

MASATO TAKASAKA

***ALMOST ALMOST EVERYTHING ALL AT ONCE, TWICE, THREE TIMES ((IN FOUR PARTS...V) FROM PICASSO TO MASATO...)
RETURNAL RETURN REDUX *works from the permanent collection and selected loans from the EVERYTHING ALWAYS ALREADY-MADE STUDIO MASATOTECTURES MUSEUM OF FOUND REFRACTIONS (1994-2024)***

**FIONA AND SIDNEY MYER GALLERY
27 JUNE – 10 AUGUST, 2024**





Foreword

It is a great joy for the Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery to present the work of the highly influential artist, academic and educator, Masato Takasaka. This exhibition of paintings, sculptural installations, drawings, video and photographic prints collapses the realms of private and public, studio and gallery, process and outcome. Collectively, the works point towards the universal and circular nature of Masato's deeply personal understandings of contemporary art and art history.

We are indebted to renowned curator Sue Cramer whose sensitive words provide a rich and revealing insight into Masato's practice. We thank all of those who have generously loaned works by Masato from their collections for this exhibition We congratulate Masato on this outstanding body of work.

Associate Professor David Sequeira
Director Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery

Why not ‘from Picasso to Masato’?

Sue Cramer

In his typically multi-part title for this survey (not survey) exhibition, Masato Takasaka inserts himself into the high canon of esteemed modernist masters, proposing for his art a direct line from Picasso, the formidable founder of Cubism—a claim only partly tongue-in-cheek. And why not embrace his audacity? Indeed, it’s easy to recognise a distinctly ‘post-cubist’ spirit—a collapsing of time and space—in Takasaka’s chaotically ordered display, and in his exhibition title too, which seems to imply cubistic simultaneity: ‘ALMOST ALMOST EVERYTHING ALL AT ONCE’. And let’s not forget the guitar, the classic cubist motif, which Takasaka updates through his obsession in his work with electric guitars, revisiting his adolescent history as a bedroom guitarist and aspiring thrash rock musician.

While this exhibition marks thirty years since the beginning of Takasaka’s oeuvre in 1994, there is no neat chronological ordering of his paintings, photographs, assemblages, prints, and films as one might expect in a survey. Rather, in a conceptual sense at least, the entire artist’s oeuvre—past, present, and future—is simultaneously present or inferred through Takasaka’s ‘already-mades’. A derivative of the Duchampian readymade object, this concept describes his continual habit of quoting from his own back catalogue of artworks (works he has already made) through the production of remakes, cover versions, simulations, and spin-offs, the future existence of remakes being also uncannily implied. Evident too in this time-altering display are quotations from Takasaka’s subjectively compiled list of ‘greatest hits’ from twentieth century art— inclusive of Cubism, Constructivism, De Stijl, Minimalism and Pop Art, both Australian and international. Wasn’t it Picasso that said ‘Good artists borrow. Great artists steal’? Takasaka prefers to think of it as analogous to a session musician performing cover versions of other musicians’ songs.

Takasaka’s mention of Picasso has its own backstory, in which it seems I played a part. In 2009, my co-curator Lesley Harding and I invited Takasaka into a large museum survey *Cubism and Australian Art* at Heide Museum

of Modern Art. Alongside works by Australian artists from the 1920s to the 2000s, were paintings by Picasso, Braque, Leger and Gris, reaching back to Cubism's European origins. 'Living the dream' was the catchphrase Masato used to describe his enthusiasm for this project, leading to his suggestion 'Why not call the exhibition 'From Picasso to Masato?'. Apparently, I replied, 'save that title for your own exhibition Masato', which he has now done at the Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery.

Weaving biography and anecdote into his work is something Takasaka loves to do—it's all part of his gently ironic strategy of self-historicisation, as seen in the proactive approach he takes to telling his own (cover) story as an artist. Consider, for example, his early satirical self-portrait as a hopeful art student who is 'in it for the money,' and his later self-styling of his project as 'Studio Masatotectures', with himself as lead protagonist. We also see this self-narration in Takasaka's eagerness to contextualise his work by openly displaying and paying tribute to his many inspirations, whether they be modernist, pop-cultural, Western, or Japanese. Each of his works is a version of another, which in-turn imitates, revises or 'remasters' a further already-made work, and so on, creating a spectrum of similarity and difference that reverberates throughout his practice. Indeed, the nature of influence—perhaps more commonly the domain of art historians—is largely Takasaka's subject as an artist. In relation to this, he enjoys quoting the words of Australian conceptual artist Ian Burn from 1982: 'Art history has always been far too important to be left up to art historians.'¹

