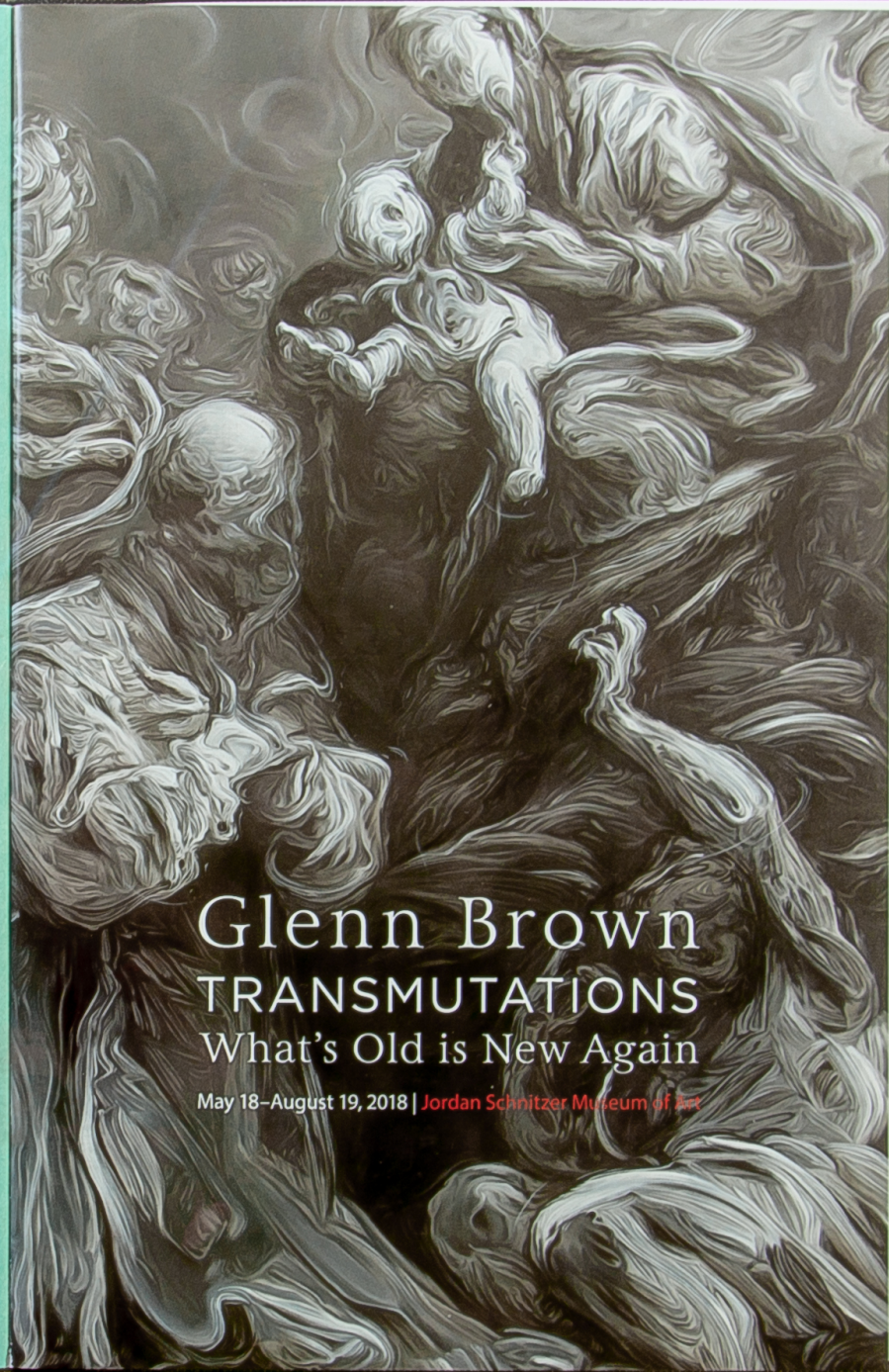


Glenn Brown

TRANSMUTATIONS  
What's Old is New Again



May 18–August 19, 2018  
Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art



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## Foreword

A few years ago, the *New York Times* put this museum on its front page with a story about our Masterworks on Loan (MOL) program. Robert Storr, recently retired from his deanship at Yale and preparing for a lecture that evening in conjunction with our Kara Walker show, told the reporter that the MOL program was of great benefit to our students and faculty. Indeed, here, in Eugene, Oregon, scholars and artists can regularly study works by modern and contemporary masters—from Europe, Asia, and the Americas—and occasionally those from earlier times.

Starting with a few lenders, we now work with more than thirty collectors and their agents. We are deeply grateful to them for sharing their treasures with us. For although the JSMA is a nationally accredited museum and one of the finest teaching museums in the country, our resources preclude the likelihood of borrowing such significant works on any regular basis.

