

Cover stories

Paintings that blur fact and fiction are the real deal, writes **Phil Brown**



BRUSH OFF ... Chris Bond's paintings of art magazine covers feature his fictional artists Ev Dennis, Jarvis Extract, Judi Ronson and Tor Rasmussen

Reports of the death of painting have turned out to be premature, so let's hope the same is true of future projections about books and print in general. It would be a sad state of affairs if Chris Bond's photorealistic paintings of fictional art magazines eventually became museum pieces reminding us of a lost world.

His exhibition *The Last Days of Painting* can be read as a wry commentary on such matters from an artist who confesses that he loves books and magazines and would be crushed if everything just went online.

"So I am painting with a sense of loss," Chris explains. "I still buy books and CDs. I love the presence of print, the tactile experience of that, and the wear and tear that goes with it."

The Melbourne-based artist's canvases feature realistic crease lines and even coffee stains, which gallery director Ryan Renshaw says enhance these "beautifully painted" works.

It's difficult to explain what's so appealing about paintings that purport to be something else. One thinks of Rene Magritte's painting of a pipe: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (this is not a pipe). No, it's a painting. In the same way these are not magazines, they are

paintings. But the details belie that claim to a degree as slivers of canvas stacked together give the three-dimensional impression that these are real publications we are looking at. It's all a bit of a game, and a most enjoyable one, cerebrally speaking.

The artist confesses to being something of a Luddite, but he has used the internet extensively to help compose these works. The fictional periodical he has created is called *Painting* and there are eight editions in all, each from 1999, a year memorable for its "sense of dread and impending doom".

Each edition focuses on a fictional artist. There's Nelson Jakes, Ursula Weiss, Patricia Bolt and, among others, the delightfully named Jarvis Extract. Chris says he has had the names rolling around in his mind for some time, a hangover from characters created when he was thinking of writing hard-boiled crime fiction. They were created with a nod to Raymond Chandler.

The imagery for each work was gleaned from using Google Images. The artist fed in the made-up names and whatever imagery he found, he would use in his works. They are mostly abstract, but there are hints of representation in some, most blatantly the one that features an image of Jarvis Extract.

Well, there is no Jarvis Extract, actually, but using that name Chris turned up an image of a homeless man whom he has turned into the fictional artist. The edition dedicated to the equally fictional artist Tor Rasmussen features a landscape with a river running through it. There was an actual Tor Rasmussen in this photo. Chris has removed the figure and blurred the landscape.

"I've tried to limit the amount I manipulate that imagery," Chris says. "Some of the results were very literally interpreted. The portrait of Jarvis Extract, for example, was painted photorealistically, while other imagery demanded some form of adjustment to match my imagined personality of the artist."

Conceptually, it's an interesting show, but the actuality is just as fascinating and satisfying. These paintings are quite beautiful, both as paintings and artefacts. I only hope we won't be looking at them many years hence and telling our kids: "This is what books and magazines used to look like." Heaven forbid.

CHRIS BOND: THE LAST DAYS OF PAINTING, until Jun 23, Wed-Sat, 11am-5pm, Ryan Renshaw Gallery, 137 Warry St, Fortitude Valley, ph: 3666 0350. www.ryanrenshaw.com.au