

# TOM OTTERNESS

## *TIPPING POINT*



**Marlborough**

COVER:

*Tipping Point*, 2017

bronze, edition of 3

83 x 58 1/4 x 29 in., 210.8 x 148 x 73.7 cm

# TOM OTTERNESS

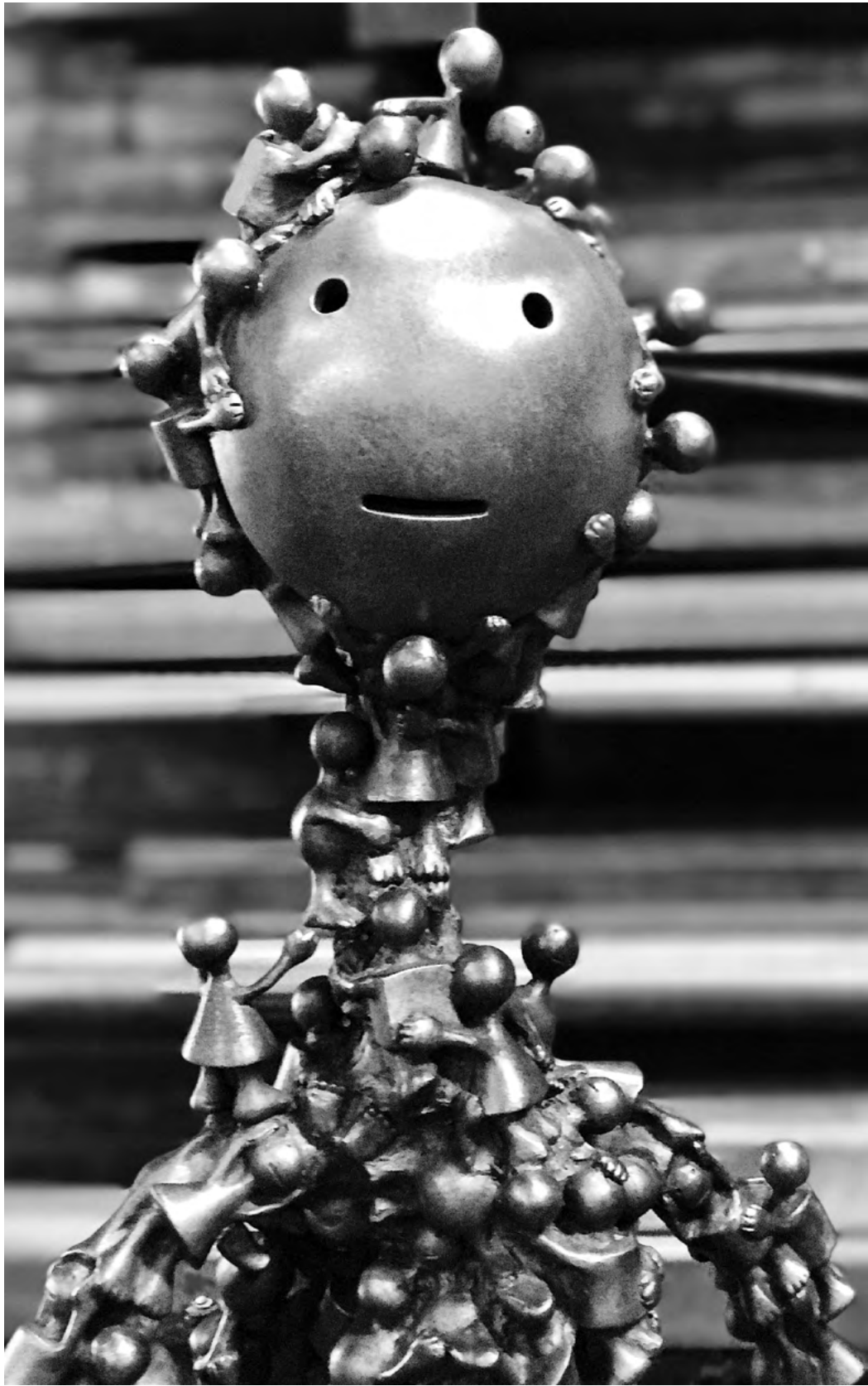
*TIPPING POINT*

SEPTEMBER 14 - OCTOBER 14, 2017

**Marlborough**

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# The Social Contract

Carlo McCormick

I once met a clown from the Soviet Union. People told me he was famous and beloved, a key figure of glasnost, a man who many credit as having helped bring down the empire. How could he get away with what he did I asked him, so many were imperiled for far less. “Because I’m a clown,” he told me, “what can they do to a clown?” Of all the radicals I’ve known, Tom Otterness is that allowed clown whose profound pathos, carnivalesque mayhem and joyful humanism can convey the folly of being in all its pyrrhic victories and bitter defeats such that we learn to laugh at what is wrong with us. There are lessons to be learned, emotions to be addressed and oh so many wrongs to be righted, but Tom’s art allows us to really laugh, and in that riotous release, to taste the liberty so many talk about but few can appreciate. As Charles Philippon, the publisher of the raucous 19th Century French humor magazine *Caricature* and the man who ruthlessly ridiculed the monarchy to rise a revolution, once remarked, *castigat ridendo mores*, fancy in Latin but just as true in English - “one corrects morals by laughing.”

There is in the rambunctious hurly-burly celebration of life in Otterness’ art something wonderfully askew, a disorder forever bubbling under the cool surface and impeccable compositional integrity of his sculptures. Often too his figures dangle on the precipice of gravity, humanity’s fall forever suspended like the moment of exquisite bewilderment before a delirious pratfall, a magnificent inversion of order both perplexing and challenging to the status quo, a simple gift of pure magic like we get in his sculpture *World Upside Down* (2017) where the smallest lifts up the giant, a plaything hefted by the joy of amusement to a flailing exultation. Guy Debord himself reminds us “In a world that has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood.” And Tom revels in these inverted perspectives, the social body in summersault, the tumult of possibilities, a tilt of the head as if to see with fresh eyes, or the simple wonder of his sculpture *Girl Upside Down* (2017) where she dangles from those once ubiquitous (and now banned as a safety hazard) playground rings, transformed by the artist into the uprising geometry of triangles. It’s a special pleasure of early youth to see the world upside that way, caught by Otterness as the posture of awe and the graceful flight of fancy.

