

PAUL O'CONNOR

AVAILABLE WORKS



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REVIEW

BY ANN LANDI

It's rare for a critic these days to be able to follow an artist's trajectory over a sustained period of time, but it's been my privilege for the last eight years to track Paul O'Connor's progress as a sculptor, along with his transition from an accomplished photographer to a fully mature talent in a radically different medium. I first met O'Connor in 2012 to write about his book *Taos Portraits* for *ARTnews*. At the time he had a couple of irregularly shaped small metal relief sculptures on his studio walls. He dismissed them, as I recall, as being nothing more than experiments.

But then, less than four years later, the artist was ready to show a body of mature work he called "6s & 4s" (after the number of sides in a hexagon and a square, the two shapes predominant in the series, which are made from wood, aluminum, stainless steel, and other materials suggestive of both the natural and the industrial world). His approach was essentially minimalist, limiting himself to the most elemental materials, but coaxing from their surfaces an amazing array of effects that resulted from using unusual woods, polishing the metal to a high or dull gloss, and introducing seductive patinas.

What almost all these earlier works had in common was a triangular, round, or hexagonal shaped "black hole" at the center. O'Connor has said that he sees this space, the void, as being akin to the Buddhist concept of *dharmakaya*, or that which is "not manifested." As I noted in a review at the time: "Formally, it seems likely the works would simply look inert without that small intrusion."

As happens with almost every adventurous artist, O'Connor eventually exhausted his original parameters and sought to expand his vocabulary. That has meant, in the last couple of years, working with new shapes and new materials, like rulers and auto-body paint, and experimenting with small jewel-like collaged metal pieces on paper, which explode his original geometries into enthralling little puzzles for the eye: shapes advance and retreat, turning into different configurations and suggesting an inherent but lively instability.

The rulers that appear in many of these sculptures, he says, "connote time and the rational mind." But also act as formal elements with their own visual intrigue. If the void reminds us of infinity, the ruler tells us that almost all things in this world demand to be measured.

But the most radical departure from previous works is a long slab-like shape which O'Connor encountered by accident as he was carrying wood to be chopped into squares. "I had the feeling I was carrying someone, a figure," he says. "I saw it as a kind of self-portrait." Resolutely vertical, works like LG-01 and LG-02, at five feet tall and hung a foot off the ground, can indeed suggest a human shape. An art historian might say these fall into the tradition of *personages*, which begins in Surrealism and depends on abstract shapes that suggest human beings. Louise Bourgeois famously did a series of totem-like wooden standing figures she called by the same name in the late 1940s.

But O'Connor's roots, unlike those of Bourgeois, are stubbornly in the American idioms forged by sculptors like Anne Truitt, John McCracken, and Donald Judd, who pointedly called his mature works "specific objects" to try to rid them of any illusionistic readings. The sculptor (and the viewer) can assign whatever meaning he or she wants to an artwork, but in the end it remains an assemblage of materials, colors, and shapes. In O'Connor's case, the success of these works is as dependent on craft as it is on what we think of as "art" (turn one over to see how exquisitely made it is). What distinguishes O'Connor from the pioneers of Minimalism, it seems to me, is a greater willingness to experiment with surfaces at the risk of seeming "decorative" (that much-abhorred term that no one seems really able to define), but those seductive forays into the realm of the sensual are the hallmarks of a distinctive and original voice, one that's still expanding its range and register.

