



SOMETHING CLICKS

MATT ARBUCKLE
ON WHAT PUSHES HIS
PAINTING PRACTICE
FORWARD, AND
THE CHANGING
SEASONS OF LIFE
THAT SHAPE IT.

INTERVIEW
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When you're standing in front of a blank canvas, where do you begin? For me the process starts before the canvas or support is chosen or made. The work begins to brew in moments outside of studio environments, linking aspects of my practice to materials and objects I'm drawn to. The foundation of the work grows through this: photos I've taken, found objects, materials I collect in my studio. Opportunities to respond to unfamiliar surroundings inform the direction I want to follow and, by the time I build and stretch the canvas or prepare the support, I'm usually almost halfway there.

What tends to spark a new body of work — a visual reference, feeling you can't quite shake? My practice is parallel to my personal life. Having two small children means that my routines have changed, which has unlocked a new mode of being, new objects, new places I'm currently drawing from — a new way of looking at the world. I'm influenced by my direct surroundings,

or the transitional zones between point A and B; bodies of work are 'sparked' by the things I encounter throughout these routes. For example, last year I was given access to a lot of marble slabs. The veins in the marble had similarities to my paintings on voile which during the process using shibori soaking is wrapped, twisted, folded and buried, reflecting a more organic texture. The chance acquisition of the marble, and the patterns I noticed between the marble and voile, triggered an entirely new body of works, and I'm always ambly looking for opportunities to form connections such as these.

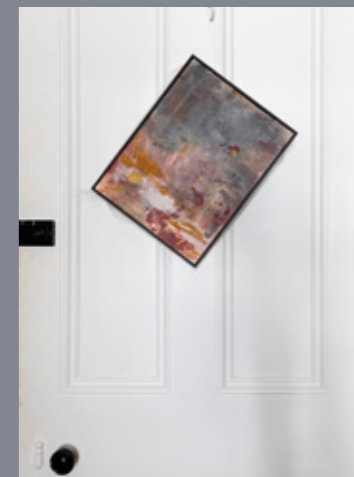
Was there a moment that clarified your direction as an artist? Not one specific moment. I've always been making something at any given point. It feels like more of a continued momentum driven by curiosity instead of a specific turning point — and finding space to look at things outside their contextual backgrounds. My exhibition *Surface Song* at Spa_ce Gallery in Napier (on

until April 18) brings together works that span the last four years. Their surface is flat but alludes to a distance and a memory of place.

What have you been working on recently, and what's up next? My young baby has had a significant period of medical intervention, which completely shifted my life and, consequently, my practice. During this time, I became fascinated by medical measurements and equipment that we had to familiarise ourselves with. Our lives revolved around PH readings, and I began exploring the relationships between the colours of the strips and their reflections within my practice, which will be present in my next body of work to be shown late this year at Two Rooms gallery in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland.

What does a day in the studio look like? Are you structured, intuitive, somewhere in between? I start with a completely unachievable list and see where the day takes me. No day is the same. I end the >

“My practice responds to my life — making has become enmeshed with the everyday, and it evolves alongside me.”



TOP & ABOVE Oil on board circa 2021. “I often pull out older works and sit them around the studio. Sometimes new things appear within them. They can help bridge to new ideas.” **LEFT** Pieces in the contemplation stage, which can last many months. **OPPOSITE** Works on the fireplace include *Divided*, 2025, *Exercising Memory*, 2025, a small watercolour from the Great Ocean Road by Matt's partner Gabriel, a green monochrome painting by his son Sylvester and an archival photo of Auckland Harbour Bridge.



ABOVE Matt enjoys using dry pastels for drawing on paper. “They have a high pigment concentration and a tactile directness. I tend to smudge them so colours and marks are in soft focus.” **LEFT** The mood in the studio can swing around pre-show. There’s a quiet unease. “I line up the paintings, then I look at them — for a very long time, sometimes weeks — and they look at me. I am not sure who is judging whom.”

day with a different list, usually longer than the one I started with.

How do colour and material decisions enter the work? I see them as symbiotic. Pigments hold different physical weights depending on whether they are organic or inorganic. Some will fall through the canvas very fast depending on the materials they’re applied on, so the variations of effects are always shifting, or included in the concept. It changes who is leading what, and what is leading whom. Chicken-egg, egg-chicken.

Are you working towards a particular tension in a painting, or does that reveal itself along the way? Not consciously. For me it’s more dynamic — it’s embedded in the process. On reflection, my recent work has evolved to become more atmospheric. Previously, with my

practice using voile, I was exploring something more sedimentary and murky that could be interpreted as elemental.

How do you know when a work has reached its final state? It’s just a feeling. Like when you’re doing one of the brain teaser wooden puzzles where you have to slot the pieces together, and once the last piece is in, there’s a ‘click’. It’s that sort of feeling for me.

Your paintings have appeared in several homes we’ve featured. What interests you about the relationship between a work and the space it occupies?

Generally, I make works that respond to each other, all working parts that are slowly put together. The way they sit in my studio feels different to the way they sit together in a gallery, which they exist in until someone responds to them.

It’s interesting to see the synergy between the space and work, or the new life it takes on outside the gallery or studio. It’s a nice little cycle of life.

What do you hope your work gives to a space or the people living with it? I hope it offers the same thing that the works in my family’s home offer me: I see them as markers of time, a living album. They will make me recall a place and time, like a net-positive sort of nostalgia. The works shift and expand in tune with life and changes. Episodic memory is a concept I come back to: a memory that shapes someone or transports them to a moment in time.

What pulls you back to the studio? I don’t like to overthink that. It’s dangerous to get too existential about it. mattarbuckle.com