

Matthew Brown

Jack O'Brien

Nectar

May 17–June 22, 2024

633 N La Brea Ave

Los Angeles

Warm Leatherette

Jack O'Brien's first solo show in Los Angeles, *Nectar*, contains material from the city that has been bastardized, mashed together, obfuscated and repurposed. Like Robert Rauschenberg before him, O'Brien seems to care little for the orthodoxies of artistic taxonomy – painting, sculpture, drawing – favouring instead the communications of a fragmented and emotional sensibility.

After the global COVID-19 lockdowns lifted in 2021, I noticed an artistic language emerging among several young artists: minimal assemblage produced from bits and pieces found at hand – building materials (O'Brien), online flotsam (Eburn Sodipo) and bric-à-brac scavenged from the street (Ser Serpas). The economy of means used for these works seemed to reflect a moment when elaborate fabrication wasn't possible or appropriate.

What connected these practices was an interest in the fragmentation of the self beyond the confines of linguistics. How might sculpture be used to communicate the profound discord of this moment? Though O'Brien's work isn't a sponge for society's toxicities (like a Sarah Lucas sculpture), its play of ambiguities and suggestions of both lifestyle and sexual practice (and their relationship with capital) makes me think about language and its limits, especially regarding the representation of non-normative identities.

Often, an O'Brien object – processed by his intuitive touch – contains found elements evacuated of their original function. *Lack* (all works 2024), for instance, consists of two conical mounds, like Jean Paul Gaultier's famous cone bra dress (1983), jutting out of the wall into which they have been cemented, with two holes ('orifices' would be too obvious) in each tip. The lumps are, in fact, rolls of mass-produced ribbon, their potential to carry out their intended purpose – wrapping, perhaps? – thoroughly thwarted by O'Brien, who has interred them within the plaster.

When he engages with the space directly, O'Brien gestures towards a kind of aggression or antagonization. It's a performative ham-fistedness, and you can almost imagine him thinking: 'I wonder what would happen if I jammed that in there.' However, there's also a sense of irreverence in bringing two seemingly unassociated materials to bear on one another – leather and glass, steel and netting, etc. – as he does repeatedly in his practice.

His work is at its most dynamic when it contains fragile and ephemeral elements, more Richard Tuttle than Richard Serra. But O'Brien is always playing with a sense of muscularity that isn't entirely realized or betrays itself as something fundamentally soft. He achieves a tension that seems to reference the kind we feel in ourselves. The work's interplay of muscularity and tenderness mimics the internal dance with which many of us

info@matthewbrowngallery.com matthewbrowngallery.com

Gallery 1 633 North La Brea Ave, Suite 101, LA, CA 90036, +1 (323) 852-3403

Gallery 2 712 North La Brea Ave, LA, CA 90038, +1 (323) 433-4237

Matthew Brown

are familiar from conceptualizing our own bodies, as we negotiate the pressures of normative beauty and masculinity.

Giant, rivet-like rolls appear again in *Grasp and Gance*. Here, O'Brien has tightly packed and wrapped more ribbon – like a bursting suitcase – against a manipulated image of a window display of luscious fiberglass cherries, over which he's applied pastel and spray paint. All elements in 'Nectar' have been processed with visible raveling and unravelling.

O'Brien uses his shows to learn about materials and to respond to the local environment. His recent exhibition, 'Love Triangle', at Aro in Mexico City, drew heavily from its location in the same way that 'Nectar' uses and reflects Los Angeles. This is most apparent in *Wrest*, a horizontally hung pair of unilluminated steel street lamps suspended from the ceiling. You might think of Chris Burden's *Urban Light* (2008), in which rows of similar lamps create an architectural space for audiences to traverse. O'Brien invites such conversations with art history without being deferential, inverting and anesthetizing already-exhausted signifiers.

Deconstructing the material of his surroundings, O'Brien remakes it in a way that's sometimes awkward or at odds with itself. (I think of the notion of 'making strange' the everyday, but it isn't an ideal fit.) Ultimately, his ambiguous works contain a series of material interactions related to haptics and the tension between the meeting of surfaces; in turn, you might interpret what you find in these frissons – between ribbon, metal, plastic, etc. – as relating to bodies, and that's your horny prerogative. But perhaps they're also operating in a sensory zone that language is yet to touch.

Sean Burns is an artist, editor and writer. He lives in London, UK.

Jack O'Brien (b.1993) lives and works in London. He received his BA in Fine Art from Kingston University, London in 2014.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Love Triangle*, Aro, Mexico City (2024); *The Theatre and Its Double*, curated by Viscose Journal, Between Bridges, Berlin, DE; *The Answer*, Sans Titre Invites, Paris (2023); *To More Time*, Lockup International, London (2022) and *Waiting For The Sun To Kill Me*, Ginny on Frederick, London, UK (2021).

Recent group exhibitions include *Non-Specific Objects*, Capitain Petzel, Berlin (2024); *Right Now, Wrong Then*, King's Leap, New York (2024); *Memory of Rib*, N/A Gallery, Seoul (2022); *Chômage Technique*, Lovaas Projects, Munich (2022); *Something is Burning*, Kunsthalle Bratislava, Slovakia (2022); *An Insular Rococo*, Hollybush Gardens, London (2022) and *Strange Messengers*, Peres Projects, Berlin(2018).

O'Brien also received the Camden Art Centre Artist Prize at Frieze London, 2023.