

# GLENN BROWN

Piaceri Sconosciuti

FORMA



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Giovanni Francesco Barbieri  
Known as Guercino  
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Stefano Bardini Museum  
Room of the Paintings (detail)



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Florence's cultural cosmopolitanism emerged during the prolific eras of humanism and the Renaissance. It is affirmed once again every time Florence opens to different cultural and artistic experiences, fostering the exchange and newness that societies need, if only to expand their acceptance and curiosity towards things that are new, different, or foreign. Direct contact with new things created in different artistic and creative realms has recently given Florence new life and made it freshly attractive for those interested in contemporary art expressions.

Florence is not meant to be just a showcase of luxury or the untouchable cradle of an era relegated to museums. It should be a creative and social testing ground where we can reconsider models of innovation and how culture is experienced. Piazza dell Signoria, Palazzo Vecchio, and Forte di Belvedere have become welcoming places for contemporary artists. This demonstrates that there is a different history of humanism and the Renaissance that is still ongoing and blossoms again in today's art and ideas, freeing us from an idealized perspective that compromises historical memory. It has often been said that all art is contemporary. In Florence, we are proving it so. Parallel to keeping current we also need in-depth exploration. Museo Novecento presents an opportunity to systematically examine the history of contemporary art, with a highly effective, fascinating program of cultural mediation. Other institutions in Florence organize exhibitions and contemporary events with the goal of broadening our knowledge and experience. Florence is discovering a realm in which it can immerse itself and see its own positive image in contemporary art. It is about the simultaneity of the present and past, a direct dialogue between painters and sculptors of yesterday and today, and a dialectic between shapes, ideas, images and visual marks. This is why we are delighted to be host to paintings, sculptures, and drawings of Glenn Brown, one of the most important artists of our day. For several months, his art will find its perfect placement in the enchanting rooms of the Stefano Bardini Museum. The exhibition shows us that the history of art is still dynamic and on the move, that inspiration takes different paths and that we still have room here for masterful skill and talent paired with humour and emulation. His works bear clear, and perhaps comforting, marks of past figurative art.

Yet, his style pushes us past ourselves and our visual certainties, throwing us into the present as we look at a reformulation of a completely different and completely personal beauty. Art has always been very generous with us, inviting us to be curious and intellectually open. It frees us from prejudices and assumptions by creating moving surprises and unexpected encounters. We hope to continue in this cultural direction, always seeking high quality, new conversations.

I'd like to thank the artist, his assistants, the curators, and the directors and offices of the public administration working on this project, and MUS.E's staff for having coordinated and organized the event in close cooperation with the Gagosian Gallery. I'd also like to thank the sponsors and everyone who has worked to support us.

Dario Nardella  
Mayor of Florence







# Glenn Brown. Admiration, Exultation, Freedom

Sergio Risaliti

"Art is produced by a succession of individuals expressing themselves; it is not a question of progress."

M. Duchamp

"Colour is nothing if it is not suitable to the subject and if it does not glorify the effect of painting through the imagination. Let painters like Boucher and van Loo use light and charming tones..."

E. Delacroix

The current exhibition of Glenn Brown (born 1966 in Hexham, Northumberland) is further evidence of how Florence has earned a prominent position in spotlighting contemporary art styles. For the second time,<sup>1</sup> experimental painting with a figurative background is at the forefront, dialoguing with Stefano Bardini Museum's art collections and with its design: a Museum famed worldwide for its dramatic display of the antique collection that Bardini, a great Florentine collector and dealer, built in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The museum rooms are decorated in fascinating eclectic style, with precious pieces coming to life in a historical reconstruction including a varied collection of the major and minor arts from antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. The museum ties together masterpieces of different ages, such as Tino da Camaino's *Charity* and Donatello's *Madonna of the Rope Makers*, as well as paintings of exceptional quality such as Bernardo Daddi's monumental painted *Crucifix*, Pollaiuolo's *Saint Michael the Archangel*, Giovanni da San Giovanni's *Night with Aurora and a Putto*, and the *Atlas* by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called Guercino. This treasure trove includes a series of drawings by Giambattista and Lorenzo Tiepolo, and by Giovanni Battista Piazzetta, magnificent polychrome terracotta figures, a few rare Robbia ceramics and an impressive collection of Persian rugs and weapons. This gallery beguiles our era's most sophisticated and talented artists, especially those who have studied and admired great art and boldly experiment with reinterpreting images and techniques. They convey a new idea of the avant-garde, light years away from antiseptic, melancholic academic mannerism.

Glenn Brown is an artist gifted with extraordinary skills and impressive artistic and art history training. Over two decades, he has reinvented the relationship between old and modern artists and different genres and styles, based only on the masterful use of his paintbrush and drawing tools. Brown has chosen to take on the great artists of the past to bring us a kind of drawing that befits our era's sensibility, while also being meaningful and effective in relationship to earlier eras. As he often says, "I am trying to make a 20th century drawing," bespeaking his great ambition, as he engages in a visual dialogue with great artists of the past – Rembrandt, Jordaens, Murillo, Boucher, Greuze, Delacroix, and Fantin-Latour – pushing the figurative theme to an extreme to the point of creating a grotesque tangle that conceals the original subject, whether a face, a group of figures, or a landscape. Here, too, he demands a metamorphoses of the subject through some sort of





Giovanni Mannozi (known as Giovanni da San Giovanni)  
*Night with Aurora and a Putto*  
 ca. 1635  
 Detached fresco (detail)



genetic mutations, resulting in aberrations and distortions of the image that shape his peculiar genre, such as in faces taken from Guido Reni and Tiepolo and in religious and landscape themes. Brown sets his extraordinary sculptures, made of pure colour, next to the paintings and drawings. Even in his sculptural work, he is ultimately always a painter. He succeeds in showing colour's creative and metamorphic power, breathing life into new worlds on two-dimensional surfaces and three-dimensional forms, whose fragility and brightness contrast with the heavy, opaque materials of the industrial era, such as iron and steel, with intense sensitivity and control hard to find in current art.

