

TIM CRAKER

Cadence, meter, measure and swing

*Human eyes impose a human pattern,
decipher constellations against featureless dark....
Perhaps the dark itself is the source of meaning,
the fires of the galaxy its visible destruction.*¹

Questions of structure and semblance, order and doubt underlie the span of Tim Craker's creative practice. Seeking to engage the half-visible patterns behind our lives, Craker's form of enquiry lends a provisional sensibility to the making and viewing of art. Things are not as they seem.

Like poems, patterns are ways of creating meaning in the world. At once abstractions and lived instances, patterns suggest both infinite possibility and a contrary sense of the particular. They link us to the material rhythms of our daily lives and shape our existence. Fragments of infinity, expressions of a universal order; patterns are models of reality and ideas of what may lie beyond its expanse. In pattern we see an elusive symmetry; hints of how nature may organise matter under certain circumstances. Giving form to the immaterial, pattern allows us to cross realms into the unsayable.

Pattern is everywhere and Tim Craker brings his creativity and imagination to what is out there. His working notebooks are about seeing relationships and the geometry present in nature. Orderly catalogues of notated and collaged materials chart the artist's emotional and aesthetic responses to a manifold world. There are musings, word drawings and reworked sayings made up of recombined segments of found text that obscure or upend meaning; mathematical tilings and supersurfaces, moiré and colour maps, architectural elements and skin, inversions and overdrawn iterations of previously worked patternings. Blueprint and precedent; the sense of things garnered in these collected observations is intimate, renegade, humorous and questioning.

In the studio, Craker heads into more abstract realms where, through intuition, play and some mathematics, the patterns and relationships he perceives are reworked; understood. His is an art made of simple daily activities and many beginnings. Often in making or in writing, an idea of the pattern of the thing precedes the thing. Craker sets up a few programmatic rules to act as defining parameters for the work, something like musical scores for improvisation, and a pattern begins to emerge. The imperfect, felt, human element along with the particular properties of the material - its weight and form, colour and dimension - influence the design. In this process 'there's the excitement of creating something vast and also unpredictable by following simple 'rules of combination' using many small, similar units.'²

¹ From 'Patterns' by Judith Wright in *Phantom Dwelling*, Angus & Robertson, NSW & London, 1985.

² Artist's statement, *Web*, 2010.

Craker is interested in the ideogrammatic and often uses words like pattern. In early text-based paintings, language is allowed as a kind of radical cartography or calligraphic architecture. Focusing on the negative shapes around and between lettering, Craker effects a kind of transposition that shifts habitual ways of looking and renders the declarative shape of words curiously unfamiliar and cryptic. Meaning is worked elliptically to allow the artist to 'talk about those things for which words do not do adequate service.'³

Language, like geometry, may also speak about the sensuous, the particular and the ephemeral. In paintings such as *From an Unknown Alphabet* 2004; *Undeciphered Symbol*, 2005 and *Obscure Notation* 2006, Craker forms glyphs from abstracted elements of font and serif, dismantling the modern conventions of type setting to reference hard-edged painting, road signs and packaging. His work also recalls the arcane protective effect of pattern. In early works like *Yell "Ow!"* 2002; *Visul, Lest, Los, Lasko, Tolcst, Taft, and Pan* 2004, Craker reconfigures words to explore the sense and sound of typographic patterning. These dynamic works engage the eye through chromatic and tonal shifts that obscure readability and obstruct the transfer of knowledge. Where we presume clarity and safety, there is ambiguity, perhaps even peril.

In later works, Craker moves towards more overt patterning and the grid. Large-scale hanging installations made of plastic safety fencing, *Botanical Data File Series #1-3*, 2008, comment on our apprehension of the natural world. The high-key orange material provides the schema and Craker has snipped out sections to create a singular leaf motif in each piece. These half-tone botanical specimens are at once single instances and easily recognisable, generic figures. Craker encodes the emblematic qualities of leaf and shadow to comment on the ways we make meaning of the world and what is elided in that process. The plastic off-cuts lie beneath the suspended grid; leaf litter, cells, genetic codes, deleted information; they mark the process of making.

The restrained iteration and considered formal relationships in Craker's work lend a beauty and elegance to mundane things. His approach to materials is democratic. Seeing value and opportunity in all manner of things, especially in the ubiquitous stuff that we discard, Craker devises a kind of turning or transformation. 'It's a self-imposed constraint... that the materials I use are easy to find and cheap to buy... And it's a small form of subversion to use – or *misuse* – an object... release it from its everyday function, and discover in it a hitherto unsuspected aesthetic quality.'⁴

Craker's easy to come by materials link to both the natural world of growth and decay and to the man-made world of mass-produced, non-biodegradable synthetics. Plastic food containers and cutlery offer their own kind of geometry

³ Artist's statement, *Ellipsis*, 2005.

