

Artist John A. O'Connor Offers Gifts to Your Collection



John A. O'Connor, *Southcoast*, 1963.2, Acrylic on Board, 6" x 7"

I am pleased to announce that artist John A. O'Connor has recently decided to offer some of his works for inclusion in museum and gallery collections.

John's artwork is represented in numerous public, private and corporate collections in the U.S. and abroad including Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL; Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Winter Park, FL; Santa Barbara Museum of Art,

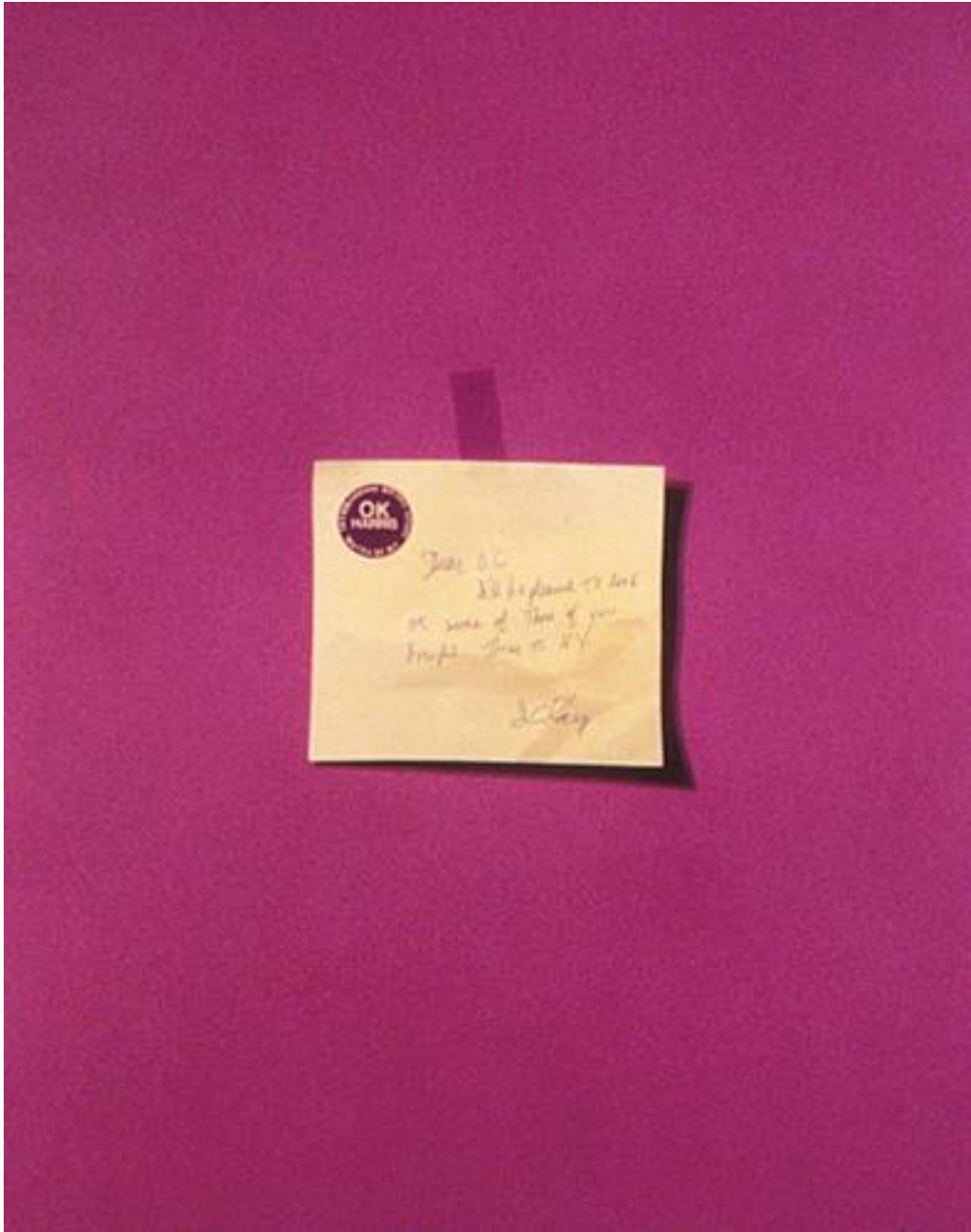
Santa Barbara, CA; State of California, Sacramento, CA; University of California, Davis, CA; Bechtel Corporation, San Francisco, CA; Cole National Corporation, Cleveland, OH; Alabama Power and Light, Montgomery, A; and IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY; and more than forty private collections. His work has also been featured in articles in *Artforum Magazine*, *Art Voices/South*, *Art Week*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, the *Santa Barbara News Press*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *Miami Herald*, *Jacksonville Times-Union*, the *Denver Post*, and the *Orlando Sentinel*. His work has also been featured in *New American Paintings*, *American Art Collector*, *Studio Visit*, and *Florida Design Magazine*.



