

I LOST MY HEART TO A STARSHIP TROOPER

GLENN BROWN

b. 1966



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Head of a Woman in a Night Cap*, 1772, The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

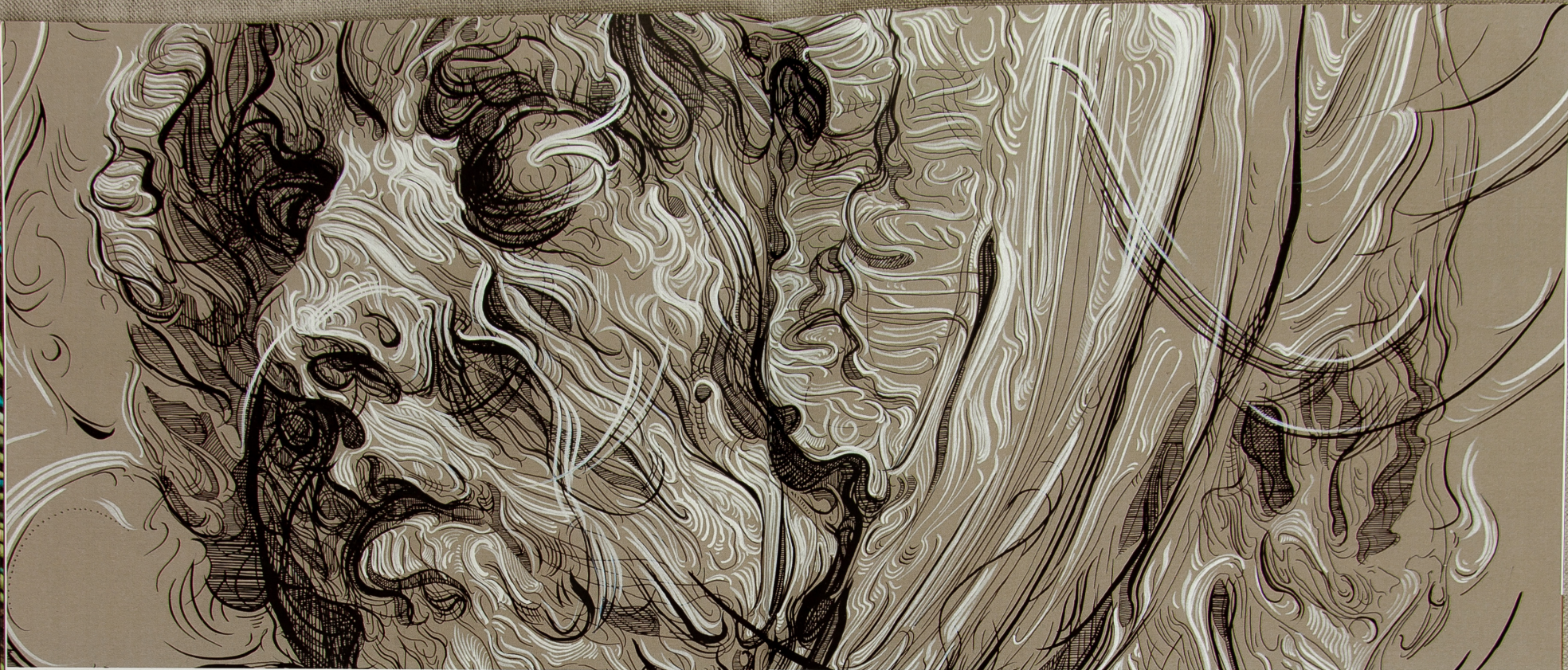


Glenn Brown, *Drawing 1 (after Greuze)*, 2014. Image courtesy the artist and Gagosian.



Glenn Brown, *Deep Throat*, 2007. Image courtesy the artist and Gagosian.





Hinkley Point (detail).

Glenn Brown's diptych *Hinkley Point* belongs to a recent series of works that combine drawing and painting as part of his continued exploration of both mediums. Brown's investigation into the nature of what constitutes art in the context of the western visual tradition is matched by his relentless pursuit of the materiality of art itself: the line, the brushstroke, the paint. Brown's sculptures consist of thick layers of oil paint rendered in three dimensions as if in protest to the flat *trompe l'oeil* in which they are captive in their two-dimensional world. It is this sense of pulling apart both the subject and the material that places Brown in the tradition of the 20th century avant-garde characterized by a concern with the very language of art, its context and meaning within both a personal and collective cultural consciousness.

Brown is known for transforming both Old and Modern Masters alongside his work depicting science-fiction illustrations. Brown stretches, combines, distorts and layers images. The drawings are drawn from numerous sources including Jordaens, Raphael, Rubens, Lemoyne and Greuze some of which becoming reduced to abstracted almost grotesque form. From the beginning Brown has used photographs as source materials translating the image from flat reproduction back to unique paint on canvas in a figurative way but rendered smoothly, drawing attention to the flat surface like an echo of the photographic original. With Brown's work it is not so much a sense of homage as longing, crisis even in his connection

to the originals and despite being the source material, they are not the subjects of his work. Brown reflects on the detachment in the role of the artist, set apart from life, at a critical distance: 'I can let my imagination run rife, which is why they end up having exotic titles, from films and horror and narcissism, they become symbols for humanity, monsters, a sign for a sense of being rather than a specific person.' His work is not about art history as much as the inevitable failure in our search for utopia and to an extent the lies and failure of the 'real' world.

Brown's work deconstructs and reconstructs on an almost forensic level and the term 'atomization' often linked to his work succinctly describes this quasi-scientific approach. These two portraits although rooted in Old Master drawings seem with their fluid brush marks and flying lines to be describing the very sub-atomic structure of our cells. Together with the use of intense dramatic highlighting the effect makes the heads appear to be in flux, coalescing or decaying, indicative of the unstable nature of our organic bodies, our molecular structure, our lack of permanence. The diptych is a departure for Brown – the position of the boy and the woman on separate panels creates a further layer of relationship – acting off one another with tension between the two that is part violent reaction, part tender encounter. The title of the work is charged with our uncomfortable relationship with atomic power as morbid threat or possible salvation.

Hinkley Point is a scenic headland on the Bristol Channel coast of Somerset, England, now dominated by two nuclear power plants. The construction of a third plant, Hinkley Point C, has recently been approved, amidst much protest and debate. This new plant, together with the proposed Sizewell C in Suffolk, are scheduled to provide 13% of the UK's energy needs by the early 2020s. Brown has used other nuclear power stations as titles such as *Torness One*, *Dungeness B* and *Windscale* and the evocative *In the end we all succumb to the pull of the molten core*, 2016 the first piece by Glenn Brown donated this year to the Laing Art Gallery, might refer to the heart of a reactor or to the center of the earth. Brown says: 'It is a painting that looks forward (the youth) and looks back (the old man), but they are one and the same, entangled in a complex game of sitting in the present. The heads could be trapped in religious ecstasy or they could be in outer space. You might think it beautiful or really rather ugly. In the end I don't want it to illustrate, any one idea – I am happiest if it just seems like a complicated arrangement of abstract lines.'



Glenn Brown, Photo: E. Laguardia.