

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY

509 West 24th Street, New York, NY 10011

William J. O'Brien: The Protectors

January 5 – February 4, 2017

Marianne Boesky Gallery is pleased to present a new body of work by Chicago-based artist William J. O'Brien that investigates the divide between personal and public memorials. The exhibition, titled *The Protectors*, will feature a selection of works on paper and bronze sculptures, marking the first time O'Brien is creating outdoor sculpture and working in bronze. *The Protectors* will be on view from January 5 – February 4, 2017 at the gallery's 507 W. 24th Street space, and is the artist's third solo exhibition with the gallery.

Within his highly varied oeuvre, O'Brien uses material experimentation and free-form creation to capture the emotion, psychology, and memory of a particular moment. His drawings, sculptures, and ceramics communicate and serve as an extension of the self. This ongoing quest for identity through artistic expression finds a new avenue in *The Protectors*, as O'Brien looks to bridge the disconnects between individual experience of struggle and perseverance and the public works intended to commemorate it.

Taking inspiration from the powerful imagery of the Mahakala, a deity in Tibetan Buddhism, O'Brien shapes his sculptures through organic patterning, the lines and curves flowing naturally in and out of each other. Images of wheels, spirals, and hands appear momentarily and then dissipate into themselves, defying figurative clarity and conveying a spiritual wildness. The tension between figuration and abstraction makes subtle reference to the internal and external push-and-pull that we so often feel as we move through and beyond personal and collective challenges. In this way, O'Brien's bronzes reflect a common narrative that can be understood by a wide and diverse audience. At the same time, the sculpture's totemic qualities and spiritual undertones offer potent opportunity for self-reflection and meditation.

The Protectors will also feature a selection of new works on paper, conceived from the same source content. The incorporation of the drawings produces a dramatic shift in scale and relationship to the viewer. The bronze sculptures, some life-sized, compel a physical engagement, while the works on paper, made in an array of cool, blue tones, suggest a more intimate and introspective experience. While presented indoors for this exhibition, the sculptures may be shown outside, furthering the inward and outward dichotomy and highlighting the vastly different visual and psychic affects of a single gesture across two media. Together, the works speak to the way we engage and respond to memorials that we encounter as well as the ones we may create.

"Memorials are a common attribute of public spaces, and they often represent a crucial moment or event—one that can alter or confront the way we perceive ourselves, culturally and historically. Yet, there is a dissonance between how monuments convey a collective whole and how different people might experience and process those same events," said O'Brien. "These newest works are about humanizing the monument, so that it offers more opportunities to find personal meaning and also healing. For me the creative process has always been about giving voice to a particular emotion or happening, so it feels like a very natural evolution to explore public works as an expression of identity."

A solo museum show of O'Brien's work, curated by Joey Yates, will also be on view at KMAC Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, from January 21 – April 9, 2017.

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Chicago-based artist William J. O'Brien's idiosyncratic and exuberant forms are born out of an improvised and intuitive studio practice, rich in material experimentation. Through drawing, painting, sculpture, and ceramics, O'Brien explores the traditional and historical application of materials, but also employs play to refute such definitive uses. Inspired by Modernism's use of primitive forms, as well as the history of material usage of Outsider Art, O'Brien's multidisciplinary practice is a search for identity and genuine expression through material and process. The first major survey exhibition of O'Brien's work was curated by Naomi Beckwith at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL (2014). He has also had solo exhibitions at the The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS (2012) and the Renaissance Society, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL (2011). O'Brien's work is included in the permanent collections of the Cleveland Clinic, Ohio; Perez Art Museum Miami, Florida; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Art Institute of Chicago, amongst others.

For more information about William J. O'Brien, please contact Gallery Director Kelly Woods at kelly@boeskygallery.com or 212.680.9889. For press inquiries, please contact Alina Sumajin, PAVE Communications and Consulting, at alina@paveconsult.com or 646-369-2050.

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