

-1 The Enigma of S.A.P. (working title) Andrew James Paterson

After the front title, the screen is black. The voices of G and H are audible, as they are approaching their destination for the early evening.

G: Well, H. It looks like we have found the correct address.

H: No argument there, G. I see many of the same people I always see at every art opening.

G: Plus a few fashion mavens. I think there's some money involved here, H.

H: I suspect you are correct, G.

G: Do you know any of these artists?

H: No, and neither do you. We had this conversation this morning, in case you've forgotten.

G: Yes, thanks for reminding me. I have had an exasperating day, and now I want to have fun.

H: Well, G, we are taking our chances here. This is definitely an event. I can smell it already.

G: Well, here we go!

At this point the black screen changes. It is succeeded by a single-frame montage of abstract "paintings".

G&H: Omigod! Serious abstraction!

H: I knew it was becoming fashionable again, but this is unbelievable!

G: And colour-field abstraction to boot.

H: Right. No drips in sight.

G: Not so fast, H. I can see a drip-painting.

H: Yes, but most of these are too mathematical for any dripping.

G: Or any other form of messy excess.

H: Exactly.

G: Hey, H. I don't see any list of artists on the wall here.

H: You're right, G. Maybe there's a list over by the bar. Let's get some drinks.

G: Now you're talking. I've had a truly frustrating day!

Single-frame montage ends here. Now G and H begin reading the Artists' Statement, as they wait for service. Visuals become a three or five framed sequence of pure solid-colours, none of them black or white, and none of them "paintings".

G reads:

S.A.P. would like to welcome you to S.A.P. The artists and the gallery comprise one singular entity. S.A.P. does not believe that art should be evaluated by any criteria other than itself. S.A.P. does not believe in identifying individual artists, whether or not an art-work is made and subsequently exhibited by one or more persons. (G laughs)

H: (takes over)

Here, let me read this.... S.A.P believe that cults of personality distort and distract from art-works themselves. Therefore S.A.P do not reveal their identities to the public. Please enjoy this exhibition, and the many others that will follow. Thank you for your attendance and patronage.

Now the visual strategy changes, so that whenever the speaker changes so does the image. Individual "paintings" shall stay on screen as long as whomever the speaker is speaking. Selected paintings do not represent the particular speaker, although sometimes they will be selected in relation to the discourse. They will always be selected in relation to their predecessors.

G: Well well well. That is quite the mouthful.

H: Now where have I seen this strategy before?

G: Let's see, H. There are and have been collectives where individual contributions are intentionally not credited.

H: True, G. But those artists always reveal themselves publicly. I mean, some of them are consummate self-promoters. Now... I wonder where the price list is.

G: And who takes care of sales procedures?

H: And where do such procedures take place?

J: Hey...G and H.

G: How you doing, J?

J: Hmmm... Drinks are quite pricey, for a start.

H: Well that's not very nice . Is it, G?

G: If you're short then I can get this round, H.

J: You might think they'd be on the house. I mean, this isn't just some cheap storefront one-off art collective. Is it?

H: No, this doesn't smell like any one-off.

G: Why do you say that? I mean, we've read the press statement. Have you read it, J?

J: Oh Jesus. This art shall not be reduced to the identity of its makers. Blah blah blah. Pseudo-collectivism or what?

H: Oh, I think there's something far more complex in play here, J.

J: Maybe yes, maybe no. Let's take the acronym - S.A.P.

G: Sap.

J: Seriously. What does the acronym stand for?

H: And whose acronym is it?

J: Very good, H. Think it over. I have to find K, since I just bought an expensive drink for her.

J moves on.

G: Good. This line-up is finally going somewhere.

H: Get me a Whatever Cold Beer.

G: Two Whatever's The Coldests. Thanks.

H: Thanks, G. Do you see F?

G: F?Yes, over in the northwest corner.

H: Now F is somebody who might know who's behind this exhibition.

G: Like who comprises S.A.P.? Or...do we mean who's the money behind S.A.P.?

H: Both. Let's check out F.

G: Hmmmm.... I saw her a second ago, but now she's moved away. She was talking to L.

H: Oh. ...Well, hopefully we'll bump into F later. Without L.

G: Feeling is mutual.

A server approaches G. and H.

Server: Hors d'oeuvres? (The server can here be represented by a psychedelic "painting".)

H: Oui.

G: Thank you.

Server: They're good, no?

H: Oui. What are they?

