

GLENN BROWN

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With a text by Tom Morton

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Installation view GLENN BROWN, Galerie Max Hetzler, 2006: MISOGYNY, 2006, THEATRE, 2006, THE HINTERLAND, 2006, ASYLUMS OF MARS, 2006

DON'T STOP ME NOW

Tom Morton on Glenn Brown

In Edgar Wright's 2004 film *Shaun of the Dead*, the titular hero – a late twenty-something feeling his life beginning to fray around the edges – decides to turn things around, exchanging failure for success, stasis for dynamism, and his soured relationship with his ex-girlfriend for one that's sweet and fragrant. There's only one problem: Shaun's native London has been overrun by flesh-eating zombies. It's the kind of thing that'll send even the best-laid plans awry, the kind of thing that'll cast a shadow over anybody's sunny day.

If there's a cinematic equivalent to Glenn Brown's paintings, surely it is *Shaun of the Dead*. Both, of course, are heavily populated with cadavers (flesh flourishes and founders in each case to an almost hysterical degree), but they also share a ghoulish humour, an understanding of the lightness and weight of life, love and death, and a poppy way of appropriating and re-vivifying visual tropes and motifs that should have long ago faded into nothingness under the flash-lights of numberless viewers' eyes. In the best-known scene from Wright's film, Shaun and his flatmates enter their local pub, only to find it staffed by an un-dead barman. Lurching forward, the barman begins his attack, but suddenly the jukebox starts up and music fills the grubby room – Queen's paean to terminal personal velocity "Don't Stop Me Now" (1978). Shaun grabs a pool cue, throws two more to his friends, and they set about the zombie in a display of gleeful, perfectly choreographed ultra-violence that's half *Tom and Jerry*, half Quentin Tarantino's balletic *Kill Bill* (2003). It's a pile-up of pastiches, sure, but the scene is shot with such brio, such surefooted understanding of how familiar things may be stretched, pulled or turned upside down so that they feel fresh again, that it becomes something that exists on its own terms. In short, it's a pure Glenn Brown moment. (*That's* why they call him Mr Fahrenheit.)

Some things you might already know about Glenn Brown's paintings: they borrow their motifs from works by the heroes and villains of art history, among others Jean Honoré Fragonard, Georg Baselitz, Frank Auerbach, Salvador Dalí, Rembrandt and sci-fi artist Chris Foss; these borrowed motifs undergo formal and chromatic distortions and cross-pollinations; whatever the texture of the surface of the work from which they take their imagery (craggy in an Auerbach, smooth in a Dalí), the surfaces of Brown's canvases are absolutely flat, resulting in a kind of *trompe l'oeil*; the titles of these canvases (*Joseph Beuys*, 2001, say, or *I Lost My Heart to a Starship Trooper*, 1996) often evoke seemingly incongruous episodes from the art or pop culture of the past that, on reflection, throw skewed light on Brown's skewed work. These, then, are paintings that are about vision and revision, about tweaks and twists – of a picture, of an expectation – and the pert surprises they produce.

Death and re-birth (or at least sickly re-animation) seem to haunt this recent group of paintings. *Theatre* (2006) is a chest-up portrait of a skeleton, whose bones are composed of

a sludgy, organic-looking substance somewhere between flesh, PVA glue and raspberry ripple ice cream. Some awful disease seems to be afflicting the skeleton, causing its eye and nostril sockets to slide across its face, as though Cubism, or the visual distortions in the skull in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533), were something a body might contract, suffer through and eventually expire from. (What, I wonder, might the face that once stretched over these ravaged cheekbones have looked like?) We might read *Theatre* as an amnesiac *memento mori*, a figure of death that's forgotten death's precise form, and perhaps this failure to remember is why the skeleton grins. The painting's central motif is taken, after all, from Vincent van Gogh's *Skull with Burning Cigarette* (1886), a work in which a roll-up smoulders in a bony mouth, its smoke unable to blacken the smoker's non-existent lungs. Van Gogh's work is about not knowing the terrible, terminal lateness of the hour. Brown's work – *sans* cigarette – is about not knowing the lateness of the hour after that, and instead smiling the fool's lipless smile.

