

PRESS INFORMATION

THE BROWN COLLECTION

The Brown Collection, which will have its official launch on 14 September 2023, is home to the collection and archive of British artist Glenn Brown. Located in Marylebone, in Central London, it occupies a renovated news warehouse with four floors of exhibition space, together with a basement archive area and an office on the top floor.

GLENN BROWN

Glenn Brown, CBE, (born 1966) is a British artist. He is known for the use of art historical references in his paintings. Starting with reproductions from other artist's works, Brown transforms the appropriated image by changing its colour, position and size. His grotesque yet fascinating figures appear to be painted with thick impasto, but are actually executed through the application of thin, swirling brushstrokes which create the illusion of almost photographically flat surfaces. The effect is powerful—often unsettling—creating an artistic language that transcends time and pictorial conventions. Brown sees these appropriations and oppositions as key to his approach.

Brown also places sculpture as a central point of his practice. They are created by accumulating thick layers of oil paint over structures or found bronze casts. His sculptures, deliberately emphasizing the three-dimensional quality of oil brushstrokes, stand in stark contrast to his flat paintings. The forms of his sculptures and the colour combinations used reference other artists' paintings and sculptures.

In the last few years, Brown has extensively embraced drawing. Still conceptually rooted to art historical references, he stretches, combines, distorts and layers images to create subtle yet complex line-based works.

His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including Domaine de Kerguéhennec, Centre d'Art Contemporain, France (2000); Serpentine Gallery, London (2004); Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (2008); Tate Liverpool, England (2009), which travelled to the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin and Ludwig Múzeum, Budapest; Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands (2013); Rennie Collection, Vancouver (2013); Fondation Vincent Van Gogh Arles (2016); Des Moines Art Center, Iowa (2016), Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati (2016), Rembrandt House, Amsterdam (2017), Museo Stefano Bardini, Florence (2017), Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK (2018), British Museum, London (2018) and Sprengel Museum and Landesmuseum, Hanover, Germany (2023).

Glenn's works have been part of numerous group exhibitions including The Saatchi Gallery (1995, 2014); Centre Georges Pompidou (2002, 2013, 2021); Venice Biennale, Italian Pavilion, (2003); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2005); Gwangju Biennale, Korea (2010); Kunsthalle, Vienna (2011); Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague (2012), Museo Guggenheim, Bilbao, Spain (2013), Centre George Pompidou Malaga (2015), Scottish National Gallery (2018), Museum of Fine Arts-Hungarian National Gallery (2018) and British Museum, London

(2019), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki (2020), Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz, France (2021), Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, England (2021) and Louvre Museum, Paris (2022).

His work is represented by Gagosian Gallery in New York and London and Galerie Max Hetzler in Berlin and Paris.

A self-described ‘appropriation artist’, Glenn Brown makes paintings, drawings and sculptures based on works by other artists, both historic and contemporary. Working mostly from reproductions, he explores their work with deep curiosity about their process, fascinated by the expressive marks of other artists and the slippage that occurs when a work of art is reproduced. In exploiting their images, he changes them, altering their size, colour or orientation. Embellished and distorted, the original images reappear in a different form, inhabitants of a strange and often grotesque new world. Elements from more than one source will appear in a single painting. He also gives his works titles that disconcert the viewer. Departing from the historical context of the source works, and often containing oblique references to contemporary life and culture, they add both mystery and directness. His art can be as humorous as it is unsettling, and his wish above all is that it should entertain.

Glenn Brown’s painting demands a high level of skill and patience, as what appears to be heavy impasto is in fact a flat surface – an illusion achieved with very fine brushwork. He is able to complete no more than five or six paintings a year. Equally as time-consuming are the sculptures. These can involve building up, and allowing to dry, multiple layers of oil paint, always applied with a paintbrush. The starting point is sometimes an existing bronze sculpture.

He is also a serious collector, predominantly of Old Masters, but also of 20th and 21st century artists. Meanwhile, curating is an important aspect of his creativity. He greatly enjoys devising shows, putting together his own and other artists’ works in ways that playfully point to both gestural and pictorial relationships between images – very much an artist’s view of art history.

CONCEPT OF THE BROWN COLLECTION

Glenn Brown views The Brown Collection like a work of art. He says, ‘I’m concerned about it being something that I can play with, use as a mode of expression for myself. It’s a place to experiment.’

