


Captain Petzel now representing Jack O'Brien

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Jack O'Brien. Image courtesy of frieze, Photo: Alexander Coggin.

BERLIN.- Captain Petzel announced the representation of London-based artist Jack O'Brien. A selection of new sculptures will be on view at our booth B36 at Art Basel Paris 2024. The artist's first solo exhibition at Captain Petzel will open

in January 2025.

Jack O'Brien's erotically charged sculptures start from found objects that have a direct relation to the body in their human scale: musical instruments, industrial materials and aluminum balls, which the artist wraps and stretches to the point of abstraction, surrounding them with the materiality of consumer society, shrink wrap, epoxy, fabric, cable ties and PETG plastic.

Through these material clashes, O'Brien challenges notions of form and function with works that appear charged with nervous energy, as if on the verge of collapse. This precariousness becomes a metaphor for the broader, often fraught, dynamics of identity, particularly within the context of queer cultural histories and the lineage of queer abstraction. The artist employs abstraction not to obscure meaning, but to open up new ways of engaging with political and personal narratives.

I'm interested in reading materials as 'eloquent texts', you could say, imbued with cultural and historical meanings related to the body. I try to emphasize the fluidity and lustre of the materials I'm using. – Jack O'Brien

Visible through layers of assemblage and melted plastic, the cherry motif is chosen by the artist as a symbol of sensuality and the erotic. The cherry maintains a constant presence within mainstream culture. Its symbolic etymology is traceable from the ancient Greeks as the elixir of prosperity to recent advertising campaigns for The United Colours of Benetton and Burberry. The appropriation of this associatively dense and flirtatious image as a background can be seen as a nod to the fact that Jack O'Brien's work is ostensibly about desire.

Edward Gillman: Your work often features found objects bound together in pairs or triples. For example, two cellos are sheathed in cellophane in *Phaedrus* [2024], while a pair of heels are wrapped with wire mesh in *Ring I* [2021]. This process of grouping and binding objects imbues your works with a deep sensuality and tactility.

Jack O'Brien: These repetitions are like sculptural palpitations, a life force that mirrors our interpersonal relationships and the myriad erotic impulses that shape them, particularly through moments of intense intimacy. Physical and emotional interactions are in constant sensual dialogue, intertwining identities and collective experiences. In *Phaedrus*, the cellos, closely embraced, evoke a deep connection to the human body, both through their size and the fact that, in their past lives, they were held by performers. It's as if the objects are in a deep state of longing: as the cellos mirror and affirm each other, they create new expanded relationships not just with the viewer but with the space, the city and other surrounding entities.

(excerpt from an interview with Jack O'Brien, published in *Frieze*, October 2024)

In binding objects with cellophane, which is both restrictive and protective, I want to amplify intimacy and interdependence, and echo the complexities of human connection, when lovers' identities often evolve, and even merge, in each other. Another way I engage repetition is by employing linguistic structures – such as syntax, grammar and semantics – to relay and underscore meaning and methodology to create stability.

Deconstructing the material of his surroundings, O'Brien remakes it in a way that's sometimes awkward or at odds with itself. Ultimately, his ambiguous works contain a series of material interactions related to haptics and the tension between the meeting of surfaces. – Sean Burns

Jack O'Brien's work is grounded in a subtle interplay of material, personal experience, and cultural critique. His installations evoke a sense of precarity, reflecting both the physical and social fragility of the structures he constructs. O'Brien's sculptures are often informed by rapidly transforming urban landscapes that have shaped his understanding of space, and the social dynamics that unfold within these environments. The artist is particularly interested in destabilizing the fixed nature of objects, forcing rigid materials like metal and glass into confrontations that evoke a sense of unease.

Jack O'Brien's solo and duo exhibitions include Camden Art Centre, London (2024); *Between Bridges*, Berlin (2023); *Sans Titre Invites*, Paris (2023); *Lockup International*, London (2022); *Polamagnetczne Gallery*, Warsaw (2022) and *Ginny on Frederick*, London (2021). Group exhibitions include *Non-Specific Objects*, Capitain Petzel, Berlin (2024); *Support Structures, Gathering*, London, (2023); *Memory of Rib*, N/A Gallery, Seoul, KR (2022); *Something is Burning*, Kunsthalle Bratislava (2022) and *An Insular Rococo*, Hollybush Gardens, London (2022).

As the 2023 recipient of Camden Art Centre's Emerging Artist Prize at Frieze, Jack O'Brien's solo exhibition *The Reward* is currently on view at Camden Art Centre in London. The artist will participate in a group exhibition at the CAPC Bordeaux in November 2024. His first solo exhibition at Capitain Petzel will open in January 2025.