

TANGO

PETEEY BROWN

This catalogue is in conjunction with TANGO,
an exhibit of paintings at the



A.I.R. Gallery, 111 Front Street, Brooklyn, New York, 11201
212.255.6651 • www.airgallery.org
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Photography: Daniel Stoloff

Design: Rita Lascaro

Front cover: *French Vanilla*, oil on linen, 36" x 30", 2013

Back cover: *Hands*, oil on linen, 36" x 30" 2013

TANGO

PET EY BROWN



Olé, oil on linen, 30" x 36", 2012–2013

DANCING WITH PAINT

by William Eckhardt Kohler

As a creative act, painting shares characteristics with many other art forms; music, theater, poetry, dance, which can serve as rich analogies for what it is like to paint. Petey Brown has a long history of utilizing dance as an apt metaphor for the physical graces and challenges of making paintings. She has found in the tango, the subject of her most recent body of work, a perfect vehicle to address the dynamics of forming images in paint. The tango is a dance form thematically driven by the nature of aggression, submission and domination, but also centered in the heart and the passion of connection.

The nature of the medium of painterly paint is that it initially flows; only to become sticky and resistant when too much of the artist's critical will has been imposed on the painting through revisions, reworks and redo's. To engage in this difficult dance with paint is almost impossible to maintain without it being an act of love. This is the ground that Brown has staked out for herself as the subject underneath the subject. Brown has said "Communication, passion, abandon fuel the pictures, which are a pathway to the sensuality of the paint and the pleasure of color."

The serial repetition of imagery provides Brown, as it has for many painters before her, the means to grapple, to have another go, to take the turn passed by the previous time. There are moments when the painter stops at the divine intersection

of bliss and pleasure, when image and paint coalesce into a seamless union. There is a sense of humor and play in the paintings, too. Perhaps the dancers in her paintings, as characters, are a little clumsy, a little imperfect, representing the humanity and vulnerability of doing something simply because it is enjoyable.

Brown's figures usually exist in a flat non-space, reminding us of the primacy of the physical moment of painting rather than the depiction of a reality. The paintings can be awkward but also comfortable in their discomfort as if signaling to the viewer, "yes, this is me, as I am." In this way, Brown's paintings recall the gnarled unfurlings of early Jackson Pollock, while he was under the influence of Thomas Hart Benton.

In *Olé*, a series of energy waves on the ground plane separate and connect two opposing lines of oddly faceless dancers. Several of the shoes are realized as the most substantive forms in the painting, grounding the otherwise otherworldly figures. The abstract and disembodied quality of these figures, some little more than ribbons of color, invokes a state of religious ecstasy like the figures from El Greco or William Blake. Evidence of scraping, repainting and layered pentimenti make it clear that this was a hard won painting.

Haze, in contrast, is a painting in which first impulses seem to have been left relatively intact. The flesh of the dancing couple has been delineated in cursory and rapid yellow-green strokes. Around the figures and on top of a grayish-green ground, movement lines have been roughly troweled on with the vigorous energy of a first go. This is a painting that has the look of having sprung from the efforts of many other paintings. At the very least it has been informed by *Hot Butterscotch*, a painting in which teal fleshed figures cavort against a yellow ochre field. This odd but effective color harmony breaks from a dependency on naturalistic color. The way the figures here are merged with and emerge from the ground highlights the improvisational nature of Brown's working method.

In *White Shoe*, with a similarly ochre ground, the figure ground relationship is solid. The paint here has been sensually palette-

knifed on like butter, and under-layers of paint have been allowed to shine through the surface. The energy lines in this piece have a sculptural certainty that makes them equal players to the figures in the dance.

Yellow directly invites thoughts about the sexuality and violence implicit in the tango. The man in the tango is supposed to lead and dominate, albeit from the heart. Here, dipping the female dancer, the male figure appears to stare out at the viewer. The implied aggression of this confrontation pushes the narrative envelope beyond the predilection for tenderness that many of the other works inhabit. The paint handling is dispatched with a quick bravado and confidence suggesting in this instance that Brown embodies the assertive role over the fluid and pliant paint.

Pose has an entirely different tone. It is one of the simplest and most literal paintings in this body of work and also one of the most gentle. Two figures are caught in a moment against a simple lush white ground. The female dancer presses against the male figure who has the look and feel of a 30s era farm worker in brown overalls. His feet are a bit odd and spatially bend sideways, suggesting that here the masculine has submitted to the feminine sensuality.

