

**Galerie Rompone**

**Joseph O'Neal** Scattered Poems solo show  
zerstreute Gedichte

11. November 2023 - 20. Januar 2024/ november 11th - january 20th 2024

„Ich male ungegenständliche Bilder in Verbindung mit Wörtern, Namen und Daten, um ein mehrdeutiges Feld von Möglichkeiten auszulösen.

„I paint non-objective imagery in conjunction with words, names, and dates to prompt an ambiguous field of opportunities.“ **Joseph O'Neal**

**When you look at your oeuvre do you have themes that are constantly to be found in your paintings?**

The subject is always the painting itself. Paint is the subject matter. Tensions and dichotomies within the work, such as the space between text, color, and form play a significant role. These tensions serve as a space of opportunity for the viewer to bring their own lived experiences. The work is a reflection of the human condition and invites viewers to engage with it in a way that is both self-reflective and multitudinous, like the human experience itself.

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**Tell us something about the body of work you present in your first European solo show named "Scattered Poems" ! And what does the title tell us about your work in the studio ?**

The title, 'Scattered Poems', pays homage to Jack Kerouac's collection of poetry published in 1971. It not only serves as a tribute to the Beats, who have been a well of inspiration for my work but also reflects on my process of working on multiple pieces simultaneously, much like scattered verses or stanzas of a poem.

I found myself immersed in the writings of Beat literature figures Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Diane di Prima. This exploration led me to draw a parallel between my painting practice and the Beat ideology of seeking truth by unabashedly following visceral instincts.

As I continued to create this body of work, I felt that it was beginning to engage in a more direct conversation with the Beat generation. There were undeniable parallels in the landscape of our respective times. As evident in the Beat era with the end of gas rations and the opening of the interstate system in the continental United States, which allowed for open travel, created a feeling of freedom – a sensation I believe many of us experienced post-COVID lockdown. It felt as if the world was opening up again, and this period of confinement stimulated important social and cultural conversations, raising awareness about issues of social, economic, and environmental injustices.

Despite these layers of meaning, at the core, the exhibition remains about painting itself. It centers on the essence of painting as subject matter. While there are overarching themes related to seeking altitude, whether literal or metaphorical—such as references to birds, the cosmos, and ‘higher places’—these themes serve as a loose reference to the Beat generation and a more direct reference to universal human aspirations and curiosity for elevated existence.

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**What do you mean by saying that for you as a painter it is important to open the door?**

I think of the urge to paint as a banging on the door. When I speak about opening the door as a painter, I’m referring to my process. A metaphorical way of saying that I believe in allowing the energy (the banging), to flow freely and unrestricted through my work. Instead of trying to translate the noise, my approach is to open the door and let it speak for itself. To be a conduit for the banging and not an interpreter.

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**Some years ago you had two back surgeries. You had to lay on the couch and you made drawings. It is the Jackie O - series. Did drawing also change the way you paint over the years?**

My experience with back surgery in 2015, which led to me spending an extended period of time lying down, had a profound effect on how I view the process of making work. During this time I turned to drawing as a means of both productivity and as a way to cope with the emotional and physical difficulties of the situation.

I created hundreds of Jackie Onassis drawings during this time. What I found in the process of making these was a strong sense of meditation through repetition. The repetition of drawing became a way for me to engage with my work and maintain a sense of purpose during a time when many aspects of my life were disrupted. The meditative quality of repetitive drawings not only helped me through this period but also left an impact on my approach to painting, imbuing a sense of mindfulness and a greater appreciation of the process itself.

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**How do you balance words and colors in your work? Could you consider both of these elements as signs (like in structuralism that there is always a sign that indicates something (signe et le signifié in french))**

Balancing words and colors in my work is an intuitive process that relies on following instinctual cues. I maintain a list of words and text that resonates with me, without necessarily questioning why I'm drawn to them. When I paint, the choice of text for a particular piece unfolds organically during the process. It's never a predetermined decision like saying, "I will make a painting with this specific word." Instead, I use the list of words as a palette or a source from which I can draw. The pairing of words with paintings is guided by a visceral feeling, and often, the text emerges spontaneously as I am working on a piece.

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**How important is the invisible and ambiguous in your work?**

The invisible and ambiguous are of great importance in my work. They serve as the foundation of the viewing experience. Ambiguity is the space that facilitates a sense of floating, providing the necessary room for transcendence to occur. It's the enigmatic space between elements, between words, colors and form.

This ambiguity fosters an ever-shifting interaction within the work. It's the tension between the words and non-objective forms, where a direct connection remains elusive, that offers viewers an individualized experience.

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**When you start painting do you have a precise idea or a feeling ? Or is it that the spontaneous result leads to a feeling/ a pictorial sphere?**

When I begin a painting, I never have a precise idea or feeling in mind. I may start with a loose composition, but as I begin working I let the act of painting guide the process. It's an intuitive dance, with many passes until the painting reaches its own conclusion.

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**What role does nature play in your work? It seems as if it is a habitat like a room someone could walk in!**

Nature is a part of my work in that it is in the well I pull water from. I don't aim to replicate nature but rather draw from it. My partner and I have a habit of having a morning espresso in our garden when the weather permits. I spend this time looking at shapes, color, and composition. It all goes into the well I subconsciously pull from. I appreciate how viewers may draw those connections, but the work is ambiguous and non-objective, providing an opportunity for viewers to project their own interpretations and connections.