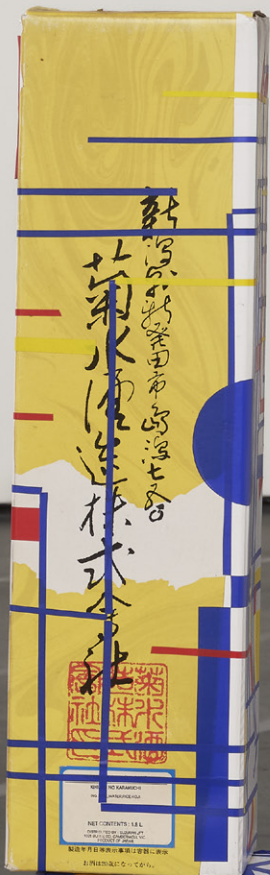
Not just another one liner

Stepping into his exhibition at the Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery, you can almost hear the thunderous opening chord of an electric guitar. Takasaka gives us a visual rendition of this reverberant sound in his most recent site-specific floor drawing, the title of which we shall abbreviate to: *Instructional work, not just another one liner... (after EVH) 2001–2024*. Made from crisscrossed lengths of masking tape—a simple tool for achieving clean-edged painting—the drawing guides our eye through the exhibition, setting the stage, as it were, for his other artworks. While taking its immediate visual cue from rock legend Eddie Van Halen's (EVH's) distinctive geometric design for his iconic Frankenstrat guitar—itself the subject of numerous replica's and tributes—Takasaka's instructional drawing is also site-responsive. Its masking tape lines systematically reach from corner to



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WISCONSIN

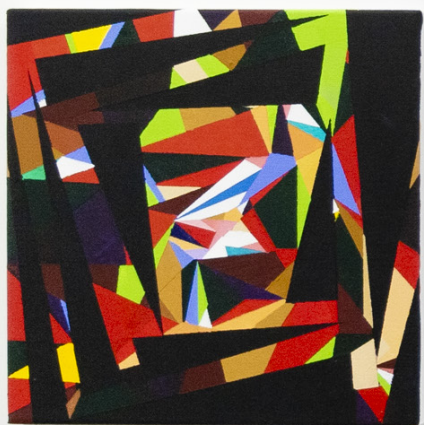
CUBISM
& AUSTRALIAN ART



corner across the gallery's irregularly shaped, multi-cornered rooms. There are distinct echoes of the similarly geometric series of instructional wall drawings of American conceptual artist Sol LeWitt's begun in the 1960s, and by Melbourne artist Kerrie Poliness.

Positioned centrally within the gallery is Takasaka's latest version of his so-called 'mini cities,' a nickname given to his series of in-the-round, sculptural installations that resemble a form of experimental architecture. Takasaka more formally calls them as *Propositional Models for the Everything Always Already-Made*. Their chaotic, postmodern 'misch masch' of sources and influences, and their combination of different materials, also resembles an exploded cubist collage. Laid out on perforated boards repurposed from his parents' Japanese supermarket, these lively and inventive installations are characterized by a dynamic array of smaller constructions, assorted artworks, and found objects arising from the artist's activities. These might include exhibition posters, essays and catalogues, CD's and films, which Takasaka has brought from his home and studio. While some objects might never have been displayed, many have appeared several times, often in an altered or updated form. Takasaka has likened the recirculation of elements in his work to an I-pod playlist on shuffle. Together they constitute a kind of improvised archive, one that is ever-evolving. Each iteration of these mini cities is unique, tailored to the specific occasion and site, and expressed through the artist's distinctive visual vocabulary—let's call it Takasaka-ese—where humour and high seriousness freely mix.

The rendition in this exhibition *Yet Another Propositional Mode for the EVERYTHING ALWAYS ALREADY-MADE ...2024* (again an abbreviated title), is relatively streamlined; Takasaka describes it as 'Minimal to the Max'. The main cardboard and foamcore structures resemble minimalist sculptures, with a nod to the angular forms of Ron Robertson Swann's yellow metal sculpture *Vault* 1980, a once controversial sculpture now located nearby in the Melbourne Arts Precinct in Southbank. Included too, are Takasaka's signature adhesive tape on cardboard box sculptures that evoke city towers or office blocks. Their patterned surfaces mimic the geometries of Cubism, De Stijl, and Japanese confectionery packaging. Mixed in with these 'originals' are carefully chosen items of museum merchandise—notebooks with paintings by Hokusai on the cover; a magnet featuring a classic John Nixon cross; and related to these, a special release



MXR guitar pedal bearing Van Halen's signature design. Playing with the form of the documentary photograph, Takasaka's double-exposure laser prints overlay views of his different exhibitions to create a pictorial fracturing and experimental play of light and dark. The resemblance to early avant-garde photography has a pseudo historicising effect. It's as if Takasaka, a self-declared post-avant-garde artist, has inserted himself into the artistic vanguard of the early twentieth century.

