

MARY ELLEN BARTLEY

May 20 – June 27, 2022

New Photographs



Angelico, 2022, 13 x 18 inches



La Nature Morte, 2022, 18 3/4 x 15 inches

The Drawing Room is pleased to present **Mary Ellen Bartley: New Photographs**, on view from May 20 through June 20, 2022. The exhibition features photographs from four series: *Blue Books*, *Reading November*, *Split Stacks* and *Morandi's Books*.

Celebrated for her nuanced explorations of the printed book, Mary Ellen Bartley has a keen interest in the still life genre that has inspired a body of work rich in metaphor, pictorial depth and tactility. The arrangements she creates exude simplicity while suggesting, with quiet insistence, the layered histories of each volume. Bartley's sensitivity to the formal properties of her subject has stimulated ongoing experimentation with innovative techniques that continue to expand the range of her imagery.

In *Morandi's Books*, Bartley draws on her recent experience as artist in residence at the home and atelier of Italian artist Giorgio Morandi, whose work has been a source of inspiration from the beginning of her practice. When her 2020 stay in Bologna was cut short due to the pandemic, she returned to her Sag Harbor studio and explored how to expand the project while restricted from traveling back to Morandi's library. She eventually embarked on a series of interventions using the original images she had made in 2020, re-photographing them after integrating paper, vellum and aged glassine book fragments from her own library. The results are subtle trompe l'oeil vignettes that engage and confound the viewer as they bridge the distance between here and there, then and now, and before and after.

Recently Bartley also returned to and reinvigorated her *Reading November* series, presenting clusters of bound volumes in each image organized around the central concepts of color and composition. Employing long exposures in autumnal light, she draws attention to the books' spines and dyed page edges as they merge into up, down, and sideways stacks. Emerging from darkness, their colorful top stains, headcaps, and aged bindings create prismatic grids that dominate the foreground.

In the series *Blue Books*, clothbound texts are wrapped in dense hues of blue. Their covers are variously pristine, stained or frayed, revealing storied histories. Bartley has a profound understanding of depth of field, and here the illusion of cut and collaged pictorial planes is achieved by the precise alignment of the books captured in the camera's lens. The assembled books recede and move forward with startling tangibility. With natural light, she harnesses deep space to such a degree that each book resonates within the assemblage as tonal shifts propel the objects through an inky twilight.



Blue Books #13, 2021, 15 x 20 inches

The playful group of *Split Stacks* examines the dense materiality of the book in motifs that rise into totemic piles the artist splits in two photographically and conjoins at a fictitious center. Here, Bartley's tongue-in-cheek towers seem to share a common spine as well as an inside joke—the stacks appear to be sculptures, yet they exist only in photographs. Like teetering monoliths, the gravity-defying structures are tenuous yet resolute.

Mary Ellen Bartley was born in New York, NY and received her BFA from Purchase College, SUNY. Her photographs are held in collections across the United States and have been exhibited at The Walker Art Center, the Houston Center for Photography, the Parrish Art Museum and the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts. Recognized for her responses to unique libraries, Bartley completed a site-specific project at the Watermill Center in 2015 entitled *Reading Robert Wilson*, which was accompanied by a “book of books” and led to her 2017 residency and installation at The Queens Museum. She has also been awarded residencies at the Penumbra Foundation, the Pollock Krasner Study Center, and the Museo Morandi in Bologna, Italy. Her recent residency at The Church in Sag Harbor fostered the creation of much of the new work presented in this exhibition.



Yellow Stack, 2021, 21 x 16 inches

Hours: Thursday through Monday 11-5 & by appointment

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