If *Theatre* is a painting in which death has been forgotten, *The Great Masturbator* (2006) is one in which it seems to have been almost infinitely deferred, or else shrugged off like a bad dose of flu. Here, against an ill-looking backdrop, what once might have been a boy, but now resembles a Tory wife in her senescence, points a quavering finger at the viewer. His flesh seems rotten, its pitted, lime-green surface an affront to the smooth pinkness of youthful skin. His bared yellow teeth framed by a lipstick-ed mouth, he appears to be making a request of some sort – to deliver him from his putrid half-life perhaps, or to join him in the ranks of the un-dead. In his essay "Plato's Pharmacy" (1968), Jacques Derrida famously presented the zombie as a figure of in-between-ness, hovering between the binary opposites of life and death. In *The Great Masturbator*, the zombie becomes an emblem of the in-between-ness of Brown's wider practice, its hovering between past and present, grandeur and pricked pomposity, between transcription and transubstantiation, the rough and the smooth.

There's something audacious about Brown's titles. Reading them, it's easy to imagine him daring himself to name, say, a painting of a gigantic bleeding, armless and legless classical statuette roaming a Northern Romantic or Heavy Metal landscape *Misogyny* (2006). Surely this appellation is too blunt, too blind to the nuances of history, to operate as anything but the most sixth-form-ish of critiques of art's patriarchal bent? This, though, may well be the artist's point. The figure in *Misogyny* is a monster made up of competing and complementary signifiers, a Hollywood B-movie *50 Foot Woman* by way of the *Venus de Milo* and various effeminate Christs and St Sebastians – all corrupted marble perfection, castration anxiety and deep, vagina-like wounds. Hilariously over-determined, this figure could keep a cadre of art historians in PhD theses from here to kingdom come, and the painting's title (which wavers between a complaint and an admission of complicity) only complicates things further. Meaning, here, is held in perpetual abeyance, and the only thing that's certain is the horrible beauty of Brown's paint.

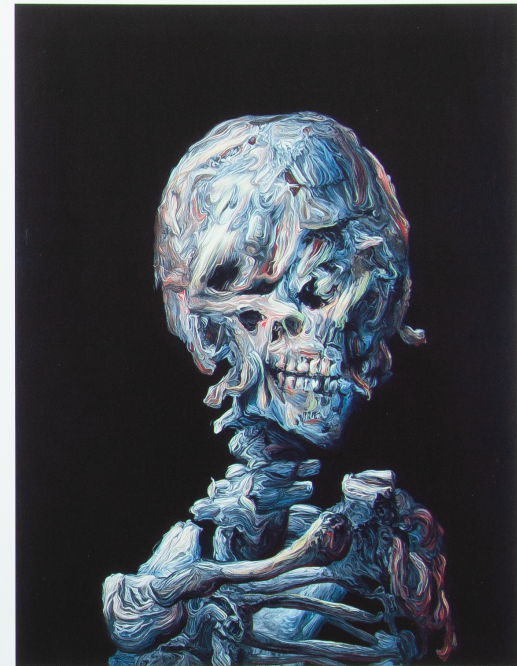
While *Asylums of Mars* (2006) and *The Hinterland* (2006) underline (with their doleful mutant heads seemingly grown in the lab of some crazed geneticist) the comedy and tragedy of Brown's Dr Frankenstein-like approach to the art of the past, it is, I think, *Declining Nude*

