

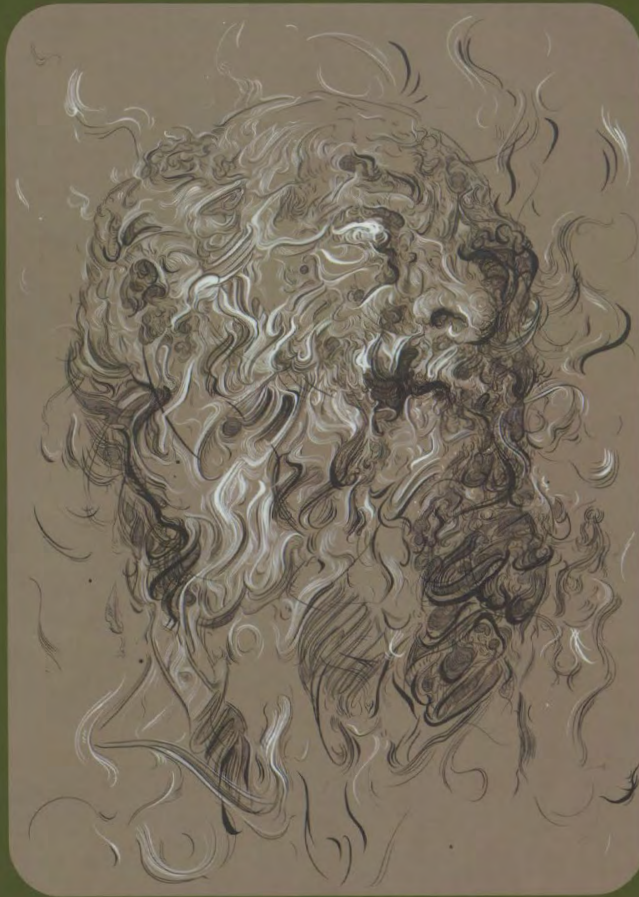
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Master Drawings

Seligman, Isabel: Emptied Gestures: Glenn Brown and the Pragmatics of Appropriation

Vol. LVII, Number 3, September 2019

Master Drawings



VOLUME LVII / NUMBER 3 / 2019

Emptied Gestures: Glenn Brown and the Pragmatics of Appropriation

ISABEL SELIGMAN



tory's greatest painterly styles for his models. Recently Brown has shifted his output from painting to drawing, and this article examines the methods and consequences of stylistic appropriation in his recent body of work drawn from reproductions of historical drawings, interrogating the claim that they offer "a bold reinterpretation of the age-old tradition of copying historical subjects as a learning process"⁴ and questioning what it means to make "a twenty-first-century drawing."⁵

Although Brown had studied life drawing dur-

Figure 1 (left)

GLENN BROWN

Atom Age Vampire,
1991

Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)

Glenn Brown (b. 1966) was born in Hexham, Northumberland, and trained at Norwich School of Art, Bath School of Art and Design, and Goldsmiths College, London. Described as a "second generation appropriationist,"¹ over the course of his career Brown has imitated both famous paintings and styles of painting with the *trompe l'oeil* of a totally flat canvas. From the heaped impasto of Frank Auerbach (b. 1931) in *Atom Age Vampire* (1991), in a private collection (Fig. 1),² to the diffuse luminosity of Rembrandt (1606–1669) in *Nigger of the World* (2011), also in a private collection (Fig. 2),³ Brown raided the range of art his-



Figure 2 (right)

GLENN BROWN

Nigger of the
World, 2011

Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)



Figure 3

GLENN BROWN

Joseph Beuys, 2001

Private Collection (© Glenn Brown, 2019)

ing his foundation year—which he described as “in a way...antiquated”⁶—drawings previously had no major role in his working process. In 2015 Brown had his first exhibitions of drawings as independent works of art in their own right, first at Galerie Max Hetzler in Paris and then at Frieze London. These exhibitions showcased drawings that Brown had been working on for the previous two years. His subsequent exhibition, *Come to Dust* (London, Gagosian Gallery, 24 January–17 March 2018), featured more drawings than either paintings or sculptures, with a salon hang of forty drawings executed on either polyester film (polypropylene) or panel. Brown’s shift from painting to drawing holds profound implications for his self-presentation. He had often defined himself as a “painter” rather than as an artist, and although he claimed that while studying at Goldsmiths, “the notion in the air was that painting was dead or at least unimportant,” he maintained that painting was a constituent part of his identity.⁷

If Brown’s technique of *trompe l’oeil* flattening was central to his method of appropriation, so, too, was his use of color. “To me being a good colourist—using colour in a complex and articulate way—is one of the highest goals I set myself,” Brown claimed in an interview in 2004.⁸ Color is one of the principal means by which he achieves the conflict and drama of his paintings. For example, in a later interview in 2009 he noted:

*A good painting should keep you looking and thinking for as long as it can. That is why if someone is drawn to a painting only to be repelled by its callous use of lime green and pink and then won over by a subtle halo of pale lavender, I think the painting is going well.*⁹

