



WILLIAM THEOPHILUS BROWN

Lonely Boat, 1988

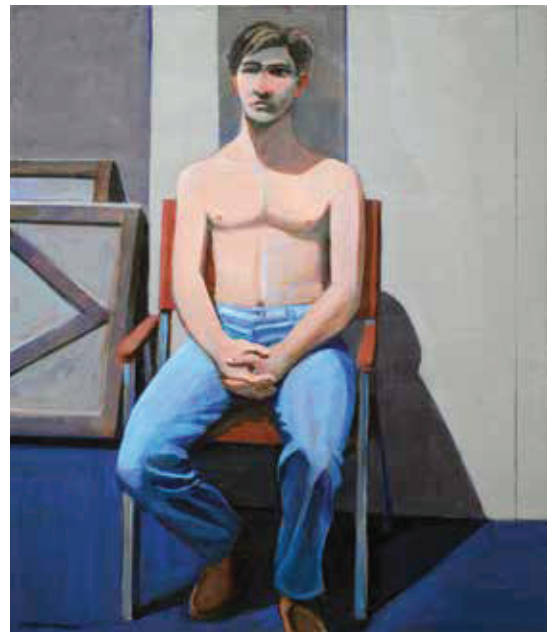
Acrylic on canvas

Promised Gift of the William Brown and Paul Wonner
Foundation Fund of the Social Project Network

Seated Man, 1994

Acrylic on canvas

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Lonely Boat | Seated Man



William Theophilus Brown (1919–2010) William Theophilus Brown was born in Moline, Illinois, and came from a long line of intellectuals who socialized with authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. He studied piano at Yale and graduated in 1941, at which time he was drafted into World War II. Following his discharge, he studied painting at the University of California, Berkeley and moved between the artistic centers of New York City and Paris. During these travels, Brown met a large number of accomplished artists, including Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Alberto Giacometti, and Willem de Kooning. His growing success, as well as his continued relationships with other talented artists, all contributed to Brown becoming recognized as a prominent member of the Bay Area Figurative Movement.

A product of its time

Brown's friend and gallerist, Thomas Reynolds, said of him: "Theophilus Brown was one of those rare artists who was successful at every stage of his career..." In the 1950s, Brown gained national attention when *Life Magazine* featured three of his paintings of football players. This caught the attention of Felix Landau, who owned a Los Angeles gallery and began exhibiting Brown's work. When Brown's art was included in the landmark Bay Area Figurative Painting exhibition at the Oakland Museum, he was set on a lifelong path as a serious artist.

Take a closer look

The Bay Area Figurative Movement consisted of San Francisco Bay Area artists who abandoned working in the predominant style of Abstract Expressionism in favor of combining abstract and figurative painting during the 1950s and 1960s. This re-introduction of figurative subject matter, such as landscapes, still lifes, portraiture, and nudes, diversified the formal concerns of Abstract Expressionism. The tension that developed between abstraction and figuration opened a range of new possibilities, which is notable by the variety of subjects and techniques the artists pursued.

Did you know?

Brown's artistic talent was apparent from an early age—when Brown was eleven, his father (inventor and chief designer at the John Deere Company) submitted one of his artworks in a regional contest that was judged by Grant Wood. Wood gave Brown's portrait third place, and presented the award himself. Brown recalled, "He [Wood] was amazed to see this kid walking up the aisle...I remember him leaning and reaching down from the stage, and me reaching up to receive the prize, and we shook hands. It was a really great moment in my life."

On your own

www.thomasreynolds.com/WTB_b.html

www.sfgate.com/art/article/Figurative-painter-Theophilus-Brown-dies-3210688.php

<https://lamodern.com/tag/william-theophilus-brown-painter>