September 12 - November 21, 2019

Opening Reception
Thursday, September 12 from 4 - 7 p.m.

"Metaphorming Minds: Envisioning the Possibilities of Nature"
Discussion with the Artist and Exhibition Curator, Simon Zalkind

The Art Gallery
Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics and Humanities
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus
13800 East 19th Avenue, Aurora, Colorado 80045
Tel. 303-724-5844
Map and directions at: www.coloradobioethics.org

Gallery Hours
9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday - Friday.
Free and open to the public.
The brain is a biological construction of maddening, mysterious and elusive complexity. But as the neuroscientific revolution has progressed, it has also become a cultural icon with symbolic and metaphoric associations providing a rich source of imagery and ideas for contemporary artists. Todd Siler is among the most ambitious and prominent among them. His graphics, in a wide variety of mediums, extravedantly beautiful visual objects whose seductions are independent of their neural-scientific sources. However, at the center of his project is his multi-dimensional understanding of the centrality of the brain for all human endeavor and for the entire range of human experience and aspiration – aesthetic, emotional, philosophical, and environmental. The implications are staggering. As Siler states, “Every event we encounter today is brain-related...created and resolved by this compact network of neural tissue that’s parked on everyone’s shoulders.” In the process of organizing this exhibition, Siler and I have had many conversations about the philosophical, the ethical, spiritual and affective dimensions of its assertions. Is the brain the “I-alexand?” Are notions of free will, choice, empathy, love, imagination...subjectively, simply the consequence of genetically determined hard-wiring? – adaptations of the brain to respond to environment and experience? I hope that Siler and I will continue to argue and explore these issues together for a long time. They elude any easy resolution. However, when it comes to “cultural input” – the experience of art – Siler and I both agree that it is inextricably boxed in the deep rhythms of the human brain. The assertion (fact?) that art has a solid biological foundation unites the views of modern neurobiologists with those of Michaleanleeg, Mondan, Ornament, Matteo and Todd Siler.

Given Siler’s strong foundation in cognitive and neural sciences, it’s surprising to experience the fact that the works in this exhibition do not rely – as one might expect – on dazzling digital or technological manipulations. Siler is a polymath, and his art is informed by an astonishing level of sophistication in an enormous range of disciplines. However, his making techniques and his stylistic allegories are refreshingly traditional. He paints on paper and canvas. He utilizes printmaking techniques that are centuries old. His sculptures are made of metal and function as discrete art objects in a gallery environment. The calligraphic elements present in so many of Siler’s works unite from the tosneaks of Da Vinci. His use of color and gesture can appear comfortably familiar in an art-historical context and suggest an upright dialogue with so many of the art of the 20th and 21st centuries. Many Abstract Expressionist practitioners, for example, were also attempting to bypass the reigning philosphical logic that did, the mind from the embodied aspect of lived experience, looking instead towards the possibility of more integrated, holistic strategies for creating art – strategies that restore us to the biological immediacy of sensation which becomes coherent when the brain assigns it meaning, utility and value. In Siler’s art, science exists in a tangle- ged relationship with beauty, and the power of his art is that we can see this brain as an archive, a container, or a prompt, or what we’re looking at. We always emerge from his sustained observation within the methodologies of his scientific research but also from his imagination – the brain, after all, contains the key to dreams. It would be surprising if the various stimuli we observe did not generate some insights into how the brain is organized. Conversely, as Siler demonstrates, the study of the brain provides substantial evidence that our perception of art – our determination of “beauty” in general – can be correlated directly with active specialization in areas of the brain.

In the May 1987 issue of Artforum critic Patricia Phillips wrote the following:
We all know that the human brain creates many marvelous and meaningful things, but Siler’s work transforms this fact into an idea of great consequence. He manages to make us not only notice something wonderful at the strange and delicate operations within the mind. The world does not exist independent of human cognition or symbolic activity. Siler’s drawings and paintings do not suggest some a priori reality. He makes the idea of “world-making” visually concrete. He depicts through a mercilessly and absolutely lucid what others are just now attempting to describe. As Phillips implies, art’s not only embracing and celebrates the natural sciences and their materialist framework but also suggests that our understanding of the “natural” is at the brink of a profound expansion. As far as I can determine, “science” is still far from providing a final answer to our deepest questions about subjectivity, love, consciousness/share, play, and the meaning(s) we attribute to the experience of being a being. A perfect narrator, host here. His work strikes a tenebrous balance between pure visual seduction and a precisely informed knowledge of the esoteric capabilities of the brain – an exemplary voyage of neural engineering – to seek connection, creativity, discovery and the unfailing capacities of imagination, of “wonderment.”

Simon Zalkind, Curator