Operating as a kind of ritualistic and radical inversion, Otterness’ sculptures elevate the lowly, make magisterial the plebeian, suffuse the quotidian with the uncanny, have the small topple the mighty, and preserve what is fundamentally prosaic and passing in that most timeless of art materials, bronze. If these are shrines to a cosmic and comic reversal they might be guided by someone like *Heyokna*, the sacred clown of the Lakota (like Tom, also born of the Great Plains), a backwards-forwards being, denoting and invoking the upside-down and contradictory. Rather than chaos, Tom Otterness is simply mining an alternative order of overturning. His is not a revolution so much as a disruption, a playful satire more than a brutal critique, and more than even that really, an allegory, a parable for the foibles and follies of the human condition. His overthrow stays within the bounds of the hegemony, like an internal convolution, akin to the carnivals of the Middle Ages where villages would erupt in magnificent spectacles of inversion - processions with the town whore as the Virgin Mary or the village idiot as the king, ridicules and ribaldry more than matched by the human mass of drunkenness, fornication and defecation in the streets - temporary reprieves from authority allowed by a calendar that would always revert back to the normal order.

Existential as so many of the scenarios Otterness has limned for more than a third of a century since his impulsive little people first began populating the art world and our public spaces, what has always been so delightful in even the most dreadful of their misbehaviors is their uncanny ability to not just engender our empathy but our recognition. In part this is due to his stripping down of individual characteristics in his characters to a kind of Everyman (or Everywoman), but it is also significantly due to the way he plays with scale. Working within the monumental mode

of public sculpture, Otterness deftly cuts his figures down to size allowing them to be human and even endearing in their diminishment. I think of this often when I encounter his parables of capitalist greed in New York City such as *The Real World* in Lower Manhattan and *Life Underground* in the 14th Street - 8th Avenue subway station. It's as if their smallness allows us to measure their avarice as equally small-minded; to not be threatened by their folly but to be bigger than that. Born of the homunculus, which dates back to 16th Century alchemy and runs through Goethe's *Faust* as the formation of the pure human spirit in a miniaturized version, Otterness' people are closer yet to the miniaturized metaphors for humanity we find throughout literature, in the Clock family from Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*, Roald Dahl's Oompa Loompas as appeared in *The Glass Elevator* and more famously *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the Munchkins of Frank Baum's *Oz*, and most pertinently for their satiric edge the Lilluputians of *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift.

