



ANDREW CRANSTON

Creative Misremembering

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For nearly three decades, Scottish painter Andrew Cranston has crafted dreamlike works reminiscent of Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard. His paintings capture daily life with a blend of innocence, wonder, curiosity, and oddity, often on linen book covers using rabbit skin glue and varnish. Cranston seamlessly merges the familiar with the uncanny, employing shifting perspectives that transition from expansive landscapes to intimate domestic scenes. In pieces like *Heads or tails* (2015), viewers shift from a bird's-eye view of a pet shop to a close-up inside a rabbit cage, such as in *You don't need to be strange to be strange* (2019), where one finds themselves among the rabbits, observing a child at the hutch. Cranston's remarks reflect his approach, inviting viewers to explore and reinterpret the spaces within his paintings, which are impressionistic, asynchronous, and occasionally absurd, evoking the fluidity of reverie.

It was in a call with Cranston, bringing us together between our homes in Manhattan and Glasgow, that I began to see more clearly the relationship between his process of painting many works simultaneously and what he calls "creative misremembering." This harmonious act of imagining, along with his affection for all things narrative, means that the snake in a D.H. Lawrence verse may slither up the leg of a coffee table in one scene and trail his soft, yellow-brown belly down the edge of a stone in another.

Lola Kramer: You had a big year last year, first, with your show at Ingleby Gallery in Edinburgh and then a major solo exhibition at the Hepworth Wakefield with 38 paintings from the last four or five years. How is that exhibition organized?

Andrew Cranston: A lot of the work

too. I'm influenced by poetry and short stories, and I like how, in a collection of poems or short stories, there's a fragmentary approach. You get a glimpse into a world, and that's it. That seems similar to my attitude to painting, and I just sort of have them all going on at once.

LK: Speaking of stories, what have you been reading lately?

AC: I read some nice Carson McCullers stories and a lot by Bernard MacLaverty.

LK: I'm not familiar with MacLaverty.

AC: He's an Irish writer who lives in Glasgow. He's a master of short stories. I gain a little window into somebody's life or a kind of experience, and they're unresolved in a certain way. That's what I like about Carson McCullers' stories. You have to do a bit of work yourself. They leave you hang-

AC: What would you say is your first memory?

LK: I grew up with a swimming pool in my backyard. I think seeing the light dance off the surface of the blue water is one of my first memories. What about you?

AC: I'm getting carried up the stairs. My dad used to give me a fireman's lift, where you get carried over the shoulder. I can see the stairs, but I'm looking down the stairs as I go up them backward. I have another memory of being with my parents in these woods, and I was going for a pee. I saw a deer and ran out. I must have seen Bambi because I came out and said, "I've seen Bambi!" These are two competing memories. I'm not sure which is the first.

LK: You've referred to your paintings as an attempt to recollect a glimpse of a fleeting

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deals with domesticity, but there's a range, especially in terms of scale. There are large canvases and very small paintings on hard-back book covers, so there are two extremes. There are a few that, while they're not exact versions [of others], they come close. They were looking at relationships between them.

LK: You work on multiple paintings simultaneously, so it seems natural that one would be in dialogue with the other. You're not necessarily painting linearly. It's more about a harmonious painting "together." It's almost like you're leading an orchestra, calling on the sounds of one painting to fall into the space of another.

AC: I like that.

LK: In this way, each painting feels like entering a different room within one world.

AC: Yeah, that's it. They are distinct

ing. Sometimes there's a haunted feeling at the end, where it's about a matter of regret.

LK: Your father, he was a storyteller. What kind of stories would he tell?

AC: Both my mom and dad were [storytellers]. They were born in the 1920s, and they didn't meet until they were, like, 40. My mom had me when she was 45. I had older parents, so the range of the history they were talking about was wide. My dad was in the Second World War, so quite a few stories were related to that. They were often slightly ridiculous. Even the war stories weren't very heroic. It's interesting how you get told about yourself. In a way, your memories become mixed up with what you're told you did, and you're unsure if that's a real memory.

LK: I've experienced that.

moment. You've called the act of painting "a creative misremembering."

