or their purpose, because the balance, the balance is just right. Its intuitive.

The granularity of each moment captured in mild assertiveness, like a letter to the world, MacDougall's ceramic papers, in all their drawn glory, direct my attention to everything human communication can never truly be – free. In 'frag 8' the marks made act as a sort of 'waking up' of an otherwise non-space, capturing the temporal, tenuous stuff of life and laying it down on a beautiful mud-like map – it's like MacDougall is relaxing into a message, scribed but asemic.

Asemic writing is a wordless open semantic form of writing – free from associations, left open for the reader to fill in. The line transcends the order in which its perceivable and becomes servile to mapping the unmappable regions of the interior. MacDougall straddles this existential horror of randomness by thinking, acting, making as though perfection is the enemy of fun. Using drawing as her shorthand, MacDougall is constantly thinking of what not to do, keeping her mind and hand moving across the porous tile, lightly and hopefully, with monk-like dexterity and nimbleness.

'Frag 44' pays homage to MacDougall's romance with rocks. Romance rocks. Romance, like rocks, evolve over time. Where there was once space, there is now a

place; sighs where there was silence, lightness where there was weight, an impression left, like an imprint, on something or someone. Using the method of monoprinting (usually synonymous with paper), MacDougall presses a single impression of an image, transferring it onto ceramic not knowing what the outcome will be until the layer is peeled back. Once the impression is made, MacDougall's hand re-enters – redacting, scratching, rubbing, “until?”, I ask. “I like it”, she says.

Marcel Proust said once, “always try and keep a patch of sky above your life”, which has always helped me appreciate things like mirrors, doorways, windows, puddles, stains, etc., as these things represent openness and vastness, thresholds between self and world, unperceivable just by looking. Mary MacDougall's fragments – her ceramic papers – are like patches of sky. They're pictographic portals free from the weight of associative communication. Latent with content. Balanced between me and you, outside and inside, light and weighted. This type of balance is hard to coerce. But with the right amount of generosity, wisdom, stinginess and patience– like MacDougall, you too can see more than with just your eyes.

Emma Finneran, 2022

Published on Arthur, art app based in NYC, 2022