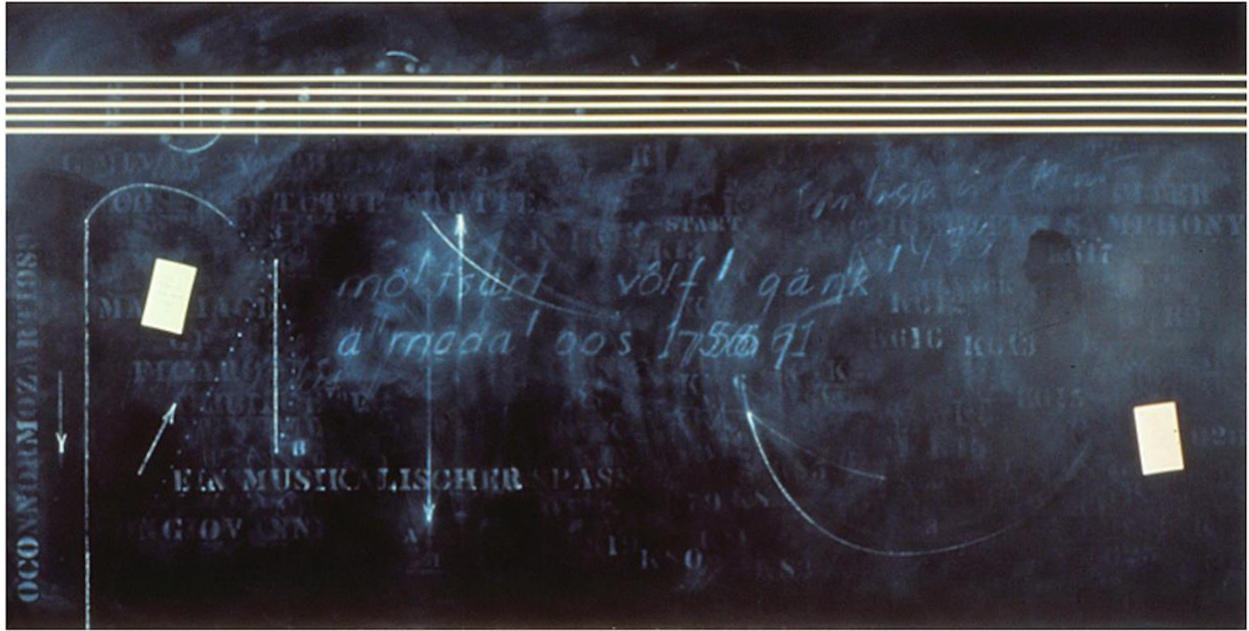
Seated Figures, 1963, Oil on Paper, 9" x 10"

John is requesting that your curatorial department consider accepting 3-5 paintings as a gift, and has instructed me to offer images to you as an addition to

your existing collection: he will also pay for insurance and shipping. To that end, I have created an information package of works that are being offered to institutions and collections nationwide. Additional examples of John's work can be found on his website at johnaoconnor.com. —Mallory M. O'Connor



Dear O'C, 1979, Mixed Media on Paper, 21" x 17"

