

Artist Statement – John Gary Brown

As a student, I explored a number of different mediums, including watercolor, intaglio and relief printing, as well as drawing with a variety of materials. By the time I received my MFA from The University of Washington it was obvious that oil painting would always be my medium of choice. Similarly, a search through all the traditional subjects and points of departure has led me, inevitably, to return to the landscape.

The landscape, certainly the most eternal and elemental of all artistic subjects, allows me to create worlds that reflect my view of reality – that the universe evolves in an unhurried but inexorable process that deserves respect and emulation. The implications of this point of view can be superimposed onto ecological considerations, or spiritual advancement, but I prefer to simply depict the landscape, in its placid and dynamic states, and celebrate each manifestation as a natural and inevitable reflection of a broader and mystical reality that must be taken on faith.

My paintings, although basically non-objective, are nearly always organized around a horizon line, or some other element which places the canvas in a particular place. There is often a light source or the implication of one. The long, eternal horizon, sometimes superimposed with vertical activity of a more transitory nature, at times suggests the firmly planted underpinnings of icon painting and owes some debt of gratitude to modern masters such as Mark Rothko and Ad Reinhart, who had similar feelings of reverence for the always changing but eternal nature of the internal and external universe.

The stark, infinite horizon of the prairie was the first landscape that I felt a spiritual attachment to. After moving to Seattle to do my graduate work, I also learned to appreciate the elusive northwestern landscape, with its ambiguous merging of land, water and atmosphere. After traveling and working in Europe, I learned to love the more ordered European landscape and later, the decayed, full-circle magic of middle eastern sites, which seem to reflect both the beginning and the end of earth's cycles. My latest efforts have, to some extent, abandoned the natural world and looked inwards, toward a landscape of dreams and meditation.

Within this context, I endeavor to create both objective and subjective interpretations of specific places or experiences, exploring unusual light and extraordinary color or configurations that occur in the area's infinite variety of outward manifestations. Natural forces, such as wind and water may be implied, and storms or celestial objects may also be represented, but overseeing each specific event or circumstance that is implied to any given painting, is the turning of the earth and the long march towards entropy and rebirth.

These paintings are generally executed in layers. A layer of free-flowing, multi-colored "underpainting" is applied by brush and allowed to form organic shapes, before the canvas is placed on the floor, face up, so that the image will stabilize and dry. After the underpainting is dry enough to work over, a la prima bands of oil paint are laid over it. This is done with a print brayer and some areas of the underpainting are rubbed out and revealed with a paint rag or palette knife. Drawing is worked into the image with a brush or the edge of the print brayer. This process is repeated in several layers until the painting is finished.

I believe that mankind's marks upon the earth are superficial and fleeting, and I try to depict and celebrate what is truly elemental in the landscape – the breathing of life into great watery vistas, seen through shifting, atmospheric veils, or the falling of sun light onto undisturbed dust. Birth, death and the works of man are celebrated in these paintings. Many of the canvases are named for places and circumstances brought about by the creativity and manipulation of man, but the dominant feature in each one is the celestial process, both external and internal.