(2006) that is the most affecting of the artist's recent works. Recognisably a riff on Camille Pissarro's *Self Portrait* of 1873, the painting depicts the long-bearded Impressionist staring at the viewer with black, empty sockets, his cheeks blushing in furious embarrassment. Why does Pissarro blush? Is it because, his eyes having been plucked from his head, his interior visions cannot match those he achieved through painting *en plein air*? Is it something to do with the nude of the painting's title, whom Brown suggests the elderly Impressionist has in some way spurned, perhaps because of his failed eyesight, or his failed potency (the two, in the mythic construction of the artist, go hand in hand)? Whatever the reason, *Declining Nude* is a perfect picture of art history's zombie afterlife, its part scary, part sad and part funny menacing of the present. Zombies, like Freddy Mercury in "Don't Stop Me Now", do not know that their time has passed, and instead rage against the dying of the light. Brown greets them, as the hero of *Shawn of the Dead* does, with something between a dance and a jab in the ribs.

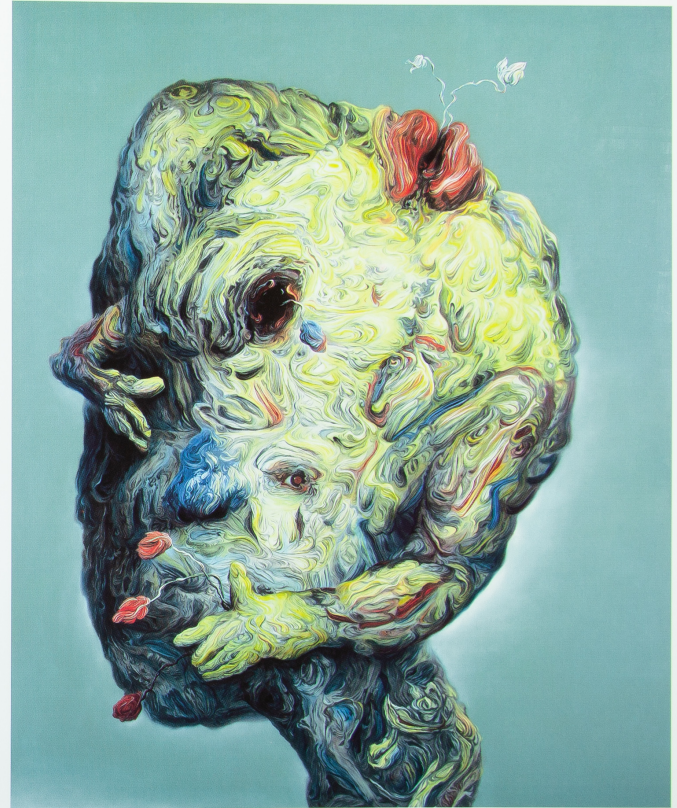




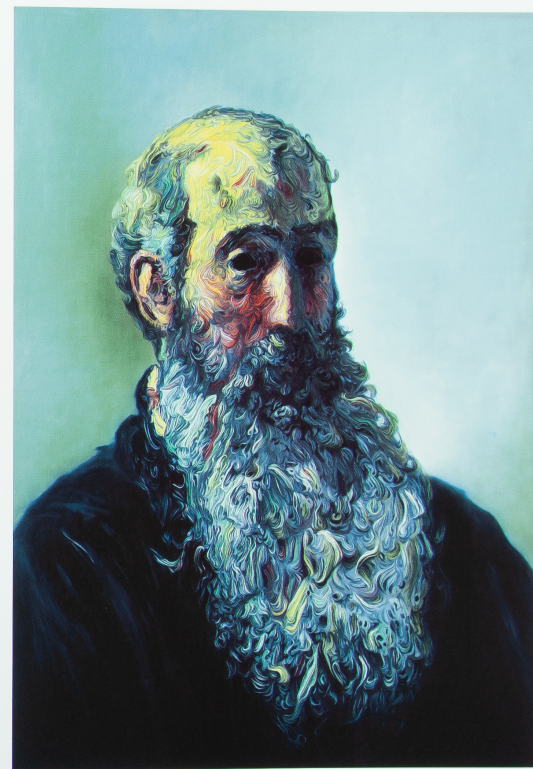






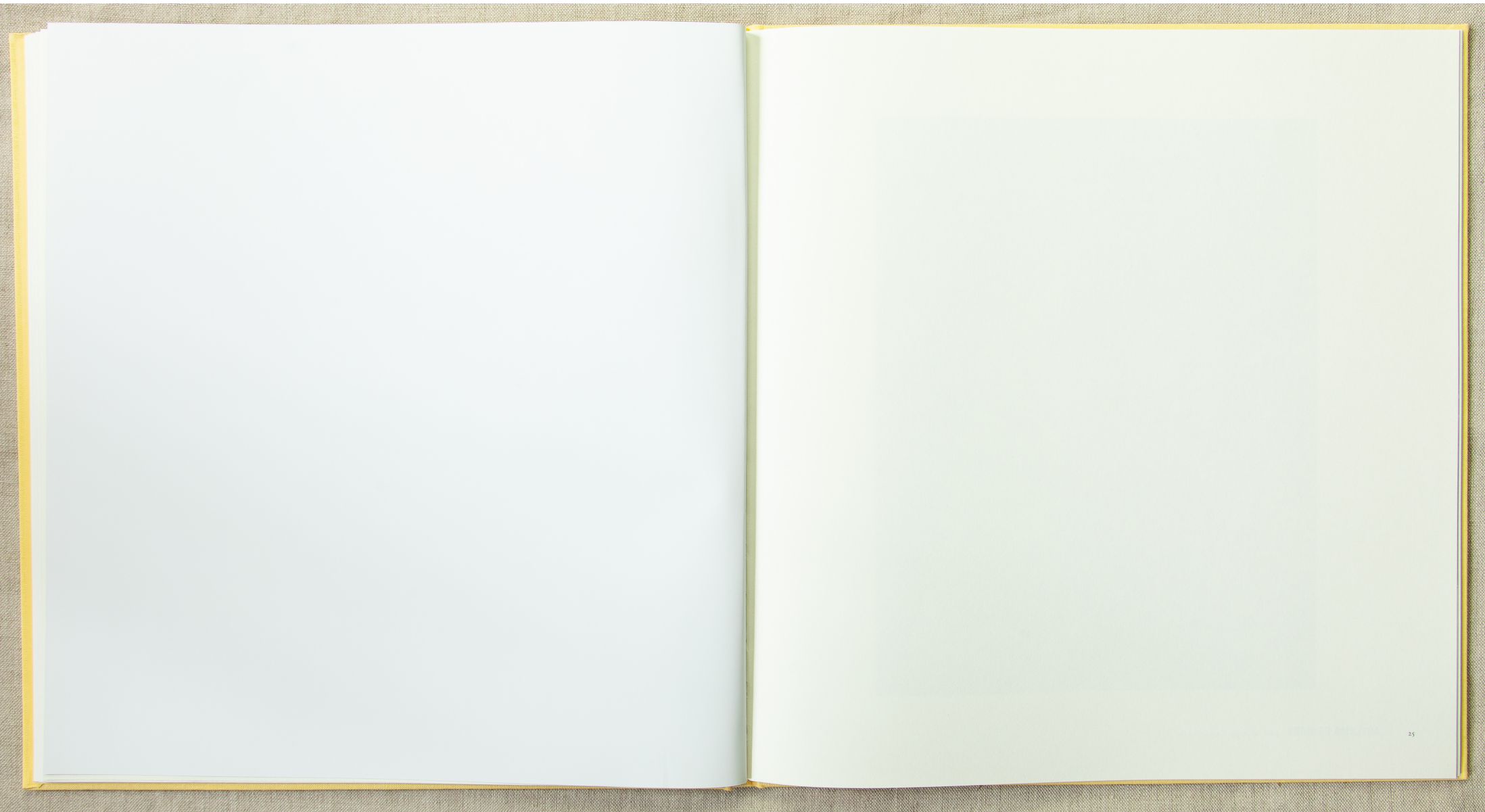






22 **DECLINING NUDE** 2006, oil on panel, 140 x 99 cm

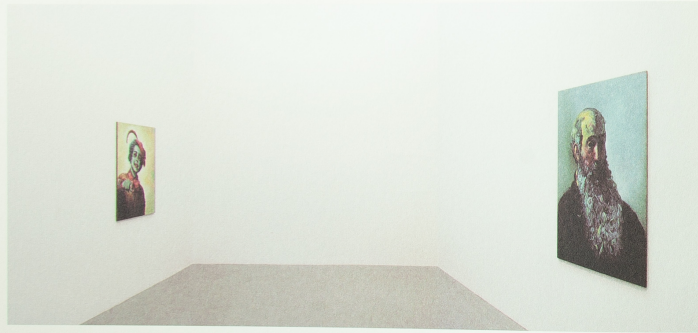












Installation view **GLENN BROWN**, Galerie Max Hetzler, 2006: **THE GREAT MASTURBATOR**, 2006, **DECLINING NUDE**, 2006

GLENN BROWN