Server: Top secret.

G: You might be able to help us. Who are these artists?

H: Who are S.A.P.? What does S.A.P. stand for?

Server: My lips are sealed.

Server moves away.

G: Well, let's actually look at these paintings. If you don't mind, H.

H: What do you mean by that, G. I think they're okay. Although I like the concept behind this exhibition more than the actual exhibition.

G: I'm inclined to agree. Although...I don't think it's just ageing. I've become quite keen on abstractionism.

H: Yes, I have noticed that and ...up until now...I've refrained from asking you why.

G: But now?

H: Yes, Why?

G: It could be my mathematical bent.

H: Or your preference for bent mathematics.

G: Quite so, H. And it could be my love of baroque music.

H: Baroque? I'm surprised there isn't some ghastly string quartet engaged at this opening. This ruse of an event.

G: Ruse? I agree there's a conceit to this exhibition...a belief that anonymity is actually the best form of personality-cult. But the word "ruse" implies subterfuge. I mean, really.

H: Well, G. Perhaps the S in SAP does stand for Subterfuge?

G: Then what about the A and the P?

H: Hmm... Art, Abstract, Pretension?

G: Preposterous?

The server cruises by with more hors d'ouvres. The "psychedelic" painting re-appears.

Server: More hors d'oeuvres?

H: Definitely!

G: Definitely!

H: The acronym, G. What the hell does it stand for?

G: Serous Abstract Painting?

H: Maybe Synthetic Abstract Painting?

G: Maybe we're being too obvious, H. Maybe it's the artists' names.

H: Sue, Alex, and Pafoofnik?

G: But I'm sure there are more than three artists in this exhibition.

H: I think you're right, G. There's one painting that's a one-off.

G: The drippy painting?

H: Exactly, G.

They meet F.

F: The dripper is definitely the odd man out. Well, I'm assuming he's a man.

G: We have to be careful with our assumptions, F.

F: I stand corrected. Hey, good to see you guys. Like what is an art opening without G and H.

H: Ouch. But you must admit, F, that there are a lot of people who've turned out for an opening for artists whom they don't know.

G: Or even recognize the artists' names.

F: Do you know what, guys? Maybe there's something happening at this event that we

just don't know about.

H: You mean a joke that we're not in on?

F: You said it.

F walks away.

G: Seven dollar beer is not a joke, H.

H: But the hors d'oeuvres are superb, G. I mean, they're like the art. No apparent flavour, but immensely satisfying.

G: Whatever. Perhaps somebody's going to make a speech.

H: And spoil the party. I highly doubt it.

G: There is a tradition of strategic camouflage, if you know your art history. Warhol was notorious for sending clones to his openings.

H: Yes, but Warhol was a work of art. A concept, G.

G: So? Perhaps S.A.P. are conceptualist anti-conceptualists.

H: They are so visible because they remain invisible.

G: Exactly, H.

H: Tut tut, G. I think we should get more hors d'oeuvres.

G: Well, here she is. Let's not be running too obviously toward her.

H: Agreed.

Server: Ah, my favourite couple. More hors d'oeuvres?

G&H But of course! (Split-screen here)

Server: I trust you two gentlemen are not driving?

G&H: Of course not!

The split-frame yields to the psychedelic painting and its cousins.

G: Sap. S.A.P stands for sap.

H: I doubt it, G. Such an antiquated word. It's from some stupid Humphrey Bogart movie, back in the nineteen-fourties.

G: Well, H. I beg to disagree. We, and everybody else in this building...

H: ...Which is incidentally yet another art gallery in a neighbourhood that used to encourage social-housing.

G: Good point you're making, H. We are saps. And...as for any gullible collectors here tonight.

H: You are so wrong, G. I would buy several of these paintings...if I had the disposable income.

G: And needed some sort of tax shelter. Or maybe it's just a lifestyle thing. Like the rich acid-heads who propped up Brigit Riley during Swinging London.

H: You should remember your art-history, G.

G: Okay, I'm being just a touch sarcastic. But I think this exhibition is ridiculous. It's not even a painting show. It's a big work of performance art.

H: By a performance artist who is smart enough to remain anonymous. You're too clever by half, G. But you must admit ... the hors d'oeuvres are wonderful. Do you dare to disagree?

G: They are wonderful.

H: And I don't think we need any more.

The images again become edited in a single-frame format, as some music begins to play. G and H stop talking and do some serious looking.

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