

## **Glenn Brown**

FIN 120: Unit 1 Artist Research

Submitted 24 Sept 2023 by Dale Graham

### About the artist:

- Age 57. Born 1966 in Hexham, a small town in northern England
- Education: BA in Fine Art at Bath School of Art and Design (1988), MA at Goldsmiths' College, University of London (1992)
- Currently resides/works in London and Suffolk
- Recognition / Awards include CBE (Commander of the British Empire) in 2019; nominated for the Turner Prize in 2000; solo and group exhibits across the UK, Europe and North America (including Tate Britain, Kunsthistorisches in Vienna, Fondation Vincent Van Gogh in Arles, France) (source: <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/biography/>)
- Controversial for his unapologetic appropriation and reworking of other artists' work (historic figures like Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Renoir, Dali – but also living artists). Accused of plagiarism for his Turner-Prize-nominated work that was based closely on the cover art from a 1970s science fiction novel (and the plagiarism contention was firmly rejected by the judging panel for the Turner Prize) (source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1044375.stm>).



The Naked Eye, 2021  
India ink, acrylic and oil on drafting film  
14.25 by 10 cm  
Retrieved 23 Sept 2023 from <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/1109/>

### The Work:

- Painting in oils and acrylics, India ink. Also drawing, etching and sculpture.
- Uses layers of thin, swirling brushstrokes that give an impression of thick impasto paints, yet with a physical presence that is smooth and flat like a photograph.
- Faces and figures often distorted, sometimes grotesque, disfigured, or with indications of decay. Eyes are opaque or cloudy, obscured or completely absent.
- Rooted in art history. Starts with reproductions of other's work, then transforms and distorts the proportions, colours, positioning, and size of the figures. He is deliberately provocative about appropriation, confidently presenting surreal, sometimes horrific re-paintings of existing works.



The Real Thing (left) and Little Death (right)

Both painted in 2000, part of a series of at least seven works based on Frank Auerbach's 1973 painting, *Head of J.Y.M.*

Retrieved 23 September 2023 from <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/>



- The Shallow End (below) is based on the 1771 work of French artist Jean-Honore Fragonard, who himself made a series of fifteen portraits that reinvented works by other artists of his era. (source <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/233/>)



The Shallow End, 2011  
Oil on panel (oval), 128 x 96 cm  
Retrieved 23 September 2023 from  
<https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/233/>

#### Context:

Glenn Brown was described in a 2013 Sotheby's auction pamphlet as "the epitome of postmodernist expression in paint... a complex negotiation between mechanical/painterly reproduction and authorial detachment" (source: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/contemporary-art-evening-auction-113020/lot.29.html>). Brown himself says the appropriations and oppositions are key to his approach (source <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/biography/>). In art school through 1980s and 1990s, he would have experienced an explosion of access to computer technology, allowing image reproduction and manipulation in a way never possible to previous generations of artists. His artistic mission seems to be melding his particular, highly-polished painting style with the issues and possibilities arising from rapidly expanding access to and manipulation of computer images.

#### Emotional impact:

Unsettling and challenging, in my experience, because of equal parts attraction and repulsion. He attracts by using beautiful colours and compelling lines that are soft and curving and filled with movement. Yet on closer examination the subjects prove to be rotting, decaying, unable even to see their world with their glazed-over eyes. The composition of the works is stunning, framing and focusing the portrait beautifully – not surprising, given that his starting points are iconic and celebrated works. On the other hand, he is giving us subjects that are literally decomposing, as if challenging the very idea of composition. It is all very contradictory.



Sex, 2003  
Oil on panel, 126 x 85 cm  
Retrieved 23 September 2023 from  
<https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/133/>



Black Ships Ate the Sky, 2020  
Oil and acrylic on panel, 216 x 144 x 2.2 cm  
Retrieved 23 September 2023 from  
<https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/912/>

#### My response and the impact on my art:

I find the swirling marks beautiful and I admire the way they often imply rather than spell out clearly the features of the subject. I love the distinct framing of the portrait in a relatively uncluttered negative space. But mostly, I respond to the confidence and assertiveness of the artist for his vision. I am not drawn to portraying horrific decaying figures, and I have some serious reservations about the “copying” of historically acclaimed art, part of me judges it to be cheating a bit. However, viewing his huge body of work enacted over decades convinces me this is not a dalliance or a trick, but a full-fledged commitment to painting, a deep exploration of how art history and painting and computerization meet in his world. I’m inspired to take risks, allow myself to make art not to find approval but to express questions and ideas that are more compellingly presented visually than in words.



Life on the Moon, 2016  
Oil on panel, 100 x 78.5 cm  
Retrieved 23 September 2023 from  
<https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/403/>