1966 Born in Hexham, Northumberland, England

1985–1988 Bath College of Higher Education, Bath, BA Fine Art

1990–1992 Goldsmiths College, University of London, MA Fine Art

2000 Shortlisted for the Turner Prize, Tate Britain, London

Lives and works in London

Solo Exhibitions

2006

Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin (catalogue)

2005

Patrick Painter, Santa Monica

2004

Serpentine Gallery, London (catalogue)

Gagosian Gallery, New York (catalogue)

2002

Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin

2001

Patrick Painter, Santa Monica

2000

Domaine de Kerguelennec, Centre d'Art Contemporain,

Bignan (catalogue)

Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin

1999

Patrick Painter, Santa Monica

Jerwood Gallery, London (catalogue)

1998

Patrick Painter, Santa Monica

1997

Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot, Paris

1996

Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham (catalogue)

1995

Karsten Schubert Gallery, London

Group Exhibitions

2006

Zurück zur Figur. Malerei der Gegenwart, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Munich (catalogue)

Infinite Painting. Contemporary Painting and Global Realism, Villa Manin – Centro d'Arte Contemporanea, Udine (catalogue)

2005

Ecstasy: In and About Altered States, The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA, Los Angeles (catalogue)

Rückkehr ins All, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (catalogue)

The Nature of Things, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Birmingham

Big Bang, Centre Pompidou, Paris (catalogue)

Bidibidibidiboo. Works from the Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Collection, Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation, Turin, Palazzo Re Rebaudengo, Guarene d'Alba, Cuneo, and Cavallerizza Chiablese e il Salone delle Guardie, Turin (catalogue)

2004

Must I Paint You a Picture, Haunch of Venison, London

PILLish: Harsh Realities and Gorgeous Destinations, Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver

2003

Heißkalt: Aktuelle Malerei aus der Sammlung Scharpff, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (catalogue)

Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer. Delays and Revolutions, 50th Biennale di Venezia, Padiglione Italia, Venice (catalogue)

Pittura/Paintings: From Rauschenberg to Murakami 1964–2003, Museo Correr, Venice

M_ARS: Art and War, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz (catalogue)

2002

XXV Bienal São Paulo: Iconografias Metropolitanas, Parque do Ibirapuera Gate 2, São Paulo

Melodrama, Artium, Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz; Centro José Guerrero, Granada; Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, Vigo (catalogue)

XIII. Biennale of Sydney 2002: (The World May Be) Fantastic, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (catalogue)

Cher Peintre, peins-moi / Lieber Maler, male mir / Dear Painter, Paint Me, Centre Pompidou, Paris; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (catalogue)

