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DAVID BREWSTER'S VERMONT RETROSPECTIVE

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September/October 2016

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BREWSTER'S QUIXOTIC ENCOUNTERS

A MOVEMENT AND A REGION EVOLVE



SOUTHERN VERMONT
ARTS CENTER
930 SOUTHERN
VERMONT ARTS CENT
DRIVE
MANCHESTER,
VERMONT

THROUGH
OCTOBER 3

*Poverty: Nugget Mania
and Ploughman, 2009*
30 1/2" x 46". Oil on
Mi-Teintes.

David Brewster exemplifies, in an extraordinary way, how American regionalism has evolved and continues to manifest into the contemporary realm. He is a master of formal and trained juxtapositions and dichotomies. In his paintings, Brewster combines the power of midcentury action and expressive mark-making – contemporary forms of plein air production – with the narrative intellectualism of scene painting, capturing and interpreting, from a personal perspective, the nuances of a specific time and place.

He is a thoroughly American artist, and as expected for a doyen talent, his work is steeped in and bridges the fullness of art history. What makes him an example and expansion of the regionalist mode is the manner in which he reveals, creates and projects a story. Like the regionalists of the past, his style

appeals to a popular American sensibility that is thoroughly modern. Today's audiences are accustomed to and desire abstracted, expressive, gestural forms of semi-realism, with recognizable and accessible subject matter. Brewster succeeds in delivering paintings that touch and bring up social realism in a manner that attracts the curiosity of contemporary visual readers.

His gorgeous and color-lush landscapes, architectural portraits and genre scenes entrap the viewer. They reveal not only the artist's mysterious, complex, intense and very authentic conceptual viewpoints, but also often-missed, fleeting and remembered atmospheric and locational details. He forces the cold metal of industry out, spotlighting its odd and contrasting trespassing upon the beauty of Vermont's land. There is nothing artifi-

cial and contrived about Brewster; the work holds a liquid and oozing honesty.

The final paintings arrive after a period of intense experimentation in which Brewster will "paint sketch" or produce a number of fast-action-filled images that are often erased, altered and discarded. He works intensely outdoors, on site, taking in not only the realism of place, but also the emotive sensations and atmosphere. He is able to capture the quality of air, the feeling of disorientation, the quick passing of visuals and imagined ghosts and shadow entities inside old houses and barns, lurking in doors and windows. Because of the wild, passionate and focused manner in which the artist creates, the final forms are exhausting and anxious in the most pleasurable way. They project a palatable, explosive energy that is equal parts satisfying and

intimidating. Each painting is a spirituous and original description of both exterior and interior realities.

THAT'S THE SPIRIT

The push-pull and balance between what's inside and what's outside is a central motif. Brewster is fascinated by the still-life arrangements within interior spaces and the structure and forms of architectural design. The geometric properties of buildings, the texture and history of decay and the imagined lives of the people who have lived, worked and died in a place are what he seeks to capture. It's about depicting change, transition, contrasts and soul. Brewster is a man wanting to find the essential spirit beyond the physical. To do this he explores spatial relationships and geometric clashing, tension and intersections. The open natural landscape invaded by industry, for example, or the empty house that still holds the ghost of its former occupants. To locate soul, to bring attention to it, Brewster pays special but subtle attention to windows, doors, entryways, roads and passages.

Outside of content, context, and subject, there are the physical aspects of Brewster's paintings. In both structure and application, the paint itself expresses as a character within the narrative. Brewster is an artist who is committed to plastic aspects of paint and the ways in which it can be managed and directed as a material to convey a message or story. If we remove subject content from his compositions, they gloriously express the physical power of the medium itself. The paint has voice. It is applied in ways that achieve a balance and intertwining of delicacy and hard, violent aggression. Brewster's surfaces are full of varied viscosity and depth. The textures are fascinating, engaging and seductive.

His 20-year retrospective, featuring views of Vermont's transition from rural and agrarian to industrial and urban, is brilliantly organized by Hadrien Redouin, gallery manager and curator at the Southern Vermont Arts Center. There are nearly 100 paintings represented, divided into two large galleries that Redouin and



Brewster installed together and casually call the "hot" and "cool" rooms, referring to color palette intensity as well as subject. A select group of works is installed in the main lobby area of the museum as an introduction to the exhibition, and several more, smaller, more domestic paintings are on view in the sales/gift shop.