The Missing Original

Takasaka's extensive series of cubist-style paintings, *Garage Days Revisited*, has been ongoing since 2016, though was prefigured by a painting in the same style from 1994. He made this while in high school, during his own 'garage days' as an aspiring musician and artist, and later submitted it for entry into art college. In hindsight, he identifies this painting as his first mature artwork and the point of origin for his practice, yet he has conspicuously withheld it from this survey exhibition. Instead, he includes a drawing of the painting and a photograph of it installed by his father in the garage of his family's home. The painting's notable absence reflects Takasaka's perennial desire to obscure the original and focus on simulacra, as this series especially does.

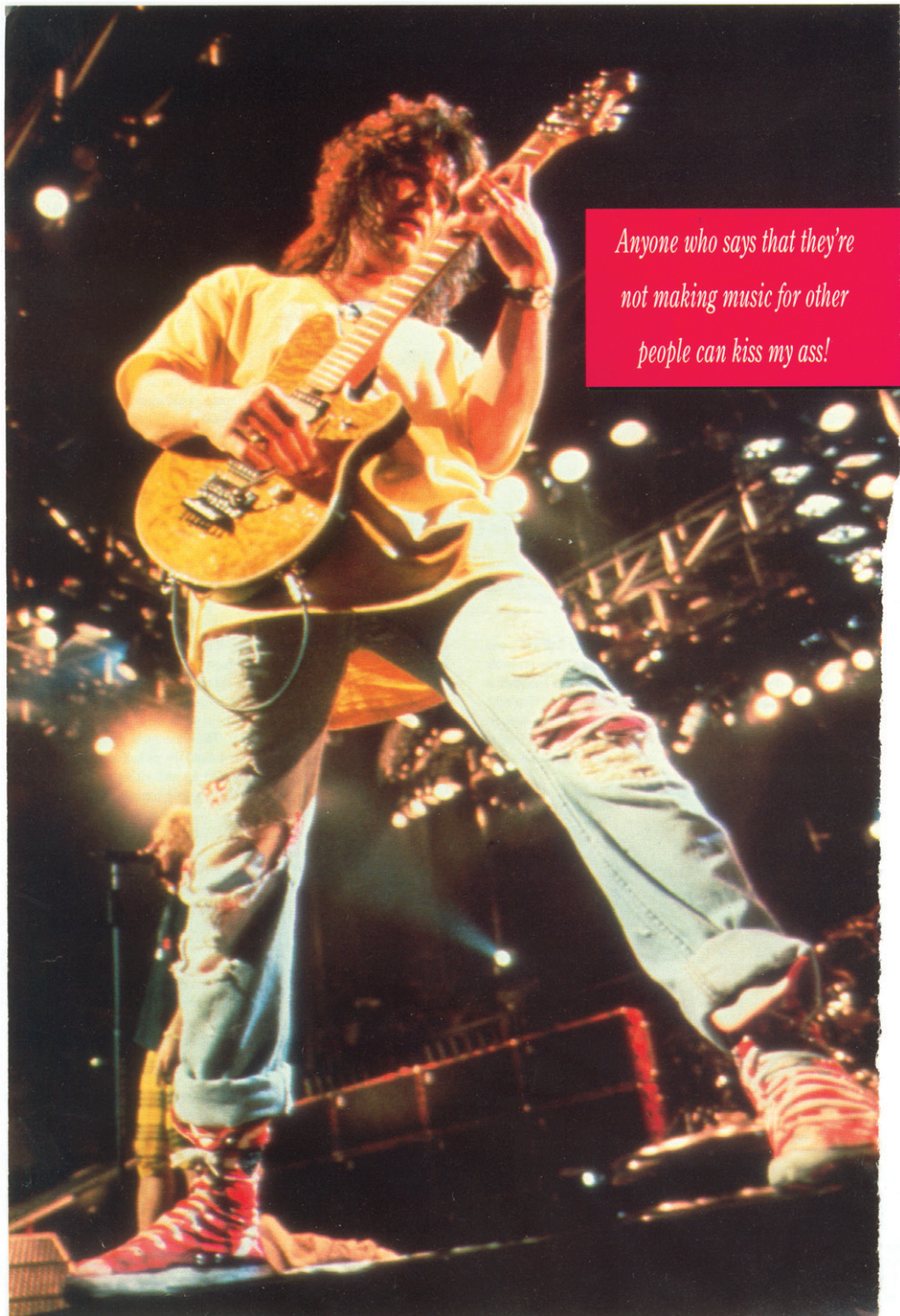
The twenty-one paintings from *Garage Days Revisited* displayed along two opposing walls evoke a non-chronological timeline of sorts, since they are hung out of date order. Each painting bears the back date of 1994 in reference to the missing original, as well as the date post-2016 when a 'remake' was made. Some paintings have a third date, indicating when he partially repainted or enhanced the remake, a process that he likens to the 'remastering' of a music recording. The series exemplifies Takasaka's idea of refraction as a scale of calibrated alterations, a spectrum of similarity and difference that flows in multiple directions across time. While the series maintains a consistent and distinctive palette, the paintings range in scale, and vary slightly in their geometric design. The overall impression is of reiterative likeness—as if the paintings were all cut from the same cloth—but closer inspection reveals Takasaka's careful attention to hand-painted variations between them. His philosophy of repetition and simulation—the RETURNAL RETURN REDUX of his exhibition title—still allows for an exquisite individuality in each work. One could draw parallels with Duchamp's intricate recreations of his artworks, including

