

Lebbeus Woods states that, "An architecture of the new must grow from a new conceptual ground, one having to do with the dramatic and sometimes violent changes that mark the present era."<sup>10</sup> Looking at Takasaka's recent work constantly reminds me of the artist's brush with Architecture Studies at RMIT. I often think of Takasaka as an architect in theory rather than practice.

Takasaka uses certain tactics to deliberately develop the interpretation of his work. His work bears the footprint of the many different worlds. His world. Malevich's 'Non Objective World', as well as the world that Rauschenberg's 'Combines' and Schwitter's 'Merzbau' once came from. The western post-industrial consumerist world. The world of the 'time-poor' business executive. The world of glossy fast food packaging, greedy screen-based imagery, high-speed information transferal, construction technology, deafening glam rock guitar solos and heart-rending synthesizer filter sweeps. How can a formalist-based art practice even hope to breach all of these influences and appeal to all that stimuli?

By a revision of the rules of course.

The ideas discussed here are not new. They're ongoing. So too is Takasaka's practice. As the title of this essay suggests, Takasaka is arranging things, rather than making new ones. In doing this, perhaps he's realised that his life's work somehow already exists. In that sense, I guess this essay probably did too.

Justin Andrews.

*"I have been tinkering in the studio ..i'll send you photos soon that will hopefully be of some use to you..sculptures will be mashed up mutant formalisms of old and new work.. kinda like a survey of my practice...very self referential...remaking old work ...and combining it with studio detritus and objects that I have collected from work..stuff like plastic take-away containers and soft drink cans..mashing my interest in lead guitar architectural forms and post-formalist sculpture..mashing classicism baroque flourish..neo constructivism and pop references collide with hard-edge minimal riff-a-rama..anyways I hope this is making sense?..m." <sup>1</sup>*

Not really Masato. Well, perhaps it does, now that I saw your studio on the weekend. Looking around, I saw collisions and combinations. One of your stated references was neo-classical 80s progressive rock. This is clear to see. The lines and forms of your work echo the excessive time changes and fret-work from those guitarists you talk if so reverently – Steve Vai and Yngwie Malmsteen to name just two. But this has been discussed in relation to your work before<sup>2</sup>. What I want to concentrate on here is the post-formalist ideas that can be found within your work.

One of the main tenets of formalist painting is a constant reference to the work of art as a discreet object. Aesthetically, its own concerns are its formal properties – how what is on the canvas relates to the physical dimensions of the work itself. Indeed, how the paint on the work should be looked at as an entity on its own, immaculately existent within the confines of the picture plane, whether it is a flat object, or a structure of three dimensions. Takasaka's perspective goes beyond this idea. Takasaka's work defies classification in the above terms. For the very interesting reason that he calls his work five dimensional.<sup>3</sup>

A two dimensional work employs two dimensions. A work of three dimensions employs three. Takasaka's art involves objects that have both two and three dimensional properties. The total sum of dimensions within his work therefore equals five. Elements that contain sections of photographic imagery are juxtaposed alongside purely formal arrangements of non-objective design. Harmoniously, Takasaka plays his 'lead guitar' in five dimensions.

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<sup>10</sup> Woods, L "ANARCHITECTURE: Architecture is a Political Act" AD Architectural Monographs no.22, Academy Editions, UK (1992) p.12

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<sup>1</sup> Email from Masato Takasaka, 14.05.2007

<sup>2</sup> Radford, L "What's the difference to you?" ex. cat.; STRUCTURAL JAM: IT'S ALL LEAD GUITAR WHEN PROG ROCK RULED THE EARTH, (The Narrows, Melbourne 23.03.07 – 14.04.07)

<sup>3</sup> This notion is of the artist's making. For the purposes of this essay, I will explain my interpretation of his idea. Please remember that all respect should be attributed to Takasaka for this concept.

One of the 'out roads' of post-formalist art is to re-secure a poetic connection with the world that it is surrounded by. For the purposes of interaction and engagement involving the viewer, who is in theory, a member of public space. The very space that engulfs the pristine confines of the archetypal, clinical, white-walled museum space. Takasaka does this in a number ways:

In the eternal attempt to attract the consumer's eye, the graphic elements of design feature predominantly in Japanese packaging. Takasaka successfully illustrates the parallel between this alternate instance, and the formalist aesthetic found in purist art. Takasaka also re-contextualises the persuasive nature of real estate signboard imagery in his art, but perhaps not as specifically in this situation. Clearly here, Takasaka is in the business of 'finding' formalism in the wider world, including the one of consumerism. Can formalist imagery somehow have a similar 'use' or persuasive power in art?