This special exhibition takes us into new territory. It is, in fact, the first time that we have worked closely with a Masterworks on Loan lender, in this case, the Peterson Family Collection, on the presentation of a single artist exhibition. Most of the works are drawn from their collection, and we appreciate the loan of an additional Brown work from Emilia and Tad Buchanan.

Glenn Brown is a perfect artist for this project as his work is imbued with a deep and keen understanding of art history and art making. We might call him an academic artist. You can tell that he loves materials—pencil, paint, brushes—and that he respects and admires such artists as Rembrandt and Tiepolo from whom he takes inspiration. But his works are far from copies; nor are they pastiche or satire. They have an old master gravitas that is not without a hint of levity, not least because of their ornate frames.

I am indebted to a highly capable and dedicated staff who worked on this special installation, including Miranda Callander, our registrar and MOL manager; Joey Capadona, our chief preparator; and Mike Bragg, our graphic designer. As a teaching museum, the JSMA works closely with faculty and students from across campus; at last count, more than 7,000 students take classes or work in the museum each year. One of those is art history graduate student Emily Shinn, who researches and writes our MOL didactics. When this opportunity arose, I asked if she would like to write an essay about Glenn Brown and the work in this exhibition, and she quickly agreed. Her essay, which follows, offers a thoughtful perspective on the artist's work, and affirms the importance of personal encounters with works of art. All of us thank the Petersons and Buchanans for their generosity and encouragement and Glenn Brown for sharing his artistic vision with us.

Jill Hartz, Executive Director

## Exhibiting Masterworks

The Masterworks on Loan (MOL) program has grown substantially since I joined the JSMA six years ago as Registrar. In addition to handling loan agreements, insurance, and the like, my role has evolved to include the design and planning of micro-exhibitions from Ai Weiwei's *Zodiac Heads* to this stand-alone installation featuring Glenn Brown. Unlike traditional exhibitions in which art goes up and comes down collectively, MOL loans change incrementally: preparators and I are in the galleries weekly taking down art and putting up new pieces.

Developing cohesive exhibitions in such circumstances with art spanning movements, media, and scale is a constant challenge. When approached with a new loan offer, I immediately begin research on the art and artist, seeking connections—if not contextual, then formal—with others confirmed for installation. From a logistical standpoint, separating, say, Neo-Conceptualists from figurative artists, is a rare possibility. Arranging works in chronological sequence is also a futile endeavor. My goal is to create interesting, even provocative, conversations in groupings of art, disparate or otherwise, searching for commonalities and oppositions, influences and reactions. I hope the dialogue fostered by MOL loans continues in our university community and beyond in the years to come.

Miranda Callander, Registrar  
Manager, Masterworks on Loan

# Glenn Brown

## TRANSMUTATIONS

### What's Old is New Again

Emily Shinn

Glenn Brown holds a distinctive position in Britain's contemporary art market, reviving the art historical canon through delicate acts of appropriation. As a graduate of the Fine Art program at Goldsmiths College in London, Brown rose to prominence amid the generational collective known as the Young British Artists (YBA). As Brown is quick to note, however, the artists commonly mentioned under the moniker—such as Peter Doig, Damien Hirst, and Gary Hume—are united less by stylistic similarities, influence, or creative ambition, than by a shared training under the weight of Postmodernism's fundamental question: "Is painting dead?" Brown's answer is a decisive "No" that strives for individual artistic expression without eschewing the history of art.<sup>1</sup>

Navigating the boundary between influence and copy, Brown refuses to see appropriation in a negative light or raise the ideal of originality onto a pedestal. He embraces the fact that direct and indirect acts of borrowing are inescapable, that "all of the knowledge of all of the art we've ever seen is with us when we paint, when I paint. Whether I choose to or not, I may appropriate artists' styles and marks and color combinations."<sup>2</sup> Taking the line of thought further, Brown works to keep appropriation a conspicuous element in order to increase and expand the web of possible connections between viewer and artwork.<sup>3</sup>

Such intentionality does not render each work immediately intelligible, however. As this exhibition demonstrates, Brown's oeuvre extends across a spectrum of enigma. Most pieces are a result of multiple influences: one artist's rendition of a subject merged with the style of second and a third's use of line or color. Brown's goal is neither to copy nor comment on a single artist or work but rather to re-focus attention on the creative act and *how* something has been—and can be—painted and drawn.<sup>4</sup> The resulting amalgamations hover on the edge of the recognizable, citations from an art historical library rendered new by the artist.

