

## William J. O'Brien: Works on Paper

September 24, 2011 - November 4, 2011

### Artist Biography

[William J. O'Brien](#)

### Press Releases

[William J. O'Brien: Works on Paper](#)

#### WILLIAM J. O'BRIEN

##### *Works on Paper*

September 24 - November 4, 2011

SHAHEEN is delighted to announce an exhibition of new and recent works on paper by Chicago based and Northeast Ohio native William J. O'Brien. The exhibition will be the first devoted exclusively to O'Brien's drawings. There will be an opening reception for the artist on Saturday, September 24<sup>th</sup> 6:30-8:30pm.

O'Brien's multidisciplinary artistic practice, and the visually and materially disparate, yet cohesive body of work that it generates is fueled by a frenetic creative impulse that conflates and counterbalances hard edge and gesture, rawness and refinement, system and intuition, repetitive order and chaos, and structure and entropic breakdown. While O'Brien's diverse output encompasses sculpture, ceramic objects, painting, assemblage and photography, his works on paper are perhaps the most consistent and clearest underpinning of his overall body of work to date. The artist's exhibition at SHAHEEN will include eleven carefully selected abstract mid- and large-scale works on paper that represent a panoply of visual influences and precedents including architecture, design, Abstract Expressionist painting, Op Art, geometric abstraction, Navajo textiles, the modernist paintings of Paul Klee and Lyonel Feininger, quilting and stained glass, among others. This confluence of references spawns works that are often retro in look, but distinctly contemporary in sensibility.

The dense, heavily worked, and often brightly hued colored pencil drawings that will appear at SHAHEEN juxtapose and counter-balance O'Brien's strong concern for rigorous, repetitive structure - primarily that of the grid - with his intuitive tendency toward freewheeling gesture and mark-making. In many of the colored pencil drawings, the intermingling (or perhaps superimposition) of a defined, often abstract visual matrix with a far less orderly network of gestures and marks generates deep, dense, entropic spaces. In a trio of large scale works executed in oil pastel on paper, the structure that pervades

majority of O'Brien's colored pencil drawings gives way to swooping, all-over gesture and long curvilinear skeins of color reminiscent of Jackson Pollock, or Brice Marden unrestrained. While there is an undeniable depth and density to the visual entanglements in these works, they are simultaneously characterized by an openness of space that stands in contrast to many of the colored pencil drawings. In both strains of work, there is a strong sense of physicality that can be traced directly to O'Brien's absorption in his working process, and the labor intensiveness of his execution. Also on full display is the artist's ability to reconcile his unrestrained creative energy and outflow with his sophisticated sense of space, color, composition and design, and hold these elements in dynamic counterbalance. The resulting works on paper are simultaneously raw and refined, deliberate and intuitive.

A native of Newbury, Ohio, William J. O'Brien currently lives and works in Chicago, where he received his MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Over the past few years, O'Brien's work has appeared in numerous solo and group gallery and museum exhibitions in the United States and abroad including a recent solo museum exhibition at The Renaissance Society (University of Chicago); one gallery exhibition at Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York; and exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York; Andrea Gallery, New York; and the Aspen Art Museum. O'Brien's work resides in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Hara Museum of Art, Japan, and the Miami Art Museum.



**William J. O'Brien**

*Untitled, 2009*

colored pencil and ink on paper  
50 x 38 inches



**William J. O'Brien**

*Untitled, 2008*

colored pencil and ink on paper  
62 x 42 inches



**William J. O'Brien**

*Untitled, 2010*

colored pencil on paper  
68 x 36 inches



**William J. O'Brien**

*Untitled, 2009*

colored pencil and ink on paper  
30 x 22 inches



**William J. O'Brien**

*Untitled, 2009*

colored pencil and ink on paper  
30 x 22 inches



**William J. O'Brien**

*Untitled, 2009*

colored pencil and ink on paper  
30 x 22 inches



**William J. O'Brien**  
*Untitled, 2009*  
colored pencil and ink on paper  
30 x 22 inches



**William J. O'Brien**  
*Untitled, 2009*  
colored pencil and ink on paper  
30 x 22 inches



**William J. O'Brien**  
*Untitled, 2009*  
oil pastel on paper  
71 x 36 inches



**William J. O'Brien**  
*Untitled, 2009*  
oil pastel on paper  
71 x 36 inches



**William J. O'Brien**  
*Untitled, 2009*  
oil pastel on paper  
71 x 36 inches

---

**Modern and Contemporary Art**

Vest Superior Avenue, Suite 101  
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

Phone: (216) 830-8888 | Fax: (216) 830-9065

[www.shaheengallery.com](http://www.shaheengallery.com)

[home](#) | [gallery](#) | [exhibitions](#) | [artists](#) | [inventory](#) | [contact](#)

The works shown are examples of present and past inventory. Copyright remains with the artists. All works are subject to prior sale.

© 2012 Shaheen Gallery. All rights reserved.  
Site credits: [Creative Commons](#)