Brown has also described how his process for making a painting involved taking the “skeleton,” or composition, from one painting, and the “skin,” or color palette, from another.¹⁰ In his catalogue essay for the 2015 exhibition of drawings, Xavier F. Salomon evoked the battle between *disegno* and *colore* in sixteenth-century discourse.¹¹ Contemporary critics characterized the former as appealing to the reason and the latter to the emotions. However, it does not

seem that Brown necessarily views his own work in these terms. Often he describes color not as an emotional stimulus, but as a discursive element, for example:

*In a painting like "Joseph Beuys" [2001; Fig. 3],¹² you are looking at my thoughts, obviously, but also the thoughts of the assistant to Rembrandt who painted it, as well as Rembrandt, and Rembrandt's son who is depicted. You also have the **opinion** of a painting by Gabriele Munter, from where I stole the colour.¹³*

The palette of acid yellow and blue, green, pink, and red of the German Expressionist Gabriele Munter (1877–1962), as seen, for instance, in the *Portrait of a Young Woman in a Large Hat* ("The Polish Woman"), in a private collection, on deposit at the Courtauld Gallery, London (1909; Fig. 4),¹⁴ is for Brown not merely an emotional trigger, but one more voice, capable of holding its own in a conversation with the *disegno* of the original painting from the circle of Rembrandt. Yet the shift from painting to drawing has largely deprived Brown of the use of color, which had been one of the key components of his work, and to cope with this transition he has begun to explore other means of expression.

In 2015 Andreas Schalthorn noted the similarity between the way Brown employed artificial brushstrokes in his paintings, and the vocabulary of different types of marks in his drawings. If the *trompe-l'oeil* brushstrokes served "as the foundation for the aberrant...forms within the [painted] works," in the drawings "these same building blocks appear through the use of hatching, individual lines, artificial blots, and varied inks."¹⁵ Yet although Schalthorn correctly identified that Brown uses line the way a painter might use a signature brushstroke, he does not examine the various "signature strokes" that Brown is himself appropriating in his drawings, nor the pragmatics of this particular method. Later in the same essay, Schalthorn claimed, "Throughout, Brown refrains from the gestures of the Old Masters in his drawings. He is no copyist who merely traces his templates like a slave."¹⁶

I would contend that far from refraining from adopting the gestures of the Old Masters in his



Figure 4

GABRIELE MUNTER

Portrait of a Young Woman in a Large Hat ("The Polish Woman"), 1909

Private Collection (on long-term loan to the Courtauld Gallery, London; © DACS, 2019)

drawings, Brown not only employs them—but positively exploits them—quoting often conflicting fragments from multiple different languages of line. Thus, it is not the gestures of the Old Masters that Brown rejects, but their context and specificity. The way in which we read a line is culturally and historically determined and depends on its context. In terms of verisimilitude, a line can represent an edge, or a crease, or they can be bundled together to imply a surface or shadow through hatching. However, as an arbitrary signifier, it can also represent an almost infinite number of things, including an abstract schema, movement, sound, smell, or atmospheric disturbance. Artists rely on the pictorial context to make clear what exactly their lines are supposed to stand for. As a case study, Brown's *Drawing 30 (after Gossaert)*, in a private collection (2014; Fig. 5),¹⁷ illustrates a few of the numerous gestures Brown appropriates from Old Master drawings. By identifying these techniques, and the manner in which they are employed (including Brown's manipulation of the support on

Figure 5

GLENN BROWN

Drawing 30 (after
Gossaert), 2014

Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)



Figure 6

JAN GOSSART

Adam and Eve,
c. 1520–25

Vienna, Albertina



which they are drawn), I will explore how Brown's drawings take advantage of this polysemy of the drawn line, while frustrating historical combinations of marks by denying them the contexts that have previously given them meaning.

Drawing 30 (after Gossaert) was drawn from a reproduction of the drawing of *Adam and Eve* by Jan Gossaert (1478–1532), which was made c. 1520–25 and is now preserved in the Albertina, Vienna (Fig. 6).¹⁸ This is what Brown might refer to as his “skeleton.” What, however, was to make up for the

lack of expressive color? What was to provide the “skin”? One technique worthy of examination is Brown's use of the swelling line. While a line that swells and tapers is the natural result of the triangular-edged burin of an engraver, the Dutch printmaker Cornelis Cort (1533–before 1578) was the first to exploit the subtleties of this quality for a particular effect. By varying pressure on the burin, Cort created a line of flexible thickness, varying the degree of darkness without adding extra lines. This technique was taken up by Agostino Carrac-



Figure 7b (above)
HENDRIK
GOLTZIUS
Detail of Figure 7a
Amsterdam,
Rijksprentenkabinet

Figure 7a
HENDRIK
GOLTZIUS
The Farnese
Hercules, Seen
from Behind, 1592
Engraving
Amsterdam,
Rijksprentenkabinet

ci (1557–1602), as well as by Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617), whose virtuosic use of it, such as in his engraving of 1592 of *The Farnese Hercules, Seen from Behind* (Fig. 7a)¹⁹ became almost an end or subject in itself (Fig. 7b).