From the Saatchi Gift, Talbot Rice Gallery, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh

Painting as a Foreign Language, Edificio Cultura Inglesa, Centro Brasileiro Britânico, São Paulo

Landscape, The Saatchi Gallery, London (catalogue)

2001

Passion, Galerie Ascan Crone, Berlin and Hamburg

Azerty : Un abécédaire autour des collections du FRAC Limousin, Centre Pompidou, Paris (catalogue)

2000

The British Art Show 5, Scottish Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; John Hansard Gallery / The Southampton Art Gallery / Millais Gallery, all Southampton; National Museum of Wales, Cardiff; Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Birmingham (catalogue)

Salon, Delfina Project Space, London

Hypermental. Wahnhafte Wirklichkeit 1950–2000. Von Salvador Dalí bis

Jeff Koons, Kunsthau Zürich, Zurich; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Rudolfinum, Prague (catalogue)

Turner Prize 2000 (with Wolfgang Tillmans, Tomoko Takahashi, Michael Raedecker), Tate Britain, London (catalogue)

Suite Substitute IV: Beautiful Strangers, Hôtel du Rhône, Geneva

Futuro: Decadent Art and Architecture, Centre for Visual Arts, Cardiff

Glenn Brown, Julie Mehretu, Peter Rostovsky, The Project, New York

The Wreck of Hope, The Nunnery Gallery, London

Blue, New Art Gallery, Walsall (catalogue)

Little Angels, Houldsworth Fine Art, London

1999

Disaster, Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston

Day of the Donkey Day, Transmission, Glasgow

John Moores 21, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (catalogue)

Fresh Paint. Recent Acquisitions from the Frank Cohan Collection, Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow

Examining Pictures: Exhibiting Paintings, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (catalogue)

Holding Court, Entwistle, London

1998

It's a Curse, It's a Barden (curated by Glenn Brown), The Approach, London

Cluster Bomb, Morrison Judd, London

Secret Victorians, First Sight, Colchester; Arnolfini, Bristol; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (catalogue)

Abstract Painting, Once Removed, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (catalogue)

New Work, Patrick Painter, Santa Monica

1997

Sensation! Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection, The Royal Academy of Arts, London; Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; Brooklyn Museum, New York (catalogue)

Pure Fantasy, Oriol Mostyn, Llandudno

Treasure Island, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Centro de Arte Moderna José de Azeredo Perdigão, Lisbon (catalogue)

Belladonna, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

1996

Glenn Brown, Peter Doig, Jim Hodges, Adriana Varejao, Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot, Paris

21 Days of Darkness, Transmission Gallery, Glasgow

Ace: Arts Council Collection New Purchases, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne; Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston; Oldham Art Gallery, Hayward Gallery, London; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham;

Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield; Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham; Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast

Out of Space, Cole and Cole, Oxford

Strange Days, The Agency, London

The Jerwood Painting Prize, Lethaby Galleries, Central Saint Martin's College, London

Fernbedienung: Does Television Inform the Way Art is Made?, Kunstverein Graz, Graz (catalogue)

About Vision: New British Painting in the 1990s, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (catalogue)

1995

From Here, Waddington Galleries, London; Karsten Schubert Gallery, London (catalogue)

Summer Group Show, Karsten Schubert Gallery, London

Brilliant! New Art from London, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis;

Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas (catalogue)

Young British Artists V, Saatchi Collection, London (catalogue)

Obsession, The Tannery, London

Painters' Opinion, Bloom Gallery, Amsterdam

That's Not the Way to Do It, Project Space, University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne

1994

Every Now and Then, Rear Window at Richard Salmon Gallery, London

Here and Now, Serpentine Gallery, London

1993

Barclays Young Artist Award, Serpentine Gallery, London (catalogue)

Re-Present, Todd Gallery, London

Launch, Curtain Road Arts, London

Painting Invitational, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

Mandy Loves Declan 100%, Boote Gallery, New York (catalogue)

