



Podcast Series: Transcript

Artist Matt Macintosh discusses his artistic life, studio and practice.

Curated by Emily McKibbon

Podcast and Interview by Linda Koenemund

Introduction by Christina Mancuso, Education Officer

Christina Mancuso:

Hi I'm Christina Mancuso, Education Officer at the MacLaren Art Centre. In this podcast the MacLaren is pleased to present regional artist Matt Macintosh as he speaks about his artistic life, studio, and practice.

Matt Macintosh:

Hi my name is Matt Macintosh; I'm a Ramara-based artist. I work across a variety of media and I'm interested in ways of approaching abstraction through systems to explore a variety of ideas.

So, I did my undergrad at the Ontario College of Art and Design, 'Ontario College of Art' it was called when I first started and they tagged on the design mid-way through my time there. I went back and did a BFA about ten years later, graduated 2009 and after a year off went to U of T to do a master's of other visual studies there. I think I might be a bit of a sucker for punishment, originally I did my undergrad in drawing and painting I felt fairly confident that painting was the hardest thing for me I could possibly do and that if I could come out the other side of that, I could translate that sensibility and technical skill into basically any other medium, for me, that's not for everyone.

So, I spent much of my BFA producing a lot of printouts and not a lot of paintings so at some level that did not go as planned but if I had to go back I'd do it again. So the compliment to that, the sort of ideational component or the engagement with conceptual art practices, I went into UofT who adheres, I don't want to be unfair but fairly reliably to a cultural studies model which again generally speaking is grounded and materialist like Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx. And I'm not a materialist so I ran my own practice and my own ideas through a pretty fine sieve and emerged the other side a little shaky but a thoroughly vetted artistic practice.

Since I was a kid I always had trouble answering the question 'what should I draw? What should I make?' and so most of what I do tends to defer away from me as a decision maker in my own ego. I try to set up systems that respond to the local environment and the exhibition environment through research, through histories, or through architectures and space and look for the discourses. So when I say 'discourses' I mean the signs and symbols that are wedded to a certain practice that give institutional or recognizable form to certain architectures, certain territories, certain spaces. I try to take practices from one discourse and apply them to signs and symbols from another and then apply those practices from that other to another and then back again, so there's something ideally circular that happens where it ends up being a closed entirely self-referential or self-reflexive system and yet at the same time I as an ego, as a subject, am always leaving a record of my decisions.

I engage with the realities of my studio space, the realities of the materials I'm working with, the histories that those materials bring, the history of the exhibition space, the history of the town, the way the archives where I access certain materials from applying all those logics one against the other so it has to be to my own practice about the space, it has to be local. This project is non-transferrable and yet at the same time ironically I'm

constantly removing things from contexts but the overall project would fall apart I think if it was removed from 37 Mulcaster Street. This show is broken into a variety of components; it circulates around Nine Mile Portage as a means to explore some of the developments of culture that form present-day Barrie. I wanted to make the pieces so they're capable of standing alone but they're really intended to work as sort of a cohesive whole. It's not really my intention to separate them apart by sense: touch, sound, sight, etc. but that it did end up being how at some level they were split apart so there's a strong degree of completeness that happens when they're together, but they're not necessarily interdependent.

I am completely the only artist in my family, my father calls himself an accountant and he was trained as an accountant but never worked as an accountant, he's an entrepreneur and very business-minded but gentle. My mother was a teacher. My brother builds houses and I have a lot of trouble telling people what I do. To explain what I do around the dinner table is an effort I abandoned probably fifteen years ago.

Support is an interesting thing, I mean, there was certainly no blanket discouragement for me to go into art. I was quick to allay their concerns that I'm not going to wind up in a garrett penny-less, and I haven't, I've come closer than I expected but I'm not there. Overall, I think there were many things I was good at but usually finished second, the hundred-yard dash for instance but art I generally finished first in and so it made sense to incorporate these other things that I was half-decent at into this one kind of 'territory' that allows you to include a lot of what you want. It's a very luxurious space art, I think where experiments don't have to go right and intentionality can be held rather lightly. A lot of disciplinary knowledge can be introduced in one space without the pressure of being really attached to results.

I have an office at my home, which is clean and allows me to work on a computer and then I have a studio space in Orillia that allows me to make a fair bit of mess but not produce any dust and then I have a very scrappy shop where I can cut wood and make

lots of dust so I have this fairly compartmentalized practice due to the necessity of the material.

I don't want my practice to be partitioned but I don't want it to be so overlapping where there aren't these distinctive elements that can't sort of emerge, can't be understood, the idea of the diffusion of one element into another rather than the collapse. So, for instance, in grad school we were offered a solo show and there were only three of us in my graduating class and we all agreed we shared the sensibility that we would not like to have three distinct solo shows but have three distinct shows where a substantial amount of overlap occurred between shows so, to put a number on it, something like twenty-five percent was elsewhere and seventy-five percent was in one space and that's really how my practice does develop and I like that so it's not fully partitioned, it's partitioned with an open door.

I usually work on multiple projects at a time, painting's a hobby. I take time away from projects that require a certain way of attending to them and a certain degree of engagement with ideas and then try to apply that sensibility back to painting and then take how I bring myself to painting back to ideas, there's got to be this exchange. The painting tends to represent the supply component of things; it supplies a lot of what I bring to this art that's more grounded in ideas and necessity, one day I would love to have a show of my paintings.

Setting up the generative systems and teasing out the logic and teasing out elements of the discourses that I'm using to find one to apply against the next is a slog and it can be tough to get out of bed in the morning to bring myself to do that type of interrogation of these things that certainly on the surface seem incompatible and unrelated but I know in my own navigation through the project, that they have connectors but there's got to be a way not only to spot those connectors but to actually use them as a way to generate work. When those ideas arrive, it is a pleasant morning or afternoon and things start to set themselves in motion. I think that's when the painter gets to express himself

through digital means whether it's again the slog of erasing the tiny lines on a map or erasing the elements of a picture. There's a joy in the labour of that part of the work and I have to say that the creative labor -maybe I am a Marxist after all- is really my favourite part of art-making.

I'm not a Sunday painter. I don't go in expecting it to be fun. It's hard work and I think that's the difficulty sometimes of getting out of bed is that I have to restrain the part of me that wants resolution or enjoyment or satisfaction and have to live with the uncomfortableness of things being unresolved, of things being difficult, of them, frankly, just not being fun sometimes. It's work. It's the hardest work. I've built houses for 15 years and at the end of the day each day I felt exhilarated although building houses was not my favourite thing to do but this, for me, is a hard form of work.

Christina Mancuso:

Type and Token: a solo exhibition by Matt Macintosh is on view from March 14 to June 21, 2015.

To download both podcasts from this series, please visit

www.maclareart.com