His sculptures are extraordinary epiphanies, authentic *coups de theatre*, objects of wonder that defy gravity and decay. And, what's more, they are made with huge amounts of oil paint instead of clay. These bursting constructions, amorphous masses, are lushly loaded with material, juxtaposed in an even stranger, more beguiling way with the extreme, intensely-coloured naturalism of his paintings. In his sculptures – almost too delicate and untouchable – and in his paintings that hang on walls the colours stay whole, without mingling or contaminating during the action of painting though born of a technique of specious accumulation with quite deliberate touches. Blues, yellows, and whites are added to each other, one on top of the next, never mixing. Brown manages to be both inside and outside of Informal Art, making pieces that are quite exemplary and sophisticated. The colour is always wet and fresh as if it were eternally blossoming. The resulting celebration is like a blossoming, and a kind of bright, vital exultation that is like a colourful moss covering small bronze sculptures of the past, pieces found in flea markets, in antique as well in modern objects collecting shops, alternating between kitsch and academic; as in his paintings, here too, his "touch" is of the highest quality.

Brown surpasses himself with every test, acting with a clearly intentioned creative project, moving back over the history of figurative art and enacting a pursuit of pictorial beauty and fragrance with a feel between emulation and appropriation, deconstruction and deformation. With a very classical approach that we could even call elitist, he sought to assert his unique style, his recognizable manner. He takes on challenges on many fronts of figurative art – from portraits to still lifes – and, between hyperrealism and surrealism. With this "rhythm," he has managed to define himself and stand out. His conceptual background is as solid as his painting technique, and knowledge of museums, catalogues, and collections. Brown uses colour deftly, having found his strengths in a phantasmagoria of colour and grotesque forms. His technical virtuosity is paired with a kind of poetics that shifts between high and low styles, between the comic and the dramatic, between the fantastic and allegorical and the clownish and grandiloquent. He often performs a kind of rhetorical inversion of the subject, so that the idyllic becomes terrible, the mystical becomes comical, the noble becomes picturesque, the lyrical becomes dramatic, and the solemn becomes spectral. And then he moves from Fragonard to Greuze, from Rubens to Boucher. He took as a model a painting from Rembrandt's workshop that depicts a smiling young man

and made a *clownerie* of it. *Poor Art*, from 2016, a melancholic image of a clown who seems to smile, but bitterly in almost a sneer, suggests an angry, melancholic facet of circus figures, which Jean Starobinsky sees as often being about the artist's transfiguration. The clown is an epic, tragic figure, a full blown emotional transfer; he is the figure of wonder, of the demonic, of play and of death.

His colours are often from the world of the Fauvists and the Expressionists, and those of Tiepolo, Rubens, and El Greco. The very idea of beauty and classical harmony seem to accompany the undoing to which forms of nature and bodies are doomed. The colour in some of the paintings is electric, almost phosphorescent. Their stylistic inversion and genre mutation are brought about by a shift in size and space. Rather than keeping the piece at a distance for a quiet, calm contemplation, it is brought forth with an over-the-top, provocative style, and the almost violently bright colours hit the viewers, enticing a sophisticated kind of thrill, an alien pleasure. As Rudi Fuchs wrote about the relationship between a Glenn Brown painting (*Everyone Sang*, a large bouquet of wilting roses suspended on yellowish background) and a still life by Fantin-Latour (a lyrical composition of pale yellow roses): "That alteration in size and proportion changed the theatre of the picture from intimate to dramatic."<sup>72</sup> Brown works, in a sense, as not just a painter and a poet, but a composer, developing musical sound and sequences on different notes and registers, from high pitched to low tones. Phrases. Strokes. Cadences shifting from grave to light.

Though now we no longer have the patronage and collecting habits that there were in the 17th and 18th centuries, Glenn Brown gives the impression that he is thinking of that kind of culture and society, that he is imagining tasteful lovers of art with different interests and sensibilities, very open-minded and far away from conformism and standardization. His choice of subjects, demonstration of exceptional technical skills, drawing on a vast world of artistic, literary, and musical references feed high expectations in an audience of connoisseurs. He trains these *amateurs* in new kinds of sensations and imagining, through using unsettling iconography, beguiling pairings of colours, and provocative deformations of the model and application methods. His art stimulates our intelligence and our senses demanding concentration and wits, humour, and a decent knowledge of art that is to be used lightly, without getting worn out in exhausting exegesis. Otherwise, the tools of philology would only suffocate the pleasure that his painting offers us, a pleasure that is ever changing in intensity and quality, as the stimuli are different and varied.

Looking at his paintings, we find areas where the execution is painstaking, meticulous, very fine, making us imagine an artist working extremely slowly with obsessive precision. This is a visual, emotional application that we all have the duty to take on spending a great deal of time looking at each painting, training our perspective with exercises of understanding and assessment. To appreciate one of Brown's painting, we are asked to perform a visual and cultural action, and one to which we are not accustomed or not often spurred. We should come close to the painting, focus on the surface, find



the different pictorial levels, identify within the mass the individual units and the brushstrokes that alternate between broad and spasmodic and thin as strands of hair. It is remarkable to find that every unit is separate and set apart from the next, and the colours do not blend, do not become contaminated, and, indeed, always stay glossy and light-filled. In certain places, the surface seems like porcelain. In other instances, Brown's brushstroke is rapid and brimming with feeling. We see the influences of and tributes to several artistic eras of Baroque and Romanticism. The variety of subjects depicted is remarkable, including still lifes and nudes, portraits and landscapes, mythological and religious scenes, which appear to interest him more in compositional and pictorial terms than in those of iconography. Brown seems to take the paintings of the great masters of the past as an opportunity to move forward. It seems that Brown feels abiding attraction and deeply-felt excitement for the power of colour and the force of the brushstroke that spurs him to surpass himself and his own era. He is inspired to use the masterpieces of others to unleash his imagination, his view of the world, to offer perspectives and a series of imaginative spurs to explore othergnoseological possibilities beyond those used in centuries of painting, sculpture and design.

Brown recently made a visit to the rooms of the Bardini Museum. He carefully considered the works on the walls painted the famous "Bardini blue," a particular hue that Bardini chose, inspired by the palaces of the Russian aristocracy.<sup>3</sup> It's a noble and warm "monochrome" that later gained great popularity in the interiors of museums and private galleries. It serves as a backdrop for paintings and sculptures from every century and genre, school and size, giving the pieces something of the aura that has been lost with mechanical reproduction. For a modern-day artist, it might also bring to mind the blue of Klein and the mystical dimension of his paintings. Brown may have been quite excited at the idea of placing his figurative paintings and their vibrant colours on such an ultramarine background. As he moved from one room to the next during his tour, he carefully weighed the images of his work to "feel" where to place them and juxtapose them with the collection's works. The result is many evocative, sometimes unexpected, inspirations with conversations and references between different distant worlds, between techniques and symbolisms, iconographies and themes. Though the combinations were made creatively, it was a very serious game. Brown calmly and silently weighed every possible option. This was all very gratifying, creative and even educational. We had a chance to reconsider our collected art history knowledge in the light of reasons more pictorial and poetic, technical and imaginative. It is experiences like these, so complex and fascinating, that make art history still something special, a thrilling performance, as the title chosen by the artist suggests: a sum of unknown pleasures.

