

RUTH LEARNER explores the knife-sharp geometries of a committed abstractionist.



# JUSTIN ANDREWS



Top: Justin Andrews, *Studio Photograph*, April 2012. Courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

Above: Justin Andrews, *After El*, 2012, acrylic on linen, 70 x 55cm. Courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

Opposite: Justin Andrews, *The Sculptor*, 2012, acrylic on linen, 70 x 55cm. Courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

Justin Andrews' divergence from the formal nature of geometric abstraction comes with a strong sense of its historical lineage. His acknowledgment of the line from Malevich's Black Square through to the work of Australian abstractionist George Johnson, to his contemporary John Nixon, is as a pointer or an index of potentiality, and as a springboard for creating a new terminology. In Andrews' case, this has manifested as an interest in random and chance processes and a concern with temporality and spatiality.

Andrews' recent paintings, *Projector*, appear as elegant vortices of coloured shards, poised in a moment of flight — balancing, intersecting, overlapping and soaring. The charged and concentrated nature of the elements represents something of the process of their creation; in this case, the use of the overhead projector. Andrews places cut-outs that "have been hanging about the studio for years" onto the projector and projects the resulting shapes onto the canvas. This then becomes the blueprint for the painting. Placing the projector further away to create a larger projection, Andrews sets a ground shape and then, moving the projector closer, he copies smaller versions of the same configuration, giving the work its depth.

Each painting only takes a day or so to complete, this fleetness in some ways mirroring the transitory moments he is embodying in the work. Andrews does not deliberate over the arrangement of shapes and limits his palette to leftover paint in his studio. Yet it is with the skilful use of colour saturation and temperature and the complementary colours orange and blue that he creates a unique spatial dynamic.

Andrews' engagement with the constraints of geometric abstraction and processes of chance comes in part from his familiarity with the terrain and the sense, as he puts it, that he is "making something out of nothing ... like alchemy". It is this melding of ideas, experimentation and know-how — the interaction of geometric shape and colour theory — that underpins his practice.

Andrews also draws on what he calls his "personal utopia" — a sense of being consumed by his work and methodology that comes from his childhood in the late 1970s in Melbourne. As a boy he felt compelled to draw, often doing so while his parents slept, setting up a studio in his room and surrounding himself with his drawing materials. In 2002, Andrews' installation *Technician* (Canberra Contemporary Art Space) involved setting up a workspace environment within the gallery, surrounded by his geometric wall drawings. During the show he sat at the workspace and made panel paintings of details of the wall



Top left: Justin Andrews, **States Phase Shift**, 2012, acrylic on linen, 70 x 55cm. Courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

Top right: Justin Andrews, **Transient State**, 2012, acrylic on linen, 70 x 55cm. Courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

Above: Justin Andrews, **Generative Array**, 2012, acrylic on linen, 70 x 55cm. Courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

drawings, revealing his concerns with immersion, temporality and inextricability between art and its process of creation.

In 2003, Andrews graduated from Canberra's NITA School of Art and returned to Melbourne where he became involved in the artist-run space MIR 11, alongside contemporaries Masato Takasaka, Matt Hinkley and Danny Lacy. With the closing of MIR 11, Andrews joined this core group in their collaboration *Inverted Topology*, whose work has shown at galleries including ACCA, Sydney Non Objective and MoMA PS1. The group's interest in breaking down individual art practice through cross-pollination and an exploration of materials and forms using coincidence resonates with Andrews' concerns in making and viewing work as a continuum, as an evolving process-driven language. His abiding focus on temporal and physical spaces, too, is expressed in an ongoing interest in experimental music and an involvement in various sound projects, including John Nixon's music group *The Donkey's Tail*.

Before moving to Canberra to study, Andrews spent three years in Bendigo in country Victoria, where he "was heavily affected by the geological texture of the landscape". Later, in 2005, he spent three years in Mildura and was again affected by the geography and sense of space. These earlier influences culminated in 2008, when Andrews undertook an Australia Council residency in Tokyo.

Andrews immersed himself in the urban density of Tokyo, making "field recordings, a series of photomontages, vector drawings of fictitious interiors based on subway architecture and a

number of ... video works which involved taking fixed-position footage of major intersections seething with people and vehicles". This sense of potentiality and transience was channelled into an exhibition, *Analogue Shift*, at Charles Nodrum Gallery in 2009.

Here, Andrews used a box to shake out offcuts from his sculptures to achieve his arrangements. He then took digital photographs of the arrangements and used these as the blueprint for the paintings, as well as presenting them as discrete works. At times, too, the offcuts were shaken and glued onto already painted canvases, creating a further layer of disconnect, reflecting something of the complex systems and structures underlying urban chaos and fragmentation.

In 2011, Andrews presented a series of paintings, *Systems*, at the La Trobe Visual Arts Centre in Bendigo. These large works involved an elaborate process of assembling wooden offcuts, photographing the constructions, then digitally manipulating, enlarging and transferring the image, which was painted. Andrews spent up to three months on each work, this time painting with exactitude. Again, Andrews configures and reconfigures, immersing himself in a process, here revealing something of the ubiquity and complexity of systems. As with all his work, Andrews draws on the immediate world around him, through his materials, process and experiences, ultimately creating a life of its own. □

*Projector* is showing at Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne, to 21 July 2012.