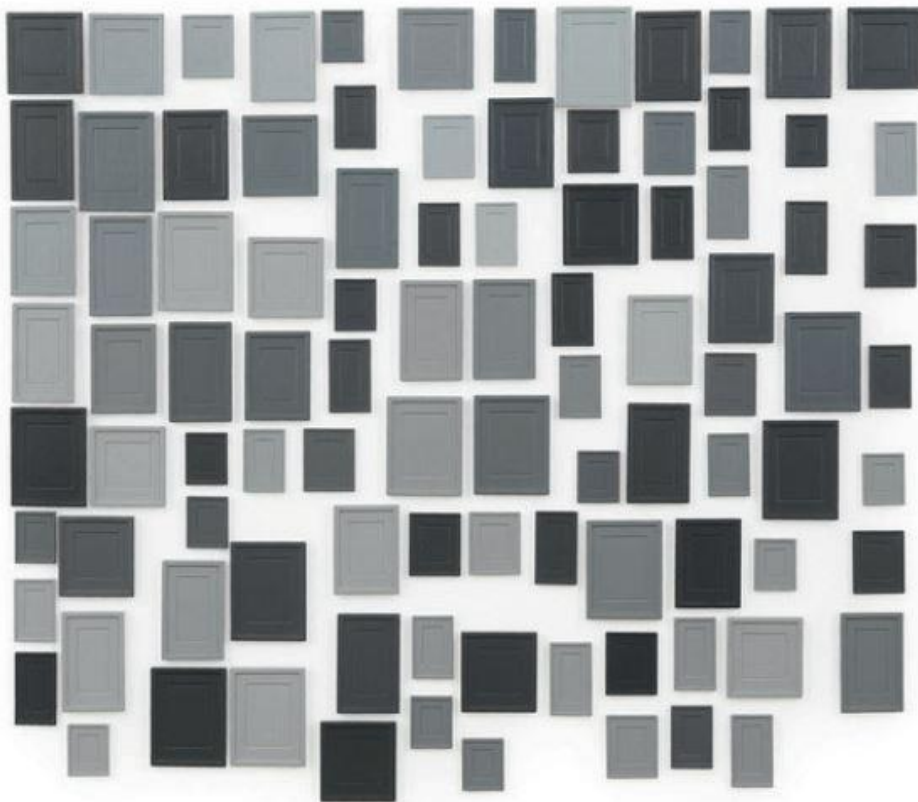


Look at Allan McCollum's work *Plaster Surrogates* shown at the beginning of this chapter and explain its relationship to Modernist art and theory.



Allan McCollum, *96 Plaster Surrogates*, 1988, (enamel on solid-cast hydrostone; in 96 parts)
© Bridgeman Images

Plaster Surrogates are copies of the original *Surrogate Paintings* that McCollum made in 1978. The originals were made from wood and museum board, glued together and painted in multiple layers to imitate paintings in frames. The *Plaster Surrogates* are made from gypsum, cast in the mould of the original *Paintings* and then painted with layers of mono-chrome paint (McCollum Series Descriptions).

The word “surrogate” is important in this piece; according to the Oxford Dictionary, a surrogate is “a substitute, proxy, replacement, stand-in”. In this case, they are created as a “substitute” for a painting. *Plaster Surrogates* then, are replacements for the replacement pictures, cast in gypsum and replicated many times over. If the *Surrogate Paintings* were replacements for “real” artwork, then the plaster versions take on a whole new meaning in terms of cultural significance, bringing together the modern concept of mass production and the cultural significance that pictures have to people. As McCollum put it himself, “I was

interested in what our needs are in looking at a painting, I don't know if it's a human need but there is something that drives us to want to make them and to look at them." (Robert, E., 2001). How has our culture, and particularly the culture of abundance, affected our need to make and look at pictures, to keep hold of our past.

Comment [WU1]: ? not in bibliography

Comment [WU2]: good

From a Modernist perspective, the *Plaster Surrogates* are pushing the boundaries of and rejecting the standards of art in the past, as a modernist artist would be expected to do. They are an exploration in new ways of expressing the culture of art. Since the surrogates do not actually contain any pictures within their frames, they allow the viewer to create their own meaning around them, while calling to attention the type of framing and placement that would have been common in an "every day" household – making the "everyday" more visual in art was another part of modernism, as the "everyday" became the subject rather than religious or historic figures and scenes (MoMA, online).

Comment [WU3]: yes, but...

Their placement can be changed depending on the location and the exhibition, but their shape and their multitude call to mind the hallways and living rooms of most homes, where pictures of meaning and significance are kept on display for those who live there and those who visit. They are part of the identity of the home. Since these surrogates are blank, except for their paint, identity can be placed upon them by the viewer without the artist dictating to us what emotions we should feel. What I found interesting was that they are all in portrait; as if they could hold the image of some loved one long passed. McCollum also mentions this in his interviews, when asked if it was his intention to create the surrogates that still held "personality"; "that was my intention: to choose the portrait shape rather than the landscape shape. It's the shape of canvas we use in depicting a person". He stated that he did not want to "make a specific painting and have that represent all paintings" he wanted to represent what paintings *mean* to people, individually. (Allanmccollum.net, 2019).

Comment [WU4]: Interesting point

Comment [WU5]: You have already made this point, it is not a good idea to restate something unless it is vital to do so

Comment [WU6]: Interesting observation. Not often commented on by other students.

All of my research so far on Modernism has been focused on Painting. As deDuve wrote in *The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas*, "sculpture never had to fear it's proximity to painting" and therefore I hadn't approached sculpture in my studies. With *Plaster Surrogates*, the artwork really straddles the boundaries between painting and sculpture. They are sculptures of paintings; in fact they are copies of sculptures of paintings. How does this affect their association with Modern Art and Theory?

Comment [WU7]: I think you mean Modernist Art here.

Greenberg's theory of modernist art says that it is "the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence" (DeDuve, 1996). With that in mind, I find myself questioning whether McCollum is using sculpture to criticise sculpture, or using sculpture to criticise painting, or if he is criticising at all. The answer is that he is working slightly beyond the boundaries of Greenberg's theory; I think, as he uses the methods of *both* sculpture (plaster, casting) and the methods of painting (layers of paint) to ask questions of us about the role of images in our culture.

Comment [WU8]: I think a long way beyond and that is one of the things he is critiquing.

Another facet of this work is the monochrome. In the image above, there are 96 pieces which are all painted varying tones of black or white. While it might appear "mass produced" in that way, they are actually all individual pieces that look similar, but are never exactly the same. I think that this speaks to us of humanity in general; even in the birth of the Modern age, with mass production and mass consumption, we are all still individual people at the end of the day. The Tate Museum talks about monochrome in modernist art as having two purposes; the first was to communicate "spiritual purity", exploring the ideas of total abstraction,

Comment [WU9]: Is he dealing with mass production and consumerism do you think?