The quill pen naturally creates such a tapering

line, which can be magnified by the use of a reed pen, which creates a coarser line. For example, in a drawing of a horse by Jacques Callot (1592–1635) in the British Museum, London (Fig. 8),²⁰ made after a print by Antonio Tempesta (1555–1630), the calligraphic swelling of the original engraved line was surpassed by the liveliness and bravura of the reed pen contours. According to Schalhorn, Brown's drawings are devoid of this type of line altogether: "Brown draws with a fineliner, resulting in homogeneous lines. This drawing instrument does not allow him to achieve lines that notably swell and shrink in width, as could a quill pen. To emphasize the outline and shadows of figures, Brown simply places lines more closely together."²¹

Figure 8
JACQUES CALLOT
(after ANTONIO
TEMPESTA)
Studies with a
Horse, 1616
London, British
Museum



If we return to *Drawing 30 (after Gossaert)*, however, we can see that the lines are far from homogeneous. The effect is even more pronounced in an earlier rendering of the same subject, drawn the year before, *Drawing 5 (after Gossaert)*, also in a private collection (Fig. 9).²² While the range of the fineliner pen might be more limited than that of a quill pen, it is certainly employed to its full extent,

Brown even seeming to use the pen to thicken the lines artificially, essentially mimicking the swelling of a line achieved with a quill pen or burin.

In Brown's more recent drawings, this effect has been achieved by an increasing reliance on brush and acrylic in combination with pen and ink, as in *Children of the Revolution (after Rembrandt)*, now in the British Museum, London (2017; Fig. 10).²³ In

Figure 9

GLENN BROWN

Drawing 5 (after
Gossaert), 2013

Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)





Figure 10

GLENN BROWN
Children of the
Revolution (after
Rembrandt), 2017
London, British
Museum (© Glenn
Brown, 2019)

this way, Brown appropriates a historically specific type of line, no longer necessarily inherent to his instrument, in the same way that earlier in his career he appropriated the gestural brushstrokes of the Expressionists. In so doing, he subverts the

myth of their naturalness or authenticity.

This fact is underscored in the context in which he uses them. Whereas Callot and Goltzius primarily used this particular line for bravura outline or curved hatching to describe musculature,



Figure 11
GLENN BROWN
Drawing 13 (after
Greuze/Rubens),
2015
Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)



Figure 12
GLENN BROWN
Drawing 32 (after
Greuze), 2015
Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)

Brown's swelling line seems to cut through surfaces, highlighting their instability. In *Drawing 13 (after Greuze/Rubens)*, in a private collection (2015; Fig. 11),²⁴ the curved lines of a halo are bent into something more resembling a jerking movement, while in *Drawing 32 (after Greuze)*, in a private collection (2015; Fig. 12),²⁵ the halo becomes a widening gyre. Brown is not just using the techniques of the

Old Masters—he has not assimilated them as “natural” means of representation—he has appropriated them as a particular language with cultural and historical baggage. Used in this new, unfamiliar context, the swelling line becomes more like the visual language used in comics to indicate speed, direction, or sound—a schematic abstraction rather than a visual representation.



Figure 13a
HENDRICK
GOLTZIUS
*Sine Cerere et
Baccho friget Venus*
("Without Ceres
and Bacchus, Venus
Would Freeze"),
1593
London, British
Museum

Another technique Brown employs is the dot and lozenge. This technique—a dot inserted inside each compartment of a passage of crosshatching—was perfected by Hendrick Goltzius in the late sixteenth century. Although it was originally developed for the requirements of engraving to render gradual tonal transitions in a purely linear medium, Goltzius then transposed it back into his series of especially large drawings known as *Federkunststücke* (drawings imitating engravings). The technique's application is well demonstrated in a subject that Goltzius treated several times in his mature work, *Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus* ("Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze"), showing the goddess of love being warmed by the deities of wine and food. For example, the British Museum's pen-and-ink drawing on vellum of 1593 (Fig. 13a)²⁶ shows the seamless transition Goltzius aimed to achieve, the soft bodies rendered glowingly smooth and supple. To make the allegory explicit, Cupid blows on a fire at the lower part of the drawing, unusually lighting the scene from below. The effect is most obvious on the underside of Venus's breasts



