
Glenn Brown (1966- ) is a British artist who uses appropriation from old master, modern, and contemporary artists to source the language of his paintings, which has given rise to some accusations of plagiarism. This publication assembles the catalogues of three exhibitions of his work at the Gagosian Galleries in London and New York, providing a consolidated biography, bibliography and list of works. The New York catalogues of 2007 (with an essay by the British writer Michael Bracewell) and 2004 (with an essay by the art historian David Freedberg) have been published separately, and some libraries will prefer the ‘authenticity’ of these contemporaneous artifacts. However, the text and images of the 2009 London show have not been published before.

At first it seems questionable what the added value of republishing earlier works is: is it an attempt to simulate a monograph? As the Tate published one in 2009, edited by Francesco Bonami and Christoph Grunenberg, this would seem unlikely. This new publication is in reverse chronological order, with the latest exhibition first - an unusual characteristic for a typical monograph. Moreover, there are three distinct authorial voices: Steiner, who was chief curator of the Serpentine Gallery, London, when Brown had his solo show there in 2004, uses Malcolm Bradbury’s The Illustrated Man as a way into a painting by painting analysis; Bracewell employs Brown’s own words to explore his love of paint and of painting, and Freedberg focuses on Brown’s painting surfaces which he sees as key to a post-modernity that resurrects painting after its so-called death.

None of Brown’s one-man shows so far has had a title, and this publication too reflects the accumulative nature of his practice. What is interesting about Brown’s work is the apparent impasto technique often married to écorché-like effects, but, up close, the painting surfaces are flat with the apparent palpability of oil paint constructed from swirling lines. These are in contrast to Brown’s sculptures, where tangibly impasto oil paint on acrylic over metal armatures or bronze, emphasizes its absence from the paintings.

This catalog is well illustrated with color reproductions of all the works and there are also black-and-white studio and installation photographs. It thus provides a useful survey of a key period of work of an important contemporary British artist, and thus in the collecting scope of libraries documenting British or contemporary art. It will also be useful to the art school library where painting students will be engaged not only by Brown’s work itself but also with his dialogue with the history of art from Arcimboldo to Auerbach.

Stephen Bury, Andrew W. Mellon Chief Librarian, Frick Art Reference Library, bury@frick.org