— Ann Landi
Contributing Editor, *ARTnews*
Founder and Editor, Vasari21.com

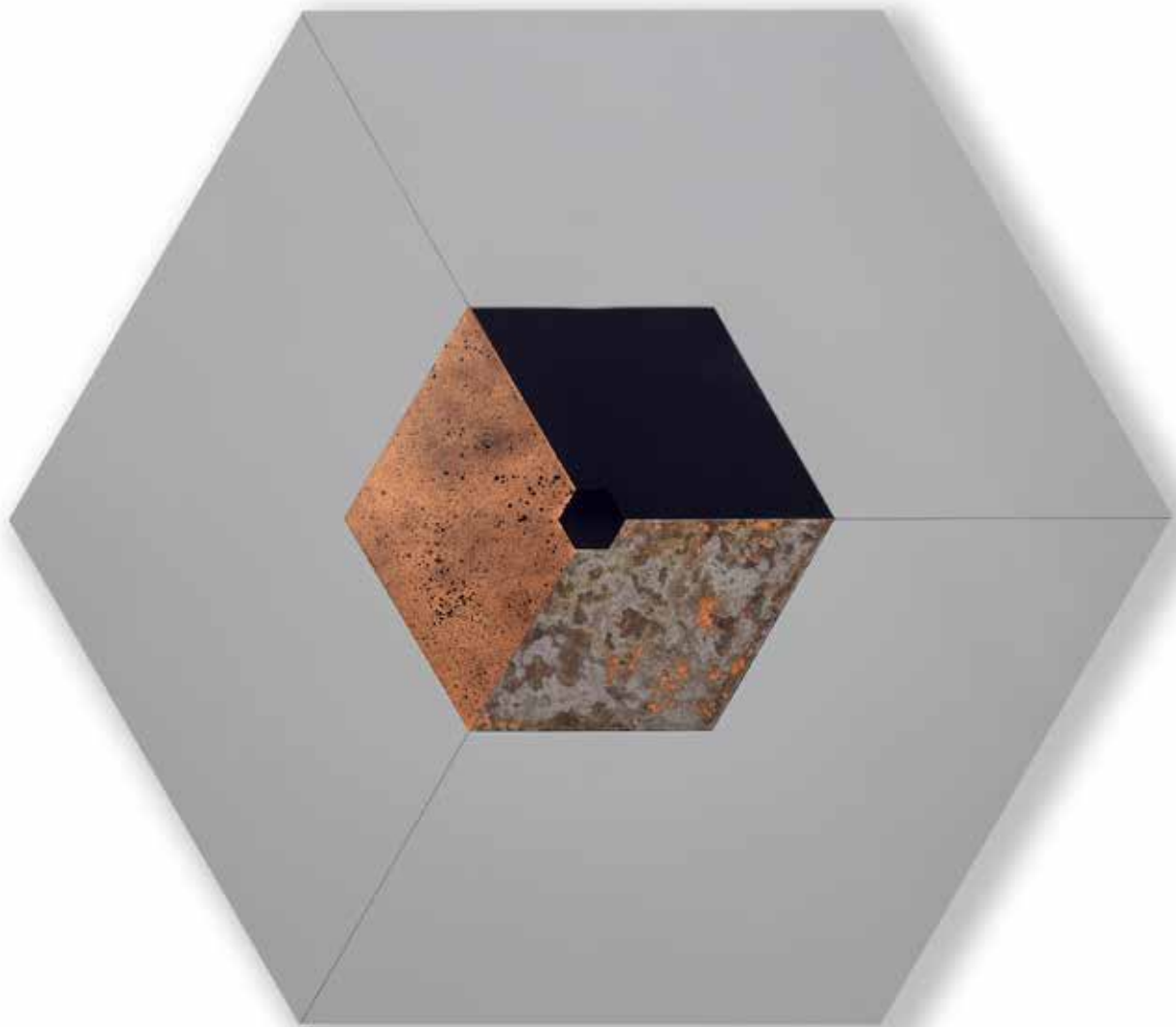


HX-29

2017

Copper, copper with patina, black and green paint on wood, black velvet void

24" x 27.75" x 1.5"



HX-33

2018

Gray auto paint on aluminum, steel with patina, copper, black paint, black velvet void

36" x 42" x 1.5"