Figure 13b
HENDRICK
GOLTZIUS
Detail of Figure
13a
London, British
Museum

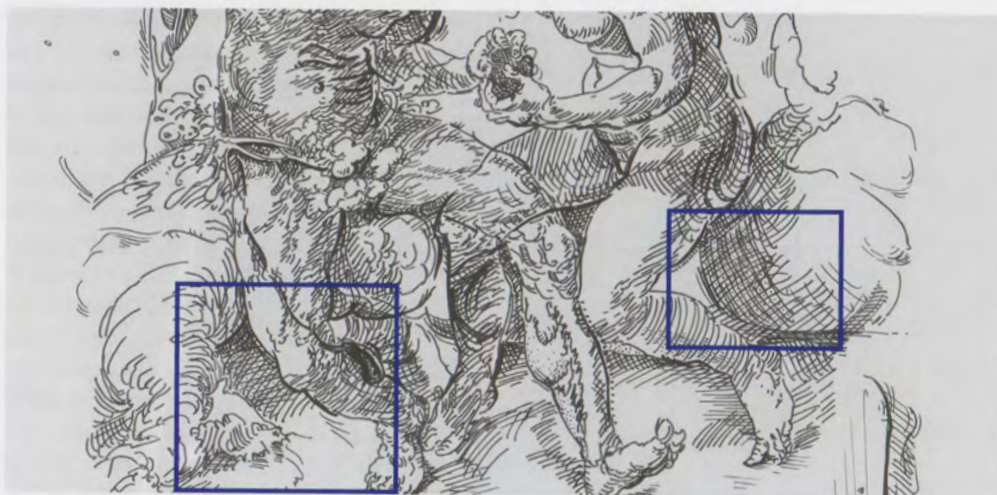


Figure 14a
GLENN BROWN
Detail of Figure 5
Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)

and belly (Fig. 13b) and her knee, emphasizing these parts of the goddess of love; the dot-and-lozenge technique allowed Goltzius to refine these transitions from light to dark, echoing the smooth gradations of oil paint in a linear medium.

With this in mind, it is interesting to examine Brown's use of this same dot-and-lozenge technique in *Drawing 30 (after Gossaert)* of 2014, seen on the boulder underneath Eve and the shadow to the left of Adam's leg (Figs. 14a-c). The first difference we might notice is that of emphasis and composition. Looking at details of *Bacchus and Ceres* (see Fig. 13b), we see that Goltzius tended to use the technique not all over the drawing, but primarily where the greatest subtlety is demanded and where the viewer's attention is focused: in this instance, the flesh of the god and goddesses. Brown's use of this technique to describe only incidental background (e.g., in Fig. 14c, where the dots stop when they meet Eve's leg) is therefore a destabilizing and de-centering gambit, which confuses the clear hierarchy between figure and ground in the original drawing.

This is compounded by a further aspect of Brown's usage. Goltzius used a dot-and-lozenge technique for the figures rather than the background because he wanted to depict the subtle transition of tone describing an intricately modulated form.



Figure 14b
GLENN BROWN
Detail of Figure 5
Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)



Figure 14c
GLENN BROWN
Detail of Figure 5
Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)



Figure 15 (top)
MICHELANGELO
Working Sketches
for a Recumbent
Statue: A River
God Planned
for the Medici
Tombs in the
New Sacristy of S.
Lorenzo, Florence,
1525
London, British
Museum



Figure 16 (bottom)
MICHELANGELO
Study of a
Crucified Man
(Haman), 1512
(detail)
London, British
Museum

However, Brown's dots do not provide a transition, but instead emphasize a flat area of tone, directly contradicting what seems to be a round boulder under Eve, contributing to an overall flattening of that area of the image. Finally, we may note that Brown's use of the technique is anachronistic—stimulated by an early sixteenth-century drawing, but using a technique that was not developed until almost a century later. In these ways, the historical, compositional, and representational contexts of the technique are frustrated, as Brown employs the technique against the grain of its original use.

Another graphic device used, and possibly appropriated, by Brown is that of the small circle, which formed part of the personal vocabulary of drawn marks employed by Michelangelo (1475–1564). Compared to other marks, this notation is most obviously an arbitrary sign, as it does not resemble what it signifies. The circles served two different functions in Michelangelo's sculptural drawings. The first can be seen in his diagram for a sculpture of a River God for the Medici Tombs, a drawing now in the British Museum (Fig. 15).²⁷ Added to the end of a line they signified that this line was intended to show a measurement, rather than an outline or contour. The second function was to indicate the most prominent highlights in a heavily worked tonal study, usually of musculature, perhaps as an alternative to white chalk. This graphic shorthand is first seen in 1512 at the lower right of the study of Haman for the Sistine Ceiling, also in the British Museum (Fig. 16).²⁸ It was noted in 1836 by the compiler, presumably Samuel Woodburn (1780–1853), of the catalogue of the Woodburn Gallery exhibition of the collection of Michelangelo drawings assembled by Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830), and again by Michael Hirst in 1988, who described it as a “private notation,” peculiar to the work of Michelangelo.²⁹

In Brown's *Drawing 30 (after Gossaert)*, as well as in *Drawing 17 (after Greuze/Greuze)*, in a private collection (2015; Fig. 17),³⁰ we note many small circles, primarily confined to the background. In the same way that Brown's dot and lozenge confuses the distinction between figure and ground, the circles highlight what is otherwise



