

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Goo at Gagosian; Kiefer Ghosts; Riley's Curves: U.K. Galleries

Review by Martin Gayford



Nov. 12 (Bloomberg) -- Glenn Brown, not surprisingly since he is a painter, is fascinated by paint.

His current exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery, 6-24 Britannia St., London WC1, (through Nov. 26), makes clear, though, that he is obsessed by pigment in a perverse fashion.

Brown's work is all about impasto: The way that swirls and whorls of pigment build up in the works of artists such as Van Gogh and Frank Auerbach. Brown lovingly depicts slathered paint, like whipped cream or dripping goo yet he does so dead flat, with a surface so smooth it looks airbrushed. So his paintings are illusionistic pictures of, well, pictures.

This approach used to strike me as too convolutedly post- modern, especially when he produced direct imitations of works by Auerbach and Rembrandt. But Brown's weird idiom now has taken on a life of its own. For one thing, he makes sculptures out of actual paint (another exquisitely perverse thing to do). And in a picture such as "War in

Peace" (2009) represents an enormous, possibly deliquescent and rotting foot, silhouetted against the sky.

Peer closer at the toes and skin, and an inner world comes into view: eyes, faces and hobgoblin shapes. It's horrible, but individual and -- in its way -- a virtuoso performance. Brown is developing a gothic, almost Disney-like imagination.