

FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2008



D C MOORE GALLERY

## ROGER BROWN: 'THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE'

The painter Roger Brown forged one of the most distinctive styles of the past half-century. He was one of the Chicago Imagists who came of age in the 1960s, among a group that included Jim Nutt, Ed Paschke and Gladys Nilsson. Brown died in 1997, and his work has not been seen in New York over the past 10 years. This exhibition of paintings from 1971 (including "Pasadena Garden Residence," above) to 1991 will delight his fans and should be a revelation for people unfamiliar with his work.

Mr. Brown created expansive, simplified and mysteriously luminous landscapes and townscapes in which natural and artificial elements conform to grid patterns. In some ways his paintings look as if they were made by a self-taught visionary. They're technically rudimentary and rely on certain formulaic devices. The land is always divided by rows of bristly, glowing bushes; buildings described by thin black lines have bright yellow windows framing occu-

pants' shadows; and puffy clouds fill the sky in improbable patterns.

Moods of anxiety-tinged nostalgia prevail. The cartoon style has a 1940-ish look, and the lucid, orderly appearance of the world evokes a mythic time of peace, prosperity and goodness. Look again, however, and you see that unsettling things are often happening. Little men in one bucolic landscape gesture in alarm toward smoke rising from a forest fire; Mothra, the monster-movie moth from Japan, looms over a quiet suburb; a double-helix-shaped column of radioactive smoke rises from Three Mile Island.

Mr. Brown was something of a contrarian. You might think his heroic portraits of President Ronald Reagan and his wife, Nancy, floating in the clouds like beneficent deities over a toylike neighborhood, were a joke, but he wasn't kidding. (Through June 13, D C Moore Gallery, 724 Fifth Avenue, near 57th Street, 212-247-2111, [dcmooregallery.com](http://dcmooregallery.com).)

KEN JOHNSON