The Brown Collection includes both Brown’s own work and his extensive collection of works by other artists. Its backbone is a selection of his own work that he has kept. As part of his artistic process, his work remains important to him long after it is finished. Nothing in The Brown Collection is for sale.

Because the paintings take a long time to make, commercial exhibitions in the UK are not frequent. Though a show of new work may take place every three years or so, it has to rotate between galleries in different countries. So while Brown often features in group shows, a solo exhibition happens in London only once in ten or twelve years. His last major museum show in London was at the Serpentine in 2004. So, a permanent home for The Brown Collection,

with its rich holdings of his own work, is also important because it gives London art lovers an opportunity that was previously scarce.

Brown was determined to find the right setting for The Brown Collection and archive, and together with his husband Edgar Laguinia, he set about finding a building. There were a number of requirements. It needed to be large enough but also relatively intimate, in the centre of London. It should be a calm place where he could take a long view of his work and, if he wished, continue to adjust it while it was actually on the gallery walls. It also had to be somewhere where he could establish a programme of exhibitions that allowed him to exercise his own very particular curatorial style. Keen to show his own work alongside that of other artists – drawing largely on his own collection but sometimes borrowing – Brown was determined to have a place to exhibit works in such a way that they would speak to each other. In 2016, they found 1 Bentinck Mews, in the heart of London's Marylebone district.

HISTORY OF THE BUILDING

1 Bentinck Mews was constructed in 1905, on the site of two 18th century mewses which, typically, would have provided accommodation for household servants, and for activities such as baking and laundry. The current building was not designed for domestic use but rather for warehousing or manufacture. Before Glenn Brown and Edgar Laguinia purchased it, it had housed a succession of different functions, mostly commercial. Among its occupants had been St James's School, as well as upholsterers, a mirror manufacturer, furriers, cabinet makers, photographers, hospital lighting manufacturers, builders and an advertising agency.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BUILDING

Beginning in 2016, 1 Bentinck Mews took six years to renovate. For the initial planning process, an architect was employed to draw up the functional elements of the building. Brown then worked closely with the builders to achieve the design he wanted. He was determined that it should be the ideal space to show his work in – not too big, vacuous or alienating, but also not too cosy and domestic.

The aim of the renovation was to restore the building's structure to its 1905 integrity and to give it a more inviting, comfortable feel inside. Key improvements included a flood defence for the basement and proper tanking for the basement vault, as well as modern conveniences like lifts and accessible toilets.

Just as important was the atmosphere of the place. Materials were to be of high quality and pleasing to the eye and touch. The corridors and staircase were to feel inviting and bright. The offices and archive had to be pleasant and efficient. Above all, it was essential to have elegant, beautifully finished, decent-sized showing spaces for art. Without any stand-out architectural statements, everything should feel easy and harmonious, so that nothing would interfere with visitors' experience of the art.

The simple brick exterior of 1 Bentinck Mews is painted cream, with chocolate brown woodwork, including doors and window-frames. The text that runs across the lintel to announce The Brown Collection is in pale blue. The frontage is reserved and dignified, and different enough to pique curiosity.

The superbly finished interior features wood-panelled walls and floors of herringbone oak parquet. The carpentry, fittings and paintwork are of the very highest quality. The staircase, which looks as though it has always been there, is new. With a Georgian profile, it has metal banisters and a handrail that is beautiful to the touch. The lift is neat and accommodates a wheelchair. Even the accessible toilet space is perfect, clad simply in marble. While there is natural light, on some floors the windows are blocked. Artificial lighting is unobtrusive and effective. Furnishings are spare but include comfortable chairs. Everything attests to the care and attention put into contriving spaces that are so elegant and seamless that there are no distractions at all.

In terms of colour, there is very little white paint, whose glare Brown finds distracting. The colours of the walls in each space may change between exhibitions. Those given below will be in place for the new hang.