1. The John Currin exhibition was also organized at Stefano Bardini Museum in 2016, *Paintings*, curated by S. Risaliti and A. Nesi, exhibition catalogue Forma Edizioni, Florence, 2016.
2. R. Fuchs, "Glenn Brown: Enigma", in *Glenn Brown*, exhibition catalogue (New York, Gagosian, 8 May - 21 June 2014), Gagosian/Rizzoli, 2015.
3. Essential bibliography for Stefano Bardini's biography and for the history of the Museum: F. Scalia, "Stefano Bardini antiquario e collezionista", in *Il Museo Bardini*, Electa, Milan, 1984; B. M. Tomasello, "Il Museo di Stefano Bardini", in *Museografia italiana negli anni Venti: il Museo di ambientazione*, Atti del Convegno di Feltre 2001, Feltre, 2003; V. N. Chini, *Stefano Bardini e Wilhelm Bode. Mercanti e connaisseur fra Ottocento e Novecento*, Edizioni Polistampa, Florence, 2009. Regarding the "Bardini's Blue" see: A. Nesi, "La collezione di arte applicata di Stefano Bardini", in G. Rossignoli, *Cuoi d'oro. Corami da tappezzeria, pialotti e cuscini del Museo Stefano Bardini*, Noedizioni, Florence, 2009, pp. 9-17.



Mirabello Cavalori  
*Portrait of a Young Boy*  
ca. 1560-1570  
Tempera on a wooden panel



# Tiepoletto, the Passage of Time, and the Mark of Rembrandt's Genius: Lessons in Taste and Fashion, from Paris to Florence in the Late 19th Century

Antonella Nesi

Stefano Bardini's brilliance at interpreting the trends and fashions of his day is now beyond question. He had had great success in experimenting with the prevailing preference for Oriental details in the newest furnishing made everywhere from London to the magical Capri.<sup>1</sup> Pairing Persian rugs with Renaissance tapestries and leather pieces in striking juxtapositions led him to do excellent business with wealthy bankers and major institutions like the museums of Berlin. He had a true passion for recreating settings with a Renaissance flavour by relocating 15th century ceilings, fireplaces, gothic portals, and heraldic finds and placing them abundantly on high walls and along the grand stairways, as well as experimenting with shades of blue on the walls and carefully attending to natural light through windows and skylights. Bardini's unique style was soon imitated by major museums around the world and in the grandest palaces of the central European and American upper classes.

The first years of the "Short Century," as the 20th century was called, marked a significant shift in collecting taste. While the latter part of the 19th century, appreciation for Renaissance sculpture and furnishings was overwhelmingly influential, in the early 20th century, gold grounds and the Primitives gained in popularity.

Stefano Bardini was a meticulous, sophisticated collector of the great eras of the 17th and 18th centuries that had been overshadowed. Entering the museum's Painting Hall today, we can see Bardini's connoisseur's eye in the attention to Giovanni da San Giovanni in the two separate frescoes from Palazzo Pucci in Florence, in Luca Giordano's intense painting, *Apollo skinning Marsyas*, Veronese's *Saint Helen*, Mattia Preti's *Bacchanal*, Borgognone's *Battle*, and Munari's two still lifes. In the portraits gallery on the right, we can see particular attention to a *Gentleman* of the Venetian School in two magnificent portraits by Salomon Adler and a *Knight of Malta* by Giovan Paolo Cavagna.

Bardini was also a dedicated admirer of the Florentine 17th century. Dolci, Volterra, Mannozi, and Cecco Bravo, who are found in his collection, were only rediscovered and reconsidered critically many decades later.

One of the museum's small rooms is devoted to Guercino's painting *Atlas* and a collection of drawings by Giambattista and Lorenzo Tiepolo, as well as two drawings by Piazzetta's workshop. We can take Tiepolo's drawings as further evidence of Bardini's sophisticated sensibilities.

Tiepoletto (Venice 1696 - Madrid 1770), the affectionate nickname for the great artist Giambattista Tiepolo, was at the absolute forefront of 18th century Venice art and that which emerged from the Arcadian reaction to the Baroque era and ended close to the victory of the French Revolution. His popularity ended with the rise of Neoclassicism, the new ideal Republican history of Jacques-Louis David and the Preromanticism of Goya.

Tiepolo worked for an opulent Venice's ancien régime, for a patrician class gratified by its own courtly and grandiose glory. After a life was full of successes and major commissions, he died in Madrid at an increasingly indifferent, inhospitable court. In the following hundred years, his fame declined, and it was only on the brink of another Belle Époque of wealth



and a new aristocracy that his genius again met with its deserved appreciation. At the end of the 19th century, Tiepolo's grandiosity and luxury were in perfect accord with the new demands of Paris, capital of art.

On one of their trips to Italy, Edouard André and Nèlie Jaquemart, sophisticated collectors and Stefano Bardini's loyal customers, bought the magnificent fresco by Giambattista Tiepolo, *The Reception of Henry III*. The fresco, dated to around 1750, was removed from Villa Contarini<sup>2</sup> and fit to a canvas, despite its considerable dimensions of 402 x 729 cm. The Andrés placed it in their grand home on Boulevard Haussmann, at the top of its large central stairway for an exceptional *mise en scène*. The staircase's semi-circle seems as if it were built to hold the fresco rather than the other way around.

Edouard André made room on the ceiling of the Cabinet de Travail for another Tiepoletto piece, the fresco, *Justice and Peace*. The couple had admired the piece in Venice in Palazzo Cornaro di San Polo, the present-day site of the Piave barracks of the Finance Police. But they had bought, in Milan from the antiques dealer Grandi, who had transferred it to canvas. While the Andrés were impressed by Tiepolo's energetic scenes, other collectors also went to Stefano Bardini to seek the great painter's paintings and sketches.

