

Chris Bond

Artist Statement

*The Skeleton Field*

Nellie Castan Gallery 2012

*The Skeleton Field* marks a return to painted books after a long hiatus.

Nine hardback books featuring the life and work of Jackson Pollock are the source material for these intensely detailed works, each of them stripped back monochrome replicas of the originals.

The painted covers of these works feature imagery typical of the art biography genre – artist standing in front of work, artist at work, and the works themselves, every drip painted in a photorealistic manner with multiple tones of a single colour. The imagery is instantly recognizable, part of modern mythology, but Pollock's name, along with the author's name, subtitle and publisher logo have been completely removed.

Constructed from linen, canvas and cardboard, the surfaces of these painted books carry exaggerated damage from their imagined use as actual objects – marks, creases, tears and stains disrupt the carefully painted surfaces. Yet the visible edges of the internal pages, constructed of layers of canvas, are crisp and clean.

These works are blanks, black holes, voids, part of the history of reductive abstraction, where the erasure of content allows the formal qualities of an object to rise to the surface, to become explicit.

Why Pollock? There's very little overlap between his working processes and mine, but despite that, his single mindedness holds an enormous appeal. It's the 'heroic' ability to block out the world and make work that only addresses itself which is a mainstay of Formalism, of making a work of art outside an historical or conceptual context, and it is that which binds our critically distant practices together.

My interest in Formalism, in particular to the writings of Clement Greenberg - a critical figure in the public defence of Pollock - stretch back to art school days in the 1990s, where I painted monochrome Monet's from calendars (removing the dates), and monochrome images of Marcel Duchamp's works from art history books (removing the text). Like the painted books in *The Skeleton Field*, these works attempted to reduce the possibility of 'reading' - by removing context through the erasure of text, flattening the image by blurring and avoiding texture, and finally reducing the imagery to a single colour.

The hardback book is a beautifully redundant form. Historically its authority was held in its bulk, its expense, its inability to be broken. The dust jacket, by contrast, is lightweight, flimsy, easily damaged – a throw away. My painted books amplify this distinction, to the extent where the covers seem incongruous, misfit.

Regardless of the non-fictional nature of the hardback book source material, the works in *The Skeleton Field* are fictional. They are fabricated beings that are stuck inside my world, where the struggle for meaning, purpose and existence causes them to crumble and decay.