Whereas the small ones of fiction typically inhabit fantasy worlds very much resembling our own, there can be little mistaking that, regardless of their abstraction, Tom Otterness' figures are of and in our world. Specifically, if we had to place them no matter where they may end up being ensconced, these people are surely of the urban experience. Yes, Otterness is by birth and upbringing thoroughly of the heartland, but as an artist he is quintessentially a New Yorker. Geography hardly matters, even less so now in the vast and inclusive globalism of the art world, but these are city-folk, the teeming masses immediately recognizable as such not merely by the way they cluster and swarm but so too in their isolation and loneliness. First and foremost I know Tom as an artist, but as a matter of fact and of our most common contact I know him as a neighbor. It is rare - and almost always a result of the friendships by which he has dedicated so much of his life to a sense of creative community - that I run into Tom on that social treadmill of the art world, but it is with far greater frequency that I encounter him on the street. It would be misleading to call him a flaneur (he has far too much of that Midwestern work ethic for such idle ramblings) but to heed Baudelaire's description of this condition "...to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the intimate. To be away from home and yet to feel everywhere at home..." is to marvel at the discrete yet engaged place Otterness' art occupies in our world.

Lastly, we should consider where this line between social versus political art lies within Otterness' oeuvre. With *Body Politic* (2017) (by title at least his most political in nature), *The Fall* (2017), *The Secret* (2015), *Tipping Point* (2017), *Totem* (2017), *Tug of War* (2017), and *Youth and Age* (2017), the social dynamics explored are confrontational and codependent. Here we get a sense of society as a fluid negotiation of the many, what Jane Jacobs in describing the busy sidewalks of New York as the order "composed of movement and change," allowing that "we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to dance - not a simple-minded precision dance with everyone kicking up at the same time, twirling in unison and bouncing off en masse, but an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole." This seems closest to Otterness' uncomfortable yet symbiotic choreography between the one and the many, what in political terms we might compare to what Rousseau called "The Social Contract." Perhaps his very notion that power must reside in the plural, among all people rather than the few, and that community presents the best solution for the problems of a commercial society, is a fallacy - but it remains the verity of humanism in what is increasingly coming to resemble a post-humanist age. Not always right, it is at least honest, and now that this fundamental set of principals is undermined by a brave new world of alternative facts and fake news, it is perhaps more important than ever to remember the words of Virgil that Rousseau took as the epigraph for his social contract; *foederis aequas/Dicamus leges*, "let us set equal the terms for truth."



*Body Politic*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
34 x 14 3/4 x 12 in., 86.4 x 37.5 x 30.5 cm





*Dog Walker*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
40 1/2 x 28 x 16 in., 102.9 x 71.1 x 40.6 cm





*Sphere Holding Sphere*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
42 x 15 x 15 1/2 in., 106.7 x 38.1 x 39.4 cm





*Girl with Flower* (two views), 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
15 3/4 x 9 3/4 x 6 1/2 in., 40 x 24.8 x 16.5 cm



*Tug of War*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 3  
50 x 84 x 39 in., 127 x 213.4 x 99.1 cm







*Reclining Cylinder*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
8 x 22 x 12 in., 20.3 x 55.9 x 30.5 cm





*World Upside Down*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
24 1/8 x 25 3/4 x 26 1/4 in., 61.3 x 65.4 x 66.7 cm





*Study for The Fall*, 2017  
pencil on paper  
7 7/8 x 10 5/8 in., 20 x 27 cm



*The Fall*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
13 3/4 x 27 1/4 x 19 1/2 in., 34.9 x 69.2 x 49.5 cm





*The Secret*, 2015  
bronze, edition of 6  
20 x 19 1/4 x 11 1/2 in., 50.8 x 48.9 x 29.2 cm



*Girl Upside Down*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
56 1/2 x 36 x 16 in., 143.5 x 91.4 x 40.6 cm



*Rabbit*, 2015  
bronze, edition of 6  
24 3/4 x 14 3/4 x 21 in., 62.9 x 37.5 x 53.3 cm





*Youth and Age*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
26 1/4 x 24 x 14 in., 66.7 x 60.1 x 35.6 cm



*Study for Innocent Giant*, 2017  
pencil on paper  
10 1/8 x 8 in., 25.7 x 20.3 cm





*Innocent Giant*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
33 x 22 x 22 1/4 in., 83.8 x 55.9 x 56.5 cm

