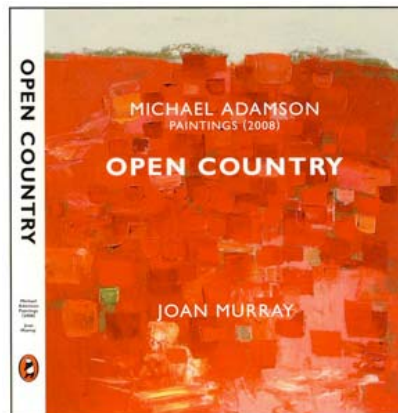


QUILL & QUIRE

CANADA'S MAGAZINE OF BOOK NEWS AND REVIEWS



Canada's newest art book press

By Danielle Ng-See-Quan

Michael Adamson is best known as a contemporary abstract painter, but the Toronto artist has now added the title of publisher to his CV with the debut of Panda Group, a new small press focused on fine art titles and monographs. Adamson came up with the idea for Panda Group last March, after a serendipitous encounter at a party with noted art curator and critic Joan Murray. "From across the room, Joan Murray caught my eye and came over," says Adamson. "She said, 'My next book is about you.'" Murray wanted to do a book about the first 10 years of Adamson's painting career. "The challenge was going to be finding a publisher, because this is really dark times for Canadian art publishing," says Adamson. "Having no idea what it took to make a book, I thought, 'I can do this.'" He raised the start-up capital through fundraising and selling his own art. The debut title, *Open Country*, collects almost 200 photographs of Adamson's work, and was a collaboration between Adamson and Murray. A quick look at the Panda Group logo reveals strong similarities to the classic Penguin logo, and Adamson acknowledges that he was strongly inspired by Penguin Group. In fact, he is a long-time collector of early edition Penguin imprints, owning 1,400 pieces from as early as the 1930s. "The Panda logo is a totally non-ironic, loving tribute," says Adamson, adding that "it's not designed to fool people into thinking it's a Penguin product." The plan is for Panda to publish one or two hardcover titles annually, but also a couple of works in paperback: possibly art-related fiction, biographies, or criticism. The next project is a collaboration with postmodern artist Joanne Tod, who is painting portraits of the first 100 Canadian soldiers to have died in the war in Afghanistan. Panda does not employ any full-timers - Adamson says the house takes a collaborative, project-by-project approach - and there is currently no distributor lined up for *Open Country*. Adamson is selling the title through Panda's office and the Moore Gallery. "It is a passion-driven, moonlight operation," he says. "I want to be really careful that we don't get obligated to keep the machine running even if we don't have titles."