

On the Rise
and the Fall v.2
JUDITH BRASSARD BROWN

December 9, 2020 - January 17, 2021

On the Rise and the Fall v.1 was curated by Darrell Matsumoto, Professor at Anna Maria College in the college's Art Center Gallery, February 19 – April 15, 2020.

A Kingston Conversation between Matsumoto and Brown, on the installation of *On the Rise and the Fall v.2*, occurs live December 9, 2020 and archived on the Kingston Gallery website.

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Judith Brassard Brown's Expressionist Paintings By Lauren Szumita, Worcester Art Museum

The dominant philosophy of art-making today challenges the notion that art is meant to strictly imitate the outside world and instead maintains that art is an expression of the artist's inner state. Labeled the "expression theory of art" by Alan Tormey in 1971, this theory implies that the creation of art is inseparable from the artist's environments, experiences, and emotional states. In simpler terms, art is a direct reflection of the artist.

Judith Brassard Brown's paintings and mixed media collages in *On the Rise and the Fall* remain universal moments but also suggest traces of her personal reality. Her vibrant landscapes, ranging from conventional pastoral scenes to abstract eruptions of color, act as representations of the every-where. For Brown, landscapes provide a natural context for understanding the artist, as they reflect a defining sense of identity based on where we reside, or "our sense of home." While her paintings are, on the surface, landscapes in various forms of abstraction, they are also distinct reflections of the inner psyche. They join subliminal sensation – thoughts and feelings and memories – with the obvious, the familiar, and the seen.

On the Rise, 2017
oil, charcoal, collage,
cold wax on canvas
36 x 30 inches

An intimate familiarity with the Italian landscape and its history has fundamentally influenced Brown's practice. More than twenty years ago, she founded Montserrat College of Art's Summer Intensive Studio Program in Viterbo, Italy and has returned frequently. Brown's earlier compositions are distinctly indebted to the Italian countryside with its rolling hills, rows of tilled earth and homes with red clay roofs under a warm, Mediterranean sun, but these recent works are less obvious. Her depiction of *San Remo* (2019) lacks the colorfully vivid architecture that draws tourists, instead featuring a hazy landscape crafted predominantly from hot

red and orange hues atop menacing grays. It eschews obvious Italian influence, save for the title. The highly abstracted *On the Rise* (2017) bears almost no resemblance to the cultivated farmland or natural geographical features in previous works. Instead, Brown focuses on color, building up textural mélanges of tone, hue, and temperature. The rich colors speak frankly to the influence of the Italian landscape.

Deliberate mark-making is a significant aspect of Brown's work. Effervescent swirls and corkscrews lend a frenzied energy to the composition. The landscape in *Running Red* (2019) is built upon layers of these distinctive marks. The colorful accumulations of line give rise to a dynamic mass of landforms that pulse with verve. A smattering of unfettered brushstrokes float across several of Brown's canvases. Seen distinctly in works like *Over There* (2019), they vaguely resemble mosaic tesserae. Though these playful shapes can be seen throughout Brown's works, it is the abstract landscapes like *Escaping Blue* (2015) where they become the primary focus of the composition and take on their greatest sense of importance. The marks are sometimes formed of paint, and other times are papers that have been pasted in though collage.

Brown applies this modern artistic technique to her own paintings following a rich history of the medium. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque's earliest experiments with collage and *papier collé* allowed subsequent artists to break from the traditions of representation. Pop artists adopted the technique and included actual fragments of materials found in popular culture, such as magazine advertisements, comic strips, and movie posters, to reduce the distance between the reality of their surroundings and their art. Collage, in modern art, is representative of the external world as it is mediated through the individual artist. Artists juxtapose materials with pre-existing meaning to create entirely new narratives, acting as a representative of the networks that span social and cultural boundaries.



Running Red, 2019
oil
24 x 24 inches



For Brown, collage may serve as a method to denote connectivity between her personal experience and the universal experience she aims to represent. She uses small fragments of paper that she has collected from old letters, documents, or receipts, or materials that colleagues have sent from abroad. Brown combines objects that wouldn't naturally intersect and by doing so, she draws attention to these unexpected associations. She also manages to introduce distant geographical regions, as her materials originate from Africa to China.

Collage is just one way that Brown's works metaphorically express the human essence. *The Fall* (2019) lacks the conclusive topography to identify its precise location. But its menacing colors act as a counterpart to the warm, sunny days pictured elsewhere, and provide an apt metaphor for the extreme spectrums of the inner psyche. *Over There* (2019) suggests the frenzy of an erupting volcano. Perhaps this is a distant reflection of the destruction of Pompeii in 79 BCE. Or perhaps the confetti-like outburst symbolizes the escape of a confined idea, thought, or feeling.

At times, Brown's collaged papers are later removed during the artistic process, revealing layers of paint that reside beneath. This excavation of sorts metaphorically recalls the archaeological mining of Etruscan civilization, as well as psychological examinations of the human brain that seek subconscious motives. Brown's works transcend the gravity of fact or the knowledge of time and place to evoke the sense of a distant memory.