Photographic material is another tactic used to affect a re-connection with the wider discursive world. For Takasaka, interest lies in the schism between the differing possibilities of representation. In the case of his current work, layers of interest are created when the urban environment is symbolised through both purist geometry found on three dimensional elements, and photographs of the city, folded into marquette sculptures, placed intuitively in, on, and around the larger structures within his installations.

Takasaka also uses unstable geometry to symbolise the world. In fact, instability and precariousness have been continuing aspects of his work. Both in the physical sense, where a fear of collapse is ever-present, and in the graphic sense, where he deliberately forges aesthetically dangerous compositions – those arrangements of elements that break all the conventions of what makes a 'good' formalist artwork. It's almost as if Takasaka has found a way to debunk those canons he once racked himself with, by laying them down via a very deliberate sense of haphazard abandon, if that is possible.

Takasaka has, in way, gone beyond a point of no return. His art is an example of the idea that the more an individual uses a language, the more that individual uses it to attach themselves to their surroundings. Perhaps it is for this reason that Takasaka may well be doomed to fail if he ever attempted the purely formal ever again. In the case of his practice, he employs formalism for the greater cause of representation. It appears as though he is not developing a body of work in the name of formalism. There is a great difference between the two types of art practice. Perhaps it is because Takasaka brazenly uses formalism as a veneer, that he has been at times called "Facado".<sup>4</sup>

Takasaka states that, "Art needs Art to make Art"<sup>5</sup>. This statement clearly illustrates his studio activity; his process of grabbing whatever is close to hand, and using it in inventive ways to make something 'new'. And after the frenetic process of construction is complete, and the hard-edge 'riff-a-rama' mini-city is a reality, what remains is an idea remade, a differing configuration of a similar thing, and extension of the same principles. Takasaka tells me that his work is made up from "...good ideas going nowhere. Does that make sense?"<sup>6</sup>

You're actually starting to, Masato.

Before I visited the artist, I travelled the 88 floors of Melbourne's Eureka Tower in 29 seconds. After exiting the mechanized bullet, I was met with an incredible view of the Melbourne CBD and inner suburbs. Whilst walking around the Skydeck, I fumbled with my thoughts on how many occurrences and situations I was looking at. The city was a seething hive of cars and people, traveling in both straight and curvilinear vectors, delivering to, departing from, and arriving at all points in between A and B. Buildings of steel, glass, and concrete shrouded bitumen corridors. Lights flashed everywhere, helicopters buzzed and hovered, and sounds of all sorts emanated from all different directions.

Looking at the city, I felt as though I had somehow, "...seen through the veil of refinement draped over it by planning and capital."<sup>7</sup> From such a heightened viewpoint, I felt as though I had caught the almighty metropolis momentarily unaware and disarmed, thereby, "...collapsing reality into a stream of images, products, and activities sanctioned by business and bureaucracy."<sup>8</sup>

Later, I remember recalling parallels between what I had seen from the Skydeck of the Eureka Tower, and what I was faced with in Takasaka's studio. To me, the relationship between Melbourne's cityscape and Takasaka's symbol of a city is similar to the artist's general interest in architecture; Takasaka is interested in the concept of architecture, the symbolic layers within a given structure, the texture of a building in the physical sense, and in the sense that it aids and abets what Henri Lefebvre calls 'spatial production'<sup>9</sup>. All of these insights into architecture are conceptual. None of them pragmatic. Takasaka is not interested in how buildings stand. He is interested in what they stand for, and what they can be made to stand in as. Having looked at the city from afar, and Masato's studio up close within the space of an hour, I believe the dualities are certainly there.

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<sup>5</sup> ibid

<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> Sandler, S "The Situationist City" MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts (1998) p.15

<sup>8</sup> ibid

<sup>9</sup> For further info, read: Lefebvre, H (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith) "The Production of Space" Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford (1991)

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<sup>4</sup> Admission from the artist – reference to Mangan, N (interview, 27.05.2007)

OCULAR LAB INC.  
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# MASATO TAKASAKA

I LIKE MY OLD STUFF BETTER THAN  
YOUR NEW STUFF (MORE PROG  
ROCK SCULPTURES FROM THE  
5TH DIMENSION)