In Bardini's historical photographic archive there is a small round by Tiepolo, *Apotheosis of a Warrior*, now in a private collection, and a large painting (194 x 318.5 cm) depicting *The Patron Saints of the Crotta Family (the Doge Lupo of Brescia with his family)*, which the Calbo Crotta family bought in 1902, was auctioned the same year at Christie's in London,<sup>3</sup> then sold in 1908 to the Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to Bardini, Herbert P. Horne was also in Florence (London 1864 - Florence 1916), though his interest was mainly for the Italian Renaissance in its diverse expressions, from the chests to gold grounds, Robbia ceramics to majolica. His refined intuition let him to appreciate the album of drawings by Tiepolo from the collection of William Beckford (1760 - 1844). On June 15, 1903, he bought it from Parson and Sons for 21 pounds. The album had already many sheets removed, which with all probability came into the collection of the Marquis de Biron and are currently at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.<sup>5</sup> An extensive repertoire of 18th century Venetian paintings sold by Bardini, especially sketches and detached frescoes, as shown in the archive photos.<sup>6</sup>

Bardini likely had contacts with important Venetian families or with a collector to help him buy a sizeable core of 18th century Venetian drawings, ten drawings by Giovan Battista Piazzetta, who has a well-known connection to Tiepolo; they were sold in New York during the auction of 1918<sup>7</sup> along with the forty-seven drawings by Giambattista Tiepolo and his son Lorenzo (1736 - 1776). Stefano Bardini Museum's permanent collection now includes two drawings by Piazzetta's workshop, eight drawings by Giambattista Tiepolo, and a series of sketches by Lorenzo, depicting allegorical figures.

An interesting essay in the exhibition catalogue *Tiepolo. I colori del disegno*, put on in Rome in 2015, Giorgio Marini explores Tiepolo's technical vocabulary



(from above)

Workshop of Giovanni Battista Piazzetta  
*Head of a Man Wearing a Turban*  
Drawing in charcoal highlighted  
in white chalk on paper

Lorenzo Tiepolo  
*Head of an Old Man*  
Drawing with pen and wash, brown ink

Giovanni Battista Piazzetta  
*Sleeping Child*  
Drawing in charcoal highlighted  
in white chalk on paper

and underscores how in the sheet *Madonna and Child, St. Francis of Paola and Two Saints* in the Bardini collection, the dynamic power of chiaroscuro becomes as "brilliant as a colour pattern".<sup>8</sup> The luminous application of diluted inks appears to reach its highest expression in *The Olympus* where the reds become electric and give energy to the rapid, dynamic pen strokes.

In the 1720s, Tiepoletto had started self-standing drawings for collectors, with mostly sacred or allegorical subjects. The two drawings in the Bardini museum seem to belong to his later work, around the 1730s, which were a foretaste of the exaltation of light that intended to give new interpretations of Rembrandt's 17th century visuals and that would define the works of Tiepolo the following decade.

In the 1740s and 1750s, Giambattista Tiepolo added to his impressive output of drawings with, the experimentation of the twenty etchings called *Scherzi* [Trickery] and the ten *Capricci* [Whims], created for Anton Maria Zanetti's collection of chiaroscuro (1743). These exemplary pieces featured rapid, unexpected strokes, for a visual effect full of new timbres and deeply influenced by Rembrandt.

In 1743, Tiepolo worked on the cycle of frescoes for Villa Cordellina, in Montecchio Maggiore in Vicenza. Recent study by Massimo Favilla and Ruggero Rugolo<sup>9</sup> identified the two drawings as *Standing young man* and *studies of three heads* and *Page with feathered hat* as two preparatory works for the fresco of *The family of Dario at the feet of Alexander* at Villa Cordellina. The attribution of the two sheets to Giambattista instead of his son Lorenzo is based on the inimitable brushwork and numerous variations that are both typical of Tiepoletto's experiments, as he was an inexhaustible genius who quickly conceived new inventions.

The sheet with the *Holy Family* is part of his work in the 1760s before he left for Madrid. In this drawing, whose subject is intimate and devotional, Tiepolo's technique creates an unusual shine with "effects that play on the contrast between the bright white of the paper and the more intense marks of the pen that erupts in the watery application of layers of diluted ink".<sup>10</sup>

It has been suggested that the drawings in the Bardini collection were bought as a single lot with those in the Contini Bonacossi Collection in Florence, to which they are stylistically and technically similar.<sup>11</sup> Stefano Bardini was one of the primary sellers of works of art to this collection, which was one of the most important art collections created in the early 20th century. From Giambattista Tiepolo's repertoire, Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi (1878 - 1955) acquired 30 drawings and a large fresco (299 x 379 cm) *Triumph of Virtue and Nobility over Ignorance*, now at the Norton Simon Foundation in Pasadena, California.

Following the 2016 John Currin exhibition, which featured paintings by the Currin laden with citations from the repertoire of art from the greatest Renaissance tradition, this year Stefano Bardini Museum is featuring a unique British artist, Glenn Brown. In his magnificent drawings, we cannot help but glimpse signs of Rembrandt's powerful allure and Tiepolo's lightweight scenes.



*Glorification* Maulbertsch erupts from the museum wall with its liturgy of angels and glorification and carries us into the creative imagination, vibrancy, and eloquence of 18th century virtuosity.

The strong impact and harmony of Brown's work breathe new vigour into Bardini's exhibition settings and his sweeping gaze on the centuries of experiments with chiaroscuro and colour in its intrinsic lightness.

Glenn Brown, in his deep classicism, gives new interpretation to the spirit and marks of a century, the Enlightenment, which enchanted its contemporaries and managed to bring love and intelligence to understanding the power of Venetian culture, consisting in robust, solid expressive forms, far from the depleted "naturalism" of Boucher or the most sentimental examples of Rocaille style.

