

THE TWILIGHT REALM OF ANDREW BROWNE

ARTWORK BY ANDREW BROWNE
INTERVIEW AND TEXT BY INGA WALTON

In a career encompassing over twenty solo exhibitions since 1981, Andrew Browne has achieved considerable renown for his compelling exploration of the ever-present tension between the built-up, urban environment and the natural one. In many ways this thematic construct only serves to amplify his most abiding preoccupation: the mutable and intangible nature of darkness and light, shadow and luminosity, the perceptible and the void.

‘It’s important to point out that the effect of, and depiction of light, is what links so much of my work—from the spots of light, lights emerging over horizons of the earlier work, through the illuminated architectural forms and onto the more recent images of foliage and detritus caught in the flash of the camera ...’, Browne emphasises. ‘I have been drawn to the depiction of light in part for its tendency to both illuminate the nocturne, but also the way it abstracts forms—calibration and placement are dependent on the specifics of the composition and the emphasis I want to put on certain parts of a picture. At times the use is more non-objective, at others quite realistic—once again this is at the service of particular themes I am exploring, whether I want to veer toward the depiction of observed phenomena or perhaps invention; the rest is up to the viewer to reflect upon ...’

The unpredictable and often disconcerting quality of light is at one with Browne’s *œuvre*, where the inter-relation between photography and painting is pronounced. His fidelity to the initial site of inspiration, and obsessive attention to detail, results in paintings of often unnerving accuracy and unsettling overtones. ‘The actual “texture” of photography has always

interested me and is evident in the surface I try to get to with the paintings—something I am probably neurotic about!’ he admits. ‘Also, photography is basically a short-hand for me, a thumb-nail sketch. I don’t particularly like the way I draw, or the result of my drawing, and have always been attracted to the distancing and objective quality you get with photography. I’m very critical of my technique, and most of the time don’t consider it as fully “there” so I usually fiddle with edges, tone, and contrasts for days ...’ Browne’s paintings are informed by his peripatetic travels, and sometimes involve revisiting particular places captured earlier. ‘I am always looking for images and ideas (for me, they are the same thing), trying to “recognise” something that may be useful—that may be hiding in plain sight’, he explains. ‘I have thousands of shots stored on my computer ... plus a lot from the pre-digital era. Only a handful ever make the grade as far as being the basis for paintings. When the photo becomes the basic composition for a painting, it often takes a while before I settle on particular images or sources.’

Although Browne’s style is often described as ‘photo-realistic’, the connection is more fluid in practice. ‘My direct use of photos as the basis for paintings really emerged in the early 1990s—the work dealing with silhouetted trees, headlights, horizon lines—all transpired via photography’, he relates. ‘It is important to point out that there is always a degree of abstraction and manipulation from the source photos before they become a model for the paintings. And even then, the final form always mutates.’ The coalescing disciplines continue to inform each other. ‘I have made and exhibited photos or photographically-based works such as etchings since the beginning of my practice in the early 1980s. Last year (2008) I made a series of photopolymer photogravures, *Seven Apparitions*, from accumulated images that had previously been used as the basis for a number of paintings. These prints kind of summed up the previous few years’ work, yet also functioned as a distinct group of “characters” that both inhabit and emerge out of their source material ... blurring the line between an objective reality and suggestive fictions’, he reflects. ‘The surface quality you get with this type of printing (in effect photo-etching) is really appealing—rich velvety blacks and great tonal subtlety—something I am also after in my paintings.’

Browne views his output over the last decade as occupying two definable phases. 'From the mid-to-late 1990s until around 2003 I was pretty focused on the more architectural and built landscape images, the result of immersing myself in formal issues of picture-making, dealing with simple and geometric forms and the banality of the urban environment,' he comments. 'Out of this I hoped to find a simple poetic image that was both "observation" and "feeling", "sight" and "emotion"—the old binary thing.' Anonymous exteriors were paired with what Browne refers to as, 'stark, cold, denuded trees as companions' in works like *Illuminated Branches & Plaza* (2004). 'That was taken from some shots I did in Basel, Switzerland, of the town square—a clash between the evocative foliage and the banal, even brutal architecture ...,' Browne recalls. 'This brings up the issue of the tension you mentioned—it is interesting to me on a couple of levels: firstly the formal possibilities it creates of composition and juxtaposition, and then the sense of the way we attempt to reconcile these different relationships to the world, for better or worse; after that, it is an intuitive response to stimuli ...'

(end of excerpt)



Illuminated Branches & Plaza (2004), oil on linen, 183 x 183 cm (Private Collection, Melbourne)



Light Effect #2 - December '02 (2003), oil on linen, 152.5 x 152.5 cm (Private Collection, Sydney)



City At Night (NY '97) (2003), oil on linen, 91.5 x 244 cm (Private Collection, Perth)



Outside - Watching (2004), oil on linen, 122 x 300 cm (Private Collection, Sydney)