

A Dictionary of Canadian Artists, Volume I

Colin S. Macdonald

CDN Paperbacks Publishing Company

Revised and expanded 1997

BROWN, John

b. 1953

Born in Sarnia, Ontario, he emerged in the 1980's as an important painter noted by John Bentley Mays at the Olga Korper Gallery, Tor., as follows, "The trouble for John Brown and for an increasing number of thoughtful people, is that . . . handy modern analogies from technology lead almost inevitably to the insidious view of the human body as a kind of appliance. . . . Few seem to care that the metaphor crumples flat at a hard glance. A pump, for instance, doesn't slow down when it hears lovely music, or thump madly when a second, sexually exciting pump lurches into view. . . . Because John Brown is a painter — one of the most solidly gifted, reflective painters to emerge in Toronto during the 1980's — his counter-statement to the deceitful mechanical thinking about the body is cast in the stuff of art, and draws its involving strength from the old materials and practices of vigorous abstract art-making. The five large oils on wood and five beautiful small mixed-media works on veneer, . . . have these or similar titles: *J.W.B.'s Leg*, *H.S.'s Eye*, *S.C.'s Heart*. These peculiar labels send two signals, first, that the identity of the owner of the particular leg, eye, heart or whatever is Brown's business, not our's, and probably doesn't matter anyway. The second message is that what we are seeing in these abstracts are painterly metaphors, antimetaphorical and sensuously intimate, of human body parts — or, to be more exact, attempts to provide a carnal vocabulary more ambiguous, poetic and holistic than the old lingo of pumps, kitchen utensils, exhaust pipes and so forth . . . each painting in this show exists as a field of incidents, excitations, rests, injuries. A patch of twilight grey, overpainted with a sullen red and scraped down to the board, the hard bone under the flesh of oil painting; a cloud of fuming, toxic green, a slashing wound bleeding oxblood, abrasions and scrapes that appear to have come with the passage of many years; strong, serene moments evoked by dry, ethereal Renaissance blues — these are some of the elements and tactics, deployed in the largest paintings here with high virtuosity, which Brown uses to declare his understanding of embodied life." Brown resides in Toronto and is represented in the CCAB in Ottawa and many other collections.

References

Contemporary Canadian Art by D. Burnett & Marilyn Schiff, Hurtig, Edn., 1983, P.288

CC Art Bank Cat. 1972-92, CCAB, Ott., 1992, P.36

Globe & Mail, Tor., Dec. 2, 1995 "Art Review — A carnal vocabulary for the human body" by John Bentley Mays