In curating the work, Redouin was faced with a special challenge: how to organize Brewster's voluminous collection of insightful, complicated paintings into a cohesive retrospective exhibition that presents a visual narrative and an intellectual interpretation of the artist.

With great purpose and focus, Redouin broke from the tired chronological method and organized a statement arrangement. He noted the "quixotic," movement-filled, and stylistic connective formal and conceptual aspects in Brewster's work, explaining that the artist's method as an innovative amalgam of forms: "The visionary work of David Brewster is a modern dance for the eyes, an all-at-once evolution of abstract expressionism from the beginning of the 20th century to the present."

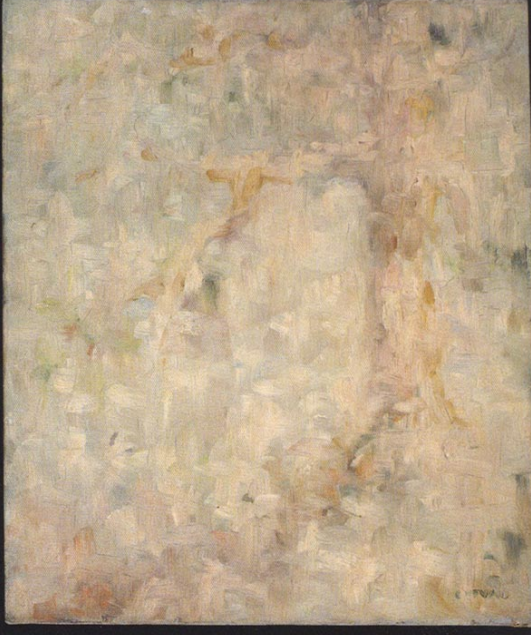

Redouin goes deeper, pointing out Brewster's talent

as an insightful visual storyteller. "David's blurring of lines creating corollary volume encourages the viewer to take in the work as whole – as a story, rather than isolated, disparate parts."

Painter Charlie Hunter, a specialist in tonalist painting who wrote an inter-

Cumbies Convenience Store, 2016, 35" x 70". Oil on Mi-Tientes.

Thompson Gallery



Charlie Nevad — Light & Dark

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pretative essay about Brewster for the retrospective show's catalog, describes the artist's manner as "furiously jousting" against "imagined beasts" as a "modern-day Quixote," battling industrial power lines, turbines and industrial sites. Hunter also acknowledged Brewster's command of color, calling his layered and boisterous surfaces kaleidoscopic.

In her discussion of Brewster's mastery, Anne Neely, a painter herself, explains his handling of material paint as electrical. Her view of Brewster's high-octane working manner is rather fascinating and unique. "They are imbued with a magnetic circuitry," she writes of his paintings.

Brewster explained that he never considered himself a "regionalist" painter pointing to Winslow Homer and N.C. and Andrew Wyeth as inspiration. But, he did agree that the scenes produced by Thomas Hart Benton,

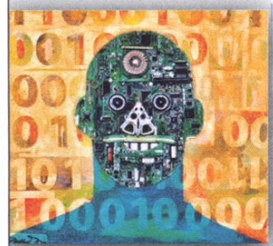
Edward Hopper and George Bellows demonstrate characteristics and approaches that resonate with him. His large volume of work is mostly composed of views of specific regional places, often with sweeping, bold, muscular landscapes offering subtle cultural, environmental, political and historical commentary as they reveal secrets. For example, we can compare Grant Wood's 1931 "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" to many of Brewster's wide and spatial landscapes, in which details of land, buildings, and industry – although in this case abstracted and expressive – are depicted.

Brewster's paintings "Same Sex Marriage: American Split," 2009, and "Poverty: Nugget Mania and Ploughman," 2009, can be easily deconstructed and discussed alongside any of Benton's social paintings, dialoging on complicated gender, social, class and economic conditions. They are

abstracted and poetic snapshots of American life.

"Quixotic Encounters" offers the viewer not only an interpretation of what's happening to Vermont as it transitions from a farming state, but also how one artist has dealt with and documented the evolution. David Brewster's paintings are masterful, emotional visual poems communicating the confusion, oppression, fear and uncertainty of change. Each application of color and each gesture are important and purposefully placed, requiring slow contemplation. The viewer will leave the gallery space drunk, light-headed, intensely moved and joyfully depleted.

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