

JENNIFER MILLS

Ron

24 June – 22 July 2017

I can clearly remember being on holiday, sort of, as a child in an unglamorous part of a country in which the recently built parts tended to grey, walking through the main square of the town my father is from. This is the only time that I have seen or heard money falling from the sky.

It turned out not to be raining. The local custom was to, when passing through the square, flick coins upward and leave them where they fell. It was understood that the money was intended for townsfolk in need, but there was no way or want to check who was collecting.

At times I've wondered about the noise and show, if discrete dropping was a refinement to come, but I've come to believe it's a refusal of elegance.

The clink upon landing and the arc drawn by metal through air broadcasts the fact that the coin is offered, deliberately. If someone is near enough to hear or see at that time, these things could certainly flag the landing location. They are useful, for sure. But there is something additional that is not useful: an impression that coins are falling through the air as if by magic, which is by no means at all.

Under two big expanses of crazed blue – it's a diptych, this part of Jennifer Mills' *Ron Work* – I can see that they are the sky above a young man in a driveway being helped to throw or catch a football. The means by which he was assisted, a long time before the scene was painted, at the earlier end of the extensive series of photographs documenting enjoyable moments in his life, are not mysterious: someone has constructed a frame which enabled him to stand and it is not a stretch to imagine someone out of frame to the side of the photographer.

However, the feeling remains with me that the two-thirds paper length of blue above the human scene is still pigment. The water trails and colour settlements bear relation to the movement of the ball, but not as a tracing, like motion lines in a comic strip panel; they occur as a weird coincidence of my eyes, Jen's hands and Ron's world. A drill bit made of enjoyment, not entertainment, seems to have pinned us together for the moment.

There are ways of being extraneous, from luxurious to useless. To go to the trouble of drawing things that could simply be displayed – say, photographic slides – is inefficient and indulgent.

Things can go the other way too, from useless to luxurious. A box of photographs no one looks at anymore has a trajectory that it belongs to, which winds up at the tip. Also, but very differently, extra work is undertaken that fashions a wrinkle in an ordinary chain of belonging.

Consider what does happen when this variety of extra work is applied. In each of our cases, two divorces occur. The first is the cutting loose of one party by the other: a coin earned, stolen or swindled (a combination of the two) is thrown, or a price is published on an auction site.

This first separation consists of an act in which the party choosing to split makes a space for their replacement, thus preserving the form of the relationship. This differentiates the cleaving from simple disposal. The reject is to keep working. The amplification of the effort makes clear that it is not loss by accident.

The other separation is not a removal. It is differently sequenced: the divorce happens not prior to the association of the involved parties, it is the *only* association, for they are unable to ever establish contact through this relationship.

If you were compelled to pick up money in a place where our custom was known, I would bet the very coin in your hand that you could never locate the person who had thrown it away. Anonymity is the supremely elastic split forming the bone of any working custom.

All of the sleuthing and painting in the world cannot lead Jen to Ron, which would be the apparent goal of this work. Ron is no longer here, but a space remains open for an end, a result or use.

This divorce is not the death of a marriage. This totally unreadable and extraneous addition is like a decoration or a rite. It introduces a faceless and bodiless presence to the side of the party to whom the freed object has moved.

The third separation is not like death, and essentially so. Because death does nothing, and that is it. Not even, it is simply not ever working again, the laziness of which cannot even be attributed to itself. Death just belongs to the same place in a sequence every time, so it isn't no thing, not a void.

All work has a goal, although in its scheme the aim has any place, it does not belong somewhere in particular. The goal, or the point from which one can look back and make sense of, or a place for the effort, is often set before starting. But work can be recruited further along, or it can be hijacked. Bitter experience has taught many of us that we can just work, just get to it, when bereft. The product of this habitual labour settles like dust, nebulously and inconsistently through the sequence.

So there is a real freedom in work. Not the type that sets you free, which it doesn't: it cradles the unfit. It is definitely in the form of work, as its supple bone. The separation of labour from its aim haunts it like a phantom sidecar, without bike, outlined in pale dotted lines, floating around inside of work. Through this piece of odd liberty you can magically feel the company of an impossible acquaintance through the tips of someone else's paintbrush hair. It is also at work whenever a face feels a look touching it, as with everything that is vitally pointless.

Jen Cabraja 2017