

Artist Resources – Cecily Brown (British, b. 1969)

[Brown at Saatchi Gallery, London](#)

[Brown at the Gagosian Gallery](#)

“I’ve always thought of myself as a figurative painter,” Brown [reflected in a video interview](#) from her New York studio in 2014. “There’s always been a strong element of abstraction, but it’s something that happens very naturally...I’m far more interested in the moment where figuration breaks down...if I don’t have some figural idea, I get completely lost.”

The National Gallery of Art in D.C. hosted Brown for [a conversation about her sources of inspiration](#) in 2016, including Fragonard, Goya, and Bruegel. “I was always really obsessed with art of the past. I never really understood why anyone wouldn’t be...I just felt a really close relationship with art from a hundred years ago. I never felt any distance from it,” Brown explained. “When you’re feeling lost, you can go back to these sources.”

Drawing and painted studies are a central part of Brown’s practice. [The Drawing Center](#) in New York hosted the first museum exhibition dedication to her works on paper in 2016. The Whitworth, at the University of Manchester, followed in 2018 with [drawings of shipwrecks](#) inspired by Gericault and Delacroix. An intimate portrait in photographs by [W Magazine](#) showcased Brown her studio as she worked through these studies.

[Apollo Magazine](#) interviewed Brown as she prepared for her 2018 exhibition at the [Louisiana Museum of Modern Art](#) in Denmark. “Seeing a group of works together in a show is like the final part of the whole process of making paintings: seeing how they relate, what story they tell, and what they mean once they’re in the world,” Brown explained. “The excitement of doing a show like this is that I get to see what I’ve been doing for the past 20 years.”



Brown, 2019
Photograph: David Oates



Brown, 2016
Photograph: Mark Hartman/W Magazine

In a [video profile with the Louisiana Museum](#), Brown discussed [the triptych for which the exhibition is titled](#): *Where, When, How Often and with Whom*, which is partially inspired by [photographs of a woman arrested in Nice](#) for wearing a burkini. “I never think of painting as a cathartic thing, but I definitely think it’s a way of processing things...the way I see the world is fragmented. Recently I’ve been thinking of it more like shattered, everything is splintered.”

Brown spoke at the [Kunsthistorisches Museum](#) in Vienna in 2018 about her love of Rubens and the influence of Old Masters paintings in her work. “I love artifice, I love fakery in art. I like it to be big, and larger than life, and clearly made up. I love how much of Rubens is taken from other places...the fleshiness and the movement are the things I keep going back to, and the color.”

The New York Times [profiled Brown](#) as she installed two monumental paintings in the main hall of [The Metropolitan Opera](#) in 2018 – the first time an artist received such an invitation since Marc Chagall in 1966.

[The Blenheim Art Foundation](#) in Britain presented an exhibition of new work in 2020, [created in response to the Palace’s history](#) as a country hunting estate and collection of paintings, tapestries, armor, and decorative art.

Cecily Brown
As Like as Like Can Be, 2014
Oil on canvas

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2020:102.1

“There are passages that are really fast and passages that are really slow and I’ve always liked the idea that there are different tempos within a painting, like a piece of music... My whole thing is that there is not one mood to a painting but that they are multi-layered in how the paint is applied, and also in layers of meaning and layers of mood. So there is never one thing going on. It’s full of contradictions.”

For London born, New York-based artist Cecily Brown, each finished canvas is a visual and physical expression of her dedication to the medium of painting. Brown is frequently aligned with the post-war American movement of Abstract Expressionism, touted as “fifth generation” in relation to first-generation New York School artists such as Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, and Mark Rothko (all currently or recently on view at the JSMA). Brown resists such labels and categorization, however, preferring to conceive of herself as a “post-post-modern” artist looking back on the whole of art history as a potential library of influence. The figure also remains a central and resolute focus of her work, inspired by events and daily life observed through her own eyes or a camera lens, reproduced photographs, and Old Master paintings. Figures reveal themselves throughout Brown’s work in fluctuating but unmistakable bodily forms and frenetic brushstrokes of flesh-toned paint. With only a playfully obscure title as a guide, the chaotic maelstrom of color in paintings such as **As Like as Like Can Be** rewards patient consideration and an open receptivity toward the artist’s affection for contradictions.



On view November 25, 2020 – February 28, 2021



Cecily Brown (British, b.1969)
Thrice Happy Green, 2019-20
Oil on linen

Private Collection; L2020:40.1

Cecily Brown studied at London's Slade School of Art among a generation of artists loosely affiliated under the moniker "YBA" (Young British Artists). She quickly rose to prominence after moving in 1994 to New York, where her large-scale canvases garnered critical and commercial success. Like many of her peers working in a time of postmodern attitudes toward art and its history, Brown grapples with essential questions concerning the historical significance, contemporary value, and potential future of painting as an artistic medium. Yet Brown also believes painting has a superior capacity to hold and collect layers of meaning over time: in the long-term, through the decades, but also in the short term, in the present moment of visual encounter. As Brown explains, "one of painting's great strengths is that it can unfold slowly" and can therefore "force people to really look at things." Her work rewards such prolonged viewing. Rendered in her emotive, frenetic brushwork, **Thrice Happy Green** suggests a world in continual flux, revealed haphazardly in restless and elusive activity. Clarity remains just beyond reach, reflecting Brown's expressed interest in "where the mind goes when it's trying to make up for what isn't there."

On view June 17 – September 20, 2020