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Giambattista Tiepolo  
*Enthroned Madonna  
 with Child and Three Saints*  
 Drawing with pen and wash, brown ink







Giambattista Tiepolo,  
*Mount Olympus*  
Mezza-macchia with a few touches of colour



Giambattista Tiepolo  
*Young Man*  
Drawing with pen and wash, brown ink



WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION





*Shallow Deaths*  
2000  
Oil on panel  
27 1/2 x 22 3/4 in





*The Shallow End*  
2011  
Oil on panel (oval)  
50 3/8 x 37 3/4 in





*Die Mutter des Künstlers*  
2016  
Oil on panel  
78 3/4 x 63 3/4 in





*Poor Art*  
2016  
Oil on panel  
42 3/4 x 29 1/4 in

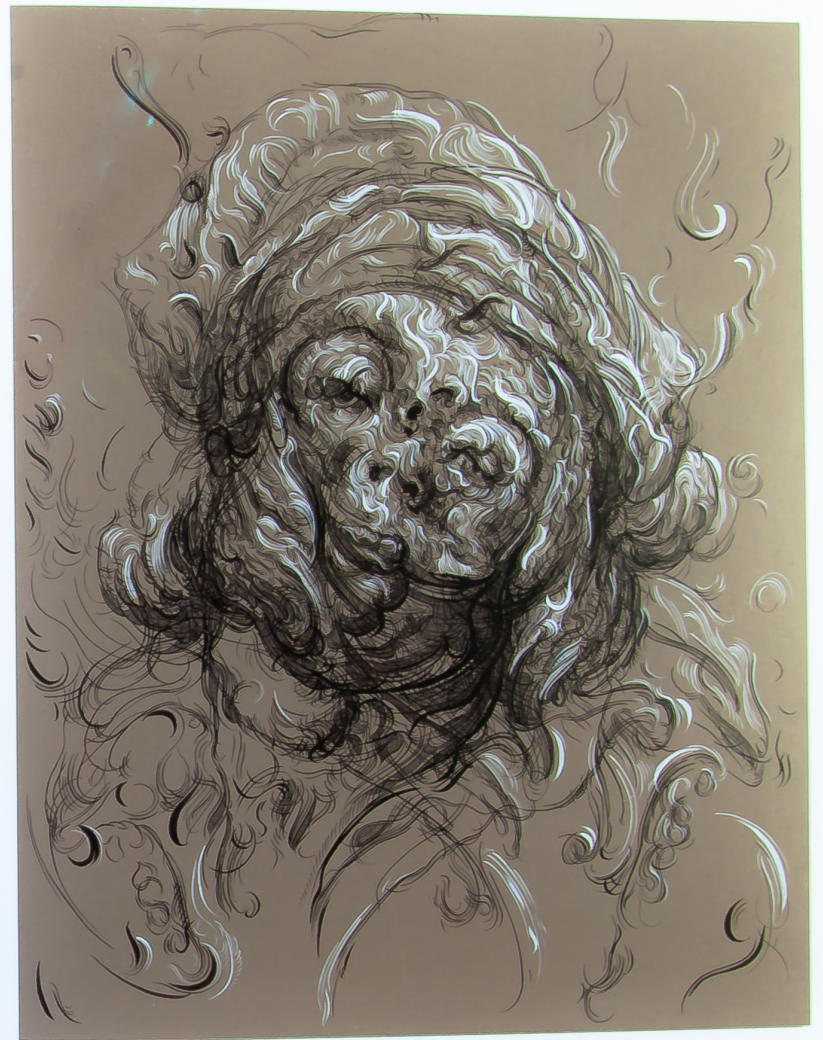


*Unknown Pleasures*  
2016  
Oil on panel  
64 7/8 x 41 1/2 in





*Nostalgia*  
2016  
Indian ink and acrylic on panel  
33 1/4 x 23 1/2 in



*Poor Moon*  
2016  
Indian ink and acrylic on panel  
36 1/4 x 29 in





*New Plastic Experiences*  
2016  
Indian ink and acrylic on panel  
61.78 x 45.79 cm



*The Music of the Mountains*  
2016  
Indian ink and acrylic on panel  
53.36 x 37.58 cm





*On the Way to the Leisure Centre*  
2017  
Oil on panel  
48 1/2 x 96 1/2 in





*Let's Make Love and Listen to Death from Above*  
2017  
Oil on panel  
91 x 75 1/2 in



