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Mitchcock sighed, turned his back on the camera and looked down at the scuffed floor of the set.

'Mitchell,' he said quietly, 'this has got to stop.'

(fade out)

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Chris Bond

'Ungame'
by Penelope Trotter

In the *Penguin, Masters and Slaves* series, shown at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces in 2004, Chris Bond has carefully painted two Penguin book covers whilst presenting the original books in separate display cases. They are painted as part of the *Cult Classic*, an exhibition with the premise that everything in the show comes in cult form.

The books are comparable to medieval scriptures engraved on vellum by scribes. They are painted in so much loving detail that we can see the dog-eared corners, cracks, smudges and stains still intact. The titles have been taken away in order to remove their identity. In painting the book covers Bond likes to think he has preserved them from oblivion. They emerge as artifacts from a parallel civilisation similar to our own.

The most prominent features of his book paintings are the abstract shapes that dominate the book covers, which have been influenced by painters from the modernist period such as Piet Mondrian and Kasimir Malevich. Mondrian and Malevich were both abstract painters who, at the height of their careers, were interested in creating an entirely metaphysical style of art by removing any unnecessary elements to the works. To do this they would concentrate on painting pure blocks of colour that would emanate particular emotions. Once when Kasimir Malevich compressed the whole of the painting into a black square on a white canvas he said 'I feel only night within me.'¹ This is similar to some of the references that Bond makes about his own works – but Bond seems to go a few steps further.

Mondrian, in his abstract works, was interested in the balancing of positive and negative with arrays of abstract shapes and blocks of pure colour. Bond is also interested in this balance between positive and negative, as evidenced in his use of raw linen in his book paintings: to him this represents 'negative space.'² In revealing the raw linen behind the book images, he encourages the form to float in negative space.

There is a second aspect to Bond's artistic practice that

Below: Chris Bond
Gianfranco Morosini's Hygrograph
Detail from *The Hitchcock Feldmar Affair*, Gertrude CAS, 2002



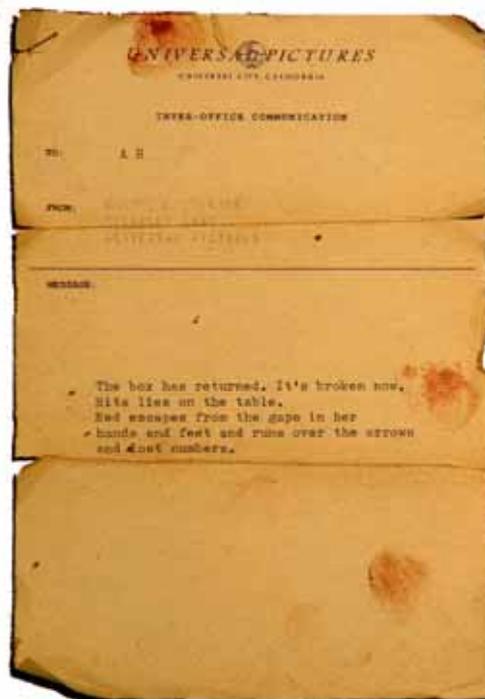
is much more peculiar. Bond uses techniques of method acting and automatic writing to make monologues and paintings of several different alter egos whilst sitting alone in his studio.³ Bond names these his 'fiction' pieces. Two of the images that appear in *Masters and Slaves* are made using this method: *Red Field II 1957* (as Anne Wallace) and *Morton's Wharf 1958* (as Peter Markovich), both of which are abstract depictions of nature. These works appear as vast arrays of tonal contrast and light, and there is a suggestion that they have been constructed via hallucinatory or subconscious means. In Bond's anecdotal works there are even stranger examples of his 'fiction' pieces. In these works Bond entirely enters the frame of the artwork as if it were the space of his own mind.

Below: Chris Bond
Abstract Remnant 0404.2 2004
 Oil on linen

Penguin – Masters and Slaves, Gertrude CAS, 2004



Below: Chris Bond
The last memo from Feldmar to Hitchcock
 Detail from *The Hitchcock Feldmar Affair, 2002*



The first we see of Bond's obsession with Alfred Hitchcock is the work titled, *If it's inside the frame everything should be OK. (Feldmar to Hitchcock, 1953) (2002)*. This piece is presented in the form of a memo written by one of Hitchcock's studio security guards to the film director. At a visual level, the most prominent concern is the dialogue that exists around the most appropriate way of creating a formalist painting. Besides the obvious literal definition, the work also prompts us to wonder that if Hitchcock were interested in committing a murder he could avoid being considered as the perpetrator if he included it within the frame of the cinematic image.

With the invention of an alter ego by the name of Charles Leonard Mitchell, Bond introduces the idea of mistaken identity to his work. The *Charles Leonard Mitchell (as Chris Bond)* works have been created as a means of escaping a structuralist methodology and are the most eerie works in the series. Here Bond assumes the guise of an outsider artist to meticulously and sporadically outline his non-ego's alleged interactions with Alfred Hitchcock. Bond refers to these works as constituting a 'Heart of Darkness',⁴ as Charles Leonard Mitchell's pursuit of Alfred Hitchcock is similar to Marlow's search for Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1917). In these stories, both characters find themselves going on an intense psychological journey because they are bewildered by 'the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from a heart of impenetrable darkness'.⁵

The narrative emerges from works of art therapy made by Charles Mitchell at The Burbank County Hospital in California, where he is in respite after attacking a Universal Pictures security guard. Watercolours of Hitchcock directing his films have dressmaking pins carefully placed around his head – penetrating what would seem to be the impenetrable.⁶ Some of these pins are placed in crucifix formation and threaded with red cotton. Words are typed sporadically, expressing the tortured artist's frame of mind.

