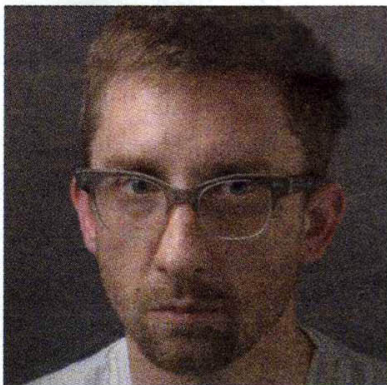
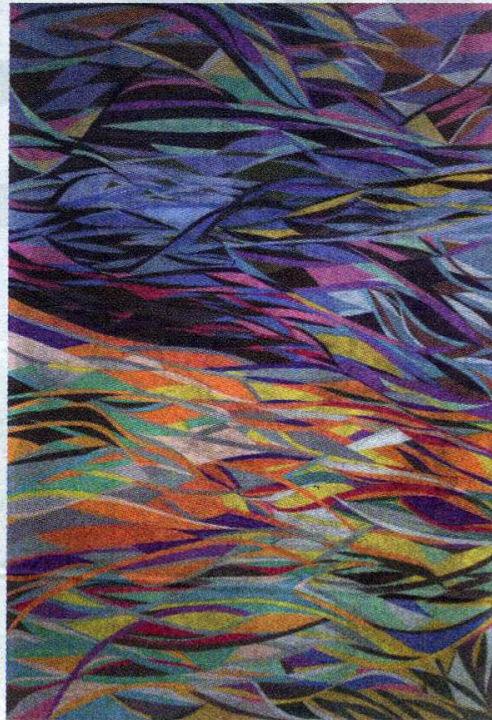


Right:
mixed media
Below:
Untitled, 2008
Colored pencil and ink on paper



William J. O'Brien

WILLIAM J. O'BRIEN HAS MAINTAINED HIS PRACTICE IN CHICAGO SINCE 2001, in a studio not unlike Francis Bacon's famed South Kensington room filled with mountains of the artist's materials and visual sources, the variety of items evidence of the maker's range of methods. Should a team of preservationists ever care to take an inventory of O'Brien's studio, as they did the late painter's, they'd end up with lists including fabrics, Xerox prints, dishware, markers, furniture limbs, ceramic fragments, strings and mounds of clay. Though not an entirely uncommon mix of the found, the made, the old and the new, it is no wonder that central to O'Brien's thought-process is the translation of a project from studio to gallery, and of the transformation of object from defunct to engaging.

A friend to his local and coastal peers, and a participant in a recent panel discussion with contemporaries Melanie Schiff and Shane Huffman, William (Bill) exudes a candor, offbeat optimism and a tender sense of humor that is present in his artwork in every way.

Incorporating colored pencil, ink, fiber, ceramics and mixed media, O'Brien's installations grow out of drawings that crave for further dimensions, texture and the immediacy of touch. Though his practice is often related to

appropriation and use of the found object, O'Brien's work is nothing if not absolutely inventive.

O'Brien's earlier work in 2004-2005, best exemplified at his "12x12" MCA show, was also installation-based, but more inclined to entirely takeover the space with lo-fi video, cluttered collage and a heavy use of overt homoerotic imagery. Though inextricable from his approach, the work seems to have moved on from these styles—namely, the erotic—to a less-overloaded, but still hyperactive, sensibility and responsiveness.

In a way, O'Brien acts as a huntsman and archaeologist of artifacts and physical remains without caring to relate them to the concerned human party, but rather linking the objects to a new history of themselves.

O'Brien's contribution at the Gladstone Gallery group show, "Makers and Modelers: Works in Ceramic," was a display of found and made objects on an old country table from Jan's Antiques in Chicago. Despite the attention it received in the press, O'Brien explains that he was dissatisfied with the piece when it was finished, and more intrigued by the transition of the items from his studio to the gallery space. Perhaps this is his position with any "finished" product, driven instead by the opportunity to witness the evolution of the object and finding a way to act on first thoughts or unconsciousness.

After O'Brien completed his MFA in Fiber and Material Studies at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005, it didn't take long for Shane Campbell Gallery to show interest, fully introducing O'Brien into their program last year with a solo exhibition titled, very fittingly, "the axis mundi." Previously, the gallery had included O'Brien's work the group exhibition "Modern Primitivism" in 2006.

O'Brien has been a favorite of smaller Chicago galleries, non-profits and young curators, his career seemingly growing up alongside these peers and supporters. 1/Quarterly, Open End Gallery, ThreeWalls gallery, Diamonds on Archer and Booster and Seven have all served as sites for his drawings and installations.

Currently his work is on view alongside Andy Coolquit and Frank Haines at Krinzinger Projekte, the large project space of Krinzinger Gallery, Vienna that has been presenting young artists since 2002. (BR)

shanecampbellgallery.com, wobwobwob.com