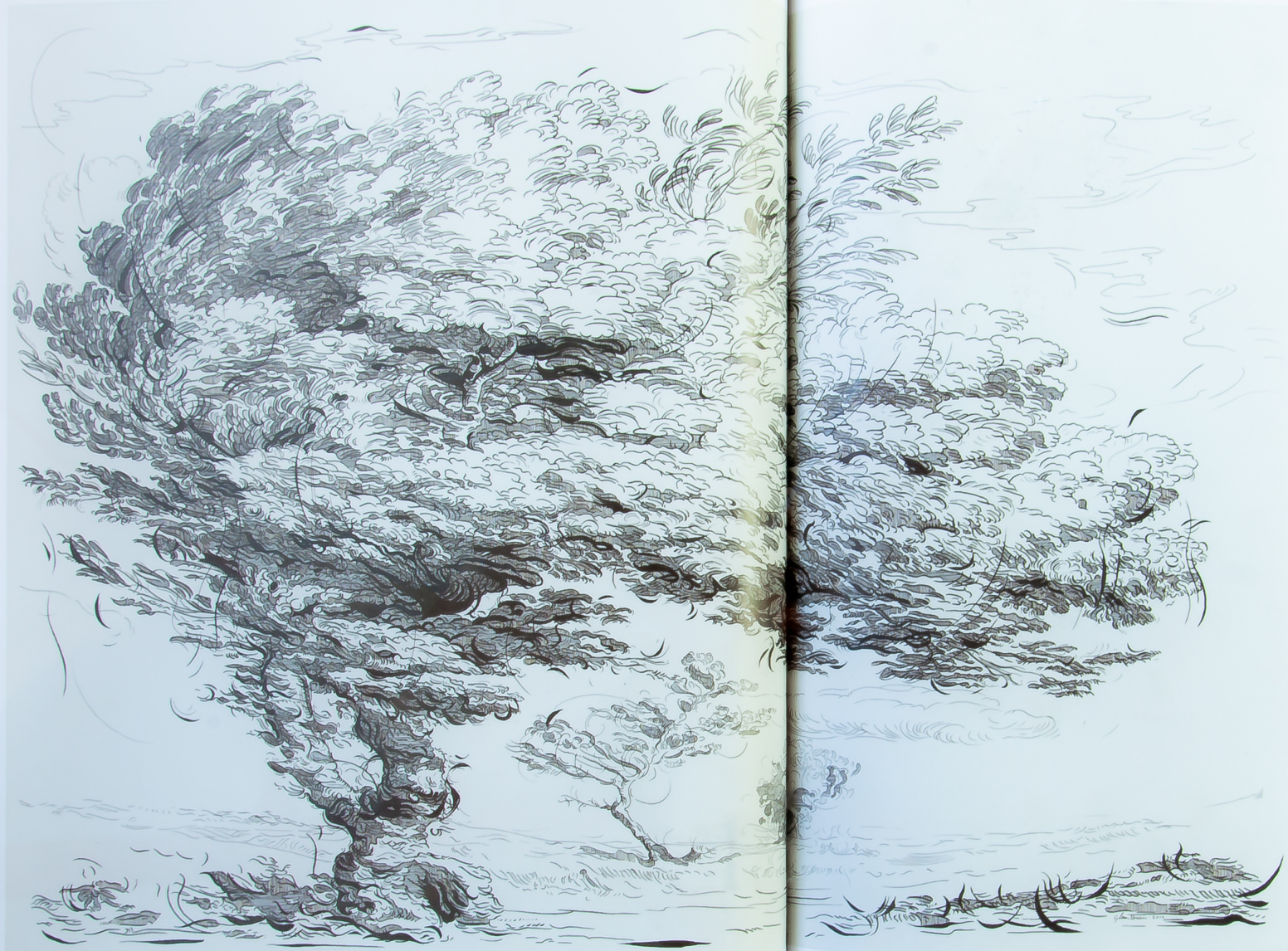


*Drawing 29 (after De Gheyn II)*  
2015  
Indian ink on paper  
27 3/4 x 19 3/4 in



*Drawing 4 (After Rembrandt)*  
2016  
Indian ink on vellum  
16 5/8 x 11 3/4 in





*Drawing 3 (after Crimaldi)*  
 2016  
 Indian ink on paper  
 30 1/2 x 44 1/4 in





*Let me ferry you out to sea  
To see who you could have been  
When the time comes to row back in  
You'll be in the place you should have been*  
2017  
Oil paint and acrylic on bronze  
33 1/4 x 29 1/4 x 26 in







*Baby Doll Lounge Parts 1 and 2*  
2017  
Oil paint and acrylic on bronze  
30 1/2 x 26 3/4 x 18 3/4 in (left)  
28 1/2 x 24 3/4 x 18 1/2 in (right)







*Trivial Pursuit*  
2017  
Oil paint and acrylic on bronze  
29 7/8 x 19 3/4 x 18 7/8 in







*Ain't No Flies on the Lamb of God*

2017

Oil paint on acrylic, fiberglass and stainless steel on bronze base

86 1/8 x 19 3/8 x 15 3/8 in (left)

92 1/2 x 24 3/8 x 23 3/8 in (centre)

81 3/8 x 23 3/8 x 16 1/2 in (right)





*Drawing 47 (after Tiepolo)*  
2015  
Indian ink and watercolour on paper  
19 3/4 x 14 1/2 in





*Drawing/Painting 35 (after De Heer)*  
2015  
Indian ink and acrylic on panel  
29 1/2 x 23 3/4 in



*Drawing 5 (after Bloemaert)*  
2016  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
23 3/8 x 16 3/4 in





*The Artist's Father*  
2016  
Etching on paper  
Image size 6 3/4 x 4 1/2 in  
Paper size 10 1/2 x 8 1/2 in  
edition of 60 plus 10 AP





*Drawing 1 (after Bloemaert)*  
2017  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
17 3/4 x 12 1/2 in



*Drawing 2 (after Bloemaert)*  
2017  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
15 3/8 x 11 1/2 in





*Drawing 3 (after Tiepolo/Tiepolo)*  
2017  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
16 1/2 x 11 1/4 in.



*Drawing 4 (after De Chéyn III/Creuze)*  
2017  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
16 1/2 x 11 3/8 in.





*Drawing 6 (after De Gheyn II/Greuze)*  
2017  
Indian ink on polyester film, over cardboard  
16 1/2 x 11 3/4 in



*Drawing 7 (after Greuze/Greuze)*  
2017  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
23 3/8 x 16 1/2 in





*The Life of Men*  
2017  
Indian ink and acrylic on panel  
9 3/4 x 9 3/4 in



*Drawing 10 (after Rembrandt)*  
2017  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
35 7/8 x 20 1/4 in





*Drawing 11 (after Tiepolo)*  
 2017  
 Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
 12 3/4 x 10 3/4 in



*Drawing 5 (after Golzeius)*  
 2017  
 Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
 21 1/2 x 15 3/4 in



# Glenn Brown. The Heretic of the Arts

Cesare Cunaccia

When the clearness of the line is lost, Art ventures into the unbridled and magmatic space of "imperfect form."

The 20th century Avant-gardes knew well what it meant to take the risk of abandoning the fine and defined contour of figuration, ending up lost in an anarchic vertigo, in the samsara of an insidious space, in a perilous and overtly iconoclastic expanse, where meaning and form – dismayed and uncertain – drift together.

A phantasmagorical realm of space and expression, oneiric and whimsical, engendering new meanings and conceptual issues. Where everything is fatally lost and then retrieved. Glenn Brown's work is made of superb and vibrating pictorial substance, fervid and putrescent. Liquefied in its colour, macerated in its morphology. A decaying, osmotic disintegration of matter, a supremely unconstrained metamorphic transmutation. Art made of atomic particles enclosed and orbiting in a state of "otherness."

Not solid, not liquid, not gaseous: Brown's works possess a different physical condition, one of the innumerable possibilities of matter, all new to explore, discover, investigate, and interrogate. His art is unsettling prophecy and unbridled form, enigmatically and proudly presenting us with meaning. This is the intrinsic significance of the work of Glenn Brown, an independent and provocative artist repeatedly accused of plagiarism. Glenn Brown's figuration draws upon what Hans-Georg Gadamer would term as an "augmentation of being,"<sup>1</sup> that is the chance given to the artwork to allude to further and misleading hermeneutic meanings and values, boldly and impudently giving onto something well beyond the seemingly impassable stronghold of solid and Leibnizian evidence.

Glenn Brown's aesthetic and figurative research develops along an "aesthetic of rescue" adopting a somewhat salvific approach representing a catharsis capable of giving artworks another opportunity, identifying a supplementary and vibrant chance of survival and palingenesis. His is a disrupting, compelling and majorly opulent narration, presented in a multifarious galaxy of paintings borrowed from museums, galleries and public and private collections from the world over-plus, taken from the web in print-on-demand version. An immense body of work, overwhelming and roving, an unbounded and colossal anatomy to dissect and recompose, onto which the artist works with wizardly flair and alchemic necessitation. His subjects are first of all selected for their extraordinary light rendition effects and their chromatic realism, in their apparent glorification of the fleeting moment fatefully attesting the sense of being alive here and now in the suspended capsule of a burning and ephemeral fragment of time.