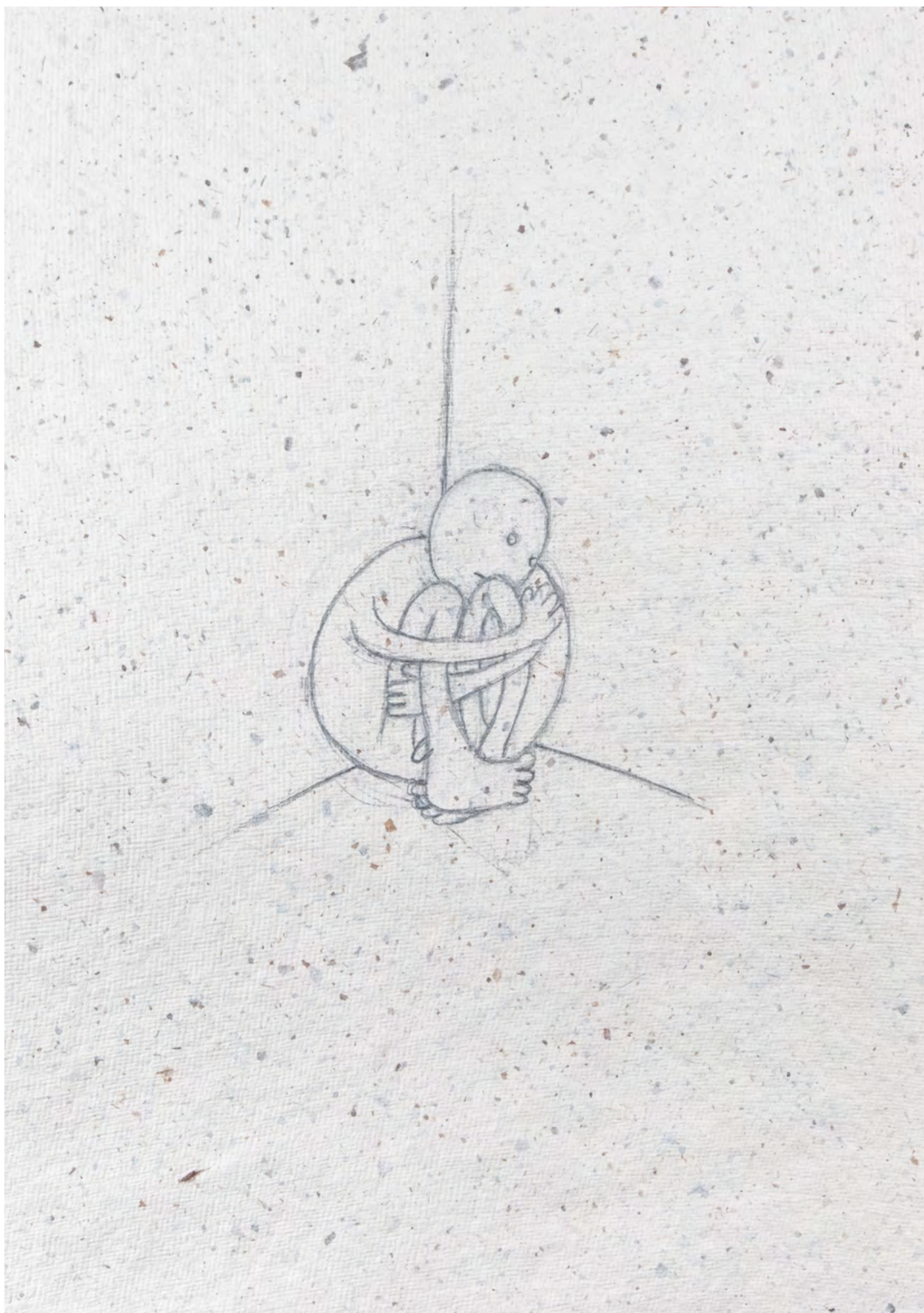




*Drunk*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
17 1/2 x 24 x 18 in., 44.5 x 61 x 45.7 cm



*Bird*, 2015  
bronze, edition of 6  
23 7/8 x 14 x 15 1/2 in., 60.6 x 35.6 x 39.4 cm



*Study for Man in Corner*, 2017  
pencil on paper  
11 1/2 x 8 1/2 in., 29.2 x 21.6 cm





*Man in Corner*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 6  
11 x 9 x 7 in., 27.9 x 22.9 x 17.8 cm



*Totem*, 2017  
bronze, edition of 3  
111 x 12 x 12 in., 281.9 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm

## TOM OTTERNESS

- 1952 Born in Wichita, Kansas  
 1970 The Art Students League, New York New York  
 1973 Independent Study Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York  
 1977 Collaborative Projects, Inc., New York, New York

The artist lives in Manhattan, New York and works in Brooklyn, New York.