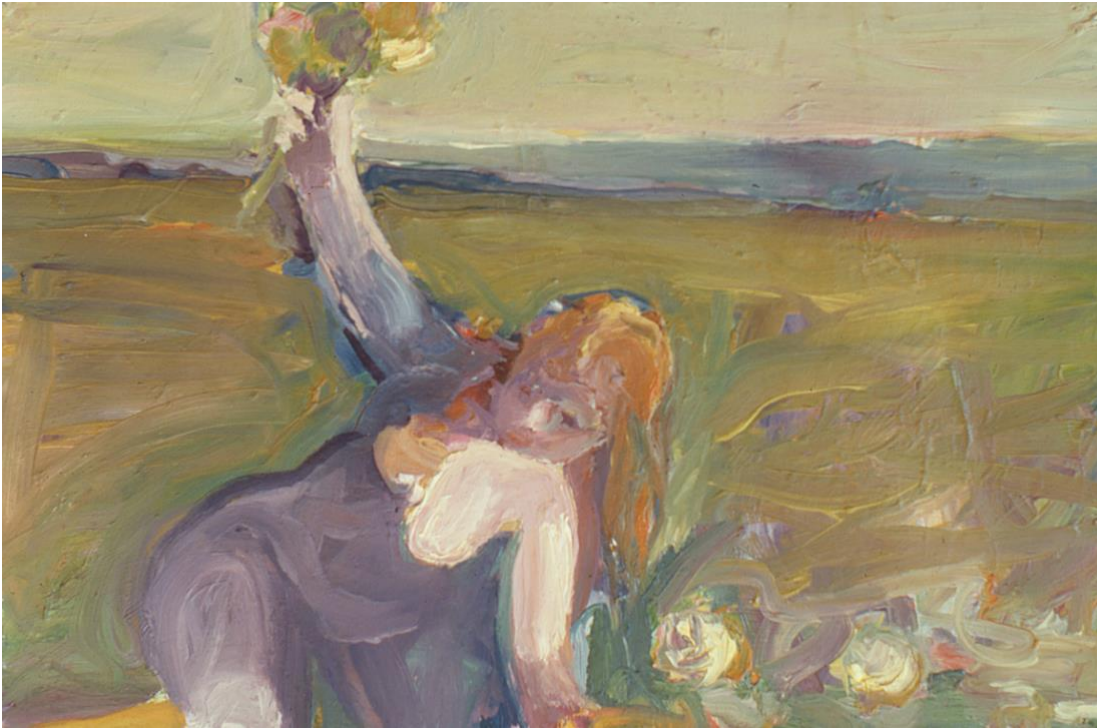


Mozart, 1988, Acrylic on Sintra, 48" x 96"

John A. O'Connor, Professor Art Emeritus, University of Florida, studied art at several colleges in California and Mexico before earning an AB with Honors (1961) and an MAA (1963) from the University of California, Davis. He subsequently taught art at the University of California, Santa Barbara; Blake College, Valle de Bravo, Mexico; Ohio University, Athens; and at the University of Florida, Gainesville. John has had 36 solo exhibitions of his paintings and has participated in more than 200 group exhibitions. His recently-published book, *White Lies Matter*, combines digital art works with satirical commentary. The sequel, *White Lies Matter, Too*, is scheduled to be published in early 2024.

Artist's Essay: "My Life, My Art" by John A. O'Connor

Part 1: Bay Area Figurative



Woman with Flowers, 1962, Oil on Paper, 12"x17"

"From 1958 to 1968, I worked in a manner known as Bay Area Figurative. I was greatly influenced by this vibrant, new style that was just beginning to emerge in northern California in the late 1950s. David Park, Elmer Bischoff, and Richard Diebenkorn are credited as the founders of this movement, and I readily acknowledge their influence on my early works."



Mallory at Malibu, 1968, Acrylic on Canvas, 48" x 96"

“However, it was studying with artists Greg Kondos and Wayne Thiebaud at Sacramento City College, and William Theo Brown, Roland Petersen, Wayne Thiebaud, and William T. Wiley at the University of California-Davis, and James Weeks at the San Francisco Art Institute, and my exposure to the work of Paul Wonner, that created the context for my early work to develop. Like many of these artists, I was aware of our extraordinary surroundings: the grand California land and seascape. However, during this time, I also explored a wide variety of subject matter that included the human figure and still lifes.”



Mallory at Malibu2, 1968, Acrylic on Canvas, 48"x 36"



Bathers, 1966, Acrylic on Canvas, 50.25" x 45.5"

“My art works during this time are characterized by vivid color, and a sensual, painterly and, somewhat, expressionistic style. I was also especially interested in the effect of light on interior surfaces. Many images were derived from personal experiences and observation in the mountains of northern California or along the jagged beaches from Monterrey to Mendocino. When I

moved to Santa Barbara in January 1963 to begin teaching at the University of California-Santa Barbara, images of bathers, surfers, and the softer, more accessible, southern California beach scenes became a major interest. I also did numerous paintings of my wife Mallory and son Chris and painted some of the rock music stars of the 1960s.”

Part 2: Reality and Illusion



Grey Envelope, Mixed Media on paper, 1979, 21" x 17"

“In 1968, I began to explore new ways of working. I had moved to Ohio in 1965 to teach at Ohio University, and my new environment was a shock to me.

The landscape was completely different, the light softer, the air much more humid, and the sky was frequently filled with lightening of an intensity that I had never encountered. Although I continued to work in the Bay Area Figurative style after arriving in Ohio, I found it harder and harder to do so. As I responded to my new environment, I began to experiment with new ideas. In 1969, I moved to Florida to take a teaching position at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Although it was déjà vu all over again, I had less difficulty continuing with my work because, since I was painting from my imagination, it was less environment-dependent than ever before.”

