

INTRODUCTION KATE BRIGGS TO JAMIE KANE'S EXHIBITION 'EARTH WIRE'

Hello everyone and welcome. My name is Kate Briggs, I am writer and translator based in Rotterdam, where I teach at the Piet Zwart Institute – which is where, in the context of the Masters in Fine Art, 5 years ago I first met the artist Jamie Kane.

It is a great honour to be asked to introduce his work here, at the opening of his exhibition Earth Wire: Landscapes of transformation.

I think one of the reasons Jamie asked me to do this introduction was because of a shared interest in the work of the American illustrator Orra White Hitchcock – who in the mid-nineteenth century produced more than sixty hand-coloured linen works. These were wall hangings intended for the classroom – as Jamie narrates in the text accompanying this exhibition; they were made as visual aids to her husband Edward Hitchcock's university lectures on geology and natural history. You can look them up online on a site called public domain review.

And there you read the titles she gave to her works. For example:

'Granite Veins in a Boulder from Westhampton, Massachusetts.'

'Coal strata.'

'Trap Veins in Sandstone, Scotland.'

'The Stratification of Geologic Deposits.'

Layering, strata, making visible and visual the slow processes of accumulation and erosion, the persistence of minerals and materials through deep time, a sensitivity to what gets trapped, but also what is able to shift and move, however slowly or discretely, what gets released. Then, there are seams and veins, of colour, of electricity, a strong sense of aliveness, of ongoing process, of pulsing transformation – I can find these concerns visualized in the Orra White Hitchcock's wall hangings; but that is only because I have been sensitized to them. If I have been sensitized to them that is thanks to Jamie's practice, to the conversations I have had the chance to with him over the years, and all the ways I see precisely these matters playing out through the different complex forms of this exhibition.

My own engagement with Orra White Hitchcock took the far more superficial form of using one of her illustrations, titled Strata near Valenciennes, France, as the cover for the American edition of a novel called *The Long Form*. Jamie, on the other hand, has for some years now been loosely transposing her drawings or parts of her drawings onto lamp shades, and illuminating them for us from within.

And it's here, in that work of illumination – the action of shedding new light on the materials of the world – that I locate the force, provocation and contribution of Jamie's rich, strange and often beautiful practice.

Sometimes, as with the lamps, the materials he works with, are lit from the inside out. I see the lamp works as offering us a simple and for that reason extraordinarily effective example of what happens when light source is switched on / or off. How the same materials behave so differently depending on the quality of attention we pay them, and the energies we bring to bear upon them – depending, in other words, on what we connect them to, what we choose to plug them into.

In other works, that plugging in takes the form of fictionalizing. Here, the materials Jamie is working with include life stories, landscapes in transformation, plastics as well as pistachio shells. The works invite us, the viewers, to engage and fictionalize in turn. To imagine possible scenarios for the ceramic and mixed media works – to invent pasts and well as futures for the scenes they propose. Like the lightbulbs suspended within their shades, fiction works here as tool for shedding new light – for illuminating the world slightly or sometimes totally differently. In this way, fiction can be a tool for suggesting a slightly or sometimes totally different world.

Jamie's work, I think, has always been as much about proposing new futures as it has been about interrogating the past. But for deeply political and affective as well as aesthetic reasons, his are always grounded futures, futures fabulated not out of nowhere or from nothing, but from often familiar, often overlooked or deeply buried materials, futures mined from layers of old ideas, forgotten lives...

Hence "earth wire" – the title of this exhibition... In an electric circuit, I now know, if there's a fault, an earth wire provides a pathway for the electric current to flow safely down into the ground.

But I think in these works Jamie has reversed that direction, rather than grounding, rather than making us or anything feel safe, these are works interested in faults, and in opening new speculative pathways through which their energies can flow not down and away but up and out... It's all switched on. It's all fascinatingly faulty. Between them, the works are all charging, flowing, conducting, connecting and resisting.

Congratulations Jamie Kane.

I invite you to enjoy the exhibition and thank you for your attention.

© Kate Briggs