



Eyes of Love: Gill Gatfield Symposium

A trio of abstract glass and stone sculptures at NorthArt Gallery by artist Gill Gatfield stimulate a subliminal dialogue on love. On an outwards-facing wall, two slivers of black inked glass draw the eye in. Reflecting conversations in the town square, *Symposium* is a counterbalance to its siblings, *Echo* and *Narcissus* who are inside the building, and cornered. Where *Narcissus* and *Echo* are both fated to be mute - the one through self-obsession, the other only able to repeat the last word spoken by others, a punishment for her unbridled verbosity - *Symposium* is a conversation, which works at multiple levels.

As physical objects, the elements comprising *Symposium* relate to the "I/One" of Gatfield's Subject-Object series. The serifed form is now divided into two halves, which are then turned inwards to face each other. The outward looking "I/One", or even "eye", conjures optional states: is it an internal dialogue with the self or an external one with the other? In the mirror geometry of the inside/outside artwork, either is valid, and operates as an expression of our common understanding of a symposium.

The sculpture's title offers a further portal into the poetic elements in the artwork. *Symposium* is also the name of a Platonic dialogue, often regarded as the most perfect of that form and which records speeches in praise of Love. While in modern English, the focus has shifted onto the conversational aspect of a symposium, the name συμπόσιον (sumposion) refers to the act of drinking wine together – often in punishing quantities. In this vein, in the sculpture we not only have two 'individuals' facing each other, but the negative space between them evoking both a stylised 'oinochoe' or wine pouring vessel (the full height of the negative space) or a 'kylix' - the bowl from which the guests drank, outlined in the lower half of the white space.

Who are these two, now divided individuals in Gatfield's *Symposium*? In the Platonic dialogue, the playwright Aristophanes (appearing 'off-Broadway' for Plato on this occasion) offers a key. Once upon a time, humankind comprised beings each with two heads and four arms and legs; fast, agile and deadly, these early humans made the mistake of challenging the Gods on Mt Olympus. Rather than destroy them with a lightning bolt, Zeus came up with a creative solution which would both reduce the threat and increase the volume of sacrifice (an authentically comic and Aristophanaen thought, wherever Plato found it): he would split each being in two, "like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling, or as you might divide an egg with a hair". Humankind thus divided spends its life searching for its other half. Thus love and thus the present artwork - a severed One which frames the void between and the reflected viewer who fits in the slot at the center of the wall.

In the *Symposium* composition, there is a further layer: the whole point of Plato's 'Symposium' (or indeed any of the Dialogues) is to give Socrates a platform. The philosopher recounts a discussion he had on the subject of love with the wise woman, Diotima of Mantinea. On this occasion, it is Socrates' interlocutor who has all the answers, and Socrates who is struggling to keep up. Love is to do with immortality. How so? The self knows it cannot live for ever: even a man is no longer exactly the same person as "he" was 10 or 20 years earlier - skin, hair, blood and bone have all changed. But Love enables the self to become immortal through leaving a new someone behind, one who will remember their deeds and maintain their honour.

The eyes of Socrates open a deeper sense in which we can view Gatfield's *Symposium*: the self speaking to the other who will succeed them and remain when they are gone.

Jon Mason
MA (Trinity College, Cambridge)
MDM (Graduate School of Business, NTU Australia)

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