Figure 17

GLENN BROWN

Drawing 17 (after
Greuze/Greuze),
2015

Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)



Figure 18 (left)
GLENN BROWN
Drawing 35 (after
Batoni/Delacroix),
2014

Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)



Figure 19 (right)
GLENN BROWN
Drawing 10 (after
Delacroix/Strozzi),
2014

Private Collection (©
Glenn Brown, 2019)

empty space. Furthermore, their status as arbitrary sign in *Drawing 30 (after Gossaert)* is highlighted by their juxtaposition with small, mirroring crosses. While Cennino Cennini (c. 1370–c. 1440) mentioned drawing small crosses with compasses to construct shapes in *The Artists' Handbook*, it is also possible that Brown is pairing the circles with their partners from the familiar children's game Noughts and Crosses (USA: Tic-tac-toe). This kind of visual play would not be uncharacteristic and highlights the circle's significance as an arbitrary sign, standing for difference as much as visual texture—the circles on Adam's half of the sheet, the crosses on Eve's (see Fig. 5).

As well as particular languages of lines and

marks, Brown also appropriates other conceptual drawing techniques from his more recent predecessors. For example, in two drawings from 2014, both in a private collection, *Drawing 35 (after Batoni/Delacroix)* (Fig. 18)³¹ and *Drawing 10 (after Delacroix/Strozzi)* (Fig. 19),³² the breast of the nude by Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) is conflated with the eye of the faces by Pompeo Girolamo Batoni (1708–1787) and Bernardo Strozzi (1581–1644), while the pubic triangle serves to highlight the jawline or the mouth. These puns recall the canonical work of Surrealism by René Magritte (1898–1967), *Le Viol*, a motif reprised several times in different media, which originally featured on the front cover of André Breton's *Qu'est-ce que le Surréalisme?*, published in Brussels in 1934 (Fig. 20). The features of a woman's face are replaced by those of her nude



body, itself (like many of Brown's nudes) truncated at the neck, and thus devoid of any characteristics other than the sexual. Both drawings also recall another of Magritte's works, the painting *Les Jours gigantesques* (1928), also in a private collection (Fig. 21),³³ in which a woman attempts to fight off a man who exists purely within the outline of her own body. Whereas Magritte's painting is a disturbing psychosexual commentary, it is also a distinctly formal one, exploiting the rules of perspective and overlap to achieve its horrifying effect.

The Surrealist impulse to associate body parts, and its implications for drawing, were theorized by the German Surrealist artist Hans Bellmer (1902–1975) in his *Anatomy of the Image*, written in 1957 (Fig. 22).³⁴ Bellmer—an artist whose works are collected by Brown—wrote of the “analogy” between body parts and the “psycho-physiological...reflex” that apparently prompts it:³⁵ “As soon as the intuitive gesture of the chin



Figure 20 (above left)
RENÉ MAGRITTE
Le Viol; cover of the pamphlet *Qu'est-ce que le Surréalisme?* (Brussels, 1934)
Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Houghton Library (© ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London, 2019)

Figure 21
RENÉ MAGRITTE
Les Jours gigantesques, 1928
Private Collection (© ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London, 2019)

Figure 22

HANS BELLMER

Illustration to *Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious; Or, the Anatomy of the Image* (Paris, 1957; Eng. edn., Waterbury Center, VT, 2004), p. 7

London, British Library (© ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London, 2019)



Figure 23 (below)

HANS BELLMER

Erotic Drawing, 1942

London, British Museum (© ADAGP, Paris / DACS, London, 2019)



establishes this analogy [between genitals and shoulder], the two images blend their respective contents by superimposing the sex over the armpit, the leg naturally over the arm, the foot over the hand, and the toes over the fingers.”³⁶ In Bellmer’s words, “the body is comparable to a sentence that invites you to disarticulate it, for the purpose of recombining its actual contents through a series of endless anagrams.”³⁷

The punning between mouth, orifice, and nipple visible, for example, in Bellmer’s *Erotic Drawing* of 1957, now in the British Museum (Fig. 23),³⁸ is an important precursor to a core component of Brown’s drawing method. Yet it is not just the association, but its stimulus—the chance distortion of a reproduction—that establishes a link between Surrealist drawing techniques and Brown’s own draftsmanship. Taking chance marks, errors, or imperfections in photographic reproductions as the basis for many of his drawn lines, the loss or gain in translation is grist for his mill, as he claims “it’s always the somewhat sad reproduction that fires my imagination.”³⁹ This method builds on a strong Surrealist tradition of automatic drawing, where random stimuli, such as imperfections in the paper (*entopic graphomania*) or blots of ink (*decalcomania*), are chosen as starting points for drawings. The system of the amplification and interpretation of these marks, which originated in Brown’s painting process, speaks to his reinterpretation of automatic drawing techniques for his own purposes. Rather than arbitrary prompts with which to draw out or illustrate his subconscious (as in Bellmer’s work, usually in a figurative manner), these marks are instead used to disrupt or fragment the existing image.