Over There, 2019
oil
40 x 30 inches

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Since the original publication of this essay in February 2020, Judith Brassard Brown has produced a new group of figurative paintings that are worth considering with respect to her larger body of work. The warmth, vibrancy, and intimacy of Brown's landscapes is evident in her expanding repertoire of portraiture. In the essay above, I note Brown's association

of the landscape with the concept of “home,” which is innately tied to our understanding of identity. The figures that inhabit that landscape refine our sense of self through a complex web of social interactions. If Brown’s landscapes depict universal spaces indubitably bound to the artist’s own spirit, her portraits are her interpersonal relationships, made manifest.

In one notable example, *Natasha* presents a buoyant, assured woman, who is framed by the cool blues of her garments and the warmth of the neutral background. Brown’s characteristically energetic marks are evident, though restrained, allowing the subject to persuasively emerge as the sole focus of the painting. An exemplary work, *Natasha* announces itself among Brown’s timeless canvases for its present-day relevance, noting social concerns of the moment. It does so primarily through its presentation, the image juxtaposed with a beautifully poignant work of poetry written by the sitter, recounting a lifetime of hardship and perseverance shaped by racism. This unique juxtaposition of Brown’s portrait with the words of her sitter, Natasha Ginyard, demonstrates that while Brown’s interpersonal relationships are uniquely hers, they exist among a complex network of friendship, love, and nods to passing strangers, which we understand collectively as the human experience.

The human impulse is to create social connections. The portrait, in art, embodies the psychological search for meaning among the silent cues of communication – expressions, the gaze, and appearance. Brown’s portraits of those who inhabit her world – as well as herself – represent a search for identity, whether formed through interactions with others or through self-reflection.

On The Rise #8, 2020
oil, collage and wax
60 x 36 inches

PAGES 12-13
Natasha (collaborative piece
with Natasha Ginyard), 2020
oil, collage and wax (painting);
vinyl wall installation (poem)
60 x 36 inches





Dry Erase Board: Ramblings of a Black Educated Female Activist

by Natasha Ginyard

You call and text me because you are bored.
We go out to eat when you are bored.
You buy my lemon bars when you are bored.
You go to the movies with me when you are bored.
You have a picnic with me when you are bored.
I play, sing, and hike with you when you are bored.

When I was young, I read when I was bored.
I played volleyball when I was bored.
I was a cheerleader when I was bored.
I rode my bike when I was bored.
I cooked with my family when I was bored.
I excelled and graduated high school and college because I was bored.
I was taught to be as tough as a board.

When you call me the n-word, I have to be as tough as a board.
When you call me whitewashed because I loved school, I had to be as tough as a board.
When I was raised to not look suspicious around cops, I had to be as tough as a board.
When I was told I sound white, I had to be as tough as a board.
When you send me hate mail for being black, I have to be as tough as a board.
When you call me chocolate, ebony, poc, black, african american,
nubian princess, cocoa dessert, I have to be as tough as a board.

When my cousin doesn't want to wear a Covid mask in a store
because he doesn't want to look suspicious, he has to be as tough as a board.
When I was told I would get pregnant before 18 and become a drug addict,
I had to be as tough as a board.
When grandma told me stories of our family as slaves, she told me she was tough as a board.
When I was called to the office in high school and was told my headband to hide my alopecia
was for gangsters and to take it off, I had to be as tough as a board.
When I was told to work ten times as hard as a white person, I had to be as tough as a board.
When I was told my opportunities were different, I had to be as tough as a board.

There is no way to get a clean slate for all of this; you can't erase everything from a dry erase board.
New laws, open mindedness, acceptance, love, kindness, action will help clear that dry erase board.
Those moments of past racist acts, markings on a dry erase board.
Those moments of present racial acts, markings on a dry erase board.
Those moments of injustice, markings on a dry erase board.

You cannot erase murders, job discrimination, slavery, rape,
police brutality, all the ignorant wrongs from our history.
We will never forget. We will continue to fight. We will always remember
there is no clean slate, only dry erase boards with markings
of what has happened, is happening, and what is continuing to happen
unless people stand up, laws change, and people listen.

On the Rise and the Fall

Judith Brassard Brown

I believe we can experience beauty or feel joy, even in the context of injustice, challenge or destruction. Creating images in response to what is happening in the world is a form of activism, of bearing witness. While these paintings may appear traditional at first glance, they are not limited to the specific; rather, they provide connections across boundaries of time or captured moments, contrast what we see with what sense in the air or below the surface.

ABOUT JUDITH BRASSARD BROWN

Brown is full-time faculty in the Foundation and Painting Departments at Montserrat College of Art; she also teaches Painting Basics and Color and Composition at Northeastern University. Currently represented by the Kingston Gallery in Boston (since 2005), other home bases included The Arden Gallery (1993-2005) in Boston, The Hopkins Gallery in Wellfleet (1990-98) and the Gimbel Gallery of Contemporary Art in NYC (1981-84). Her work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions at the Danforth Museum (Framingham, MA) the Art Complex Museum (Duxbury, MA), Soho20 (NYC), Cerulean Gallery (Philadelphia, PA), HallSpace in Boston, MA, and venues in Viterbo and Trieste, Italy.