AC: That's exactly what we're talking about. There's some creativity in you seeing a David Hockney-style swimming pool or a glistening surface of something. Whether it's an accurate image or not, it could be that you're adjusting it with what you've absorbed since then.

LK: Dreams can be a kind of creative misremembering, too. It's that moment when you're grasping for the shape of the thing before it fades away.

AC: Totally. Remembering the scale of something is funny. I can distinctly remember getting a bath in the sink. I must have been small enough to fit in the sink. There is some looseness to remembering where you may be making one thing bigger or recasting it.

LK: *A snake came to my coffee table on a hot, hot day to drink there* (2023) comes to mind. It's the interior of a salon, but there's a view out the window onto buildings across the street. Once I started looking at your work closely, I noticed this recurring dynamic between inside and outside. I mean this in the literal sense, as in a room with a view outside, and in the imaginative sense, as in a space of fantasy. That seems related to the idea of memory being more like a "misremembering," as we've been calling it. There's often a sense of another world behind the world. Can you speak about that?

AC: You answered your question well. It is often about a threshold between two worlds. Somebody once argued that two metaphors for painting are the "mirror" and the "window." The mirror might be when painting is looking inward, as if looking back at yourself, and then, the window is you looking out into the world or through the world. It's a useful device because you're framing the world through a window in a literal sense, but there's also the pane of glass that has a surface. It could exist on a different plane than the image through it. There's lots to play between inside and outside.

LK: Absolutely.

AC: It's a cinematic situation when you can just look out the window. There's a pure *looking* that goes on where you have an image that's framed for you. I did this thing once at the top of the stairs at my parents' house. Funnily enough, it's exactly where my first memory took place. At the top of those stairs was a window looking onto fields. There was a garden below, then a wall and some fields and hills in the distance. Around 1992, after I'd left home and went back and forth as a student, I photographed this view from the window. Every time I returned for the next 15 years or so, maybe more, until my brother and I sold the house, I photographed that window. It changed slightly over time. For a long time, the field had horses, cows, and stuff like this; a tree would get chopped down. Then there was a house built in the field, and then, another house. Each time there were little changes, sometimes, hardly any. But I was changing. My life was changing, and sometimes quite dramatically. It's one of these things you do through the habit of

being an artist. You don't know what you'll do with that. I've got maybe forty or fifty photographs of the same image changing slowly. The first time I took that photograph, it probably wasn't so significant, but by the time I took the last picture, my parents had died, and we were about to sell the house. Lots of things had happened. Suddenly, it seemed like the most meaningful thing in the world. I think it's a sort of paradox of meaning that it grows rather than just being there from the start.

LK: I would love to see these photographs.

AC: Yeah, I'll dig them out. I find one occasionally, but they're not all in one place. They're scattered.

LK: It's interesting if they're not in chronological order because then —

AC: Exactly.

LK: That's how memory functions. It's not a linear progression.

AC: I think time is [experienced as] cyclical more than linear. You keep coming back to things, or maybe you never escape something. It's not like this big progression. It doesn't feel like that, anyway.

LK: Your process reflects that. There's something cinematic about your descriptions. Are there any particular filmmakers that you've been drawn towards recently?

AC: Many. I really like Michael Powell's and Emeric Pressburger's films. They're fantastic films made in the 1940s and 50s, like "The Red Shoes" and "A Matter of Life and Death." I like Nicolas Roeg's films as well. "Don't Look Now" (1973) and "Performance" (1970) definitely play with time. Nicolas Roeg's a great image-maker.







LK: *You don't need to be strange to be strange* (2019) struck me as particularly cinematic. It's an oil painting on a hardbound book, using the texture of the surface to create a frottage. The image positions the viewer as if they're inside a rabbit cage. You see a child peering into the painting. So, in a way, you've put the viewer in the position of being in the cage with the rabbits, inside the painting.