Seven of the works in this exhibition highlight the paintings and drawings that comprise the majority of Brown's output, alternating between direct and opaque references to masters of the Renaissance through the nineteenth century. Merging the mediums of drawing and painting, these pieces provide a window into Brown's foundational interest in line and brushwork, thereby continuing art history's obsession with surface and how marks on a canvas are seen as signatures of personalities and validations of authenticity.<sup>5</sup>

Brown begins with a digital image, which he manipulates with software programs such as Photoshop – cropping, removing backgrounds, adjusting proportions and colors. He then projects the reworked image onto his chosen support and proceeds to paint, copying and revising the digital creation as desired.<sup>6</sup> The result is a hybrid of the painterly and the digital, emphasizing expressive brushwork and sheer, flat surfaces simultaneously.

The dark paneled support in *Mother's Tongue* enhances this effect and speaks to Brown's reverence for the tan backgrounds in the drawings of Albrecht Dürer, which provide an ideal backdrop for white highlights.<sup>7</sup> The use of sturdy yet translucent polyester drafting film overlaid on cardboard in *Drawing 3* and *Drawing 11* achieve a similar result. When paired with Brown's distinctive brushstrokes, the completed images have more in common with a chalk or graphite sketch than an acrylic painting. The delicate individual brushstrokes linger on the boundary between coalescence and dissolution, creating a sense of movement and metamorphosis: these are images in the process of becoming.

As indicated by their titles, *Drawing 3* and *11* are "after" Giovanni Batista Tiepolo, one of the most prominent decorative painters of the eighteenth century. While the counterpart for *Drawing 11* is obscure, *Drawing 3* closely follows Tiepolo's *Head of a Young Man in Three-Quarter View*. Without copy-

ing the original directly, Brown captures the spontaneity and draftsmanship for which Tiepolo is known as well as the master's talent for pairing psychological subtlety with naturalistic physical details.

*Mother's Tongue* also showcases Brown's artful manipulation of images and affinity for pre-existing frames, which he uses as starting points, creating images to suit the frame rather than searching for a frame to complete a pre-existing work.<sup>8</sup> Two individual drawings are superimposed to create a composite that challenges both the mind and the eye. Though the result is entirely his own, Brown captures the essence of unfinished sketches by Rubens or da Vinci while providing viewers with the sensation of an optical illusion.

Similar to the Tiepolo drawings, *Drawing 2 (after Bloemaert)* honors the style and subjects preferred by Dutch Mannerist Abraham Bloemaert. As part of the Haarlem Mannerists, Bloemaert was a successful draftsman, painter, and teacher in late sixteenth century Netherlands. Though historical subjects with prominent landscapes are the central feature of Bloemaert's work, Brown is primarily attracted to the Dutch painter's "brilliance with trees," often taking a single tree as his appropriated subject.<sup>9</sup>

*Poor Moon* provides an example of Brown's repeated turns to Rembrandt as subject and inspiration. The esoteric title does little to direct viewers to the Rembrandt self-portrait at play, however, demonstrating Brown's affinity for referencing popular culture in addition to art history. *Poor Moon* quotes the name of a contemporary American alternative rock band and a song from the 1980s band Canned Heat, from which the former gets its name. It also shares the name of a crater on Mercury, one of the largest in the solar system, discovered in 2008 and named after the Dutch painter. The roundness and grey tonality of the image does seem to resemble a planetary crater more than a portrait, with only the suggestion of the white cap

common to many of Rembrandt's self-portraits to signify the Renaissance master directly.

Expanding the samples of Brown's paintings and title play are *This Island Earth* and *Daydream Nation*. The title of the former quotes a song by punk band the Misfits as well as the title of a 1952 sci-fi novel and the cult favorite film it spawned; the latter borrows the name of a Sonic Youth album. Full of enticing metaphor and begging to be unraveled, the titles are as enigmatic as the paintings they purport to name.

*This Island Earth* emanates a familiarity at odds with the nebulous suggestion of figures, standing out in its demand for viewers' art historical knowledge. The scene appears to depict a woman holding a child, a praying or benevolent male at her feet, and a pair of flanking angels, with a touch of white at the top to evoke the dove of the Holy Spirit. Stylistically, the painting echoes the work of Raphael, Titian, and Rubens—full-bodied graceful figures, weightless environments of spiritual transcendence, and visual opulence. Without referencing an individual work or artist, Brown uses technique and composition to capture a complete lineage of Renaissance depictions of the Virgin Mary, from Madonna and Child to Assumption.

With its vivid color and sumptuous application of paint, *Daydream Nation* is the most visually arresting of the works on paper. Each element competes for attention and captures the imagination, hinting at connection with the title. The dematerializing jade haze creates an illusion of depth and places focus on the young girl. With her stirring blue eyes gazing beyond the confines of the frame and lost in thought, she wears a dress that gives the impression of liquid paint while her skin has the appearance of putty still warm from being molded by an artist's hand. Here, Brown's distinctive brushstrokes have more in common with threads floating in a viscous liquid than chalk sketches or paint deposited on canvas by a brush. Despite

such rich materiality, the surface is utterly flat, as though the ridges of paint had been scanned and transformed into a digital print.

