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A beautiful thing happened over the summer: Ellsworth Kelly's *Sculpture For A Large Wall* came to New York. Originally commissioned in 1957 and installed in the lobby of the Penn Central Transportation Building in Philadelphia, the work was on view at Matthew Marks Gallery for the month of June. Which is to say that, forty-one years after the fact, *Sculpture For A Large Wall* made its first appearance in the art world. But even though the twelve by sixty-five foot anodized aluminum mural covered the entire east wall of the gallery—and even though two benches were provided for getting a good, museum-style bead on it—there were still moments when I swore it wasn't there.

Let me explain: Kelly's early drawings are simple ink studies of light and shadow, object and reflection, density and disintegration. Abstracted into graphic shapes (cartooned, really), the arch of a bridge or a slanting ray of light become interchangeable with the water surface or window sash that frame them. In other words, the bridge and the light become confused with what they are not. *Sculpture For A Large Wall* is the same idea on a larger scale, comprised of 104 shield-sized aluminum shapes mounted out of kilter on horizontal rods. Some of the shapes are painted and others have a brushed finish, many with edges cut to match those of adjoining shapes, so that from certain views they appear to be fixed together and yet from other angles they pull apart. As light plays across and through these shapes the spaces between them are alternately made to congeal into solid matter and then vaporize into air—to appear and disappear. After a while these optical effects affected my nervous system and made me uncertain of my own edges, made me unsure of where my body stopped and my surroundings started, even when planted on an oak bench.

While I sat there disintegrating I was reminded of my favorite show from last summer: Henry Dreyfuss, *Directing Design: The Industrial Designer and His Work*, at the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum. Dreyfuss is the most prevalent American objectmaker of this century, and in that respect his work is both

more invisible and more profound than that of better-known designers. While it is impossible at this point to consider the work of Frank Gehry or the Eameses without also having to take into account their personas, I guarantee that any American over the age of thirty has encountered hundreds of Dreyfuss objects without ever having given him a thought. This is not to say that Dreyfuss is somehow a more noble or pious designer, but to suggest that, like Kelly's relation to the Abstract Expressionists, there's more than one way to make an impression.

Having cut his teeth on the Modern movement and 20s Art Deco, Dreyfuss' commission by the Bell Telephone System to re-design their standard phones forever etched his work into the American consciousness, from the wall-mounted 500 series chatted on by housewives to the desktop model Tipi Hedren used in *The Birds* (1963). Big Ben alarm clocks, Polaroid Land Cameras, Honeywell room thermostats, John Deere tractors—just about any image of the United States from 1940 to the present, in some measure, depicts Henry Dreyfuss. What was so impressive about his show was the unsettling feeling of having such mundane details from your life suddenly presented to you in a vitrine. Not the obvious icons, but details in the background of the memory of your parents' living room that night you spilled a can of Coke on the new white shag. There . . . behind the recliner . . . was that a Dreyfuss thermostat? What with so many artists combing the streets in search of "the everyday," the Dreyfuss show was an excellent opportunity to admire one of the people most responsible for what it looks like.

Perhaps more than any of his peers, Henry Dreyfuss knew what it meant to have one's work go unnoticed. For him this was the pinnacle of success since, from the standpoint of both the client and the discriminating consumer, the better the design, the surer its immersion in the world. In contrast to the fine arts, which are bound by distinction and preservation, it is a particularly perverse aspect of designers like Henry Dreyfuss that the more we engage their objects the more invisible they become. Dreyfuss' oeuvre demonstrates that the most impressive aspect of design as an art form is not that you can sit on it or dial it or wear it in the rain, but that by doing so with pleasure unwittingly over time, and object's beauty and rightness are confirmed. Until that day comes when, on the very verge of disappearing, someone deems that the object is worth saving.

Despite having lived in the relative obscurity of a corporate lobby for 40 years, *Sculpture For A Large Wall* eluded both public defacement and committee destruction. (Kelly's *Seven Sculptural Screens in Brass*, another commission for the same building, was not so fortunate.) And now that the new owners of the Penn Central Building have decided not to include the sculpture in their overall renovations—leading Marks and Kelly to buy it back—the work's place is in flux. It's status, however, is not. As with a Dreyfuss design, the most important aspect of Kelly's piece is the fact that we have been made aware of it, and the extent to which that awareness alters our perception is the measure of the sculpture's success as a work of art. Through its simple evanescence, *Sculpture For a Large Wall* turned the superficial notions of "appearances" into a structural questioning of all that is solid, making you forget about your own ephemera for a moment and almost wish that you could disappear.