



museum of arts and design

**MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN EXHIBITION EXAMINES WORK OF
ROGER BROWN, CELEBRATING ARTIST AS COLLECTOR**

Roger Brown: Virtual Still Lifes
On view through September 15, 2019



Roger Brown, *Virtual Still Life #15 Waterfalls and Pitchers*, 1995. Collection of the Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, MI.
Photo courtesy Roger Brown Study Collection, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

NEW YORK, NY (May 9, 2019) – The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) presents an exhibition dedicated to the work of American artist **Roger Brown** (1941-1997), examining the ways in which collecting, arrangement, and the theatrical informed and enriched his artistic practice. *Roger Brown: Virtual Still Lifes*, on view through September 15, 2019, features works made in the final years of the artist's life that combined his passion for collecting with his groundbreaking approach to painting. Marking the first solo museum show in New York devoted to Brown, the exhibition at MAD offers a rare opportunity to view over forty works that trace the artist's evolution through the lens of collection and display.

Brown is associated with the Chicago Imagists, an informal affiliation of representational artists that emerged from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in the post-World War II era.

Brown and his contemporaries—Ed Paschke, Barbara Rossi, and Phil Hanson, among them—drew from references outside of the fine art canon, including commercial art, comics, surrealism, self-taught art, and popular culture, to develop an aesthetic sensibility uniquely their own. Brown's work is included in nearly a hundred public collections across the nation.

“Roger Brown is a historically significant figure in American painting,” said **Shannon R. Stratton**, exhibition curator and former MAD William and Mildred Lasdon Chief Curator, “whose signature style of ominous weather, patterned landscapes, omnipotent points of view, and nods to the theatrical make for a nuanced critique of the artificiality of post-war American culture. His and his contemporaries’ influence can be felt anew, as young artists today re-explore surrealism, pop culture, and vernacular aesthetics as a means to examine contemporary life.”

Brown's “Virtual Still Life” series became a studio expression of his collecting and curating of found objects. To create the twenty-seven works in the series, eight of which are on view at MAD, Brown selected from nearly five hundred objects, primarily ceramics, and curated distinct arrangements on display shelves extending from beneath his painted canvases of stylized landscapes.

Frothy waterfalls flow into an array of pitchers in *Virtual Still Life #15 Waterfalls and Pitchers* (1995); mugs arranged by height mirror the rugged mountain range of *Virtual Still Life #11 Mugs and Mountains* (1995); and a harmony of color blends seamlessly from canvas to a singular pot in *Virtual Still Life #5 Elegant Pot with Gold Sky* (1995).

“Brown did not believe in the artificial hierarchies imposed on human creativity,” Stratton said, “and his eventual integration of his collecting practice with his canvases was an intentional leveling of those hierarchies, literally foregrounding the work of unknown potters and other makers.”

Organized into five sections, the exhibition positions the “Virtual Still Life” paintings alongside earlier works from various stages of Brown's career, illuminating his process and tracing the development of his last important series.

A grouping of carved wood hearse panels from Brown's personal collection, which mimic the dramatic folds and sweeping drapes of the curtains that flank theater stages and movie house screens, introduce the artist's “Theater Paintings.” The works in this section, part of a series of more than twenty, depict interior theater scenes, many framed by architectural curtains, and reflect the artist's interest in the stage and concepts of spectacle or display from early in his career.

“Painted Objects” features a range of painted, found furniture and sculpture by Brown, including chairs, stools, and a footboard. One of the earliest works in this section, *Untitled (Crawling, Flagellated Building)* of 1975, foreshadows Brown's virtual still lifes through the placement of his crawling Christ as a skyscraper on a shelf in front of a stylized sky.

The large projected images of “Home(s),” give a glimpse into the live-work spaces Brown inhabited in Chicago, Illinois, New Buffalo, Michigan, and La Conchita, California, and the collections specific to each site. The photographs illustrate how Brown curated and displayed the collected objects—ranging from toys and ephemera from popular culture and advertising to indigenous, folk, craft, and self-taught art—that surrounded him.

Upon his death in 1997, two of Brown's homes and their collections were gifted to his alma mater, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and would come to form the basis for the school's Roger Brown Study Collection.

"Ceramics" features two of ten preserved arrangements of pottery and ceramics from Brown's home in La Conchita, where he collected works of amateur and anonymous studio pottery, mid-century California wares, and regional and folk craft pottery from Mexico. The *Untitled Arrangement (Studio Left Unpainted)* consists of a humble wood cupboard, its shelves practically brimming over with meticulously arranged bowls, vessels, and platters in a variety of shapes, sizes, colors, and finishes.

The exhibition concludes with Ellen Sandor and (art)n's PHSCologram portrait of Roger Brown. In this "Virtual Still Life," Brown plays with the "virtuality" of Sandor's project, a 3D image visible without the special glasses, by making his portrait a Virtual Still Life that features himself. He is dressed up as one of his iconic skyscrapers—his legs protruding from the base of a building in silver pants and shoes. On either side of him are shiny red apples and behind him, a variation on one of his ominous skies. In placing himself on the shelf, Brown collapses hierarchies between humans and things, becoming just a thing himself.

Additionally, the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) will host a two-day symposium focused on the artist's work and career on September 7–8, 2019. Coinciding with the release of the limited-edition book, *Roger Brown: Virtual Still Lives* edited by Stratton and published in collaboration with SAIC, the symposium will include film screenings, lectures, and tours of the exhibition. More information and registration information will be available at madmuseum.org in the coming months.

EXHIBITON CREDITS

The exhibition and its accompanying publication are produced in partnership with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Roger Brown: Virtual Still Lives is curated by former MAD William and Mildred Lasdon Chief Curator Shannon R. Stratton with support from MAD Assistant Manager of Curatorial Affairs Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy and Roger Brown Study Collection Curator Lisa Stone.

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) champions contemporary makers across creative fields and presents the work of artists, designers, and artisans who apply the highest level of ingenuity and skill. Since the Museum's founding in 1956 by philanthropist and visionary Aileen Osborn Webb, MAD has celebrated all facets of making and the creative processes by which materials are transformed, from traditional techniques to cutting-edge technologies. Today, the Museum's curatorial program builds upon a rich history of exhibitions that emphasize a cross-disciplinary approach to art and design, and reveals the workmanship behind the objects and environments that shape our everyday lives. MAD provides an international platform for practitioners who are influencing the direction of cultural production and driving twenty-first-century innovation, and fosters a participatory setting for visitors to have direct encounters with skilled making and compelling works of art and design. For more information, visit madmuseum.org.

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