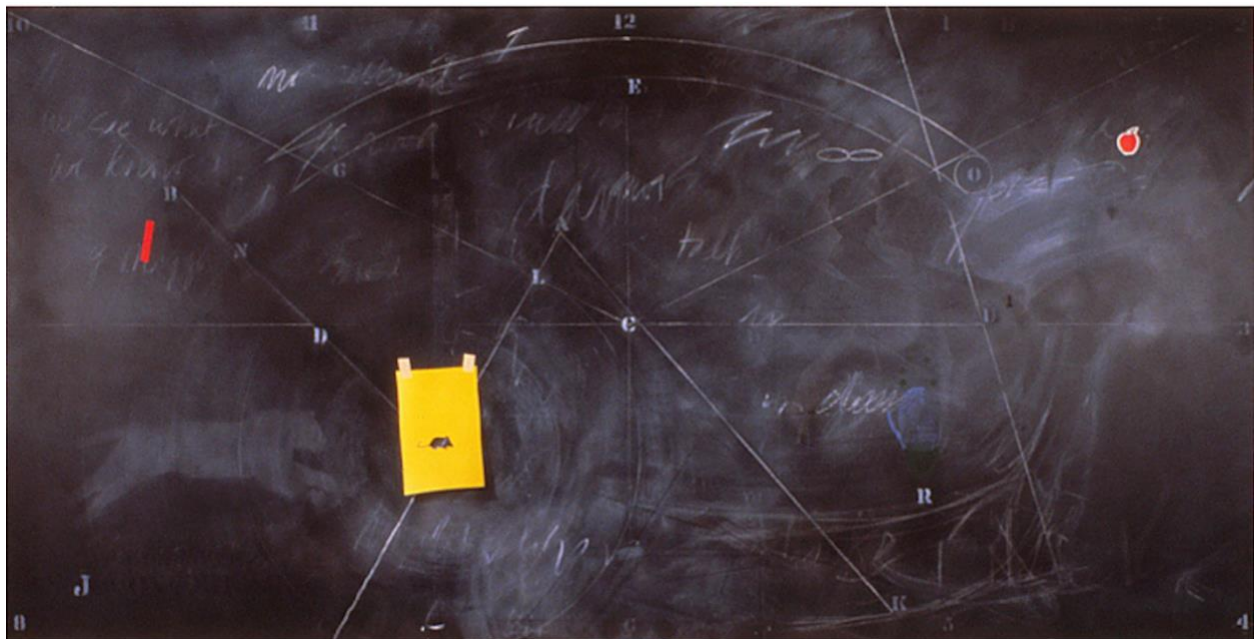


Dear Apollo, Acrylic on Board, 1972, 40" x 30"

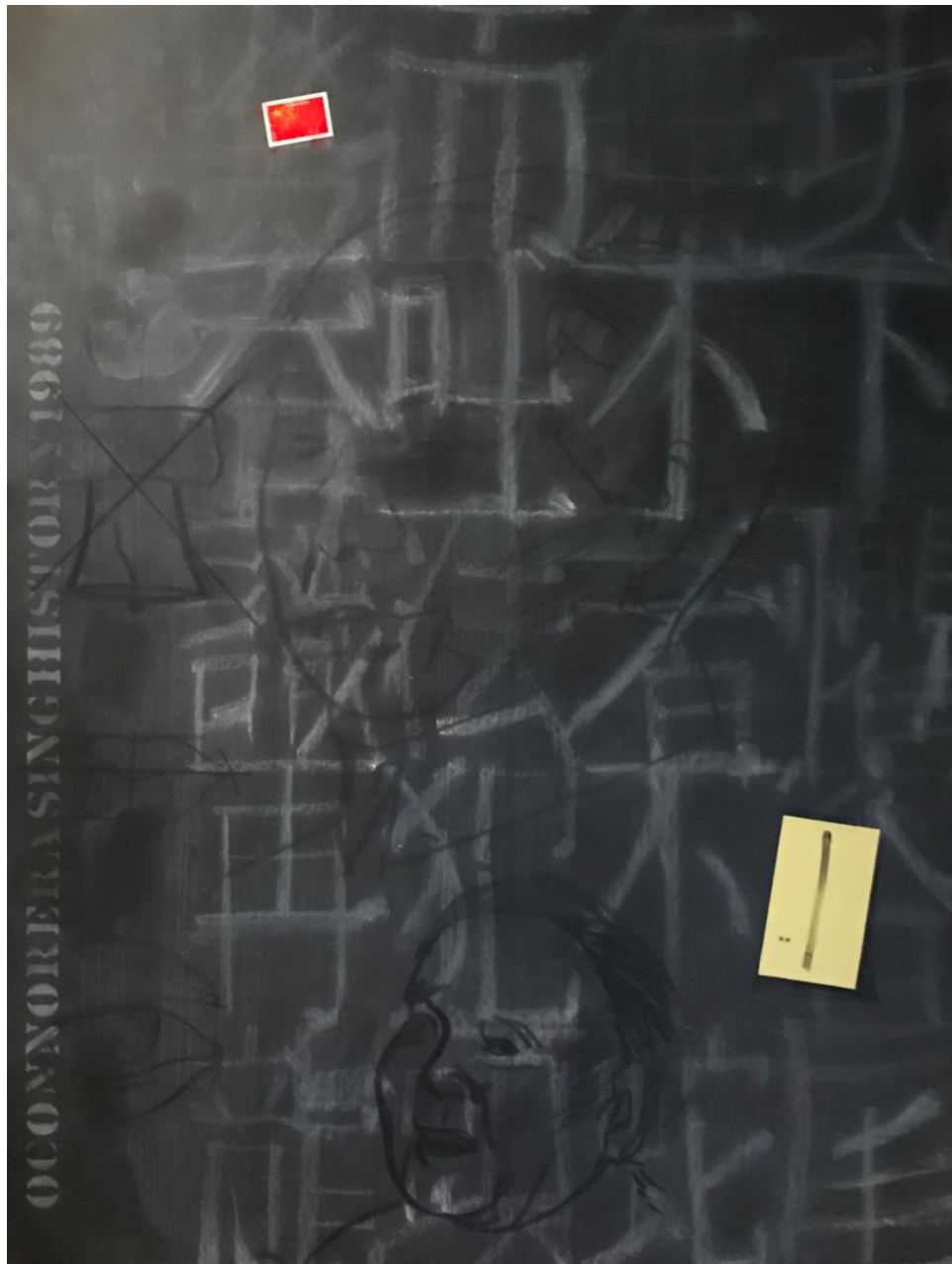
“I called the paintings from 1968 to 1986 *Conceptual Realism*. They are the record of a journey to explore the mystery of illusion and reality. My goal was to provoke thought about how we create our reality. Humor, paradox, deception, and riddle are aspects of this working/process. The result is conceptual realism—not new realism or photo realism. Everything in these paintings is invented. I didn’t paint from objects, I painted from my mind. I was interested in things the mind thinks it knows, things seen but not apprehended, things perceived but not truly experienced. By 1986, this particular period in my art practice had completely evolved into the *Blackboard Series*.”

