

POST-STRUCTURAL

(Shut up! We know you can play!...)

WALL

MASATO TAKASAKA, like a few artists I know, had a parallel practice as a teenage guitar hero. An adolescent immersion in this world can seem a way of rebelling and saying yes to poetry, while still finding acceptance and praise, at an age where we realize it's more important to impress other teenagers than our parents. But these early interests have a way of manifesting themselves later in an artist's practice, though the 'readymade' quality in Takasaka's work, the found objects, the mechanics of Constructivism and geometric abstraction, may seem at odds with the sensibility of rock guitar wizardry. This difference is evident in the attitude Takasaka brings to his material and the way he restructures its forms, but mainly in the way it negotiates the idea of technique.

The musicians featured in these works are rock guitar heroes or established session musos. Session guys are shapeshifters. As is required, they excel in all genres, and when they release solo albums, much like a resume, they cover it all. Typically they will feature a blues number (progressive), an extended jazz-funk workout, an obligatory Bach prelude – it's a chops showcase – a folio. They're always playing other people's tunes, with 'signature' inserted. Every night laying down the same notes – perfectly – over someone else's art. It's a scene full of contradictions: improvising – but perfectly, creative – but repetitive, incredible talent – little or no criticality. They are admired for their skill and virtuosity, but hired for their dependability, which, ironically, is a product of their teenage incarceration via relentless bedroom practice. They are repressed in puberty, and again professionally. Do some folks hate this kind of virtuosity and its display because it doesn't contextualize, it's just about the music? It's the essentialism, the pure 'me-ness' of the improvised solo. Apparently, it's a wank.

There's a long and well-documented association of rock music with sexuality, but the connection to onanism is more recent and related to the rock guitar solo (who would say such a thing about a Keith Jarrett piano performance, or, heaven forbid, a cellist?) Elvis introduced the pelvis to the visualization of the rock vocabulary, and Hendrix wrote the Guitarman Sutra – thrusting, playing with his mouth, and squirting lighter fluid onto his squealing axe, but it's the gratuitous extended soloing of second-generation heavy metal guys and Prog rockers which we associate with self-love. Is it the pretension and self-glory, or the

visual resemblance to the 'act' courtesy of the facial expressions, and proximity of these frenzied hand movements to the (usually) male pubis? Structurally, the relationship of rhythm and cadence to these acts, and the improvisational element they employ – is very different – the solo form is more akin to oratory, a kind of speech or lyricism. Perhaps Punk, with its velocity, repetition, resemblance to rant and the 'over in 3' and a '½ minutes' format, is more appropriate.

Takasaka's recent work negotiates the repeated act – previous sculptures and drawings have been reconstituted in recent shows – but rather than recycle past works, these images revisit the magazines which fascinated him during his youth in an attempt to connect with a time when his methodology was formed. The twin thrust of Abstraction and Guitar Player magazine produced a child, and growing up in the 80's – the cock rock decade – he learned to make the Work of Art in the Age of Musical Masturbation. Eddie Van Halen's Constructivist inspired guitar paint job could be the pivot where Takasaka's visual practice converges with his guitar practice. His drawings and reassembled installations are the result of an improvised riffing process – an elaborate 'call and response' system enacted with the self. Like the high-velocity Rock solo, these 'automatic' structures seem to make themselves – accident and intention seem interchangeable and there is little space between the idea and its form. This idea of direct and intuitive correspondence is challenged by Takasaka's new work. These images are about technique, but don't display any, and the format they reproduce contains various levels of 'authorship'. The magazine page features text, a photographed subject and an advertisement – a collaboration where the singular voice is muted – much like the catalogue you are now holding – designed, written and illustrated by others.

Somewhere between a fictional re-staging of Vito Acconci's 'Seedbed' performed with a guitar pick, and the story of Fragonard 'performing' a twenty minute painting in his parlour before an applauding audience, Takasaka questions his relationship to the idea of 'studio', and presents us with a possible version of what he would rather be doing...

Damiano Bertoli, 2009

Frampton Comes Alive!