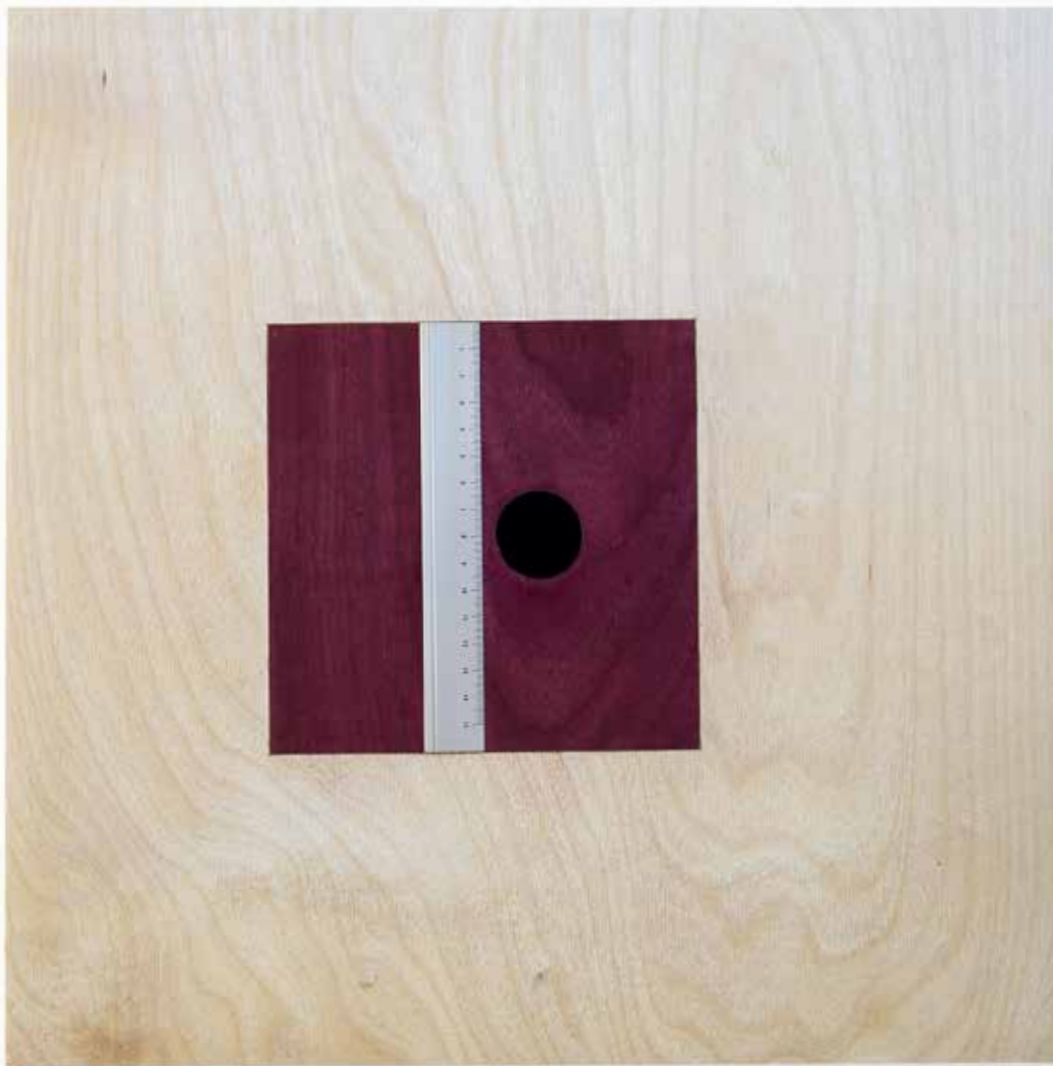
EL GAMAL

2020

Collaboration with Hank Saxe

Ceramic, found metal, black velvet void, leopard wood frame, AR museum glass

29" x 29" x 4"



SQ-41

2018

Purple heart wood, aluminum ruler, plywood, black velvet void

15.625" x 15.625" x 1.5"



SQ-48

2018

Brushed aluminum, black velvet void

15" x 15" x 1.5"



LG-01

2018

Red grandis wood, vintage ruler, black velvet void

60" x 11" x 1.5"



LG-03

2019

Steel with patina, aluminum ruler, cartridge brass with patina, black velvet void

60" x 11" x 1.5"



IG-04

2021

Bloodwood, aluminum rulers, black velvet void

60" x 11" x 1.5"