paintings, sculptures and readymades, for his edition *La Boîte-en-valise* 1935–1941. Refusing mechanical means of reproduction, Duchamp made each editioned replica subtly different. Indeed, in more ways than one, Duchamp's practice sets a vital precedent for Takasaka's already-mades. This is particularly true of his activities in the 1930s, a period when, as Elena Filipovic observes, 'Duchamp seemed to be "vacationing" in his past through various exercises of repetition, reproduction, and collection.'² Duchamp's time travelling portable museum (not museum) has much in common with Takasaka's speculative and non-chronological MUSEUM OF REFRACTIONS, as epitomised by the twenty-one near replica paintings in *Garage Days Revisited*.

In relation to the cubist qualities of this series, it is important to note that Picasso's stylistic influence on Takasaka came indirectly via Australian artist Robert Jacks. By chance in 1994, Takasaka saw a newspaper reproduction of a cubist-style painting by Jacks and decided to create a similar piece, which in turn became the precursor to *Garage Days Revisited*. (Jacks was also a key artist represented in the *Cubism and Australian Art* survey at Heide.) Pop-cultural influences were important too. As an electric guitarist and metal rock fan, Takasaka was attempting his own covers of songs by Metallica. There are echoes of the band's lightning bolt insignia in his painting's geometric shapes—indeed bizarrely, his attunement to the explosive visual graphics of thrash metal music, may have drawn him to the forceful geometries in Jacks' formalist painting. Unsurprisingly then, when Takasaka commenced his *Garage Days Revisited* series in 2016 looking back for inspiration to his 1994 painting, he borrowed and adapted the title of Metallica's *Garage Days Re-Visited* from 1987, an album of cover versions performed by the band of their favourite songs.

With signature inserted

In 2009, Damiano Bertoli, a fellow artist and close friend of Takasaka's, described Takasaka's *Post Structural Jam (Shut Up We Know You Can Play!...)*, first exhibited that year, as an attempt 'to connect with a time when his methodology was formed'.³ The series reproduces pages torn from music magazines that Takasaka avidly consumed as a teenager in the 1990s, and returns us as viewers to his formative period. This is in lieu of a more conventional origin story—as might more usually be conveyed in a survey exhibition through a display of early works. Bertoli continues, 'the



*Anyone who says that they're
not making music for other
people can kiss my ass!*



musicians featured in these works are rock guitar heroes or established session musos. Session guys are shape shifters. They are always playing other people's tunes with signature inserted.' A stack of the poster/catalogues with Bertoli's accompanying essay is theatrically displayed in the same room as Takasaka's new digital print on vinyl rendition of *Post Structural Jam*, which surrounds it on the wall. Mimicking the list of dates and venues on a promotional rock tour poster, it now lists all of the occasions when *Post-Structural Jam* has been exhibited. Like a piece of band merch collected at a gig, it can be picked up by visitors to the exhibition, a gesture that also knowingly replays the stacks of takeaway posters and wrapped candies exhibited by New York artist Felix Gonzalez Torres in the late 1980s.