The five floors are:

- Basement with a vaulted ceiling, with two separate spaces. The first, which houses sculptures, is open to the public. The second, the archive, is a resource for Brown and academics studying his work
- Ground floor entrance and exhibition space, with natural light from windows, painted dark green
- First floor exhibition space, painted bright pink, with some windows blocked, some left open
- Second floor exhibition space, painted deep grey-blue, with some windows blocked, some left open
- Third floor private offices

Speaking of his approach to renovating 1 Bentinck Mews, Glenn Brown said:

‘The two ideas about art that I like very much are Mannerism and the Baroque. Those ideas don’t have to be 18th century, but can be very contemporary. They’re about the relationship between man and nature. Man doesn’t dominate nature, but works in harmony with it. I think that’s what Baroque is, compared to Modernism or even Neo-Classicism, which are about the domination of nature. So I’m trying to create a space which does feel slightly more natural, though not nostalgic. This place is very authentic, it’s very well finished and perfect.’

THE NEW EXHIBITION

The Leisure Centre

Opening 14 September 2023

The title Leisure Centre questions not what a leisure centre is but what might be the centre of leisure. What is at the heart of our leisure? That point at which relaxation and non-functional activity allows the mind to wander? Indulging in activity or thought just for the pure pleasure of thinking or doing.

At what point does sex go beyond procreation, food satisfies more than hunger furniture becomes more than functional - the point at which it becomes art.

The exhibition asks the viewer to be a *flâneur*, travelling through time and place around the rooms of The Brown Collection to engage with paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures. Question in which century a work was made, who made it and why. The cultural significance or value of a print may be monumental, a painting whose grand gestures are enjoyably false. A tiny drawing has grand aspirations. We would like the audience to enjoy the surprisingly complex game of smoke and mirrors without expecting a big reveal.

The exhibition will feature some 25 works by Brown, including drawings, paintings and sculptures. Among these are major works such as *Bikini* (2022), included in his solo exhibition that took place at Gagosian in New York, 8 November – 23 December 2022, and *Searched Hard for You and Your Special Ways* (1995), a painting that Brown appropriated from the Wallace Collection's *A Boy as Pierrot* (1785) by Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Both those seminal works reside in The Brown Collection.

Alongside Brown's own work will be a similar number of works by other historical and contemporary artists, also held within The Brown Collection. These artists, each of whom holds a particular meaning for Brown, may be well known, lesser known or simply unknown. One artist whom he cites as being of interest to him is the Dutch Old Master, Abraham Bloemaert (1566 – 1651). Brown owns paintings, drawings and prints by this less famous contemporary of Rembrandt, and has worked from several of them. The forthcoming exhibition will feature drawings by Bloemaert – relevant because Brown is tending at present to make work based on drawings, rather than paintings. Another artist important to Brown, and included in his collection and in the new exhibition, is Grace Pailthorpe (1883 – 1971). A lesser-known Surrealist painter, Pailthorpe trained as a doctor and went on to become both an artist and a psychoanalyst, pioneering a form of art therapy she described as 'psychorealism'. Having discovered her in recent years, Brown finds that her way of combining colour, figuration and abstraction aligns with his own work.

With some editing during the final hang, artists in the forthcoming show will be chosen from the following longlist –

Philip Akkerman (Dutch, b.1957)
Abraham Bloemaert (Dutch, 1566-1651)
Glenn Brown (British, b. 1966)
Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (French, 1827-1875)
Gillis Claesz. de Hondcoeter (Dutch, 1575/80-1638)
Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (Dutch, 1562-1638)
Morris Cox (British, 1903-1998)
Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836-1904)
Gaetano Gandolfi (Italian, 1734-1802)
Mauro Gandolfi (Italian, 1764-1834)
Ubaldo Gandolfi (Italian, 1728-1781)
Jean-Baptiste Greuze (French, 1725-1805)
Hans Hartung (German-French, 1904-1989)
Grace Pailthorpe (British, 1883-1971)
Fiona Rae, R.A. (British, 1963)
Austin Osman Spare (British, 1886-1956)
Andries Jacobsz Stock (Dutch, 1580-1648)
Jan Toorop (Dutch, 1858-1928)
Gillian Wearing (British, b. 1963)

LOCATION AND OPENING TIMES

The Brown Collection is at 1 Bentinck Mews, Marylebone, London W1U 2AF, a short walk from the Wallace Collection, one of Brown's favourite London museums, and from the Royal Academy of Music, the Wigmore Hall and the soon-to-be-opened Bechstein Hall, and to Frieze – all of which have significance for the artist.

The Brown Collection is open on Thursdays, Fridays & Saturdays from 11am to 6pm. Admission is free.