WOM-01

2020

Cartridge brass with patina, brass, aluminum with pink and purple paint,
black velvet, bloodwood frame, AR museum glass

18.75" x 18.75" x 3"



WOP-09

2020

Copper, steel, aluminum, black and pink paint and patina on Arches 300# paper,
black velvet void, curly red oak frame, AR museum glass

17" x 21" x 2.75"



WOP-11

2020

Aluminum on Arches 300# paper, black velvet void,
curly red oak frame, AR museum glass

17" x 21" x 2.75"



WOP-14

2020

Brass, steel, aluminum, red, pink and purple paint on Arches 300# paper,
black velvet void, curly red oak frame, AR museum glass

17" x 21" x 2.75"



WOP-15

2021

Brass, metal, red paint, and aluminum ruler on Arches 300# paper,
flaming birch wood frame, AR museum glass

17" x 21" x 2.75"



WOP-16

2021

Brass, copper, aluminum, and red paint on Arches 300# paper,
black velvet void, flaming birch wood frame, AR museum glass

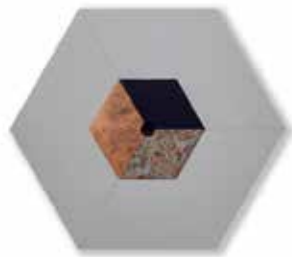
17" x 21" x 2.75"

INDEX

All pieces, except works on paper, are backed with laminated Baltic birch plywood and aluminum plate with black velvet interior. Most have multiple orientations for hanging, as seen by the placement of the stainless steel clips.



HX-29 P. 5
2017
Copper, copper with patina, black and green paint on wood, black velvet void
24" x 27.75" x 1.5"



HX-33 P. 6
2018
Gray auto paint on aluminum, steel with patina, copper, black paint, black velvet void
36" x 42" x 1.5"



EL GAMAL P. 7
2020
Collaboration with Hank Saxe.
Ceramic, found metal, black velvet void, leopard wood frame, AR museum glass
29" x 29" x 4"



SQ-41 P. 8
2018
Purple heart wood, aluminum ruler, plywood, black velvet void
15.625" x 15.625" x 1.5"



SQ-48

P. 9

2018

Brushed aluminum, black velvet void
15" x 15" x 1.5"



LG-01

P. 10

2018

Red grandis wood, vintage ruler,
black velvet void
60" x 11" x 1.5"



LG-03

P. 11

2019

Steel with patina, aluminum ruler,
cartridge brass with patina,
black velvet void
60" x 11" x 1.5"



LG-04

P. 12

2021

Bloodwood, aluminum rulers,
black velvet void

60" x 11" x 1.5"



WOM-01

P. 13

2020

Cartridge brass with patina, brass,
aluminum with pink and purple paint,
black velvet, bloodwood frame,
AR museum glass

18.75" x 18.75" x 3"



WOP-09

P. 14

2020

Copper, steel, aluminum, black and pink
paint and patina on Arches 300# paper,
black velvet void, curly red oak frame,
AR museum glass

17" x 21" x 2.75"



WOP-11

P. 15

2020

Aluminum on Arches 300# paper,
black velvet void, curly red oak frame,
AR museum glass
17" x 21" x 2.75"

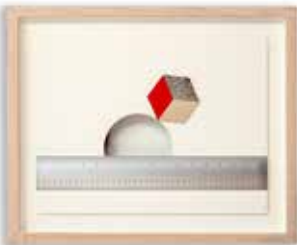


WOP-14

P. 16

2020

Brass, steel, aluminum, red, pink and
purple paint on Arches 300# paper,
black velvet void, curly red oak frame,
AR museum glass
17" x 21" x 2.75"



WOP-15

P. 17

2021

Brass, metal, red paint, and aluminum
ruler on Arches 300# paper, flaming
birch wood frame, AR museum glass
17" x 21" x 2.75"



WOP-16

P. 18

2021

Brass, copper, aluminum, and red paint
on Arches 300# paper, black velvet
void, flaming birch wood frame,
AR museum glass
17" x 21" x 2.75"