⁴ Artist's statement *TAKE(N) AWAY*, 2009.

in configurations that comment on the effect of human activity and consumption on our environment. In *Overindulgence* 2010, plastic spoons form a slumped crystalline form like a fallen star or seed pod. The restrained palette and gentle hammock-like form of *Mixed Marriage* 2006, melds plastic forks and wooden chopsticks. In *Thought Pattern* 2007, Chinese soup spoons shimmer against a wall, white on white, the looping shapes formed by cast shadows as vivid as the objects themselves. In *Cascade* 2008, clear plastic cups are strung together to resemble a fall of water. Using the same material, *Blanket* 2008 presents a slumped, opaque mantle. *TAKE(N) AWAY* 2009, is a mobile construction of transparent spheres made from plastic food containers and *Map* 2008, links the rectangular lids to create a flattened topography. Displayed as a floating ground, the plastic surfaces refract their surrounds much as water holds elements of changing sky.

The body is another important material element in these works. *A Strong Ache* 2010, is an installation of seven geo-domes made of white plastic clothes hangers, entirely suspended as a fluid mobile structure. Delicately balanced they float and orbit; spinning freely to create ephemeral, Spirograph-like patterns traced in light and shadow. The elegant mathematical beauty of this rudimentary planetary or molecular architecture is punctured by the recognition of the material as an everyday throwaway. The significance of the mobile form lies in the impossibility of perceiving the whole as apart from its surrounds. As we in turn circle the piece, its depiction of motion, change, and unpredictability reflect the natural, perpetually restless state of our eye. Patterns change.

The 'thingness' of these immediately recognisable modular units lends a tactile and symbolic dimension to the reading of Craker's constructions. The familiar forms link to intimate and universal social rituals such as drinking, dressing and sharing a meal; activities that structure our relations and conversations. They speak about social mores and ways of thinking; patterns and arrangements that can often be normative in their effect. Interested in what lies beyond these apparent structures, Craker reminds us that there is a kind of human geometry in the forging of the patterns of our daily lives that often goes unnoticed.

Exploring the possibilities of the multiple, Craker unwaveringly pulls the viewer away from the ideal to the real. His continued fascination with the simple mechanics of making and the weave; tying, knotting, threading, is evident throughout his oeuvre. In *Web* 2010, segments of fennel stems are strung together to make a loose hexagonal net that, 'sags and stretches, swells and crumples. It's biology writ large, a massive cellular structure, aromatic and multi-hued, assembled according to genetic prescription, to be eventually reclaimed by nature: a net, a trap, a map – a web, of life.'⁵ At once barrier and framing device, we read the intersecting lines of the web as kind of drawing in space; the various thicknesses and lengths of the stems mimicking various

⁵ Artists statement, *Adaptation*, 2010.

densities of mark-making. Distorted hexagonals of negative space structure and dissect the view beyond.

In the *Lattice*, *Net* and *Screen* paintings, 2007-2009, Craker's geometric and vegetal patterings disrupt the grid and energise the eye, keeping it alert to possible transformations. There are patterns, and shapes within patterns and tonal connections made across pattern fields. Solid notes of in-filled flat colour create non-repeating design transformations that seem to scramble an idea. Silhouetted leaves, tendrils and latticed arabesques perform over tea stained grounds and fractal splashes of paint that suggest gravity, chance and unstructured order. These unpredictable combinations play against our immediate apprehension of the pattern as deceptively straightforward. Gridded fields that help us towards certainty, give way.

Tim Craker is concerned not to locate or fix meaning through iteration. His work is deliberately equivocal, engaging with the ambiguous quality of patterning; its fluidity, mobility and cellular, grid-like structure. Craker is not interested in pure formalism or in creating self-referential, impersonal systems, rather his human geometries and material transpositions focus on the remnant parts, the ellipses and flaws. Inviting wayward elements and sway, subtly pushing the work towards collapse only to hold it, wonky and imperfect, away from shattering, Craker allows us to see something new, something distinct and unrepeatable. Perhaps his skewed and broken patterns imply a world that is not so much formulating, rising ever upward, but slowly fracturing. Certainly it is a world in flux; a space in which to recognise individual samenesses and differences; a space for both uncertainty and a sense of things; a making room for the self and for the freedom of the small gesture in daily life.

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