1992

Surface Values, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge

How Did these Children Come to Be Like That, Goldsmiths Gallery, London

With Attitude, Galerie Guy Ledune, Brussels

And What Do You Represent? Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London

1991

Todd Gallery, London

1989

Christie's New Contemporaries, The Royal College of Art, London

British Telecom New Contemporaries, ICA, London; Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester; South Hill Park, Bracknell; Dean Clough, Halifax; Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal (catalogue)

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Glenn Brown. Hexham: Queen's Hall Arts Centre; London: Karsten Schubert, 1996. Text by Phil King; interview by Marcelo Spinelli.

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Bidibidibidiboo. Works from the Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Collection. Turin: Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation; Milan: Skira, 2005. Edited by Francesco Bonami.

Big Bang. Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2005. Edited by Catherine Grenier.

Eostasy: In and About Altered States. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005. Edited by Lisa Mark, Paul Schimmel.

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M_ARS: Kunst und Krieg. Graz: Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum; Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2003. Edited by Peter Weibel, Günther Holler-Schuster.

Vitamin P: New Perspectives in Painting. London: Phaidon, 2003. Introduction by Barry Schwabsky.

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Jonathan Jones, "Dawn of the Dead". *The Guardian* (London), 16 September 2004.

Sarah Kent, "Altered States". *Time Out* (London), 22 September 2004.

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Tom Lubbock, "Brushing Up. On the Clichés". *The Independent* (London), 21 September 2004, p 13.

Ian Macmillan, "You Take My Place in This Showdown. Put On Some Glenn Brown and Press Play". *Modern Painters*, vol 17, no 3 (London), Autumn 2004, pp 79–81.

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Gloria Vallese, "Glenn Brown. Nato per spiaggiare". *Arte*, no 374 (Italy), 2004, pp 126–130.

Michael Wilson, "Glenn Brown". *Art Forum*, vol 42, no 10 (New York), Summer 2004.

Brooks Adams, "Picabia: The New Paradigm". *Art in America*, no 91 (New York), March 2003, pp 84–91.

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Natasha Edwards, "Cher Peintre peins-moi!". *Modern Painters*, vol 15, no 3 (London), Autumn, p 145.

Peter Herbstreuth, "Focus Painting Part 1". *Flash Art*, no 226 (Milan), October 2002, pp 78–85.

Suzanne Muchnic, "Glenn Brown: Patrick Painter". *Art News*, vol 101, no 1 (New York), January 2002, p 125.

Ben Tufnell, "Dear Painter, Paint Me". *Contemporary*, no 43 (London), September 2002, pp 90–91.

Peter Herbstreuth, "Glenn Brown: Max Hertzler". *Flash Art*, vol 33, no 215 (Milan), January/February 2000, p 110.

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Matthew Collings, "Higher Beings Command". *Modern Painters*, vol 12, no 2 (London), 1999, pp 58–59.

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Jennifer Higgie, "Glenn Brown. Jerwood Gallery". *Frieze*, no 47 (London), June–August 1999, pp 98–99.

Jonathan Jones, "Pick of the Day". *The Guardian* (London), 17 May 1999.

Jonathan Jones, "I Thought I Was in Ulm". *Untitled*, no 19 (London), 1999, p 6.

Herbert Martin, "Glenn Brown". *Time Out* (London), 12 May 1999.
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Untitled, no 19 (London), Summer 1999, pp 4-6.
 David Pagel, "Mixed Media". *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles),
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 Sarah Kent, "Sensation". *Time Out* (London), 10 September 1997.
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 (London), 11 November 1996, p 10.
 Michael Archer, "Licensed to Paint". *Art Monthly*, no 186 (London),
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 Glies Auty, "Edge of the Black Hole". *The Spectator* (London),
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 A Brush with Genius: 20". *The Guardian* (London),
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