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Cal Lane *Dirt Lace*

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Cal Lane: *Dirt Lace*

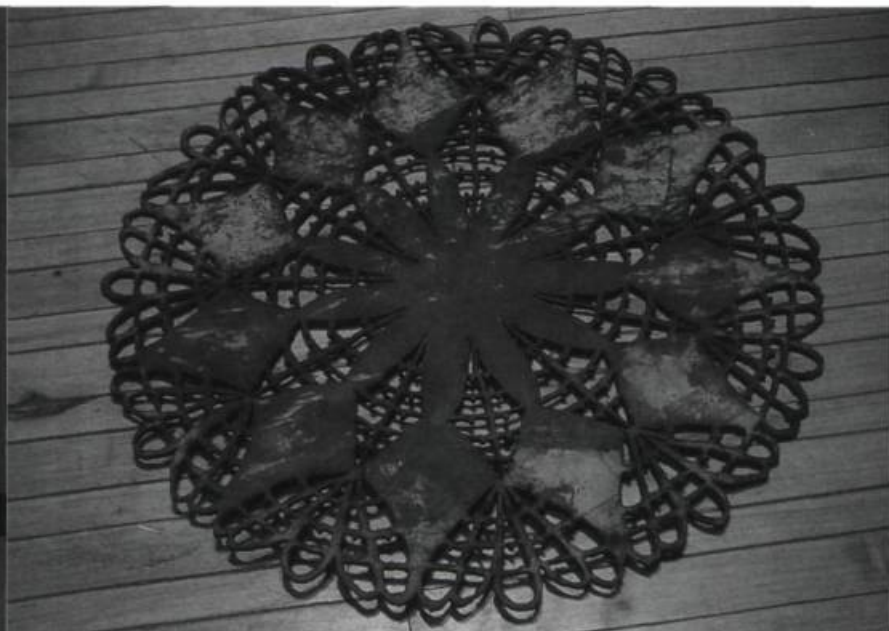
GIL McELROY

It's true: opposites really do attract. Cal Lane's new sculpture is proof positive. The New York City-based artist's recent work invokes an aesthetic of oppositions, primarily focused on that between the manufactured and the handmade. It's an aesthetic lots of craftspeople — ceramists, foremost among them — have long been forced to deal with, like it or not. But its place within sculpture hasn't become quite such

about the right diameter and thickness as actual manhole covers, but instead of being such purpose-oriented objects of manufactured lineage, they spoke, instead, of the handmade. Lane has taken disks of plate steel and, using an oxy-acetylene torch, cut complex patterns into them entirely free-hand without the aid of guiding template or jig. What she has created has much less to do with any heavy metal sculptural machismo or industrial brutishness, than with, of all things, textiles, and a concomitant evoca-

contrast that exists between the manufactured and the handmade. While her pieces immediately evoke (and how could they not?) a correspondence to manhole covers — obviously mass-produced artefacts and not uniquely one-of-kind objects — the imprecision evident in the patterns cut from the steel tell delightful tales of the handmade and artisanal. While the ornamental motif Lane has cut into the metal is as formally symmetrical as any tatted from lace, it is a hand that has done the cutting

meaningful relationship of positives and pluses — of likeness and similitude. When you come right down to it, there isn't such an enormous leap from tough industrial steel to delicate lace doily; both are, after all, utilitarian and purpose-oriented things, the former as a material, the later as an artefactual product. But the oppositional is primary to this new body of work, and just in case we might have any doubts, Lane restated her case, here, with an installational work filling one entire room of the



Cal LANE, *Dirt Lace*, 2004. Details. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

an inevitable and inescapable part of the status quo. Lane's new work ably demonstrates that the dynamic tension between oppositions can be mighty productive indeed.

Here's what Lane does: she takes an industrial material — in this case, steel — and uses it in an artisanal way. What we were given to see as part of her first solo exhibition at the Wynick/Tuck Gallery was a series of circular, floor-mounted steel pieces that, at first glance, resembled nothing so much as a number of ornate manhole covers — floridly decorative Victorian sorts of things. Closer examination proved, however, that these objects were far more aesthetically complex. These were indeed metal forms

tion of what has historically been considered feminine handiwork. Lane's sculptures are, in fact, doilies.

Take *Steel Doily* (2004), for instance. At almost a meter in diameter, it's obviously much larger than its textile counterpart, and as a 2-centimeter-thick slab of steel, it further violates other such strictly 1:1 correspondences. So what we have here are a couple of oppositional differentiations — one pertaining to the material distinction between steel and lace, the other all about the dimensional discrepancy between Lane's manhole-size works and the comparatively minuter proportions of the referent domestic objects — which form a goodly chunk of the aesthetic rationale of these pieces. They're coupled with the larger, overriding

and not a machine, and imperfections abound: loops within the pattern, for example, don't faultlessly match with one another; the spacing between spokes radiating outward from a work's centre is irregular; and the steel itself is rough and uneven to the touch, blotchy and discoloured to the eye.

So this has nothing to do with the artifice of a perfectly machined object. The imprecision to Lane's cutting is the equivalent, if you will, of a painterly brushstroke. It is mark-making at the most personal, all owing to the contrast between the cool, industrial anonymity of steel and the highly individual "touch" of Lane's freehand oxy-acetylene torch work.

It's not exclusively about contrast and polarity, however. Lane's work also articulates a

gallery. *Dirt Lace* was just that: a reiterated lace pattern laid out on the gallery floor by filtering dirt down through a metal plate — a jig — cut through with the design. It's actually a grid work: sixteen abutting rectangles within which recurs the same intricate pattern. The oppositional approach employed here inheres to the specifics of the exhibition itself: the sturdy constants of steel doilies versus the fleeting ephemerality of earthen lace. It will do just fine. ←

Gil McELROY is a poet, independent curator, and critic. He is the author of *Gravity & Grace: Selected Writings on Contemporary Canadian Art*.

Cal Lane: *Dirt Lace*
Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto,
Ontario
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