

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## MARY ELLEN BARTLEY

Photographs

August 2012



*Diebenkorn Blues (Blue Books)*, 2004  
archival pigment print, 28 x 35 in (image), edition of 5



*Untitled #44 (Paperbacks)*, 2009  
archival pigment print, 18 x 27 in (image), edition of 7

From August 2 through September 3, The Drawing Room in East Hampton is pleased to present the gallery's first exhibition of photographs Mary Ellen Bartley. The show encompasses three recent bodies of work in which Bartley composes views of her collected books. Various huddled in stacks, opened at their spines, or assembled in lateral or towering configurations, the volumes fade in and out of focus in compelling still lifes bathed in subtle and evocative light. In each series, Bartley reexamines the physical and metaphoric potential of her subject and creates nuanced color photographs that hover at the intersection of still life and abstraction.

Bartley's formal concerns as a photographer are informed by her keen knowledge of art history and reverence for masters of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century painting. The earliest photograph on view, *Diebenkorn Blues* (2004), is a monumental image of green and blue clothbound books taken with a large format camera. This composition of clustered forms both flattens into geometric abstraction and draws the viewer into a deep, spatial midnight. Captured at twilight, this and other works from the *Blue Books* series constitute Bartley's homage to color field painting. The palette here is saturated in painterly blues so rich and pigmented they conjure memories of Mark Rothko's stained canvases and the infinite space implied by their diffuse margins.

The muted colors and minimalist sensibility in Bartley's *Paperbacks* suggest an appreciation for Giorgio Morandi, whose chalky-hued still lifes embody timelessness and tranquility. Spines of pale paperbacks silhouetted against cool neutral grounds stretch upward and outward, devoid of text and infused with soft light. Each composition is imbued with the poetry of silence, an ode to literature as philosophical refuge from the cacophony of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. Inferences to gradual temporal shifts emerge as Bartley arranges and rearranges her modest subjects. Still, time seems to hover within these images that have been stripped of any narrative.

In her most recent work, Bartley mines fresh compositional opportunities by framing close up views of photography books splayed open or propped upright. The highly abstracted *Standing Open* photographs explore the potential of depth of field, bringing the clarity of a page edge in the

(over)

foreground into crisp focus while imagery on interior pages dissolves into a suggestive blur. This series also allows Bartley to gently signal to her viewers some of her sources for inspiration, from the British pioneer of photography William Henry Fox Talbot to the innovative contemporary artist Hiroshi Sugimoto.

Bartley's gentle use of light and shadow create an atmosphere of reflection, solitude, and intimacy. Each photograph communicates a longing for the materiality of books, reminding us of the tactility of the object – evermore fleeting in the world of e-books and digital media.

A New York City native, Mary Ellen Bartley earned a BFA at Purchase College. Since her move from New York to Eastern Long Island several years ago, she has received numerous awards, including recent honors from Photolucida Critical Mass, Houston Center for Photography and Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton where she will have a solo show in 2014.

Gallery hours: Monday – Saturday 10-6; Sunday 11-5  
For further information and reproduction quality images, please contact Janet Goleas at 631.324.5016.