



WILLIAM THEO BROWN

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It is easy to identify William Theo Brown as a *Western artist*. His paintings appear to have grown out-of-doors, like plants. And there is a freedom of form and color that seems, like Western scenery, to know no boundaries. And the human figure takes its place as a natural part of the landscape, unseparated from it, as in the Matisse interiors. Man is not portraitured against a physical world that serves him as a mere background. He is an integral part of that world.

Other Western artists with whose work Brown's paintings have much in common are the late David Park, Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bischoff, and Paul Wonner. One might call them "the school of Western artists," for their paintings show marked similarities that must be the result of mutual influences upon one another; yet each of them has retained his identity. Most important of what they share is perhaps their common environment in which one is more aware of natural phenomena (the enormity of the sky, the mountains, the brightness of the sunlit world and the brilliance of its colors, the harmony to be found therein) than of the creations of man himself.

After the advent of Abstract Expressionism in this country, which produced in de Kooning, Pollock, Kline, Rothko, the first group of American painters to win high universal prestige and to cause European artists to look to this country for new visions (whereas American painters had before always looked to Europe, particularly to France), the American artist had to choose between two ways in which he could

develop his contribution to plastic expression: he could return to the forms of nature with the new freedom he had found in the works of the abstract painters; or he could ignore the natural world and concern himself with the forms created by man. The Western painters chose the first of these ways. One can not help feeling at times, studying the landscapes or the figures of Brown, or Wonner, or any of the other Western painters, that now the violence found in de Kooning and Pollock has been resolved, that peace and harmony can be found again, at least in the natural world; but the freedom remains to create dynamically in strong color and large, loose forms. Those who chose the second way to develop are known to us now as the Pop artists, and the Op. It is as much to be expected that their work would develop in the overpopulated East, where one is more conscious of man's created forms (skyscrapers, billboards, freeways) than of nature's. If at times their works appear "tricky," contrived, prankish, cerebral, these failings or attributes (depending upon one's individual judgment) may also be attributed to an overpopulated, anxiety-ridden environment that has reduced the artist's pursuit to an almost primitive attempt to establish his personal identity, to become first a public figure, second an artist.

Easterners are often caught off-guard when they deign to visit the West. They admit the physical beauty of the land and its people, appreciate the temperate climate, and are a little surprised to find the tempo

of the working day more leisurely than what they are accustomed to; for if one becomes inured to pandemonium, it takes a long adjustment to recognize the reality of a less strenuous world.

They become restless when they visit in California, they complain of the lack of intellectual stimulation, they distrust the physical freedom and the relaxed tempo, they seem to have no personal resources in dealing with time and environment and to be totally dependent upon the perhaps false stimulations of Eastern life and culture, the anxious status-seeking, the desperate scramble for identity.

When reviewing an opening exhibition of one of the *Western* painters in a New York gallery, one of the city's newspaper critics summed up his response to the paintings as being "very comfortable to live with." The comment was not derogatory, but the critic had expressed this judgment, somehow, as if it had never before occurred to him that pictures could or should be comfortable to live with, and he did not seem too con-

vinced that this comfortableness was for certainty a virtue. Shock, sensation, repulsion have become such a fixed part of contemporary aesthetics, it is disarming to find a genuine artist who is not concerned with them.

The paintings of William Theo Brown are comfortable to live with. But one must not be deceived that this comfort is of blindness or indifference to the contemporary world. Rather, it is the comfort we feel in the presence of a sagacious friend who knows all the scandals and atrocities of the town's happenings, but who sees no reason to alarm his friends with shocking gossip and strives above all to retain humaneness in all his relationships. And perhaps the harmony of these paintings is something that lies more deeply in the universe than its temporal eccentricities and conflicts. Perhaps to appreciate these paintings best, we must learn to accept the reality of harmony and oneness as surely as that of chaos.

WILLIAM INGE

PAINTINGS

1. *A Cup of Coffee*, 1960
oil/board, 10¾ x 11¾ inches
2. *Muscatine Diver*, 1962
oil/canvas, 60 x 40 inches
3. *Regatta*, 1963
oil/canvas, 46 x 48 inches
4. *Man in a Green Shirt*, 1963
oil/paper, 16½ x 13½ inches
5. *Swimmers at Dawn*, 1964
oil/canvas, 46 x 48 inches
6. *Apples and Spoon*, 1964
oil/board, 8¾ x 9 inches
Private Collection
7. *Lemon and Spoon*, 1964
oil/board, 8 x 10 inches
Private Collection
8. *Portrait of D.K.*, 1964
oil/board, 11½ x 9¾ inches
9. *Boys Wrestling*, 1964
oil/board, 12¼ x 11¼ inches
Lent by Mr. & Mrs. Andre Previn
10. *Self-Portrait*, 1964
oil/canvas, 14 x 13 inches
Lent by Mr. & Mrs. James Gill
11. *Along the River*, 1965
oil/board, 18 x 23¾ inches
12. *Man in Patio*, 1965
oil/board, 24 x 25 inches
13. *Nude in Garden*, 1965
oil/board, 24 x 25 inches
14. *The White Dog*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 72 x 84 inches
15. *Woman and Deer*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 40 x 42 inches
16. *Helen Bathing*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 40 x 42 inches
17. *Girl on the Porch*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 40 x 53 inches
18. *Figures in a Field*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 48 x 48 inches
19. *Studio Doorway*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 48 x 48 inches
20. *Male Bathers*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 52 x 56 inches
21. *Ride in the Desert*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 52 x 56 inches
22. *Pedestrian Crossing*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 48 x 48 inches
23. *The Swing*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 52 x 56 inches
24. *Horse, Hound and Rider*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 51 x 53 inches
25. *The Leap*, 1966
acrylic/canvas, 48 x 48 inches
26. *Three Nudes in Sunlight*, 1966
acrylic/board, 13 x 12 inches
Lent by Mr. & Mrs. Paul Wonner
27. *Still Life with Two Mirrors*, 1966
acrylic/board, 15 x 12 inches
Lent by Mr. & Mrs. Philip Casady
28. *Still Life with Geranium Blossom*, 1966
acrylic/board, 15 x 15 inches
Lent by Mr. & Mrs. Ben Masselink
29. *Two Figures*, 1966
oil/board, 6 x 9½ inches
30. *Sketch for Portrait of D.P.*, 1966
acrylic/board, 17 x 14 inches
31. *Portrait of D.P. in her Garden*, 1967
acrylic/board, 15 x 12 inches

DRAWINGS

1. *Necklace*, 1965
charcoal, 17 x 14 inches
2. *Frances in Garden*, 1966
charcoal & wash, 14 x 17 inches
3. *Nude*, 1966
charcoal, 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 17 inches
4. *Model Seated*, 1966
charcoal, 17 x 14 inches
5. *Seated Nude*, 1966
charcoal, 17 x 14 inches
6. *Girl on Sofa*, 1966
charcoal & wash, 17 x 14 inches
7. *Frances in Black Hat*, 1966
charcoal & ink, 17 x 14 inches
8. *Girl on Couch*, 1966
charcoal & ink, 17 x 14 inches
9. *C. R.*, 1966
ink wash, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
10. *C. in Mexican Chair*, 1966
ink wash, 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 9 inches
11. *Four Bathers*, 1966
charcoal, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 inches
12. *Seated Man*, 1966
ink wash, 11 x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
13. *Reclining Nude*, 1967
charcoal, 14 x 17 inches
14. *Reclining Figure*, 1967
charcoal, 17 x 14 inches