

BITS & PIECES

PUT TOGETHER
TO PRESENT
A SEMBLANCE
OF A WHOLE

WALKER ART CENTER COLLECTIONS

this mistake. He remarked, "If you repeat 'tableau' and 'bateau' ten consecutive times, you will inevitably end up by saying bateau instead of tableau and tableau instead of bateau, and by the sound of things you could hold forth on the last bateau as easily as on the last tableau."⁴ Broodthaers' literate work is similarly limber, in both mind and eye.

J.R.

Notes

1. *Pense-bête* is a French term for a mnemonic device, like putting a knot in a handkerchief, but also suggests the phrases "think animal" and "think stupid." See Michael Compton, "In Praise of the Subject," in Marge Goldwater, ed., *Marcel Broodthaers*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), 24.
2. For a discussion of Broodthaers' many slide projections, see Anna Hakkens' essay in Frank Lubbers, Anna Hakkens, and Maria Gilissen, eds., *Marcel Broodthaers, projections*, exh. cat. (Eindhoven, the Netherlands: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1994), 10–33.
3. Manuel J. Borja-Villel, Michael Compton, and Maria Gilissen, eds., *Marcel Broodthaers: Cinéma*, exh. cat. (Santiago de Compostela, Spain: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 1997), 226. The painting was also the subject of four related works: the films *Analyse d'une Peinture (Analysis of a Painting)* (1973) and *Deux Films (Two Films)* (1973), and a film and book of 1973–1974, both titled *A Voyage on the North Sea*.
4. Quoted in Hakkens, *Marcel Broodthaers, projections*, 25.

Broodthaers Films

Marcel Broodthaers made more than forty films in a period of less than twenty years. Yet his films are rare: they were not widely distributed and even today are infrequently screened.¹ Their importance, however, is unquestionable. They are essentially a bridge between the earlier modernist tradition of an artist making a film or two (as embodied by Fernand Léger and Marcel Duchamp) and the contemporary practice of an artist employing it as a coequal medium.

Broodthaers often referenced silent trick cinema and slapstick comedies. Early motion pictures captured boldface dichotomies; they appealed to the uneducated and to intellectuals alike; they entertained and offered trenchant social critique. For an artist obsessed with the complexity of definitions (both verbal and visual), film history provided the means to explore the medium and, above all, a way to question its relation to reality. Broodthaers' films thus form an urtext for postmodern visual art.

Context is now a touchstone in contemporary art, but this concept is one that Broodthaers examined early on in his films: How does an object, event, or idea change when it is physically, temporally, culturally relocated? In his last film, *La Bataille de Waterloo (The Battle of Waterloo)* (1975), Broodthaers reflected on this question by intercutting images of his London exhibition with footage of the British Trooping of the Colour and that of an actress undoing an Italian toy puzzle called "La Battaglia di Waterloo." Repositioned in our time, the historical battle becomes subsumed and repackaged by popular culture and the commercial world. For Broodthaers, this result was emblematic, inevitable, and vital.

D.S.

Notes

1. The Walker holds twenty-three films by Broodthaers, which were donated by his widow, Maria Gilissen, on the occasion of the artist's 1989 Walker-organized retrospective.



Marcel Broodthaers: *La Bataille de Waterloo (The Battle of Waterloo)* 1975. 16mm film (color, sound) 11 minutes. Edmond R. Ruben Film and Video Study Collection

Glenn Brown

British, b. 1966

-- Exhibitions

"Brilliant!" *New Art from London* (1995; catalogue, tour)

-- Holdings

1 painting

Since the early 1990s, Glenn Brown has been engaged in a kind of Romantic necrophilia, resuscitating the expired painterly bodies of Surrealist Salvador Dalí, sci-fi illustrator Chris Foss, and British postwar Expressionist painter Frank Auerbach, among others. In each case, Brown has appropriated images of their works, either in part or in whole, from reproductions of the original paintings that he has found in books. He then meticulously and obsessively copies the images onto canvas, being sure to erase all traces of his own gestural brushstrokes. His version of an Auerbach, for example, appears from afar to be as tumultuous and thickly impastoed as the original; on closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that Brown is a master of *trompe l'oeil*. The textured surfaces of his source paintings are rendered in hyperreal near-flatness, the result of a painstaking and time-consuming technical process he developed for the purpose. He also sometimes crops his source images, changes their colors, or skews their perspectives. This gap between his "night of the living dead" (the title of one of his early works) and their original daylight counterparts instills his work with an underlying sense of Romantic longing.

Brown's quotation and subsequent transformation of these source paintings is not, however, simply another instance of postmodern irony. Unlike the strategies of photographic appropriation practiced by a previous generation of artists, including Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine, Brown's works—each of which often takes up to five months to complete—have an intensely laborious, almost lovingly handcrafted quality. In fact, in a certain sense, his paintings give a new meaning to Robert Smithson's invocation of Vladimir Nabokov's assertion that "the future is but the obsolete in reverse," as Brown works backward through many mediated layers of the reproduction of these paintings in order to put them back onto the canvas by hand. As he explains, "In all of [my sources], there was originally a model sitting in a chair in the studio who gets characterized by that artist. He finishes it and it gets photographed. Then the photograph gets turned into a print, which gets put into a book. I get that book and do my painting from it. Through those stages, the original person gets further and further back. Further and further lost, further removed. The whole notion that there was a character underneath the image kept me wanting to do them. It was that sense of loss, as if they were ghosts."¹

Brown's *You Never Touch My Skin in the Way You Did and You've Even Changed the Way You Kiss Me* (1994) is based on an Auerbach painting of 1983, *Head of Julia*, which Brown found reproduced in a gallery catalogue.² His *doppelgänger* Auerbach focuses only on a central portion of the head featured in the original, greatly enlarging it while changing and intensifying

its colors. Like all of Brown's work, it is as much a meditation on our relationship to memory as it is on the act of painting itself. He once likened his painterly program to the planet in Andrei Tarkovsky's science-fiction film *Solaris* (1972), which resurrected replicant versions of dead people from the memories of the living. As the artist has suggested, "I'm bringing things which aren't real back into a state of physically being there. The sadness is that these things know they're not real."³

D.F.

Notes

1. Douglas Fogle, "Interview with Glenn Brown," in Richard Flood, ed., "Brilliant!" *New Art from London*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1995), 16.
2. Brown borrowed the title—itsself a poignant metaphor for his project—from a 1969 song by pop singer Lisa Stansfield.
3. Fogle, "Interview with Glenn Brown," 17.



Glenn Brown: *You Never Touch My Skin in the Way You Did and You've Even Changed the Way You Kiss Me* 1994. oil on canvas. 60 x 48 1/4 in. (152.4 x 122.6 cm). Butler Family Fund, 1994. 1994.166