It is in his next anecdotal work, titled *The Hitchcock/Feldmar Affair* (2002) that Bond decides to take on the personality of a murderer. More typed notes from Hitchcock's security guard Warren H. Feldmar comprise the installation, but this time they are pieced together to solve the murder of Rita Penhurst. Notes with captions such as 'It can't be a coincidence that I've run out of excuses,' and 'Now listen to me. This is important. The box has a glass face with two arrows and some numbers beneath it, and I see those arrows move sometimes',⁷ outline Feldmar's regression into an acute paranoid state.

Jacques Lacan's 'paranoiac'⁸ has often been referred to and mimicked throughout the history of performance art and modernism, and dates as far back as the paintings of Salvador Dali, as a way of tapping into parts of our subconscious that we often do not accept to be part of ourselves. Lacan's paper presents paranoia as

distinguishable from other forms of delusional disorder because the sufferer is able to 'create for himself a complete and logical systemization of his delusions'.⁹ This is the kind of thing that Bond is simulating in his 'fiction' works.

As we read through Bond's exhibit, Feldmar challenges the science of epistemology in order to try and maintain a grip with reality. From one note to the other, we notice the discolouration of the paper is becoming darker and darker and a plaque at the side of the installation suggests that a gas leak may be what is responsible for Feldmar's madness.

Bond then takes on the alter ego of art critic Anita Bjorklund, who writes a review about Feldmar. This review appears very postmodern but, ironically, we find that it does not make much sense. Bjorklund describes that during Feldmar's regression into madness Hitchcock's secretary Peggy zealously guards each note, or 'the treasures of modernity,' so that they may play some role in the 'afterlife'.¹⁰ We realise that Bond is really speaking of himself and the way that he obsessively guards the treasures of modernity in his own paintings. Thus these 'non-ego,' works could be viewed as a renunciation of the self and an attempt to address the amount of structuralist critique he has put into his paintings. As Bond describes, they are a loosening up of the self conscious and analytic artistic ego.

The next anecdotal work that Bond showed was at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces in November 2002. This is a repetition of the work titled *If it's inside the frame everything should be OK. (Feldmar to Hitchcock, 1953)* (2002), but this time it is presented as part of an ensemble with two other simple *Frame* works. This ensemble includes a small linen covered frame, as well as a semi reflective graphite mirror set into an ornate gold frame. The linen covered frame acts as the purest example of the negative space that Bond refers to when revealing raw linen in his paintings. The semi reflective mirror of Bond's is very shadow like. It stands in strange contrast to the ornate gold frame that encases it, and in a way the golden frame effectively purges the dark aspect of his practice back out of the work. The mirror in this context becomes like the one that Lacan speaks of, as it exposes parts of the self that are unacknowledged or denied by consciousness.¹¹ In Bond's case, his mirror reflects what comes to the surface when he lets go of the constraints of the self-conscious and analytic artistic ego. In this mode we find that aspects of the self are revealed that the artist has no control over.

Even in the most recent works, Bond still combines the metaphysical with ideas gleaned from 'paranoiac' thought processes. This brings us to question the possibility of art as a construct that simply exists as a figment of a person's imagination. In viewing these contrasts between positives and negatives we also realize that Bond's works are not as



Above: Chris Bond
Abstract Remnant 0404.1, 2004
Oil on linen
76 cm x 76 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

detached as they initially seem. It appears that in Bond's practice there also exists the Romantic principle that 'only through acceptance of the soul's dark side can a person become spiritually whole'.¹²

1 Kasimir Malevich cited in George Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution*, George Baraziller, New York, 1995, p.24.

2 Theo Van Doesburg, from *Principles of Neo-Plasticism* cited in Paul Overy *De Stijl*, Studio Vista, London, 1969, p.204.

3 Chris Bond, studio interview, 2002.

4 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1985.

5 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1985, p. 79.

6 *ibid.*

7 Chris Bond (as Anita Bjorklund), *Dyrythmic endgame scenarios in the memoranda of Warren H.Feldmar*, 2002, p2.

8 Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the "I" as revealed in psychoanalytic experience,' (1949) in *Ecrits: A selection trans A. Sheridan*, Norton, 1949, pp.1-7 & Lacan, "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis," in *Ecrits* pp.8-29.

9 Marina Scharf, *Liberation Through Art: Dada and Surrealism*, The Open University, Sussex, 1976, p.70.

10 Bond (as Anita Bjorklund), 2002, p.2.

11 Lacan, 'The mirror stage' and (1949) 'Aggressivity in *Ecrits*, pp.1-29.

12 Ken Johnson, 'Cindy Sherman and the Anti Self: An Interpretation of Her Imagery,' *Arts Magazine*, Vol.62, No.3, 1987, p.47.

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