

## INTERVIEW: JAMES SIENA

James Barron: How closely do you follow the execution of a system in your work?

James Siena: I am happy to fuck up the idea half way through the execution. I am not stuck on blandly following an idea. I want to see something, but I also want a little slippage. I want something to get close to breaking down.

JB: Is the slippage about human error?

JS: I think it's about evolution and variety.

JB: You said to me, "Rome really gets in the bones." Tell me about that.

JS: Well, it's probably because there are so many bones in Rome! It's also that it's like a living thing. It's gone through so many changes. It's been a cosmopolitan city for more than 2,000 years. It feels like a comfortable weight, like a nice blanket that you want to have over you.

JB: But you haven't been intimidated by the past. You came here, went to the Porta Portese market, bought a typewriter, started pecking away and you made a new form for your work.

JS: I started making art on a typewriter in Rome, which I never felt compelled to do -- even though I like typewriters as a metaphor and the machines as a hobby, to look at and collect.

JB: Why now, why Rome, why that typewriter?

JS: I have always liked Olivetti machines. The one I saw at Porta Portese is one I had never seen before. I don't think they exported it. It's called the 'Studio Typewriter.' Actually, I was doing emails. I was playing with the parenthesis key. I sent emails to people I with hundreds of parenthesis going back and forth. It would be like sound waves traveling back and forth in the email. That's how it started. Then, I decided to try to do some parenthesis typings. That led from one thing to another. The number sequences were completely unanticipated.

JB: That's your methodology?

JS: I get an idea to do one thing. I make one decision. It presents me with three other opportunities. Then, those three opportunities lead to another three. If I follow that model, I have lots of things to do. It's a methodology for making the next thing.

JB: Listening to you make a drawing just now, the keys have different intonations.

JS: I like the rhythms that I get, especially because I have to use the shift key. I'm using a European typewriter. The number one is the lower case "l." Whenever I am typing one through ten, I get a thump when the carriage goes down for one, and another thump when I go up to two.

JB: You have a huge studio at the American Academy, but it has not increased the size of your work.

JS: I really want to pursue the typings and the toothpick sculptures here. Things never got large.