A final technique Brown appropriates from the Old Masters is not a manipulation of the drawn line, but of its support. While some of Brown’s drawings are on paper, or increasingly on panel, most are drawn on either one or both sides of sheets of polypropylene or polyester—both transparent plastic surfaces. Brown has described his process, as follows: “I sometimes put the polypropylene sheet directly over the image in a book to trace the image when starting.... They are all drawn on both sides of the...sheet. I turn the image back



Figures 24a–b
LEONARDO DA VINCI
Virgin and Child with a Cat, c. 1478–81 (recto and verso)
London, British Museum

to front and continue to draw free-hand or trace more from different images.”⁴⁰ According to Xavier F. Salomon, “[Historically it has been] impossible to see the drawn lines on a sheet’s recto and verso at the same time. Some of Glenn Brown’s earliest drawings vanquish this longstanding challenge.”⁴¹

Although double-sided drawings could not have been viewed simultaneously, this is not to say that earlier artists did not also use the potential transparency of a support as a compositional tool. Jon Whiteley has described how Claude Lorrain (1604–1682) achieved tracings of his own drawings by “placing the drawing on a piece of glass and holding it up to the light.”⁴² Guercino (1591–1666) regularly did the same.⁴³ While both these seventeenth-century artists probably used this technique to isolate and reverse motifs, it is also possible that they developed the practice as a starting point to stimulate new ideas. The technique was famously employed for this purpose by Leonardo da Vinci (1453–1519) in his double-

sided drawing of the *Virgin and Child with a Cat*, also in the British Museum (Figs. 24a–b),⁴⁴ where the motif’s tracing on the verso is an opportunity for Leonardo to modify and clarify his original idea. Using wash to obscure two ideas for the position of the Virgin’s head, while strengthening and adding volume to a third, Leonardo both developed and resolved the original motif. Identifying these historical forebears places Brown’s strategy in a wider context of master draftsmen. Of the reasons for his tracing process, Brown says: “I like to be able to see the drawing in mirror image to make sure it works both ways round and is balanced.”⁴⁵

Leonardo made a similar point in his notes for a *Treatise on Painting*, advising the painter “to have by you a flat mirror in which you should often look at your work. The work will appear to you in reverse and will seem to be by the hand of another master and thereby you will better judge its faults.”⁴⁶ Although there is a subtle difference in that Leonardo advised reversing a work in order



Figure 25
GLENN BROWN
Half-life (after
Rembrandt) 1,
2016
Etching
London, British
Museum (© Glenn
Brown, 2019)

to defamiliarize it as an image and give the artist some critical distance (with a view to improving the work), Brown's use of mirroring to establish the overall compositional balance of a drawing exploits a historical technique for his own ends—ends that are often to complicate and fragment the image rather than to clarify it. Indeed, this has become such a favored technique that when producing his recent series of etchings, *Half-life (after Rembrandt)* (e.g., Fig. 25),⁴⁷ Brown drew on both sides of the intermediary transparent sheets used to translate the drawings from his iPad to the etching plate (in the manner of a touched proof), often reversing and combining them in an elaboration of Leonardo's and Claude's approach. Whereas Claude, Guercino, and Leonardo used the translucency of the paper support to help them

“improve” upon an original motif or composition, usually with a view to creating a final, polished painting, for Brown this layered image is the finished work of art, and the motifs' layering and rearticulation is an end in itself.

Brown's amalgamation of historical techniques of draftsmanship is a conscious engagement with such a variety of traditional representational codes that one could almost say that it renders his drawings a contemporary critique of the idea that any artistic language could transcend time and pictorial conventions. Indeed, an adroit description of the way Brown appropriates different traditions of drawing can be found in Christoph Grunenberg's analysis of his painting:

Today, talent and technical proficiency can be grounds for critical suspicion as much as asset, setting technique against the primacy of conceptual acumen and critical content. However creative techniques are not always secondary means to an artistic end; they also have a history which is charged with associations and meanings and could thus be described as “expressive.” Brown's painted oeuvre is distinguished by the resurrection not only of unloved genres, artists and images but also of outmoded techniques and modes of representation. He establishes a complex system of references around surface, flatness, touch and gesture, superficiality and profundity.⁴⁸

This analysis is useful for two reasons. Firstly, it identifies a division between praxis and theory, which is a tacit expectation of much contemporary art. The artist's *technique* is often supposed to be the means with which they express their “conceptual” content: it is not necessarily supposed to constitute it. That style itself is semantic (connotative and denotative)—a linguistic element that can be used to construct meaning—is something that Brown recognizes. This quotation from an interview in 2009 also refers to his painting, but shows the artist's keen awareness of these factors:

