

Monochrome Fields

Monochromatic works of art have been reoccurring in artists' oeuvres for nearly a century, from Alexander Rodchenko's triptych *Pure Colors: Red, Yellow, Blue* to James Turrell's more recent *skyspaces*. *Monochrome Fields* folds itself into this tradition, albeit through a limited palette of color paper available through a particular retail store. Transforming the ordinary source material, off-the-shelf sheets of blank color paper, establishes an ironic connection between mass-produced commodities culled from consumer culture and the aura of originality generally associated with paintings and other works of art. Each sheet pulled from a pile of commercially available standard-sized paper would seem to be identical and not worthy of deeper contemplation. However, using a high-resolution scanner to transmit light through them, as opposed to recording light that reflects off of their surface, reveals each sheet's unique fiber structure and brings their aesthetic qualities to light. The final selection of colors are not based on any subjective criteria, beyond purchasing the 8 ½ by 11 inch paper from a single store and the scanner's ability to project light through the paper; yet particular colors will, nonetheless, have specific associations for individual viewers.

In an earlier project titled *Art as Paper as Potential: Giving/Receiving* I took 365 blank sheets of white paper as source material, one for each day of the year. In some respects, this project simplified my practice as an artist down to the least common denominator; that is, it focused my attention on blank sheets of white paper. The choice of standard, letter-size paper—a ubiquitous surface that generally functions as a carrier of words and other types of information—allowed the work to address more than visual art. When I began *Art as Paper as Potential: Giving/Receiving* it was not my intention to directly reference or confront the history of monochromatic painting, but sometimes what begins as a simple, straightforward idea begins to encompass much more. *Monochrome Fields* continues this exploration with the modest reintroduction of color; the stark emptiness of a blank white canvas is replaced by—begins and ends—a series of monochromatic color fields. Additionally, a careful consideration of scale further connects the final pieces to historical and contemporary abstract painting. Each scanned sheet of paper generates two prints; each sheet is doubled, so to speak, by simply turning it over. The view from one side is represented by a large-format print, while the other side is reproduced at a more modest 1:1 ratio.

Another objective in producing *Monochrome Fields* is to remain engaged in the dialogue surrounding the meaning of materials in contemporary artistic practice. The process of scanning the sheets of paper as if they are film transparencies reveals the interiors of what are generally considered as two-dimensional surfaces, thus calling attention to their three-dimensional nature as ultra-thin rectangular objects. In photographic terms, each sheet of paper functions like a piece of film, the referent to which the final image is derived and visually connected. After a subtle manipulation of the resulting digital files—the intrinsic patterns determined by the unique fiber structure of each sheet of paper is exaggerated by increasing the contrast of the original scans—the temporary immateriality of the bits of data, once again, materialize as a series of tactile pigment prints on paper. The final prints end up being as distinct as the individual sheets of paper used as source material. Lastly, the digital environment through which the information passes provides a contemporary context that has rapidly become commonplace across a variety of disciplines and industries. The material-to-digital-to-material transformation allows *Monochrome Fields* to transcend the objectness associated with modernist painting, while adding another layer to the enduring fascination, perhaps obsession, with solitary colors in the relatively recent history of art.

My recent interest in blank sheets of paper has evolved over many years, and in hindsight, is the logical result of my earlier manipulations of off-the-rack text and image filled pages. All of these projects address the intersection of fine art and popular culture by manipulating various forms of commercially available, readymade paper products. *Monochrome Fields* is an homage to past monochromatic works of art, a sincere desire to engage on conceptual and aesthetic levels with this rich history. It is an examination of the surprisingly uniqueness of mass-produced commodities, specifically in regard to the tangible and malleable qualities of paper products. Finally, this work is a reflection upon the material nature of paper in a digital age. *Monochrome Fields* advances an ongoing body of work that examines the intersection of high and low art within a consumer-driven society. In the future, paper may be used less and less as it becomes just another antiquated material, yet some of us will refuse to completely discard it for a digital surrogate. Instead, like the reoccurrence of monochromatic works of art, I will do the responsible thing: recycle.