Her work has been reviewed and featured in articles in *The Boston Globe*, *Boston Magazine*, *Art New England*, *ArtScope*, *Cape Cod Voice*, *Delicious Line*, *Boston Traveler*, *Il Messaggero Viterbo* and *Trieste's Il Piccolo*. Brassard Brown's work is included in corporate and private collections in the United States and abroad.

*Self Portrait Somewhere
Between*, 2020
oil
40 x 30 inch





Boys Will Be..., 2020
oil, collage and cold wax
54 x 38 inches

Over There #9, 2020
oil
40 x 30 inches







ABOVE

The Climb to the Rise, 2020
oil, collage and cold wax
24 x 24 inches

LEFT

On The Fall #10, 2020
oil, collage and wax
60 x 36 inches

La Fiora, 2020
oil
40 x 30 inches





ABOVE

What Remains #5, 2019

tempera

8 x 6 inches

RIGHT

The View From Here, 2020

oil, collage and cold wax

20 x 20 inches



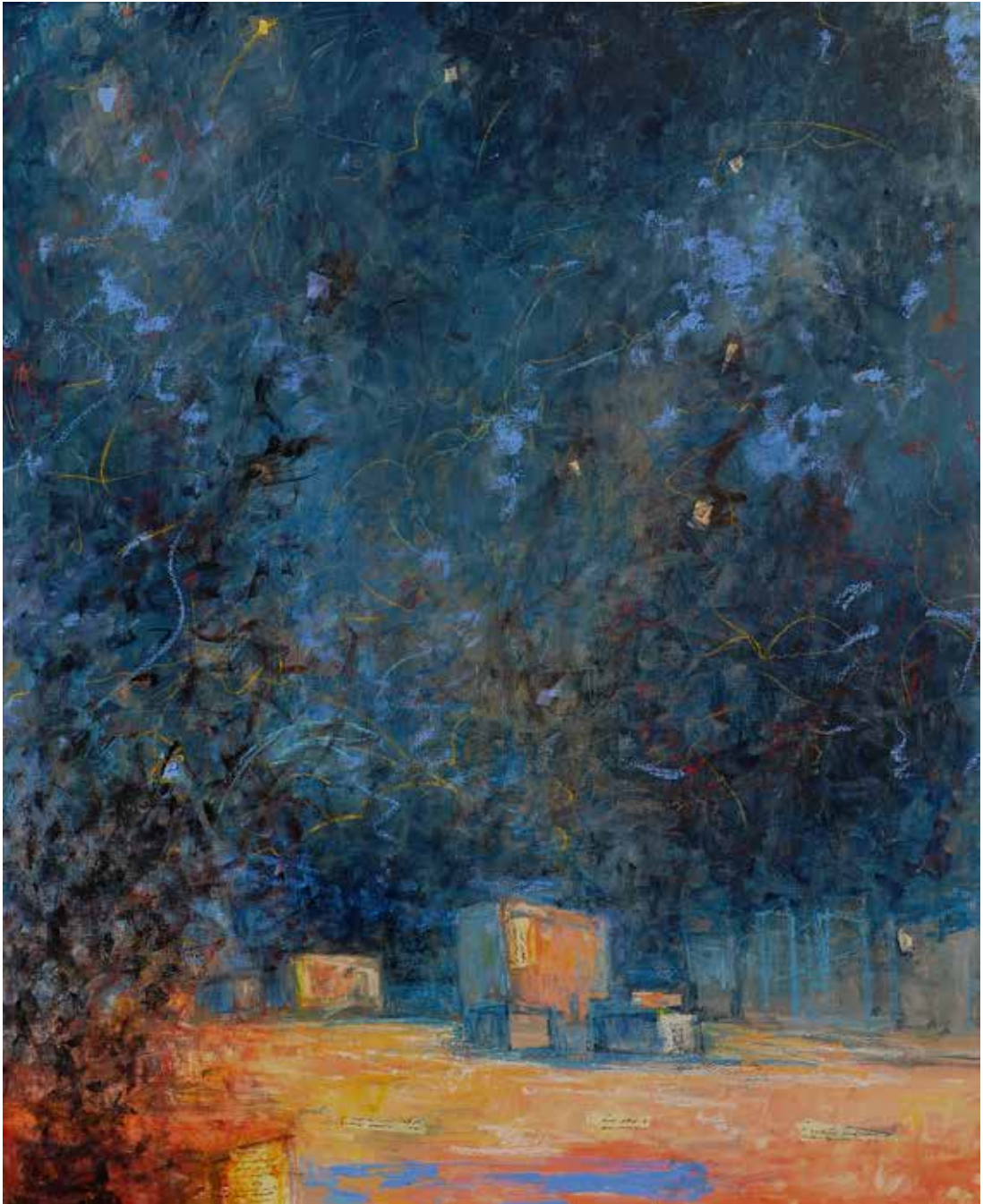




ABOVE
What Remains #4, 2019
tempera
8 x 6 inches

LEFT
Where There's Smoke, 2018
oil, collage and wax
60 x 36 inches

Firestorm, 2019
oil
60 x 36 inches



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