Part 3: Chalkboards/Blackboards

“Since 1985, the *Blackboard Series* has been the predominant form of my art. It grew out of work produced in the early 1970s, but the impulse that led to the blackboards was largely undeveloped and not recognized by me. Art has a peculiar way of telling an artist something that he may not understand for many years.”



Blackboard Jungle, 1986, Acrylic on Sintra, 48"x 96"

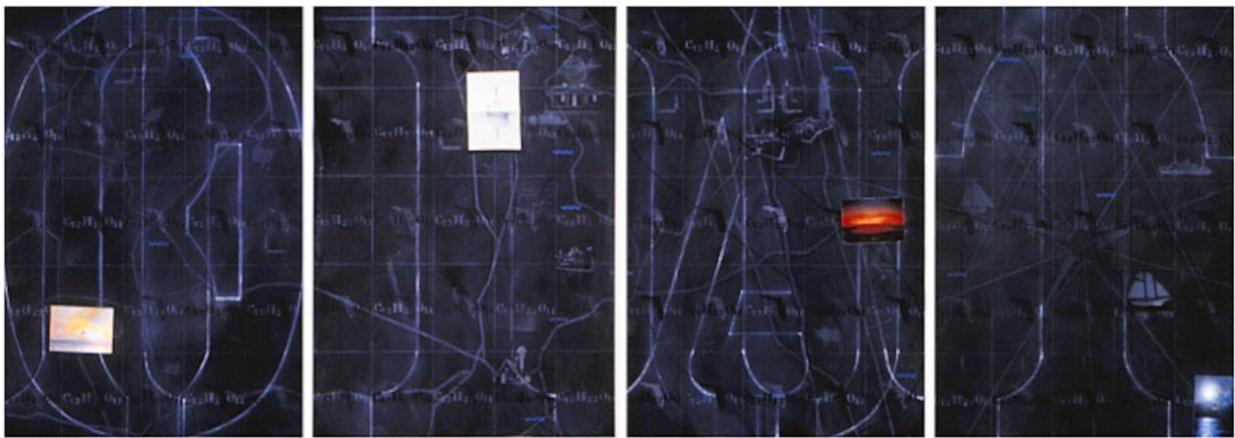


Erasing History, 1989, Acrylic on Board, 40"x30"

"In a 1989 painting titled *Erasing History*, I explored the practice of manipulating "historical facts" as a form of propaganda; more recently, in paintings such as *America* and *The New Ivory Tower*, I have focused on the manipulation of words and symbols as "historical documents" used to sway public opinion and to reinforce popular mythology. In addition, the didactic

quality of the blackboards allows them to be utilized to fulfill their real function: to inform, to explain, and to teach. It is interesting to note that one of the most influential educational innovations in America in the 1870s was the introduction of drawing as a required subject in public elementary education. Drawing instruction was justified as valuable training in visual literacy. Teachers used the classroom blackboard to illustrate the basic principals of line, shape and proportion. For my own purposes, the blackboard is the ideal conceptual vehicle because it is the medium par excellence with which to manipulate ideas as a material.”

“A critic once said that my blackboards reminded him of “those waxy tablets with the thin vinyl sheet over the top that some folks still remember writing on as a child.” He pointed out that such a device is called a palimpsest, a magic slate on which images could be drawn and then magically erased by lifting the vinyl sheet. Interestingly, the palimpsest was one of Sigmund Freud’s favorite metaphors for the unconscious. Encountering my blackboard paintings, the viewer is invited to enter an environment of palimpsests: ghosts of gestures, the residue of images and words linking thoughts and concepts of visual entities and written language. They are the tracings of a life’s journey. Partially erased, but not forgotten, my blackboards provide a dark window into the modern psyche. Like us, they may be but fleeting illusions, or they may establish our own reality against eternity.”



