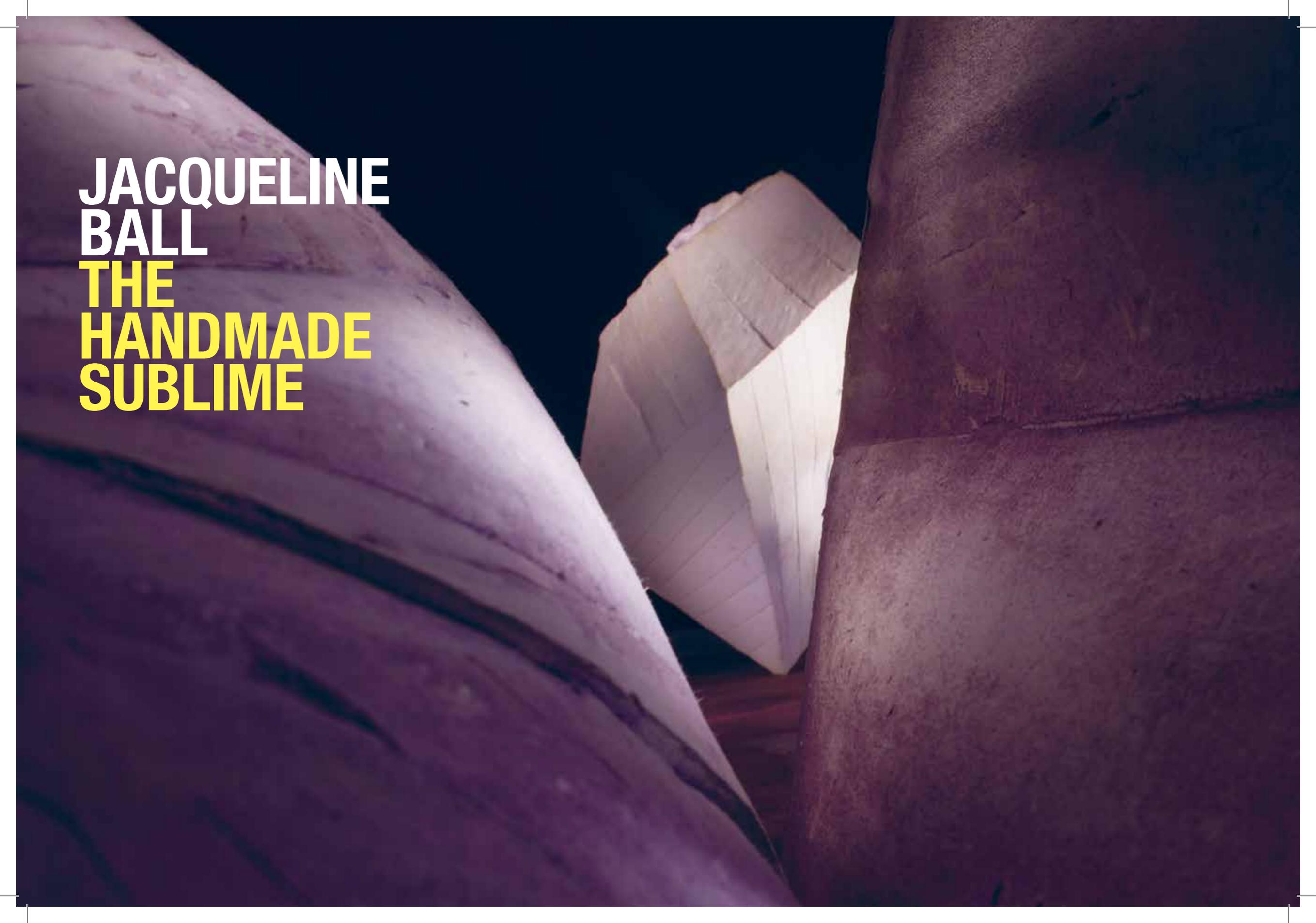


PRIMAVERA
2013
YOUNG
AUSTRALIAN
ARTISTS



**JACQUELINE
BALL
THE
HANDMADE
SUBLIME**

JACQUELINE BALL THE HANDMADE SUBLIME

The impressive scale and formal dynamism of Jacqueline Ball's photographs hook the viewer straightaway. As we move closer and more of the detail becomes clear, we see materials curve, fold and crumble, suggesting both natural and architecturally outlandish forms. It's hard to tell exactly what we're looking at. All sense of scale is lost without a familiar point of reference, and, although at times a material might seem faintly recognisable, ambiguity is carefully orchestrated within the works. It's difficult to discern inside from outside, the colossal from the minute. Her work remains a mystery.

