

## **M.A.P.i. (Method Abstract Plastic interview)**

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**Masato Takasaka and Justin Andrews**

**Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne**

**21.11.03 – 13.12.03**

**M**.A.P. (Method Abstract Plastic) was exhibited in Studio 12 at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces. Melbourne folk Masato and Justin work within the vocabulary of geometric abstraction and were interested in developing a collaborative process for the exhibition. They wanted to see whether this method would open up new possibilities in the way they approach their own individual art-making. One of the aspects of this exhibition that I liked was the way in which you could immediately get involved with the work. As there was no single product, you didn't need to decipher the intent. The process, which was the product, was directly revealed to the audience.

**M.A.P. (Method Abstract Plastic) has developed through a collaborative process, even though you were both making work individually. Viewing the objects separately, they seem to become increasingly affected by the other person's output. What processes had you initially established to produce the work?**

**JA (Justin Andrews):** The main idea of this project was to produce a string of work which pointed towards its own collaborative process... just as much as any one object which was made out of it. M.A.P. started out quite algorithmically – constraints and conditions were set for each stage of the project.

A series of alternatively fabricated works were to be made – four from Masato and four from myself, so that each work was informed by, and derived from a new and unpredicted study. This way, the direction of the project was to remain unknown until the end. A level of analysis was always required... each work had to operate as a drawing of something not entirely known. This way, the project was in a constant state of change, but the process was to remain consistent. This closeness that you refer to comes from the evolution of two variations upon the language of geometric abstraction... both from separate studio environments. This progressive level of affect comes from an increasing familiarity of the other artist's mark, or from a growing inclination of how (in my case) Masato may interpret a set of elements within one of my own paintings.

However, having said all this, one of the aims was to push this process as much as possible. As Masato and I have found out, the furthest one can push something is until its own laws are broken, or until pre-set conditions are deconstructed. But this is another matter from what you're asking here.

**MT (Masato Takasaka):** For me, the focus of this project was on the translation of a two-dimensional image (Justin's painting) into one of my sculptures...

and it was interesting to see how Justin would interpret my translation back into a painting again... We both work in a vocabulary of geometric abstraction. We are able to work with 'speaking' the same language... although our approaches and methodologies are quite different. For instance, Justin takes a very technical approach to the making of his paintings and the masking of each area... a painstakingly time-consuming approach... but in the end you get these hard edges and the way he uses paint ends up looking like computer-cut vinyl or something...

My approach to things is to try and keep as much of the visible hand-made 'dodginess' as possible... by cutting the foamcore the wrong way you end up getting these really burred edges... I guess I like the look of this anti-technical way of making. I can't be bothered doing it properly anyway. I tend to make my sculptures very quickly because they rely on an improvised process of making...

In the end, both Justin's approach and mine are quite different, yet the value in the 'making' of the work is still really high. Having the chance to study the planes and forms that make up each composition in Justin's paintings is challenging to try and build on sculpturally. Curious as it may be, the work is starting to look like models of contemporary art museums... maybe I'm looking at too many glossy architecture mags...

**You both mentioned different elements involved in the translation from painting to sculpture and back again. One of the elements I liked a lot is where opportunities seem to open up between the different mediums you both work in. There's a sculpture where a white void in the previous painting is represented as a white plane in the sculpture, when it literally could have been left as a void. In one of the paintings the surfaces seem to take on the thickness of the foamcore. Do you both feel that responding to a different medium has been an important part of the process in breaking down your individual approaches and allowing an exploration of your work in different ways?**

**JA:** M.A.P. has shown me that the interpretation, and then the offering of results are equally important parts to the process of collaboration. Different rules apply to the logic of objects when they occupy changing kinds of space. I would suggest that my paintings operate within a perceived space. Masato's work, whilst originating from a sense of constructed illusionism, must adhere to the laws of the physical. This is where the M.A.P. project succeeds – it allows for rules to be made and redefined within each successive stage. The white spaces being transformed into built white planes is a perfect example of this.