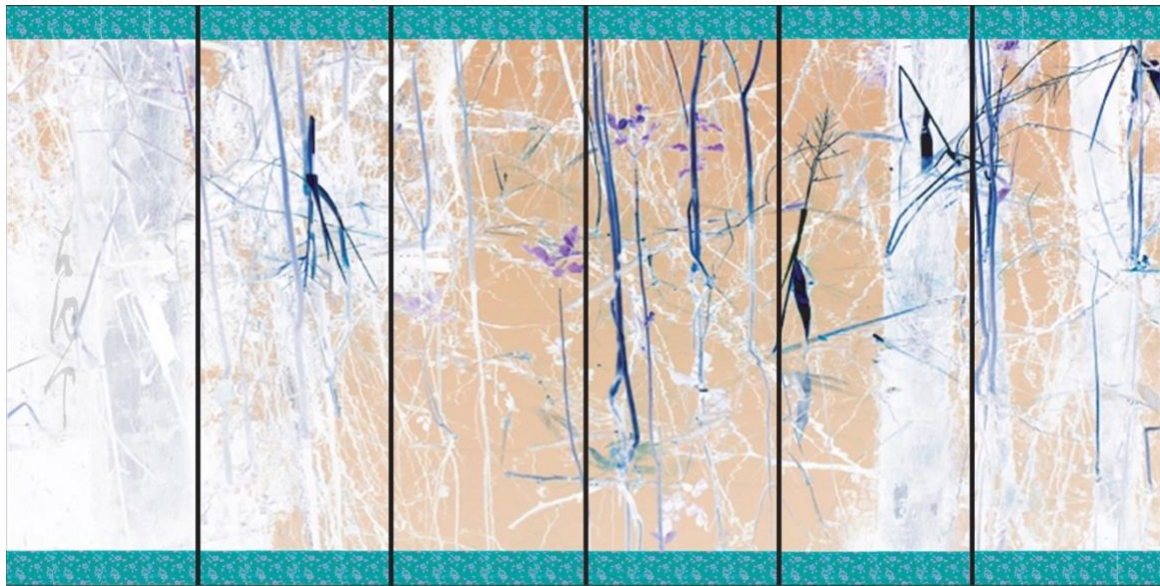
Florida Suite, 2004, Acrylic on Sintra, 4 panels, each 40"x30"

“It is tempting to suggest that both my *Conceptual Realist* paintings and their transformation into the *Blackboard Series* owe their form to nineteenth century trompe l’oeil painting and are merely an extension of that genre. However, that would be erroneous. One of the concepts that I have steadfastly developed is that of going beyond traditional illusionism. Typical trompe l’oeil painting, no matter how initially deceptive, inevitably breaks down under close scrutiny. In my blackboard paintings, I invite the viewer to question the nature of reality itself. Consequently, I have developed concepts and techniques to create realities that are the vehicle for such transcendence. All of my blackboard paintings are done in acrylic on board or Sintra—there is no collage. While I enthusiastically admire the trompe l’oeil masters of the past, my own work has evolved primarily as a result of twentieth century influences found in the works of William T. Wiley, Jasper Johns, and particularly, Marcel Duchamp.”

