



Blood Pressure (2011), colored pencil and graphite on paper, 77.5 x 70 inches

BANNISTER GALLERY

John O'Connor: Self-Avoiding Walks

Nov. 10 - Dec. 10, 2021



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Conspiracy Shape (2018), Graphite and colored pencil on paper, 69.5 x 49.5 inches

John O'Connor: Self-Avoiding Walks

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 10 - FRIDAY, DEC. 10, 2021

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Hitchcock's Rope (2018), Graphite and colored pencil on paper, 48.75 x 36.75 inches

John O'Connor: Self-Avoiding Walks

John J. O'Connor was born in Westfield, MA and received an MFA in painting and an MS in Art History and Criticism from Pratt Institute in 2000. He attended The MacDowell Colony, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, was a recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Grant in Painting, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant, and the Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation Studio residency.

O'Connor has been in numerous exhibitions abroad, including The Lab (Ireland), Martin Asbaek Gallery (Denmark), Neue Berliner Raume (Germany), Rodolphe Janssen Gallery (Brussels); and in the US at Andrea Rosen Gallery, Pierogi Gallery, Arkansas Arts Center, Weatherspoon Museum, Ronald Feldman Gallery, Marlborough Gallery, White Columns, Museum of Contemporary Art in Baltimore, the Queens Museum, and the Tang Museum. His exhibitions have been reviewed in Bomb Magazine, The New York Times, Artforum, the Village Voice, Art Papers, and Art in America.

O'Connor presented his work in discussion with Fred Tomaselli at The New Museum, and his work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Weatherspoon Museum, Hood Museum, Southern Methodist University, and the New Museum of Contemporary Art. A catalogue spanning 10 years of O'Connor's work was published by Pierogi Gallery with essays by Robert Storr, John Yau, and Rick Moody. He is currently the chair of the Visual and Studio Arts Program at Sarah Lawrence College, and is a member of the art and technology collective, NonCoreProjector.

O'Connor has solo exhibitions scheduled in 2022 at Pierogi Gallery and False Flag Gallery, and is presenting a project in conjunction with IBM's Project Debater at the Barbican in London later that year. ■

John O'Connor at the Bannister Gallery, Rhode Island College

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Richard Whitten, Professor of Painting

If we start with the understanding that Art is about communication, we have a key into John O'Connor's maze-like and overwhelming works.

At first glance, we see bright colors, doodles, psychedelic patterns, words, and numbers. We, the viewers, start to read, and our understanding of a piece shifts continuously. As we see and put more of the disparate but related ideas together, we begin to feel that each piece must have a logic and that each part of a piece must have a logical place. Our experience becomes a search for that "logic".

Does this mean that the painting is an equation worked out to an inevitable end? No, it is the logic itself that is in question, and the conversation between the artist and the viewer shifts as we revise our perception of that logic.

John O'Connor does not rely solely on words. Each piece, be it drawing, painting, or sculpture is a beautifully crafted image or object. He communicates with visual tools and words equally. His work is a synthesis of the two ways of thinking. He understands that words and letterforms are also shapes – visual and compositional elements that are simultaneously carriers of meaning.

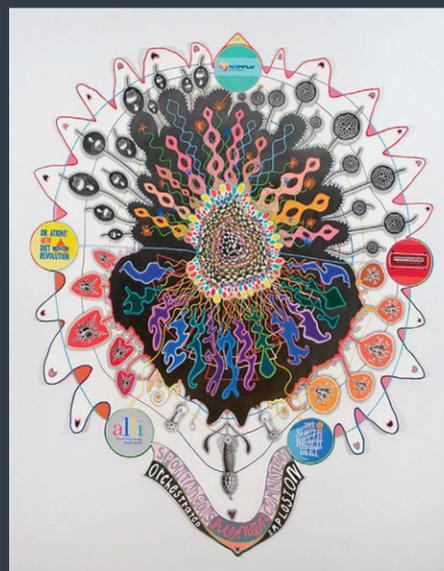
O'Connor treats each word/idea with

equal care and emphasis. He asks us to see the many parts of a drawing and to compare them – yet he organizes them so that we, the viewers, are not overwhelmed. In fact, his work is partly an exploration of how people organize information visually. O'Connor's visual forms remind us of mandalas, grocery lists, quilted rugs, air traffic maps, and ledger books. Each of these methods is a presentation that doesn't imply a hierarchy of ideas since each part is of equal importance.

O'Connor researches a concept and collects words that connect to it. He then presents them in a visual format that helps give logic to the relationships that he finds. It is important to note that he doesn't editorialize or preach through his art – he simply explores and invites the viewer to explore with him.

O'Connor explains his thoughts and methodology for the drawing *Pay to Play*:

"I built this work from the bottom up. In doing so, I invented ways of translating many different types of information about the Lottery – social commentary, winning numbers, losing predictions, odds of winning, etc. into forms shapes and patterns. My process was additive, incremental, and inconsistent.



"The main conceptual/information-based layers of the work, from bottom to top, are:

1. INCORRECT PREDICTIONS OF WINNING LOTTERY NUMBERS, WHICH I TRANSLATED INTO WORDS VIA A SIMPLE SYSTEM (EACH NUMBER CORRESPONDED TO A LETTER: A=1, B=2, ETC.)
2. PURELY RANDOM NUMBERS
3. REPRESENTATIONS OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS/ CROSSES: SIGNS OF FAITH
4. VARIOUS WRITTEN DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE LOTTERY AS DESCRIBED BY VARIOUS SOCIOLOGISTS
5. ACTUAL WINNING NUMBERS FOR THE NY LOTTERY
6. AVERAGE PERCENTAGE CHANCE OF WINNING

"I thought of the whole thing as my building/drawing of a very unstable tower, which is based on the ideas and implications of the lottery as a medium for social change."

O'Connor is certainly an artistic descendant of the language-based art that Joseph Kosuth explored in the 1960's, but a more closely related forebear of this work is perhaps Ad Reinhardt's six-hour slide presentations. These presentations were composed of innumerable random images. The audience would often see tentative connections and themes only to have their "logic" crumble as the slides continued.

O'Connor certainly explores the human compulsion to find meaning in comparison and connection, but like Reinhardt, he creates connections that are simultaneously obvious and tenuous.

We see that O'Connor loves research and assemblage. What he chooses to examine has heavy political or social overtones. The choice of what he explores, perhaps, is his commentary. Nevertheless, by avoiding a conclusion, he avoids becoming heavy and overbearing. Similarly, his visual systems are not governed by strict geometrical rules. While retaining a level of symmetry, the compositional balance is approximate and ad hoc—playful.

He retains a freshness, a humor, and almost an innocence, that allows his viewers to research alongside him. He seems to say, "Hey, look at this!" ■

