

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Artforum
January 2014

ARTFORUM

William J. O'Brien
by Michelle Grabner

01.25.14-05.18.14 Museum of Contemporary Art | Chicago, Chicago
Curated by Naomi Beckwith

William J. O'Brien's feverish material explorations regularly succumb to restrained, taxonomical displays when entering the public arena. At Chicago's Renaissance Society in 2011, O'Brien installed a tiered arrangement of modestly scaled ceramic objects. Last winter, he hung grids of felt compositions and framed oil pastel and inkwash works on paper at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York. For this survey exhibition at the MCA, to be complemented by the first major catalogue devoted to the artist's work, roughly one hundred of O'Brien's abundant artifacts will be "organized like a poem," with stanza-like groupings convening disparate objects including textiles, paintings, colored-pencil abstractions, ceramics, and glitter-coated assemblages. One of the show's earlier pieces is a 2008 line drawing that depicts a nude clown with a conspicuous erection, riding a camel-like circus animal—an allegorical figure that, in its Calder-esque clarity and simplicity of means, should stand out as an anomaly in O'Brien's vast field of work shaped by intuitive, romantic energies.

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