

THE PIPER GALLERY

Martin McGinn – Volume I

Friday 11th January – Friday 8th February 2013

The Piper Gallery is proud to present *Volume I*, recent works by Martin McGinn that treat art history books as still lives and explore the idea of a reproduction of a reproduction. Looking at the distance placed between a viewer and an original work of art, his works invite a re-assessment of history, returning a reproduction to an original oil on canvas.

McGinn explores the complex association between contemporary painting and art history, producing curiously playful reproductions that successfully alter the context, scale and colour of their more familiar original forms. *Volume I* presents books painted from life in an eminently traditional way, using traditional ideas. Some works also show pages from books that have been screwed up; McGinn has vandalised these books before transforming them into something to be revered. The works are fresh and dimensional, turning still life on its head while analysing McGinn's own relationship with art history.

In his catalogue essay to accompany the exhibition, Richard Cork comments, *'The omnipresence of art reproductions lies at the centre of Martin McGinn's fascinating new work... McGinn scrutinises [books] with as much penetrating zeal as other still-life painters might devote to flowers, vessels or food. Relying on traditional skills and eschewing all computerised ingenuity, he isolates art-history books, monographs on individual practitioners and substantial exhibition catalogues in expanses of empty space. But there is nothing predictable about the work he produces.'*

Having begun painting novels (one of his early works includes a copy of *Girl with a Dragon Tattoo*), McGinn progressed to art books using art history in an individualised and tangential way. His paintings appear aesthetically simple but have complex undertones comparable with the 17th century vanitas that contained symbolic objects referencing the inevitability of death and transience of life. Containing few objects, vanitas were often sombre compositions of great power. In the same way, McGinn's works have multiple resonances, forcing us to look at that which we may not normally consider. There is an amazing incidental detail in his books with their dirty paper and curled edges.

In a painting entitled *Art History's Shadow* McGinn inspects a survey of art history casting a shadow on the wall on which it leans. This prompts us to question the meaning of the work - how can one painting be about the whole of art history? But, looking at the painting of this tatty book, we are also forced to ask whether McGinn is suggesting that art history itself is falling apart. Or, is this just a much-cherished and dog-eared catalogue?