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**You grew up in North Carolina and at 12 you discovered Skateboarding. Did this activity open up the doors for you as a painter?**

Skateboarding opened up the world to me. It was the vehicle that allowed me to realize that there was so much more to the world than the town I grew up in. It exposed me to diverse cultures and broader possibilities. Skateboarding also brought out an intense and obsessive quality within me, a quality that I now channel into my painting. It taught me to look at the world in an adjacent way.

Skateboarding played a pivotal role in introducing me to the art world. I worked at N.C. Skates, a skate shop in Wilmington, North Carolina, for several years. The shop received Juxtapoz magazines from the publishing company High Speed Productions, the same publisher of Thrasher Skateboarding Magazine. Juxtapoz Magazine was my first encounter with art outside of the typical beach motifs that were prevalent where I grew up, and the classic Renaissance painters found in local bookstores. It was my initial connection to work that resonated with me on a personal level.

Being introduced to works by Skateboard artists such as Mark Gonzales, Neil Blender, Ed Templeton and many others started a journey of learning more about the art world as a whole. Leading me to Basquiat, and Basquiat leading me to Twombly, and Twombly leading me to Turner. It was a pursuit of following what I was drawn to and then digging more. I wanted to know how picture planes were constructed, I wanted to know how it all worked. This all eventually led me to learning about the contemporary art scene, and I wanted to be part of that conversation.

Joseph O'Neal (born.1983 in North Carolina) lives and works in Easton, Pennsylvania (USA). O'Neal has participated in group and solo exhibitions throughout the United States, Europe, and Mexico. These includes a notable large-scale two person exhibition held in Basel, Switzerland in 2011, 2015, and Zürich in 2018. O'Neal's work has appeared in publications such as The Basler Zeitung, Sensitive Skin Magazine, Art Rated, Still Developing: A Story of Instant Gratification, Lula Japan, as well as interview features with Telebasel, and NPR.

### **selected Solo Exhibitions**

2023- Scattered Poems, galerie Rompone, Cologne, Germany

2022 - Letters from the Earth, Cabin Contemporary, Pottsville, PA

2021 - Soil Grows Through The Eye, Ressarts Projects, Frenchtown, NJ

2018 - A Sunday in Soho III (w. Joe Strasser) ,Zürich, Switzerland

2018 - de profundis, Index Gallery, Newark, NJ

2017 - World Champs, Ard Bia, Galway, Ireland

2017 - during a time like this, Activate: Market Street, Gallery Aferro, Newark, NJ

2016 - Trapping Ghosts, The Road Gallery, New York, NY

2015 - A Sunday in Soho II (w. Joe Strasser), Gimmick Studios, Basel, Switzerland

2011 - A Sunday in Soho (w. Joe Strasser), Fabrikreal Glanzmann Generalunternehmung AG, Basel, Switzerland

### **selected Group Exhibitions**

2023 - In Other Words, Kansas City Public Library, Mountain Gallery, Kansas City, MO

2023 - Worry, Soft Machine Gallery, Allentown, PA

2023 - A painting is a painting is a painting, Artport Kingston, Kingston, NY

2023 - Real Estate, Center for Visual Research at Cedar Crest College, Allentown, PA

2023 - Quadrivial, Chefas Projects, Portland, OR

2022 - Salone Rompone, Galerie Rompone, Cologne, Germany

2022 - Tell Me More About Yourself, Gallery Aferro, Newark, NJ

2021 - Gelée royale, Galerie Rompone, Cologne, Germany

2021 - a Little Undefined, Lodger Gallery, Kansas City, MO

2021 - Between the Lines, Grove Collective, London, England

2020 - Way Out, La Grange Gallery, Cernay-Lés-Reims, France

2020 - If You Like This, You'll Love That, Collar Works Gallery, Troy, NY

2020 - People , Brick and Mortar Gallery, Easton, PA

2019 - 'Of Course, I Haven't Forgotten', Warbling Collective, 115A Artists Space, London, England

2018 - buyers market, Brick and Mortar Gallery, Easton, PA

2017 - The 500 Project, The Road Gallery, New York, NY

2016 - Queen of Angels : When a Church Dies, Art and Artifacts, Newark, NJ

2015 - Grand Opening, Quinientos Cincuenta, Mexico City, Mexico

2015 - Chainlink invitational, Hibbleton Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2015 - Home Tour, The Road Gallery, New York, NY

2014 - Dichotomy, Index Gallery, The Art Factory, Patterson, NJ

2013 - Cover the Wall, 7 Dunham Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2013 - Works on Paper, LBI Foundation, Loveladies, NJ

2012 - Put a Bow on it, Kraine Gallery, New York, NY

2011 - Imaginary Arms, Arch Collective, Brooklyn, NY

2010 - umbilical poetry, Space Womb Contemporary Gallery, Queens, NY

2010 - beginnings, Spice Factory Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2010 - Instant Gratification, Copro Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2009 - Polaroid Party, Hibbleton Gallery, Los Angeles, CA