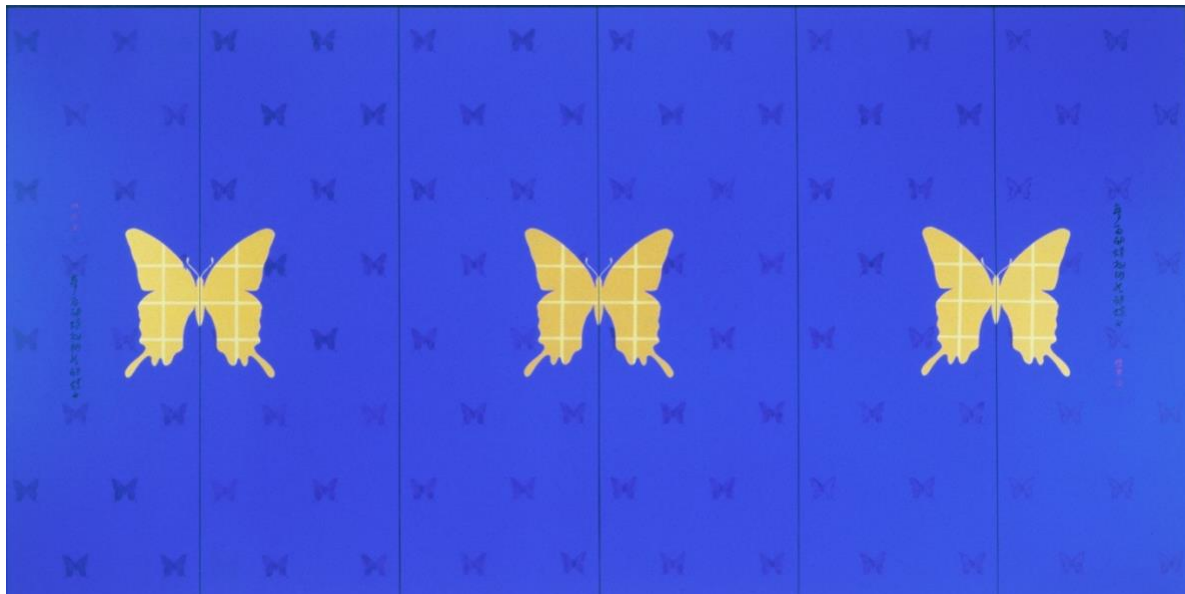
Part 4: Folding Screens

“My notes on, and research into Oriental folding screens, dates back to the mid 1970s. Again, it was an inspiration that I did not even begin to start to fulfill until 1984. And, although I painted the first of the *Folding Screens* in 1984, and, even though I continued to research, makes notes for, and develop ideas about them, I did not fully return to this genre until 2005 with the painting *Butterfly*. My folding screens, while ostensibly decorative, encompass a space for private reflection—there’s more to them than meets the eye. Like the Zen koan, they also pose a riddle, a paradox, and an unanswerable question: illusion or reality? The folding screens are a significant current interest. However, I am continuing to work on the *Blackboard Series* (which has morphed into the *Chalkboard Series* that includes blackboards, whiteboards and greenboards—the last two that have replaced most blackboards in the classroom). And I am producing many examples of both forms of illusion and reality as “virtual” works of art. Using an i-Mac, I am able to generate numerous “scripts” for future works—some of which will be tangibly realized and others that will be available as commissioned works.”

“So, although my paintings have gone through several incarnations, they inevitably ask the same questions? And, since the questions can’t be answered, they continue to motivate me, at eighty-plus years old, to continue to explore what I initially set forth: an art forged from impressions, imagination, relationships, education, meditation, dreams, travel, language, other cultures, and various experiences of realities.”



Water Flowers, 2012, Digital/Mixed media on Sintra, 30" x 60"



Butterfly, 2005, Acrylic on Sintra, 60" x 120"

What the Critics Have Said:

“More than most artists John O’Connor is comfortable with contradiction. It’s the dynamic of his career. Some of his major paintings are exemplary specimens of trompe l’oeil that required the discipline and attentiveness of a monk copying a manuscript. Narrowness is far from all, however. For example, as a teacher he introduced the first courses in performance art in an American college.

He recently had a full retrospective of his career at two venues in Gainesville, Florida. They brought out major shifts but the road he was on was far from bumpy. There’s a logic to O’Connor’s moves, much of it based on the simple facts of his life. Early paintings influenced by the renown Bay Area Figurative Movement, whose major artists he knew, including Richard Diebenkorn and Paul Wonner, vividly portray a fine domestic. Paintings feature his wife and young son and also chronicle the rock vibrant music scene that helped make San Francisco a radical culture capital in the 1960s.

But O’Connor has never been one to slavishly follow a major style, and he found it hard to resist the influence of William T. Wiley who was teaching at the University of California at Davis with O’Connor. It is perhaps due to Wiley and his sense of the absurd that has been likened to that of a Zen master. O’Connor’s keen observation and that skill came to the fore in a kind of absurd way in the trompe l’oeil paintings that followed. The new focus of O’Connor’s paintings became the sky. To be able to imitate the stuff of life in a painting, like 19th century painters such as Harnett and Peto did, is a kind of feat. In their manner, O’Connor could make it look like a real piece of cellophane tape was holding down the objects, admission tickets and crumpled receipts from daily life which he copied, making them look astonishingly real.

The next enthusiasm is widely considered to have engendered O’Connor’s most important work, the Blackboards, which began in the 1980s. In a way they are directly related to the trompe l’oeil paintings; both feature flat surfaces covered with information, momentous or not. But the power of trompe l’oeil is that it presents its ephemera as lasting for eternity, while blackboards are erased leaving palimpsests. Such traces of time keep the paintings fluid. They can hold any kind of content even the absurd kind, as they implicitly state that they are records of the transient nature of thought and ideas.

O’Connor rightly sees Jasper Johns as the immediate source of the Blackboards. Early on, Johns postulated a blackboard when he created his mutable numbers and letters. He has always favored gray, which hints at gravity and deep thought, even though what may appear is finally incomprehensible Dada. O’Connor also makes great use of the stencil, which is practically a Johns trademark. Stenciled writing signals something profound and lasting. Whatever O’Connor’s myriad

influences, he openly acknowledges them, but he also digests them, along with what has been imparted over the years, to create an art that is fully his own.

The most recent paintings have ascended into grandness. First of all they are very large and polyptychs have appeared. If rock and roll was the impulse for some of the 60s paintings, Opera is now. Mozart's "Idomeneo" was summoned up in a large black painting, and in 2003 O'Connor paid lavish homage to Strauss's "Arabella." Butterflies have gotten their majestic due on a large canvas replete with them. Although they might resemble pinned-down specimens, the butterflies might be a symbol of O'Connor's mutableness, and above all, freedom."

— The late William Zimmer, an art critic for the New York Times, New York City, wrote this review in 2005.