The development of my own 3D to 2D translation would have to be the most intuitive facet of M.A.P – the area of it that I have been the most interested in. Making highly deliberate paintings from relatively visceral situations has been very challenging. It has



Masato Takasaka/Justin Andrews, *M.A.P. 4* (2003), foamcore/acrylic on board

been interesting to see how the apparently organic direction of the project has worked through some of the more deliberate continuations such as colour formulae and scale, which we tried to use as constants to link the project together.

The most interesting thing is how people read space. Masato uses elements of anamorphosis to point towards some of the perspectival distortion within my paintings. He does this through the use of foreshortened/extended sculptural planes. My works for this project were derived from manipulated digital photographs. Some side-sections of Masato's foamcore are carried through to the next painting due to decisions involving colour and composition.

For me, M.A.P. has been an exploration more into the process of collaboration, rather than into my own system of abstraction. This project has definitely developed some of my ideas on the specific properties of sculpture. There is a literal presence to three-dimensional work that two-dimensional paintings (of three-dimensional structures) can only allude to... but in another sense, sculpture can never simultaneously redefine itself in the way that abstract painting can.

**MT:** The project has evolved with each painting/sculpture set. We have learnt to adapt each other's visual characteristics. Even though we are working on this project in a collaborative sense, there is the freedom of working independently in our own individual studios. In this sense, I have found that working in collaboration can be about the exchange of ideas and about points of similarity, whilst negotiating a level of autonomy within the project.

I have been thinking a lot about the sense of time and memory... about how this has been translated/interpreted into paintings and sculptures, and then back again... how there is a sense of transformation going on... the starting image that Justin painted being some kind of 'generic' signifier of a architectural structure... then gradually the image has been cut, exploded, expanded, compressed, and flattened out to produce a more complex and specifically multi-layered diagram.

I'm interested in the conceptual strategies behind paper architecture and the relationship between 'virtual models' of architecture and the making of models of abstract sculpture. I am interested in

collapsing the two forms to produce something that is neither an architectural model nor an abstract sculpture... but something somewhere in between. It's interesting to see people's reaction when they come to the studio to see the work in progress, for them to see the fabrication differences between the paintings and the sculptures. If I wanted my work to be perfect I would have got an architectural model maker to produce them. Exposing the materiality of the foamcore adds some kind of life or character to the material and the to sculpture... This is a very important point.

**Someone who is unfamiliar with your work buys a piece. Is the work, for example, one of Justin's paintings, signed Justin Andrews and Masato Takasaka, Justin Andrews with Masato Takasaka, or do you maintain individual authorship? The work is produced individually, with the other person seeing the work when it is completed, yet it is reliant on that person's previous piece, along with the various discussions you have both had? What do you think about the idea of authorship in this situation?**

**JA:** Authorship can become confusing if importance is mainly placed upon the situation that a work may reference or be created within, rather than in the actual artwork itself. The works from M.A.P. are derived from a mixture of both my own and Masato's observations (in every work), and so individual lines became increasingly blurred as the project went on – I think that's a sign of success in a project like this.

Selling work is a complex process; one that partly depends upon what the collector is wanting to buy – a single object, or a series altogether (the latter obviously being preferable here, in terms of keeping the project complete). I would say that the four M.A.P. stages from Masato and myself would be the lowest divisible states of this project. Each half of any one state is made in response to the other. Reasonings for one half of any stage will always lie within the other. It is for this reason that each pair must be presented as a single work, created by, from, and through the studios of both artists.

I am very interested in looking through artworks to find the concepts behind them. Collaborations most often involve aims, goals, or other kinds of hypotheses that may or may not be realised. These kinds of motives, and what happens in the interim are some of the most interesting aspects of a project like M.A.P. Because all of the works form points within this kind of pursuit, they all hold equal levels of importance. (Needless to say that they are all critical to the presentation of what actually happened in the M.A.P. process.)

Overall, Masato has described all this very articulately by suggesting that all works aim to point towards a moving (and at times enigmatic) idea of trying to document an entropic process of change via a number of works which act as contextual brackets, or as process markers.