AC: Yes! There is a flipped perspective in its own way that interests me. In the sense that there is the imagination and a rhetorical position where you can imagine, "What if?" Like when Kafka writes about a character who becomes an insect. Obviously, there's a symbolic reading, but then there's the practical business of how you would get out of bed. How would you function? This other viewpoint is good to be playful with. I

did a painting in college that I had completely forgotten. I was obsessed with *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. I made a painting from the position of the frozen lake that you see down below, where skaters and people are curling. I took that viewpoint looking up, so the hunters are very small figures coming into the corner of the painting. It seemed like a puzzle to reimagine the painting from another perspective and from within the painting.

LK: That's a fascinating idea.

AC: It was one of these ideas that I didn't see through, but the spirit of it I've returned to a few times. You can think through the spaces of a painting and reposition yourself within them. It's a bit like the child's perspective, where the heights of things are different. You might spend



more time under the table and see your relatives all around. I used to go under the table. Did you do that?



LK: Oh yes. *Silent treatment* (2015), your painting that takes a child's perspective beneath a table, reminds me of being in my mom's clothing shop as a kid. I would hide in the middle of these circular racks while people were browsing. You see children's legs sitting at the table in your painting. But then it becomes absurd because there's also a turtle. It reminds me of your painting *A snake came to my coffee table on a hot, hot day to drink there*. It almost feels like these two images are from the same room but from a different vantage point. This one, however, is pulled back, almost like the story's narrator has shifted from first person to a third person point-of-view. Everything is normal, or so it seems until you see the snake, and at that point, it transforms from an everyday interior to a hallucination.

AC: That's right. That's one of the things I took from Bruegel, who's a very cinematic painter. Filmmakers love Bruegel, most obviously Tarkovsky. That painting [*A snake came to my coffee table on a hot, hot day to drink there*] is from a higher vantage point, so you can get an overview. The room itself was in an apartment that we lived in. I knew the room very well. And the building across the road.

LK: I admire your ability to shift perspectives from one painting to the next.

AC: I like thinking about spatial chang-



es, how to represent things, or use space in a way that can bring another dimension to the image, even psychologically. Hitchcock is an obvious example [of that]. Somebody changes the camera angle, which might have an unnerving effect or [produce] a feeling of dread. There are ways of making the space seem more intimate or more distant. It's sometimes more interesting when you get things wrong when there's a sort of movement or wobble. There's a great [moment] in Bonnard's *Nude in the Bath* (1936) where he gets it wrong, and it's much more dynamic than if he'd gotten things accurate. There's a way in which you can create tension and really activate things by getting them not quite right. It's an interesting paradox between imperfection and perfection, almost like a memory.

LK: I like what you pointed out with Bon-

nard's *Nude in the Bath*. For me, that's the difference between technical painting, which is about realism, versus painting which moves into the flaws and isn't about holding the eye accountable as the lens of a camera. It becomes much more about the possibilities of an image emerging in pigment.

AC: You want it to *work* as painting, if that makes sense. There's a sort of truth to materials that you're not hiding.

LK: I read that your hero is Giorgio Morandi. You described him as an artist who worked through the rise of fascism and two world wars, one of the most violent times in history, yet he continued to focus on painting dusty bottles in the back room. Can you speak to this idea of painting through difficult times?

AC: It's complicated, isn't it? You

sometimes struggle with it. It's so interesting what he did. [His paintings] almost shouldn't be as interesting as they are. They seem to exist outside the time, the context, and what was happening outside the window. There's this [quote] I came across by the French philosopher Pascal. He said: "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."... [For Morandi] that's what you do when you've got freedom and when you've got time. It is an act of defiance to believe that something so small can be really valuable. You do what you can.

T.S. Eliot came out with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) during the First World War. The poem is about a nervous man worrying about how he's seen, and one of his concerns is that he's going bald. A person in the trenches read this and thought, "This is what life is really about." It's not about fighting. Maybe it's about having the right to worry about something very small. That should be your human right. Your intimate, small concerns can give importance to something deeply human... [W.H.] Auden said something about his poems when he was feeling down, and his poetry hadn't changed anything politically. He said, "Poetry makes nothing happen." I've been thinking about that in terms of painting recently. Painting makes nothing happen. And, of course, there's another way to read what he said. Making nothing is quite an achievement. It could be a space you create for people to think in and experience something.



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