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"The trompe-l'oeil still lifes painted by late-19'th century American artists such as Harnett, Peto, and Haberle brim with the same kind of mundane but dense information, and deliver that information with the same optical trickery, as fills O'Connor's deceptively lucid panels. The word games, image games, word-image games, and other meta-rebuses that moved from Victorian parlors to the art of the surrealists' American inheritors, from Cornell to Comix, recur, in spades, throughout O'Connor's oeuvre."

—Peter Frank, Editor of *Visions* art quarterly and art critic for the *LA. Weekly*. In New York he served as art critic for *The Village Voice* and *The SoHo Weekly News*.

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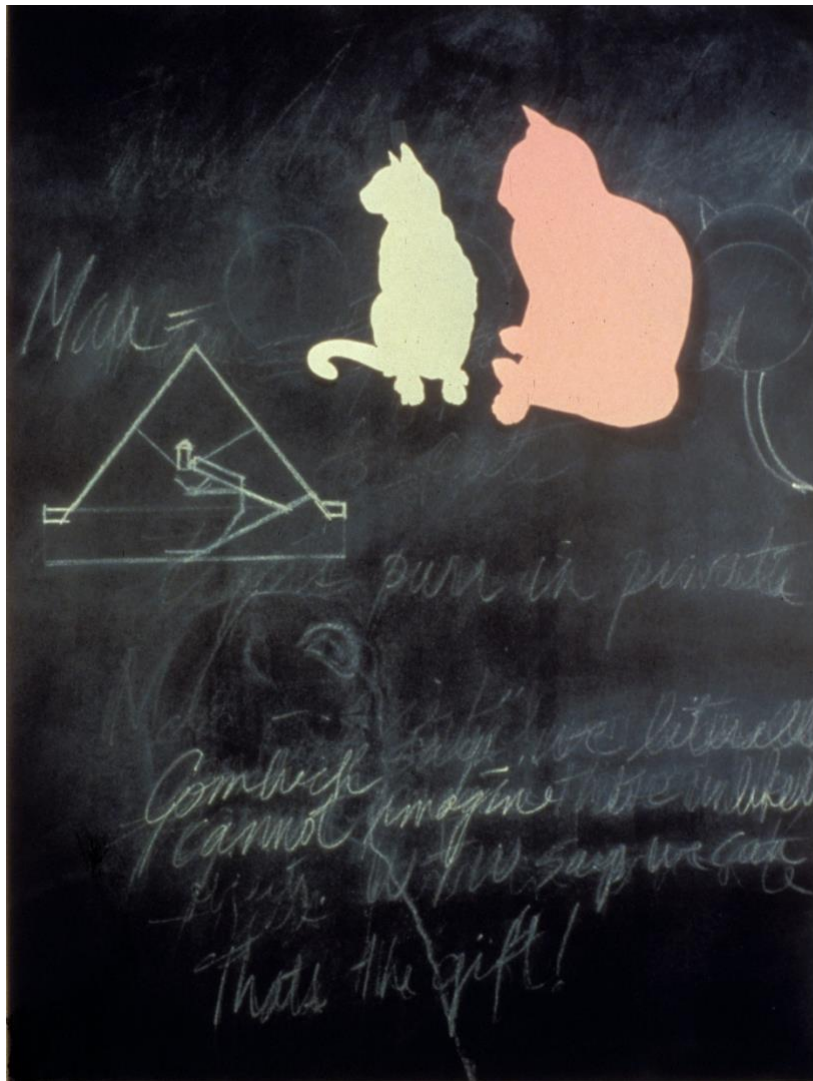
"Realism has always involved the creation of reasonable facsimiles. In certain trompe l'oeil instances, the facsimiles are more than reasonable. They appear to be the real thing, and so we look again. In this game of "trick the eye," artist and onlooker are like two chess masters, each trying to see one move ahead of their opponent. The painter must double-check every detail and hone his skills in an effort to create a seamless illusion; viewers examine the image ever more carefully to find the telltale clue that unmask the hidden truth. It's a difficult challenge; barring the few forgers, who have managed to avoid prison, John O'Connor is the best contemporary "counterfeiter" in the business."

—Gerard Haggerty wrote for *Artnews* and taught art at the City University of New York.

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“O’Connor’s works—particularly the “blackboard” paintings, in which the invocation of a lesson is most direct—would seem to be firmly entrenched in the postmodern questioning of discourse, both visual and verbal. Clearly this is how the artist, a veteran professor, speaks of the project. Calling his method “conceptual realism,” he stresses that the teaching slate’s multiple erasures and emendations trace a history of infinite approximation, of constantly altered “certainty.” The chalkboard palimpsest refutes fixed reality, or at least any hope of an unshakable human grasp of its essence”

—Richard Vine served as managing editor of *Art in America*, and has also served as editor-in-chief of the *Chicago Review* and of *Dialogue: An Art Journal*



Mau, 1988, Acrylic on Board, 40" x 30"