The point I am trying to make is that language is cultural and I have no option to express myself other than with language. It's good old poststructuralism. If I want to paint a tree then I cannot avoid painting it with the

knowledge of all tree paintings that are in my head, which is quite a lot.... I could cheat and pretend to do otherwise, pretend to be terribly, incredibly original, but that, as I said, would be fraud. I tend to go the other way and make a big fat point of it.⁴⁹

The Old Master techniques that Brown employs are divorced from their original semantic contexts. The swelling line no longer describes a surface, or an outline, but is deployed to pierce or fragment them. The dot and lozenge does not describe the modulation of a three-dimensional surface, but a flat area of tone. Small circles do not signify highlights or measurements, but instead create visual texture. The combining of images and the harnessing of chance blots do not seem to be a way to give voice or shape to the subconscious, but instead a way to further destabilize images. The layering and reversal of compositions is not a way to “clarify” or perfect them, but to complicate them further.

In the same way that Brown examined the supposed authenticity and “naturalness” of gestural brushstrokes in his paintings, the appropriation of particular drawn marks reveals an artist conversant with the possibilities of drawing as a medium: its rules, its history, and also its myths. Earlier in his career Brown claimed, “I looked at the history of painting and couldn’t see why expression should be aligned only with the brushmark.”⁵⁰

Brown is quite clear that gesture should not be confused with emotion or expression, nor the absence of gesture with a lack of it. As his *trompe-l’oeil* rendering of the brushmark was the sign for a gesture, rather than the gesture itself, so Brown’s drawings are finely woven tissues of appropriated marks denied their proper context. Rather than using copying as a learning process by which to assimilate various styles, his quotation of them in new and conflicting contexts instead highlights their artificiality, and in so doing the arbitrary, culturally-conditioned, and self-referential nature of drawing itself.

Isabel Seligman is the Bridget Riley Art Foundation Curator of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, London.

NOTES

1. See Rochelle Steiner and Alison Gingeras, “A Careful Concoction of ‘Push’ and ‘Pull,’” 1 December 2011, *Tate Etc.*, 15 (Spring 2009); online at <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/careful-concoction-push-and-pull> (accessed 6 April 2016).
2. Oil on canvas; 82 x 71 cm; see Alison Gingeras, *Glenn Brown*, exh. cat., London, Serpentine Gallery, 2004, no. 1, repr. (in color); and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/12>.
3. Oil on panel; 172 x 138 cm; see Hans den Hartog Jager et al., *Glenn Brown: Rembrandt: After Life*, exh. cat., Amsterdam, Rembrandthuis Museum, 2017, p. 43, repr. (in color); and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/234>.
4. See *Glenn Brown: Frieze London*, gallery pamphlet, London, Gagolian Gallery, 2015, n.p.
5. Glenn Brown, interview with Xavier F. Salomon in London, 23 July 2015; quoted in idem, “The Invention of Drawing,” *Glenn Brown: 36 Drawings and a Sculpture*, exh. cat., London, Gagolian Gallery, 2015, p. 7.
6. Marta Gnyp, interview with Glenn Brown, *Zoo Magazine*, 50 (March 2016); available online at <http://www.martagnyp.com/interviews/glenn-brown.php> (accessed 25 June 2018).
7. See *ibid.*
8. Rochelle Steiner, interview with Glenn Brown, in London 2004, p. 95.
9. See Francesco Bonami and Christoph Grunenberg, eds., *Glenn Brown*, exh. cat., Liverpool, Tate Liverpool, 2009, p. 143.
10. The terms are Brown’s own, quoted from an interview with Sabine Folie; see Alison M. Gingeras, ed. “*Dear Painter, paint me...: Painting the Figure since late Picabia*,” exh. cat., Paris, Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, and elsewhere, 2002, p. 88; cited in London 2004, p. 13.
11. See Salomon in London 2015, pp. 9–10.
12. Private collection (oil on panel; 96 x 79.5 cm); see Amsterdam 2017, p. 29, repr. (in color); and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/113>.
13. See Liverpool 2009, p. 145 [emphasis mine].
14. Oil on board; 72.2 x 48.8 cm; see Sulamith Behr et al., *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression, 1906–1917*, exh. cat., London, Courtauld Gallery, 2005, no. 8, repr. (in color).
15. See Andreas Schalhorn, “Calculation and Passion: On the Drawings of Glenn Brown,” in idem, *Glenn Brown: Dessins*, exh. cat., Paris, Galerie Max Hetzler, 2015, p. 63.
16. See *ibid.*, p. 62.
17. Ink on polypropylene; 370 x 300 mm; see London 2015, no. 13, repr.; and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/326>.

IMAGE: Prudence Cummings Associates.