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *Makin Hay*, Ulrich Museum, Wichita, Kansas (through 2017)  
*Metal on Paper: Silverpoint, Copperpoint, and Steel point Drawings*, Marlborough Gallery, New York, New York  
 2014 *Tom Otterness: Creation Myth*, Marlborough Gallery, New York, New York  
 Gulliver, SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz, New York  
 2013 *Makin' Hay*, Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, Bentonville, Arkansas  
 2012 *Tom Otterness*, Marlborough Monaco, Monte Carlo, Monaco  
*Tom Otterness*, The Cultural Council of Palm Beach County, Palm Beach, Florida  
 2011 *Tom Otterness: Animal Spirits*, Marlborough Gallery, New York, New York  
 2007 *Tom Otterness: The Public Unconscious*, Marlborough Chelsea, New York, New York  
 2006 *Tom Otterness in Beverly Hills*, Beverly Hills, California  
*Tom Otterness*, Marlborough Monaco, Monte Carlo, Monaco  
*Tom Otterness in Grand Rapids: The Gardens to the Grand*, Frederick Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids, Michigan  
 2005 *Tom Otterness on Broadway*, New York, New York  
*Tom Otterness in Indianapolis*, Indianapolis, Indiana  
 2004 *Several Strange Objects*, John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, California  
 2003 *Free Money on Park Avenue*, Park Avenue and 57th Street, New York, New York  
*Bombeater*, Skoto Gallery, New York, New York  
 2002 *Tom Otterness: Free Money and Other Fairy Tales*, Marlborough Gallery & Marlborough Chelsea, New York, New York  
*See No Evil*, Marlborough Gallery, New York, New York  
*What the Hay*, Utica, Montana  
*Tom Otterness*, Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbour, New York  
 1999 *Tom Otterness*, Galería Marlborough, Madrid, Spain  
*Tom Otterness: Gold Rush—New Sculpture and Drawings*, John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, California  
 1998 *Tom Otterness: The Marriage of Real Estate and Money and Other Recent Projects*, PBCC Museum of Contemporary Art, Lake Worth, Florida  
 1997 *Otterness*, Marlborough Gallery, New York, New York  
*Life Underground*, Battery Park City Authority, New York, New York (through 1998)  
 1996 *Tom Otterness: Marriage of Real Estate and Money*,

- Motel Fine Arts, New York, New York  
 1995 *Tom Otterness, On the Commons: Recent Sculptures*, MetroTech Center, Brooklyn, New York  
*Tom Otterness: The Tables*, Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas  
*Tom Otterness: Drawings and New Sculpture*, Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York, New York  
*Tom Otterness: Recent Sculpture*, Public Art Fund at Doris Freedman Plaza, New York, New York  
 1994 *Tom Otterness: Recent Drawings and Small Objects*, Gallery of Contemporary Art, Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois  
 1993 Galerie Weber, Münster, Germany  
*Tom Otterness: New Sculpture*, John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, California  
*Tom Otterness: The Tables*, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
 1992 *Tom Otterness*, Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York, New York  
 1991 *Tom Otterness: The Tables*, Sculptures and Drawings, Institut Valencia d'Art Modern, Centre Julio Gonzalez, Valencia, Spain; traveled to Portikus/Senckenbergmuseum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany; and Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, The Netherlands  
*Tom Otterness*, Nancy Drysdale Gallery, Washington, D.C.  
 1990 James Corcoran Gallery, Santa Monica, California; traveled to Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York, New York  
*The Tables*, Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles, California  
 1987 *The Tables*, Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York, New York  
*Projects: Tom Otterness*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York  
*Sculpture and Drawings*, John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, California  
 1986 *Tom Otterness*, PPG Plaza, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
 1985 Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York, New York  
 1984 Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne, Germany  
 1983 *Tom Otterness*, Recent Drawings, Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York, New York  
*Sculpture*, Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York, New York

### PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

- 2015 *Playground*, Aspinwall Riverfront Park, Aspinwall, Pennsylvania  
 2014 *Other Worlds*, Hamad International Airport, Doha, Qatar  
 2013 *Creation Myth*, Memorial Art Gallery Centennial Sculpture Park, Rochester, New York  
 2011 *Big Girl Playground*, Ridgehill, Yonkers, New York  
 2010 *Otterness's Playground*, Silver Towers, New York, New York  
*Free Money*, Wi City Blooming, Ilsan, Korea  
 Centennial Sculpture Park, Rochester, New York (commissioned by Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester)