As the lone "sculpture" in the exhibition, *Trivial Pursuit* demonstrates the compelling means by which Brown adapts his techniques to a three-dimensional medium. Inspired by modernist Frank Auerbach's thick application of paint and uniform brushwork, Brown re-purposes found bronze castings with multicolored layers of paint that enrich the dimensionality and spatial interaction innate to sculpture.<sup>10</sup> Brown's sculptures are an extension of his works on paper and his interest in merging mediums; they are envisioned as three-dimensional paintings that use bronze as their support instead of paper or canvas.

In this piece, one figure from the original pair is almost entirely overtaken by paint. Slender and feminine, the remaining hand and foot suggest an amorous counterpart for the young boy untouched by paint. Brown's adaptation seems to illustrate a moment of metamorphosis, recalling Bernini's marble rendition of Apollo and Daphne. Viewers are invited to witness the moment of enchantment, as the male youth leans in for a chaste kiss—his *trivial pursuit*—and his companion transforms from bronze to oil and acrylic.

Brown's mastery of medium, art history, and conceptual whimsy are on full display in these eight works. Merging painting, drawing, digital manipulation, and sculpture, the pieces refuse to be defined by traditional categories of style, influence, or even time period. Rather than frustrating the viewing experience, however, the obscurity piques the imagination and demands thoughtful interaction, enhancing the experience of each piece. Individually and as a group, the works address a question that Brown himself has raised, one that has currency beyond the walls of the gallery: why deny the artistic past, if it continues to speak to the human condition?<sup>11</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 "Art in America Interview with Glenn Brown by Lynn MacRitchie," last modified March 28, 2009, <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/interview-glenn-brown/>.
- 2 "Art in America Interview with Glenn Brown by Lynn MacRitchie."
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 "In Conversation: Glenn Brown and Xavier Bray," last modified February 28, 2018, <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/video/#/27/>.
- 5 "Glenn Brown: After Life, Rembrandt House Museum 2017," last modified January 16, 2017, <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/video/#/19/>.
- 6 "Glenn Brown: After Life, Rembrandt House Museum 2017."
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 "In Conversation: Glenn Brown and Xavier Bray."
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 "Art in America Interview with Glenn Brown by Lynn MacRitchie."
- 11 Ibid.

## Work

Mother's Tongue

**Mother's Tongue, 2017**  
Acrylic paint on panel; frame  
22 ¼ x 16 ⅞ inches (unframed)  
37 x 32 ⅞ x 5 ½ inches (framed)  
Peterson Family Collection



Poor Moon

**Poor Moon**, 2016  
Indian ink and acrylic on panel  
36 ¼ x 29 x ¾ inches  
Peterson Family Collection



Drawing 3 (after Tiepolo/Tiepolo)

**Drawing 3 (after Tiepolo/Tiepolo), 2017**  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
16 ¼ x 11 ¼ inches  
Peterson Family Collection



Drawing 11 (after Tiepolo)

**Drawing 11 (after Tiepolo), 2017**  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
15 1/4 x 11 1/4 inches  
Peterson Family Collection



Daydream Nation

**Daydream Nation, 2017**  
Oil paint on panel  
44 1/8 x 31 1/2 x 1/4 inches  
Peterson Family Collection



Trivial Pursuit

**Trivial Pursuit, 2017**  
Oil and acrylic paint on bronze  
29 7/8 x 19 1/4 x 18 7/8 inches  
Peterson Family Collection



This Island Earth

**This Island Earth**, 2017  
Oil paint on panel  
107 ¼ x 72 ¼ x ¾ inches  
Peterson Family Collection



Drawing 2 (after Bloemaert)

**Drawing 2 (after Bloemaert), 2017**  
Indian ink and acrylic on polyester film, over cardboard  
18 1/4 x 13 1/2 inches (unframed)  
23 1/4 x 18 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches (framed)  
Collection of Emilia and Tad Buchanan





**Glenn Brown** (British, b. 1966) attended Norwich School of Art (1985), Bath College of Higher Education (1988), and Goldsmiths College, University of London (1992). He has had numerous solo and group exhibitions in the U.K. and abroad, and his work is included in significant public and private collections. Brown participated in the 2003 Venice Biennale and the 2010 Gwangju Biennale. He is represented by Gagosian Gallery in New York and London and Galerie Max Hetzler in Berlin and Paris. He currently lives and works in London.

Photo credit: Edgar Laguinia, courtesy Glenn Brown studio

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