Although Ball's works are large-scale photographs, they are so materially rich that the 'flatness' of photography is easily forgotten, surpassed by the sculptural qualities found within the frame. Not unlike artists such as Thomas Demand and Saskia Olde Wolbers (Wolbers being a critical influence), Ball carefully constructs models in her studio out of materials such as clay, plaster, wax, cardboard and metal, which she then photographs or films. The process, however, is far from simple. There is a great deal of thinking behind every step: every surface is meticulously considered, readjusted and shot multiple times to achieve formal tension in the image.¹ This wrangling between artist, materials and camera produces striking results as light softly bounces from some surfaces to bring them forward or recedes from others to emphasise certain textures and create depth. Indeed, like all photographers, Ball uses light as a subject – but she pushes it so far that it becomes almost a 'special effect'. The depth of field is also skilfully manipulated, softening and sharpening when necessary to achieve abstractly theatrical results.

The series Ball produced for *Primavera 2013, Fluctuate #1–8* (2013), consists of eight large photographs (140 x 210 cm each) printed on photo rag; they are displayed together, unframed, and double-hung on the wall. The way the individual images create an overall composition is an important aspect of her work. She often creates works that specifically address characteristics of the space in which they are to be displayed. The scale, image ratio and overall grid composition of these eight works, for example, is tailored to a specific gallery wall. In this sense, rather than the photographs being discrete works, they extend outside the frame due to Ball's use of scale. The images collectively announce their architectural presence, both internally through their subject matter and externally in how they engage with the walls and floors of the gallery. The size of each image in *Fluctuate #1–8*, for example, is based on an enlarged domestic doorway.²

Although the composition of each image in the series is unique and the textures varied, they are all tonally consistent. Red, purple and pink tones, in combination with curved, organic forms, suggest bodily qualities, creating a visual tension when contrasted against structures with sharper angles and geometric forms.

As we gather from the works' highly constructed nature, fiction is a crucial element of Ball's practice. Clearly present in this work is her interest in 'post-apocalyptic narratives, cultural artefacts, archaeological discoveries, and old world expeditions into unknown territories'.³ Her photographs are so enigmatic they act like entry points into alternative realities, allowing for an open-ended experience that encourages fantastical thought. In *Fluctuate #1*, for example,

we peer into a tunnel or larynx-like gorge which opens up onto a darker space filled with sharp, triangular peaks – like we're performing a laparoscopy into an unknown, part organic, part constructed entity. Other images from the series look like the interior of a cave, with massive resting monoliths and stalactites suspended from above, or like ancient abandoned temples either decaying or untouched.

The powerful, even awe-inspiring, nature of Ball's constructions is reminiscent of 19th-century Romantic painting, in which artists used the epic force of nature as an expression of the sublime. A well-known example of this is Caspar David Friedrich's painting *The Monk by the Sea* (1808–10). There's also a certain darkness and peril in the works that is suggestive of Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime, in which the imagination is moved to awe and instilled with horror by what is 'dark, uncertain, and confused'.⁴ The sublime may inspire horror, but one receives pleasure in knowing that the perception is a fiction – a sort of negative pleasure that derives from the dual emotional quality of fear and attraction. What Ball's deliberate ambiguity does is to reject an easy resolution of this binary; because we don't know where we are, her constructions remain as unsettling questions. The fact that their massive size looms over us makes them doubly troubling in this regard.

With her careful control of such effects, it's no wonder that Ball has a keen interest in photography's constructed nature. She cites Blair French's take on Pat Brassington (also a key influence) as being an apt summary of what drives her practice: '[photography] is in fact an opaque medium with its own material qualities. It abstracts and distorts its source material. It is an art of fabrication, a construction...'⁵

Ball has really made this zone her own, making us simultaneously believe in and doubt photography as a machine of realism. In doing so, her work charts the tension between photography's truth value and its status as a tool for the imagination. In a sense, then, she not only highlights the artifice of all modes of representation but also emphasises the relativity in how we perceive the world.

Through her work, small clumps of material can become colossal forms and mysterious ancient caves – a universe can fit in your hand.