Little does it matter if it is Guido Reni's terse Arcadian Emilian classicism or the gleaming and austere hidalgo language of the Iberian *Siglo de Oro*, as regally interpreted by Diego Velázquez. Luis de Góngora meets Red Hot Chili Peppers. And they get along just fine, no doubt. The taut bright neon tones that lash El Greco's sombre smears atomise and deflagrate ever more; immersed in late 16th century Venice infused with Titian's dazzling lesson,



the original Byzantine hieratic composure is spent and liquefied and finally transformed into a shimmering metallic blade forged in the Hapsburg city of Toledo. Hidden in the secret doctrine of Rembrandt's chiaroscuro, infused in the cold heraldic Baroque glory of Anthony van Dyck's sublime portraits, an unexpected chromatic range trickles down from the canvas, hounding and bewildering the viewer. But there is more: Jean-Honoré Fragonard's sensuous Rocaille sfumato, Adolph von Menzel and Gustave Courbet, Renoir's Impressionism, Vincent van Gogh's Arlesian solipsism, and Salvador Dalí's surreal plastic unmistakable cipher. All the way to borrowings from living contemporary artists such as Georg Baselitz or Frank Auerbach. No other place than the chosen one, of all places, could be more perfect to house Glenn Brown's Florentine exhibition, displaying over thirty works including paintings, drawings, and sculptures. Works sometimes framed in mystic Renaissance gilded frames and complemented by the presence of extraordinarily beautiful artefacts, textiles, bronze sculptures, panels, and paintings from different times and cultures part of the Stefano Bardini Museum truly eclectic, prestigious, and opulent collection: a marvellous and engaging narrative, an extraordinarily deceptive and sensorial Garden of Eden, astounding and sensual; a *Pastiche* of times and intuitions, a *métissage* of truth and imitation of truth; a fascinating emanation of lost mysteries with a vocation to eternity put together by an unique, amazing demiurge of the late 19th century, the art dealer Stefano Bardini.

Masterpieces of Art often face an inglorious fate: that of becoming "icons". When an artwork becomes an icon, death is all that awaits it. The icon manifests itself the moment the artwork crystallises into a perfect form, paradoxically stalwart and unattainable, losing its magic capacity to suggest unexpected meaning and hermeneutics, encourage the imagination, raise questions, and prompt unprecedented hermetic and dialectic outcomes.

The icon materialises when meaning fixates into a condensed, absolute, definite and therefore desperately sterile effigy. When collective imagination celebrates that rite of unanimous vulgarisation and servile acquisition, when the artwork regrettably becomes perfectly and universally readable, comprehensible and blatantly revealed.

Icons<sup>2</sup> are only there to be "worshipped," they live a life of their own, they feed on the narcissism yielded by their own myth, forcing us to be passive, totally and resignedly accepting their formal definition, acquiescing to an acritical consumer orthodoxy with no space for questions or dialogue whatsoever. This is the sad destiny of some major masterpieces that today have morphed into templates of an accumulation of intramuscular emotions, abused by advertising and other improbable uses, subject to an ephemeral and yet obsessive reproduction Instagram style that gradually nullifies their original message, blurring their challenging truths and their subversive or pleasing semantic import. An effraction of meaning, an excessive marketing of genius and beauty. A pressing issue nowadays, in our time of endlessly deferred and unresolved apocalypse, as Paul Virilio termed it.

One need only to think about the sense of disappointment we at times feel when we find ourselves, by chance, face to face with a masterpiece in some small or major museum. A much-anticipated meeting, often envisioned in our thoughts with our imagination. A much longed for experience that can sometimes translate into a dull and disappointing encounter, into an ordinary visit against the backdrop of an ordinary day, unexpectedly delivered into the flow of the often banal stream of everyday existence.

When everything has been said and over-wrought about an artwork or an artist, one is necessarily caught in a complex but yet closed dynamic that morphs that piece of art into a reassuring and universally obvious icon ready to be worshipped. It has become perfectly transparent for everybody. Its aesthetic assessment is now universal, taking on an indisputable aesthetic, symbolic, and allegorical value. An icon is a sacred and therefore untouchable image, it is taboo, and it becomes an idol. Through the veneration of sacred images, humankind finds protection from the negation of form, which is death and oblivion. Our culture is founded on the power of the icon and on the sacralisation of images.

Glenn Brown's fearless work overturns this triumphant "iconocracy" that by having taken over the world has dulled and obfuscated people's vision and thoughts. Glenn Brown is a heretic of the arts. Anarchic, dissident, and proudly sacrilegious, he is accused of blasphemy due to the transfiguration of form and the contortion of images he incessantly engages in. The same way were condemned and considered sulphureous, infernal creatures, those picturesque beggars, street acrobats and contortionists of the Middle Ages – those shabby companies that used to put up shows outside a church, ready to contort their bodies in serpentine and funambulatory poses for a few coins or something to eat.<sup>3</sup>

Drawing from his deep knowledge of art, Glenn Brown rips off the icons' impassive aura and thick hieratic varnish. Almost like a madman who, on entering a place of worship or a museum, suddenly slashes a *Nativity Scene* or an *Annunciation* with an awl or a pair of scissors.

Referring to Glenn Brown, Francesco Bonami rightfully talks of "art plastic surgery." The outcome of plastic surgery may not always be aesthetically pleasing nor plausible, yet these physical modifications always convey a new image by transfiguring a person's features. A new image that can sometimes be monstrous and cartoon-like, perilously balancing between "defiguration" and "representation."