Takasaka frequently cites Bertoli's essay when talking about his own work, especially the phrase 'with signature inserted', which so aptly describes his methodology of appropriation, for despite wearing his influences on his sleeve, his already-mades are always distinctively his own. Likening your art practice to that of a session musician demonstrates a modesty that rejects the notion of the artist as a hero or solitary genius. It shows graciousness in acknowledging the creative influences of others and in contributing something new to the broader art dialogue of which we are a part. Ultimately, the endlessly generative output of Studio Masatoteatures arises from conversation with other artists—be they Picasso or Bertoli—and from Takasaka's irresistible enthusiasm for art.

- 1 With thanks to Lisa Radford for bringing this quote to Takasaka's attention, and subsequently to mine. See *Ian Burn: Collected Writings 1966–1993*, edited by Ann Stephen, published by Power Publications, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König. Design and typesetting by Robert Milne. The quote was accessed online, 25 June 2024, <https://shop.powerpublications.com.au/products/ian-burn-collected-writings-1966-1993>.
- 2 Elena Filipovic, 'A Museum That is Not', *e-flux Journal*, Issue no 4, March 2009, accessed online, 25 June 2024, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/04/68554/a-museum-that-is-not/>.
- 3 Damiano Bertoli, exhibition essay for *Post Structural Jam (Shut Up We Know you Can Play!...)* 2009, originally published for the work's showing at Y3K gallery, Naarm / Melbourne, 20 August–12 September 2009. Republished in 2024 for the exhibition *ALMOST ALMOST EVERYTHING ALL AT ONCE, TWICE, THREE TIMES ((IN FOUR PARTS...)) FROM PICASSO TO MASATO...)* RETURNAL RETURN REDUX *works from the permanent collection and selected loans from the EVERYTHING ALWAYS ALREADY-MADE STUDIO MASATOTEATURES MUSEUM OF FOUND REFRACTIONS (1994–2024), Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery, Naarm / Melbourne, 28 June–10 August 2024.

MASATO TAKASAKA

ALMOST ALMOST EVERYTHING ALL AT ONCE, TWICE, THREE TIMES
(IN FOUR PARTS...V) FROM PICASSO TO MASATO... RETURNAL
RETURN REDUX *works from the permanent collection and selected
loans from the EVERYTHING ALWAYS ALREADY-MADE STUDIO
MASATOTECTURES MUSEUM OF FOUND REFRACTIONS (1994-2024)

Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery
27 June – 10 August, 2024

List of images

Cover: Masato Takasaka, Installation view of *Yet Another Propositional Model for the EVERYTHING ALWAYS ALREADY-MADE STUDIO MASATOTECTURES MUSEUM OF FOUND REFRACTIONS (1979-2024)* *Yes, You Kant After Duchamp! From Picasso to Masato...*, 2024, cardboard, foam-core, found objects, self-adhesive vinyl on enamel paint on peg board, masking tape. Documentation image by Christo Crocker.

p. 2 – 3 Masato Takasaka, Installation view of *Yet Another Propositional Model for the EVERYTHING ALWAYS ALREADY-MADE STUDIO MASATOTECTURES MUSEUM OF FOUND REFRACTIONS (1979-2024)* *Yes, You Kant After Duchamp! From Picasso to Masato...*, 2024, cardboard, foam-core, found objects, self-adhesive vinyl on enamel paint on peg board, masking tape. Documentation image by Christo Crocker.

p. 7 & 8 Masato Takasaka, Close-up view of *Yet Another Propositional Model for the EVERYTHING ALWAYS ALREADY-MADE STUDIO MASATOTECTURES MUSEUM OF FOUND REFRACTIONS (1979-2024)* *Yes, You Kant After Duchamp! From Picasso to Masato...*, 2024, cardboard, foam-core, found objects, self-adhesive vinyl on enamel paint on peg board, masking tape. Documentation image by Christo Crocker.

p. 10 Masato Takasaka, *Untitled 20 Garage Days Revisited*, 1994/2023, pencil and acrylic on canvas. Image courtesy of Haydens.

p. 13 Masato Takasaka, *Anyone who says... Guitarist May 1993*, 1994/2024, digital print on vinyl.

p. 14 Masato Takasaka, Installation view, digital vinyl prints on wall. Documentation image by Christo Crocker.

Designed by Mia Murone
Exhibition installation photography Christo Crocker
Typeset in Rag, Dennis Grauel
Printed in Melbourne by Press Print

ISBN: 978-0-6481586-1-5



FIONA
AND
SIDNEY
MYER
GALLERY



MASATO TAKASAKA