- Wild Life*, Connell, Washington  
*Another World*, Happy Hollow Park & Zoo, San Jose, California  
*Play Garden Park*, Fulton, Mississippi
- 2009 *Social Invertebrates: Millipede, Scorpion, Walking Stick*, Phoenix Convention Center, City of Phoenix, Office of Art and Culture, Phoenix, Arizona
- 2008 *Millipede*, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas  
*Large Covered Wagon*, DUMBO Brooklyn, New York (through January 2009)  
*New Direction*, Hunterdon Museum of Art, Clinton, New Jersey
- 2007 *Coqui*, P.S. 20, New York, New York  
*Matriculated Nature*, City of Claremont, California  
*DNA*, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida  
*Immigrant Family*, 18 Yonge Street, Toronto, Canada
- 2005 *Amorphophallus Titanum*, New York Botanical Gardens, Bronx, New York  
*Humpty Dumpty*, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, New York, New York  
*Large Frog and Bee*, Montefiore Children's Hospital, Bronx, New York  
*Large Covered Wagon*, Pioneer Park, Walla Walla, Washington
- 2004 *Life Underground*, 14th Street Subway Station ACCEL Lines, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, New York, New York  
*El Coqui Gigante de Las Cavernas del Río Camuy*, Parque de Los Cavernas del Río Camuy, Camuy, Puerto Rico  
*Untitled*, Museum Beelden aan Zee, The Museum Foundation, Scheveningen, The Netherlands  
*Tornado of Ideas and Horse and Rider*, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas
- 2003 *The Return of the Four-Leggeds*, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, Washington State Arts commission, Spokane, Washington
- 2002 *Mortellito Memorial*, Branchbrook Park Station, New Jersey Transit, Newark, New Jersey  
*Makin' Hay*, Utica, Montana; Sun Valley, Idaho; traveled to The University of Washington, Pullman, Washington; The Outdoor Art Collection, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California; and San Antonio, Texas (acquired by the Alturas Foundation; through 2009)
- 2001 *Suspended Mind*, Carl Sagan Discovery Center, Montefiore Children's Hospital, in collaboration with Rockwell Group, Bronx, New York  
*The Lesson*, Little Red School House, New York, New York  
*Independence School*, P.S.234, New York, New York
- 2000 *Time and Money*, Public Art Fund, Hilton Times Square, Hilton Hotel Corporation, New York, New York
- 1999 *Gold Rush*, United States Federal Courthouse, General Services Administration, Sacramento, California  
*The Music Lesson*, Music Building, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina  
*Feats of Strength*, Western Washington University, funded in partnership with Washington State Arts Commission, Art in Public Places Program, Bellingham, Washington  
*Rockman*, United States Federal Courthouse
- Minneapolis, General Services Administration, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- 1998 *The Gates*, Cleveland Public Library, in collaboration with Maya Lin, Cleveland, Ohio
- 1997 *Law of Nature*, United States Federal Courthouse Portland, General Services Administration, Portland, Oregon  
*Visionary*, Metro Tech Center, Brooklyn, New York
- 1996 *The Marriage of Real Estate and Money*, Roosevelt Island, New York, New York
- 1995 *Dreamers Awake*, Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas
- 1994 *Upside-Down Feet*, Krannert Museum of Art, Kinkead Pavilion, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois
- 1993 *Upside-Down Feet*, Krannert Museum of Art, University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois  
*Die Überfrau*, State Library, Munster, Germany; Architect: Bolles-Wilson
- 1992 *The Real World*, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Park, Battery Park City Authority, New York, New York
- 1991 *The Frieze*, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Greensboro, North Carolina  
*The New World*, The Edward R. Roybal Federal Building, General Services Administration, Los Angeles Federal Building, Los Angeles, California
- 1984 *Kings Parade*, Buchhandlung Walther Koenig, Cologne, Germany
- ## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS
- Arts Council of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana  
Beelden Aan Zee Museum, The Hague, The Netherlands  
Eli Broad Family Foundation, Santa Monica, California  
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas  
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Delaware  
Gateway Foundation, St. Louis, Missouri  
Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey  
Institut Valencia d'Art Modern, Center Julio Gonzalez, Valencia, Spain  
Kemper Art Museum, Kansas City, Missouri  
Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids, Michigan  
Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico  
Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor, New York  
Palm Beach Community College Museum of Art, Lake Worth, Florida  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California  
The Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, New York  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel  
The Miyagi Museum of Art, Sendai, Japan  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York  
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York  
Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Greensboro, North Carolina  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York

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