

JOHN O'BRIEN at Kristi Engle Gallery

The connection John O'Brien draws in his latest two- and (especially) three-dimensional work to Arshile Gorky is not simply a matter of coattail-riding. An intricate thinker engaged with form and contour, O'Brien looks closely at Gorky and several other significant artists (the press release mentions Theodore Roszak and John Altoon) whose art he was informed by, but moved beyond surrealism in a search for a working method that presumed spontaneous and virtuoso response. Neither mind nor hand should seem to have labored in the actual production of the artwork, only in its conception. In fact, in this regard, O'Brien's work most closely resembles that of yet another impulsive, brilliant, and technically stunning modern master, Dieter Roth. Certainly the wallworks, mirror-imaged photographs (the bottom a pale reflection of the top) knitted together with just the right amount of handiwork, recall Roth's elaborate drawing-collage objects and books with their swirling trails and eccentric structures. O'Brien continues this expansive but studied approach in his sculptures, table-like constructions from which erupt peculiar, vaguely figural linear shapes — which apparently relate to Gorky's paintings of women.

—Peter Frank