Iván Muñoz Reed

1_ Suggested in an email conversation with Robert Cook, 6 June 2013

2_ *Primavera 2013* Media Release

3_ Artist's Statement

4_ Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Published by J. J. Tourneisen, 1792, first published 1756

5_ French, Blair, 'Pat Brassington' in Daniel Palmer and Blair French, *Twelve Australian Photo Artists*, 2009, Piper Press, Sydney, p.13

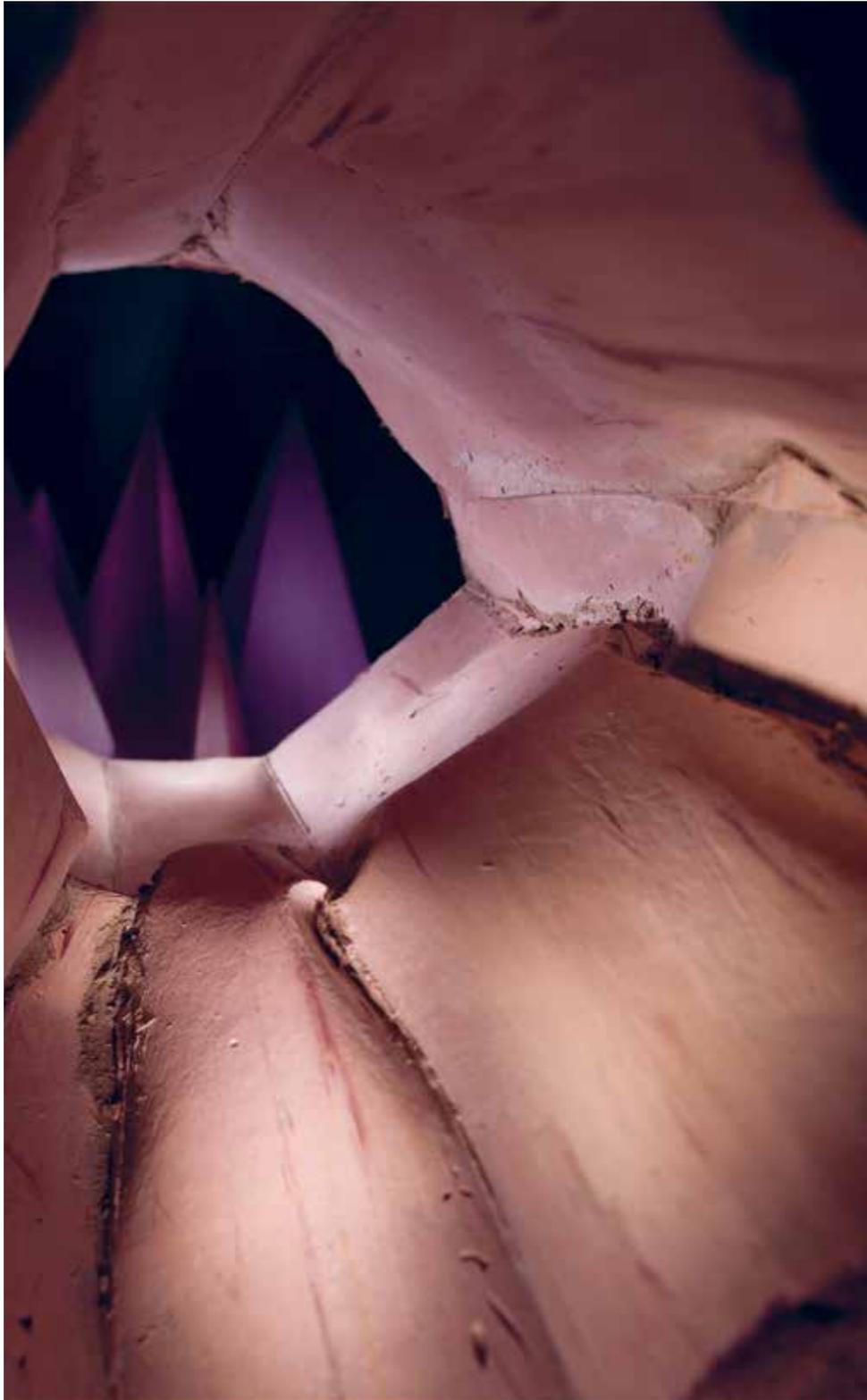
Previous pages:
Jacqueline Ball
Fluctuate #5 2013
photographic print on
305gsm Hahnemühle
archival photo rag
140 x 210 cm



Left:
Jacqueline Ball
Fluctuate #4 2013
photographic print on
305gsm Hahnemühle
archival photo rag
210 x 140 cm

Right:
Jacqueline Ball
Fluctuate #8 2013
photographic print on
305gsm Hahnemühle
archival photo rag
210 x 140 cm





Left:
Jacqueline Ball
Fluctuate #1 2013
photographic print on
305gsm Hahnemühle
archival photo rag
210 x 140 cm

Right:
Jacqueline Ball
*A Collection of Organised
Spaces #46* 2011
inkjet print on
archival rag
176 x 120 cm

Below:
Jacqueline Ball
*A Collection of Organised
Spaces #29* 2010
inkjet print on
archival rag
192 x 120 cm