Appropriation art dominated the last decades of the 20th century. Often with subversive purposes, this art trend took possession of existing works to make authentic replicas. Orlan for instance, the French body artist who took centre stage between the 1980s and '90s, used plastic surgery to sculpt her face to imitate the models of the past, shaping her flesh to resemble the distinctive sharp chin of the Botticelli *Venus* or the wide and serene forehead of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*. These operations became videos, artistic installations, performances with a musical score and interaction on the viewers' part, with





Mattia Preti  
*Bacchanal*  
 ca. 1640  
 Oil on canvas (detail)



choreographies and poetry readings. Their focus was not the experience of pain or the celebration of the outcome of the surgery, but rather its translation into a show, and the unsettling emanation of the narration of a modified face, supposed to prompt a public debate. Glenn Brown, on his part, uses computer scans, prints, and the layering of different images taken from Old Masters' works. Brown also uses graphic design software to modify, reverse, and capsize the images. He deforms, tilts, distorts, contorts, and intertwines outlines and surfaces, creating disjointed physiognomies, as in an imaginary scorched and disfigured Arcimboldo painting.<sup>4</sup> Brown vivisects artworks just as Leonardo da Vinci used to dissect human corpses during his nocturnal anatomical studies, with the same painstaking passion, with the same firm hand and rationality of a surgeon or necromancer.

The filmic farandole of quotes and inspirations takes centre stage soaring over a fine and ambiguous line that, no matter how tense, will never break and never be interrupted. Again and again, the heroic figures of Diego Velázquez and El Greco impose their masterly presence, and so does the Flemish figuration of Rembrandt and van Dyck, or Fragonard's enamelled 18th century trills. Some of these masters Glenn faces directly, investigating their gnosis, their word, their aporetic facets. Making their poetic features totally recognisable and unrecognisable at the same time.

Glenn Brown distorts the icons' appearance, with acid melting the definite perimeter of form and the line's adamant grace. He displaces meaning. He frees it, for good, directing it towards a new ontology of being. Lavish, liquid and literary, disturbing, dangerous, and fragile, the image is given a new life. The image is recreated and shaped into the programmatic frame of a new and intact meaning. Through demystification, it grabs hold of its authenticity again. It becomes a vision, a projection; it embraces its new existence that is a proclamation of an oneiric communion and crumbling matter, incandescent and stirring like volcanic lava. At this point, reference to the liturgy of Rembrandt's self-portraits is *de rigueur*.

Before Francis Bacon, Rembrandt – a solitary and desperately tormented soul trying to stay afloat in the 17th century trading maritime Dutch society fixated on profit and mercantile power – is perhaps the artist who has been the most obsessed and possessed with self-representation. The artist closer to Brown's conceptual framework.

Over the years, Rembrandt compulsively produced an uninterrupted series of self-portraits accurately mapping out the modifications time and life impressed onto his physiognomy; as if endlessly and helplessly racing against Kronos, trying to reach a finish line that was continually postponed and pushed slightly further on. Because time is always stronger and smarter. Rembrandt engaged in a neurotic, psychologic, and arrhythmic investigation of self. A tormented and honest *auto-da-fé*, an excruciating *memento mori* anticipating the obscure and painful outcomes of Freudian psychoanalysis. Rembrandt endured the dreadful strain of form searching for refuge from the damages inflicted by time over matter. To the point of modifying himself, changing

and chiselling the shadows, inverting the line ratio, against the victorious spread of entropy. Rembrandt trespassed the boundary of the line, he gave up barriers, palisades, and borders, and ventured into the unknown space of the unfinished and incomplete. In Glenn Brown's work we sense the same compulsion, the same drive

Never before has painting been subjected to such deep experimentation using existing languages, avoiding vanguard revolution but recombining many different kinds of revolutionary moment to create an almost out-of-body experience. The viewer is forced not merely to look at the painting in front of him but to search the paintings inside his memory. Looking at one of Glenn Brown's works we get the disturbing feeling that we are standing in front of someone we know very well but who has been transformed into, or has acquired an uncanny resemblance to, someone else. The greatness of Glenn Brown's work is its ability to tell us of the endless mutation of the history of painting, its decay and resurrection, its capacity to remain young when all around is getting older and older. Through a sophisticated nip/tuck job Glenn Brown makes a new series of masterpieces out of the ageing ones. We love them; and we fear them.<sup>5</sup>

In the past people used to wonder what would become of painting after photography. And what is left of painting today, after Computer Art? Glenn Brown reflects on the possibility that painting might still have something to say, something that has not yet been said. He wagers the paintbrush can still be a mean for contemporary communication, investigating the image in its deepest hidden meanings, focusing on its "latency."

Glenn Brown's pictures are hallucinations that open the door to possibility, to flights of fancy, to the realm of dream; acid colours, the perverse and ironic play of deformation, the textural quality, the tactile layering of colour. A tapestry throbbing with a variety of conceptions, a mixing of unreal files, of hyperbola, of energetic and striking motions. Neo-Baroque, Rococo, Surrealist, futuristic, academic, classical and pop illusions and projections.

The image takes on a value in itself, absorbing an unknown and previously hidden energy, proclaiming and celebrating a latent virtualities. An "ontological event" as Hans-Georg Gadamer would term it in his *The Relevance of the Beautiful*. The growth of self and the revitalising expansion of being are fully achieved. A plurality of quotations resembling a symphonic choir vocalisation. A choir ensemble is formed by so many different voices. But it's so clear that all together they sing and give rise to a single glorious melody.

Special thanks to Cristian Spadoni for his collaboration.

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Stefano Bardini Museum  
Room of the Small Bronzes (detail)





Glenn Brown,  
photo Will Corry

## BIOGRAPHY

Glenn Brown is a British artist, known for the use of art historical references in his paintings. Starting with reproductions from other artist's works, Brown transforms the image by dramatically 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. These works are created by accumulating thick layers of oil paint over structures or found bronze casts. His sculptures deliberately emphasise the three-dimensional quality of oil brushstrokes, and stand in stark contrast to his flat paintings. The forms of his sculptures and the colour combinations used, also quote 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.

Glenn Brown has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including Rembrandt House, Amsterdam (2017); Des Moines Art Center, travelled to Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati (2016); Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles (2016); Rennie Collection, Vancouver (2013); Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands (2013); Tate Liverpool, England (2009), travelled to Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin and Ludwig Museum, Budapest; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (2008); Serpentine Gallery, London (2004); and Domaine de Kerguelennec, Centre d'Art Contemporain, France (2000). His work has also been part of numerous group exhibitions including Centre George Pompidou Malaga (2015); Museo Guggenheim, Bilbao, Spain (2013); Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague (2012); Kunsthalle, Vienna (2011); Gwangju Biennale, Korea (2010); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2005); Venice Biennale, Italian Pavillion, (2003); Centre Georges Pompidou (2002, 2013), and The Saatchi Gallery (1995, 2014).

Born 1966, Hexham, Northumberland, England; the artist lives and works in London and Suffolk, England.



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