

The Brown Collection

A new artists' museum enriches London

British artist Glenn Brown delights the public with his illusionistic paintings. He takes inspiration from the Old Masters. In his private museum, the artist presents his own work in dialogue with artworks from the 17th century.

London. Glenn Brown is a sought-after artist among collectors. Thanks to his mastery of lighting and painterly technique, his paintings appear extraordinarily three-dimensional. But what is perceived as corporeal and impasto is an illusion. Over weeks and months, the artist applies thin brushstroke after thin brushstroke.

The 57-year-old Briton is not the first to show his work in his own museum. Artist duo Gilbert & George opened the Gilbert & George Centre last year, and Young British Artist icon Damien Hirst has had his own exhibition space in London's Vauxhall for years.

In Britain, artists' initiatives are booming at a time when public funding is scarce. But no one combines creativity and collecting at quite the same level as Glenn Brown. In his newly opened 'The Brown Collection', he unites his own works with artworks from his collection in an environment that is as harmonious as it is atmospheric. The former workshop building is situated in a quiet cul-de-sac in Marylebone, in the heart of London. Built in 1905, it has been carefully renovated by Brown and his husband Edgar Lagunia to create four showrooms over four floors, providing an ideal setting for the works on display.

Visitors enter the first exhibition room through a glass door facing the street. They are abruptly confronted by a large nude seen from the back. The painting entitled "On the way to the leisure centre" from 2017 dominates the ground floor. It brings together important themes that preoccupy the artist: Baroque and Mannerist forms, the body as volume and in motion, and landscapes in motion, achieved, for instance, through twists and deformations.

Glenn Brown seeks to engage with art history. At times he borrows the vivid palette of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, at other times a motif from French painters of the late Baroque period; all combined with Brown's bewilderingly sculptural painting technique.

But the real journey of discovery begins when visitors turn their attention to the works that flank Brown's own: 17th-century landscapes and works on paper by Dutch, Flemish and Italian old masters. In places, they are enriched by lesser-known English artists of the 20th century. It is a spectrum that offers a universe of artistic experience based not on chronology, but inspired by the eye of the artist as curator. "I want to show artists who are not often exhibited," says Brown in an interview with the *Handelsblatt*.

Brown looks for thematic references and poses the fundamental question of art: How do you create an image of reality? In conversation, his particular passion for the line as the basis for pictorial composition comes up again and again. On the tour of the museum and the collection, Brown is continually impressed by the masterful use of the line in both drawings and prints. He speaks about the Italian Gandolfi family with enthusiasm: "I love their brushstrokes." Geometric circles and arcs – often without colour – form corporeal shapes; be they human bodies or Brown's beloved trees.

It is no surprise, then, that the artist himself continues to create drawings that bring the dimensions of the large-scale paintings and sculptures back to an intimate format: "I like to make art for the private, domestic space".

All the rooms are designed to make you feel like you're in a living room. Parquet flooring in rooms that aren't overly large, powdery colour palettes for the walls, chairs that invite you to relax and contemplate: "I want people to slow down when they come here. And I want them to enjoy things slowly. Because there's a lot to see.

Brown and Laguinia also live with a colourful art collection in their private lives. But you can also see it in institutional exhibitions, such as the one Brown had a few months ago at the Landesmuseum and the Sprengelmuseum in Hanover. There, historical works – which form the basis of Glenn Brown's own creative approach – were juxtaposed with his own work.

This idiosyncratic and original symbiosis of life and work, of old masters and daring contemporaries, has finally found a permanent home in London. Brown's works ensure that visitors are not lost in an ahistorical idyll.

The third floor is all about transcendence. Brown says of Caspar David Friedrich: "I love the idea, this sense of religion that is just built into the space of the landscape." Questions about the universe arise here that the artist cannot and does not want to answer. But they linger in the visitor's mind long after she has left this marvellous cabinet of art.

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