**MT:** That's a really good question Dave... it's a challenging question to answer. My individual practice tends to question notions of 'value' in terms of X amount of labor = X amount of money. I would say that the project calls into question the formal dollar values associated with painting and sculpture. I suppose it could be interesting to see what would be worth more – the painting or my sculpture. But having said that, I'm not really interested in the outright commercial



Masato Takasaka/Justin Andrews, *M.A.P. 4* (2003), foamcore/acrylic on board.

side of the art equation which states that making + selling = value.

So what I'm trying to say is that this project aims to work beyond the idea of making the saleable item. The prospect of someone buying the work as a set (all paintings and sculptures) would be ideal because any one of the paintings or sculptures would not exist if it were not for all the other works. Meanings are best collected/presented completely. If you were interested in a painting and not the sculpture, it would be like buying a car without the engine...

**You have both talked about an interest in the relationship between art and architecture. Masato mentioned generic contemporary art museum architecture and the final sculpture made me think of what Federation Square would look like if it collapsed! A lot of recent architectural projects, primarily because of the computer, have been driven by time-based processes like animation and parametric design. While these processes provide almost endless variation, I sometimes feel that the end product is highly controlled. The M.A.P. process is the 'product' and so in that way the question of when to stop, and therefore take control of a final product, doesn't really seem that important. How do you view this relationship with this kind of architecture?**

**JA:** 'Architecture' is such a broad word. This project may appear architectural due to pre-existing meanings that connect our work with buildings and city forms. Throughout the research that I have conducted into geometric abstraction, I have found that this specific form of art and the urban environment (as a context or subject) are intrinsically related. Without getting too specific, I believe that geometric abstraction (that employs urban architecture) is a literal and direct means for the visual interpretation of the city. Whilst my work definitely falls in line with this, I would say that a much more interesting (and less tangible) form of architecture is at play here. Architectures of time, of duration, of occurrence and variation – these are the exact kinds of space you have mentioned, and may be visible within M.A.P.

Static works themselves reference a punctuated or singular occurrence. A number of static works can record a changing situation. This is how each M.A.P. work functions – both singularly, and as component

parts within the overall project. Within these kinds of heady and indefinite ideas is where M.A.P. really starts to pull away from the concrete notion of architecture. This is because it can succeed if it hints, or alludes, or even fails – all of which are indefinable outcomes in a strict, commercial, client/brief sense.

By stating that a work begins a sequence of events and another concludes it, a bracket is produced for all intermediary works to exist within – a kind of passage. The events that the transitional objects document are an intersection between the works and the process within this continuum. There is a notion of time in my own work, and there is a relationship between the paintings and animations that I make. I have been fortunate within this project in that I have been able to partly transfer my own processes into a collaborative setting, where an even broader range of media has been used. For this work to be seen as architectural is a definite success. Seeing the city and architectural abstraction as one (and attempting make this kind of work), is a view that this M.A.P. upholds, and one that I maintain at all times.

**MT:** The more I look at architecture, the more I realise the differences between what architects and what (like-minded) artists do – their practice is related to architecture but at the same time not... it seems that architects have to rely on measurements, requirements, engineering, plans and all this other complex stuff that is required for concepts to become built environments. I am interested in reading about paper architecture and projects about 'imagined' and 'fictional' space because I guess they're closer to what Justin and I are doing in this project. Even looking through architecture magazines... the photos presenting built work, e.g. museums, houses, etc., still have the look of being virtual, simply because of the hyper-real quality of the reproductions. This interpretation occurs when I look at buildings in magazines... it seems funny to think that these large buildings get condensed down to magazine size. What's stranger still is when you see people in the interiors or around the exteriors of the buildings, in the installation photos. They end up looking like props or something...

The comment I have made about 'generic museum architecture' is a comment made by people when they talk about what see in my sculptures. It's interesting that you think that my final sculpture looks like Federation Square collapsed... I think that it may be because everything in it balances precariously, on top of each other – I haven't glued any of it down... I hope it doesn't collapse during the exhibition!

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**Dave Morison is a graduate architect and undertakes projects with \*IF THIS, THEN..... a collaborative studio based in Melbourne.**

**The artists wish to acknowledge the support of Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces & Deacons.**