18. Inv. no. 13341. Pen and brown ink; 257 x 210 mm; see [http://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=Inventarnummer=\[13341\]&showtype=record](http://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=Inventarnummer=[13341]&showtype=record).
19. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet, inv. no. RP-P-OB-10.348 (engraving; 419 x 303 mm); see www.rijksmuseum.nl.
20. Inv. no. T.14.38. Pen and brown ink, with brown wash and touches of red chalk; 234 x 342 mm; see www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online.
21. See Paris 2015, p. 62.
22. Ink on polypropylene; 260 x 187 mm; see <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/283>.
23. Inv. no. 2018,7036.1. Indian ink and acrylic, on polyester film, over cardboard; 964 x 574 mm (rounded top corners; framed); see Isabel Seligman, *Pushing Paper: Contemporary Drawing from 1970 to Now*, exh. cat., London, British Museum, 2019, no. 42, repr. (in color); www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/664>. IMAGE: Mike Bruce.
24. Indian ink on paper, Pergamenata White; 500 x 408 mm; see Bice Curiger and Judicaël Lavrador, *Glenn Brown: Suffer Well*, exh. cat., Arles, Fondation Vincent Van Gogh, 2016, p. 18, repr. (in color); and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/419>. IMAGE: Mike Bruce.
25. Indian ink on paper, Pergamenata White; 993 x 693 mm; see <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/436>.
26. Inv. no. 1861,0608.174. Pen and brown ink, on vellum; 629 x 422 mm; see E.K.J. Reznicek, *Die Zeichnungen von Hendrick Goltzius*, 2 vols., Utrecht, 1961, no. 129, repr.; and www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online.
27. Inv. no. 1859,0625.544. Pen and brown ink; 137 x 209 mm; see Hugo Chapman, *Michelangelo Drawings: Closer to the Master*, exh. cat., Haarlem, Teylers Museum, and London, British Museum, 2005–6, no. 43, repr. (in color); and www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online.
28. Inv. no. 1895,0915.497. Red chalk; 404 x 206 mm; see Haarlem and London 2005–6, no. 29, repr. (in color); and www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online.
29. See Michael Hirst, *Michelangelo Draftsman*, exh. cat., Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art, and Paris, Musée du Louvre, 1988, pp. 44, 49, under no. 17.
30. Indian ink on paper, Pergamenata Natural; 498 x 367 mm; see Arles 2016, p. 20, repr. (in color); and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/423>. IMAGE: Mike Bruce.
31. Ink on polypropylene; 353 x 251 mm; see London 2015, no. 15, repr. (in color); and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/331>. IMAGE: Prudence Cummings Associates.
32. Ink on two sheets of polypropylene; 460 x 340 mm; see London 2015, no. 6, repr. (in color); and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/316>. IMAGE: Prudence Cummings Associates.
33. Oil on canvas, 72.4 x 54 cm; sale, London, Christie's, 20 June 2012, lot 56, repr. (in color); and <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder>.
34. See Hans Bellmer, *L'Anatomie de l'image*, Paris, 1957; Eng. trans. by Jon Graham as *Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious or The Anatomy of the Image*, Waterbury Center, VT, 2004, p. 7.
35. See *ibid.*, p. 8.
36. See *ibid.*
37. See *ibid.*, pp. 37–38.
38. Inv. no. 2012,7080.1 (Bequest of Richard Hamilton). Pen and brown ink, with brown wash, over graphite; see Isabel Seligman, *Lines of Thought: Drawing from Michelangelo to Now*, exh. cat., Poole Museum, and elsewhere, 2016–18, no. 47, repr. (in color).
39. Rochelle Steiner, interview with Glenn Brown; see London 2004, p. 95.
40. Email (15 July 2015) from the artist to Andreas Schallhorn; cited in Paris, 2015, p. 62.
41. See Salomon 2015, p. 10.
42. See J.J.L. Whiteley, *Claude Lorrain: Drawings from the Collections of the British Museum and the Ashmolean Museum*, exh. cat., Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 1998, p. 101, under no. 49.
43. See Nicholas Turner and Carol Plazzotta, *Drawings by Guercino in British Collections*, exh. cat., London, British Museum, 1991, pp. 19 and 176.
44. Inv. no. 1856,0621.1. Pen and brown ink; 130 x 94 mm; see Poole and elsewhere 2016–18, no. 72 (shown only in Providence, RI, 2017–18), both sides repr. (in color); and www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online.
45. Email (15 July 2015) from the artist to Andreas Schallhorn; cited in Paris, 2015, p. 62.
46. See Martin Kemp, *Leonardo on Painting*, New Haven, 1989, p. 202.
47. London, British Museum, inv. no. 2017,7023.1 (etching on Velin Arches 400 gsm paper; full sheet: 890 x 680 mm; image: 760 x 560 mm); edition of 35 plus 9AP (#6/35); see Amsterdam 2017, p. 60, repr.; and <https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/565>. IMAGE: Mike Bruce.
48. See Christoph Grunenberg, "Capability Brown: Spectacles of Hyperrealism, the Panorama, and Abject Horror in the Painting of Glenn Brown," in Liverpool 2009, p. 16.
49. See Laurence Sillars in conversation with Glenn Brown, in *ibid.*, p. 140.
50. Quoted in London 2004, pp. 16–17.