

GAGOSIAN

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GLENN BROWN COME TO DUST

Opening reception:
Tuesday, January 23, 6–8PM
January 24–March 17, 2018

20 Grosvenor Hill
London W1K 3QD

I use pre-existing images to go into pre-existing frames. I don't like a blank canvas or a blank sheet of paper.

—Glenn Brown

Gagosian is pleased to present “Come to Dust,” Glenn Brown’s first major exhibition in London since 2009.

For Brown, one of Britain’s most renowned contemporary artists, the past and present are treasuries of raw material, offering countless images, titles, and techniques to be combined, appropriated, and deconstructed. Mining an extensive knowledge of art history, as well as of literature, music, and popular culture, Brown creates complex and sensuous works of art that are resolutely of our time.

The title of exhibition, taken from a song in Shakespeare’s play *Cymbeline*, evokes the ineluctability of death. The exhibition, comprising oil paintings, drawings in period frames, grisaille panel works, etchings, and sculptures, attests to the ever-intensifying dexterity with

which Brown employs paint, content, and form. It teems with contrasts and contradictions, collapsing time, and allowing different, often opposing, references to exist simultaneously. Sources include Rembrandt, Delacroix, Greuze, and Raphael, as well as Abraham Bloemaert, Francesco Mancini, Gaetano Gandolfi, Elisabeth Le Brun, and Bernardo Cavallino.

In Brown's oil paintings, hybrid figures painted in intricate swirls reveal the sumptuous potential of oil paint. While these paintings give the illusion of corporeal volume and fullness, closer scrutiny reveals the surfaces to be smooth and flat. Painted flesh deliquesces, rots, and glows with a vital force. Rather than using paint to depict skin with observational exactitude, Brown shows the medium itself to be full of visceral life; translucent brushstrokes reveal the flesh, muscle, and sinew beneath the surface.

In *Die Mutter des Künstlers (The Artist's Mother)* (2016), a female nude offers her hand, her finger dripping blood (presumably from a visible wound on her side) in a gesture that is both maternal and Christ-like, but with a sickly, accusative edge. Not only does Brown distort the proportions of the figure from Eugene Delacroix's *Nu Feminin assis (Mademoiselle Rose)* (1820), he also removes the figure's head, plunging the viewer into his own alternate reality. Bathing the painting in bluish tones (an evident nod to Picasso's Blue Period), Brown asserts the history of art to be dynamic, not static. Another headless figure is visible in the gut-wrenching work titled *Passchendaele* (2017), in which an heroic male figure derived from another Delacroix work strides resolutely forward against a background of greens and yellows, colors that subvert the ideals of French Romanticism. Brown does not merely appropriate his source images, he fragments and infects them, introducing saturated hues that appear almost photo-luminescent. A series of new and grandiose grisaille panel paintings, based on small oil sketches and completely devoid of color, distort their subjects into grotesque parodies of altar paintings. In *Music of the Mountains* (2016), a graphic work on panel, Brown paints using only black and white lines over a neutral ground. Sharp, elongated strokes are layered meticulously and deliberately as Brown skillfully overlays and intermingles portrait heads from Raphael and Guido Reni to create depth and animation on a fused yet fractured entity that hovers between representation and dissolution, tranquility and unrest.

Brown's choice of picture frames adds an additional layer to the richly layered visual anachronism. Inverting the normal order of image-making and framing, Brown treats the frames as readymades, creating drawings in response to the particular color, size, design, and narrative detail of each. Thus, the drawings and the frames are integral to each other. In the exhibition, an entire room of recent drawings is hung salon-style, some mounted in elaborate Renaissance gilt and carved wooden frames.

Brown's sculptures are highly compelling, elaborate masses built from precisely placed strokes of very thick oil paint. In some of them, the cold, sensuous curves of nineteenth-century bronze statues are still visible but engulfed by growths of pulsating, gravity-defying oil paint. The cold, hard metal contrasts with the soft, luscious paint. *Ain't No Flies on the Lamb of God* (2017) is comprised of three truncated, upside-down feet, smothered in paint. Inspired by the motifs of painter Georg Baselitz, they are also an absurdist interpretation of the Crucifixion.

Merging the captivating and the uncanny, the beautiful and the repugnant, "Come to Dust" immerses the viewer in Brown's enigmatic world. The figures and forms of history mutate and evanesce, overtaken by hypnotic terrains of color and suffused in delirious, otherworldly light. Harnessing and transforming the allure of Old Master paintings and drawings, then stepping it in reverence and profanity, Brown tells a much darker and more complicated story, fit for our times.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue that includes an essay by novelist Hari Kunzru.

Glenn Brown was born in 1966 in Northumberland, England and lives in London and Suffolk. Collections include the Arts Council Collection, London; British Museum, London; The Laing Art Gallery, England; the New Art Gallery, England; Zabłudowicz Collection, London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; FRAC Limousin, France; the Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Rennie Museum, Vancouver; Des Moines Art Centre, Iowa; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Recent institutional exhibitions include the 50th Biennale di Venezia (2003); Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (2008); Tate Liverpool, England (2009, traveled to Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Italy; and Museum Ludwig, Budapest, through 2010); the 8th Gwangju Biennale (2010); Upton House, England (2012); “Conversation Piece V,” Frans Hals Museum, The Netherlands (2013–14); Des Moines Art Center, Iowa (2016, traveled to Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati); “Glenn Brown/Vincent Van Gogh: Suffer Well,” Fondation Vincent Van Gogh Arles, France (2016); “Glenn Brown/Rembrandt: After Life,” Rembrandt House Museum, Amsterdam (2017); and “Piaceri Sconosciuti,” Museo Stefano Bardini, Florence (2017).

Image: Glenn Brown, *Let's Make Love and Listen to Death from Above*, 2017, oil on panel, 90 15/16 × 75 9/16 inches (231 × 192 cm) © Glenn Brown. Photo by Mike Bruce.

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