

**Matt Arbuckle: When memory becomes moment.**

Language is a mutable system, with enough flexibility that it can describe its own dissolution. It seems miraculous that combinations of nouns and adjectives can interlace to form the unformed and reform the formed. The creative systems that Arbuckle employs in his practice are similarly open and generative. His repeated processes of folding and dying are a systematic sleight of hand that, like language, can dismantle the usual rules applied to painting and reorient the viewer.

Arbuckle's works are both map and land. They disorient the categories typically used to contemplate artwork; figure collapses into ground, abstraction merges with figuration and memory becomes moment. As a diagram they are fractal, ever-expanding and open. In this way, Arbuckle's work occupies a kind of expanded field of art making;<sup>1</sup> a place described as "a space of propagation, of effects. It contains no matter or material points, but rather functions, vectors and speeds."<sup>2</sup> The speed of spread as the paint bleeds into linen, or the gritty, rubbed surface of the drawings are evidence of velocity and movement, back and forth across the abraded surface. Each work highlights the dynamism of its materiality, the productive grott of a dry brush contrasted with a sealed, slick surface.

Works occupying 'the field' are propelled by their own internal volition, a Bergsonian vital force that will do away with distinctions between body and sculpture, or architecture and landscape. It is in those instances when landscape enters the architecture, or when an artwork is activated by a body, that the distinctions that divide are dissolved.

The field is also present in the strict processes and parameters that Arbuckle subjects his work to. They are dyed and folded, and these folded marks become a problem, but one that is porous and generative. As Stan Allen explains; "Field configurations are loosely bound aggregates characterized by porosity and local interconnectivity. Overall shape and extent are highly fluid and less important than the internal relationships of parts, which determine the behavior of the field." Arbuckle solves the problems within his paintings through improvised experimentation. He creates pulsing dynamics between foreground and back, with top heavy bands of colour and illusory seascapes contravened by surface brush work.

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<sup>1</sup> The expanded field as a concept incorporates ideas such as expansion, convergence, adjacency, projection, rapport, intersection and other terms used to redraw the boundaries between art and architecture since the 1960s. It was popularised in 1979 by art historian Rosalind Krauss's essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," which laid out in a precise diagram the structural parameters of sculpture, architecture, and landscape art. *Retracing the Expanded Field* was published in 2014 and revisits Krauss's text, mapping the ensuing interactions between art and architecture. In the context of this essay the term also incorporates Stan Allen's conception of the field: "To generalize, a field condition could be any formal or spatial matrix capable of unifying diverse elements while respecting the identity of each. Field configurations are loosely bound aggregates characterized by porosity and local interconnectivity. Overall shape and extent are highly fluid and less important than the internal relationships of parts, which determine the behavior of the field." In Stan Allen, 'Field Conditions', in *Points and lines, Diagrams and Projects for the City*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999, p. 92

<sup>2</sup> Sanford Kwinter, In Stan Allen, 'Field Conditions', in *Points and lines, Diagrams and Projects for the City*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999, p. 92

There is labour in these works as they negotiate the push-pull between scumbled brush work, a rubbing back, thinned out paint, or heavy thickened topcoats.

Whilst their creation is rigorous, with set rules and processes, they do not ever have a predetermined outcome. Rather than describing form, they become form. Like a map made from the earth it describes, Arbuckle's paintings are impressions of time and architecture, and not descriptors of phenomena. As time and space are disorientated, linear projections are scrambled through the folding and dying process. Memory becomes moment, and yet the rigid structure of their creation – dye, fold, dry, paint – is temporal, marked by its own systemic, rhythmic process. The map does not know its own coordinates; it is in them, and of them.

The year 2023 has been Tamaki Makauraru's wettest year ever. The dramatic flooding and incessant rain has highlighted the abstract relations between the rigid isobars on a weather chart, to the mould bloom spreading through many Auckland houses. The watery isthmus seems to be subsumed, with the thin crust of housing flimsy in the face of nature's dysregulated outpourings. In Arbuckle's studio the extreme weather necessitated a shift from working on the ground to working on the walls. The floods destroyed several months' worth of work and this new series of paintings and drawings were created in near darkness caused by the flood-damaged electrical wiring.

Regardless Arbuckle continued working. His process is open and permeable to change, generative when faced with disruption. As an abstract template with indeterminate outcomes, the stain, fold, dry, stretch processes are sufficiently mutable to accommodate the unknowable vagaries of weather in the Anthropocene. This is because Arbuckle's rules are processes, consisting of spaces between, rather than end points. It is this non-linear, folding, flowing approach that ensures that interruption, or even mutation, activates the system, rather than collapsing it, and that there is space within his porous fieldwork. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, "Liberty is a practice... liberty must be exercised."<sup>3</sup>

Emily Cormack, 2023

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 87.