Brown's paintings are alternately sweet and tough. They speak to the romance of the search for, the loss of and the declaration of self. The tango is romantic and ritualistic. The dancers as people are taken up, subsumed by the dance. Likewise, the painter is subsumed and taken up by the act of painting, by its inherent beauty, by the ritual moment of enactment and by its capacity for transforming the artist into something more than who she is.

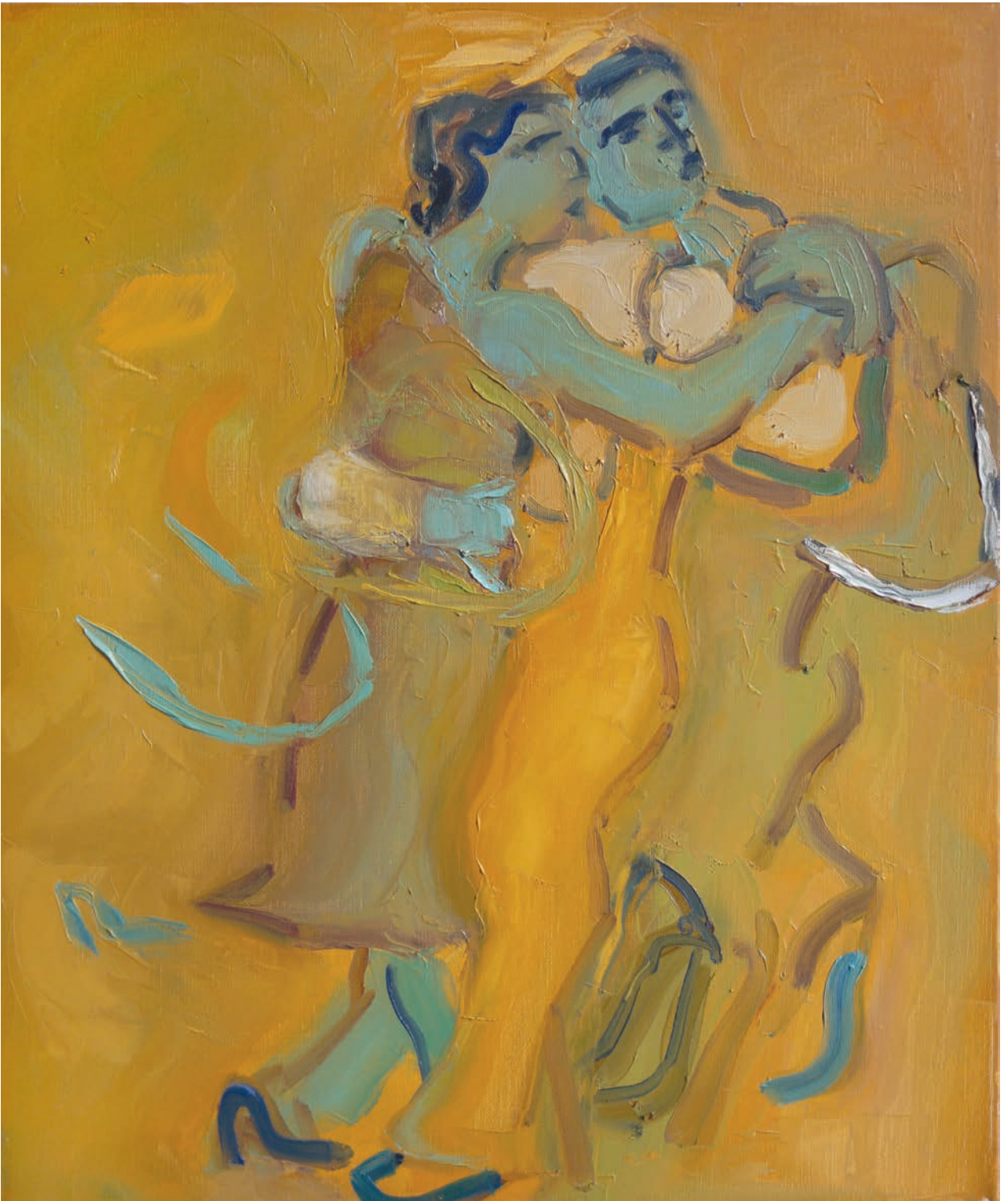
WILLIE KOHLER writes for the *Huffington Post*. He studied painting at The Maryland Institute College of Art and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He has taught painting and art history at various institutions including The University of Indiana, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and The American Academy of Art.

“The tango is a direct expression
of something that poets have often
tried to state in words: the belief that
a fight may be a celebration.”

—JORGE LUIS BORGES



Haze, oil on linen, 36" x 30", 2013



Hot Butterscotch, oil on linen, 24" x 20", 2013



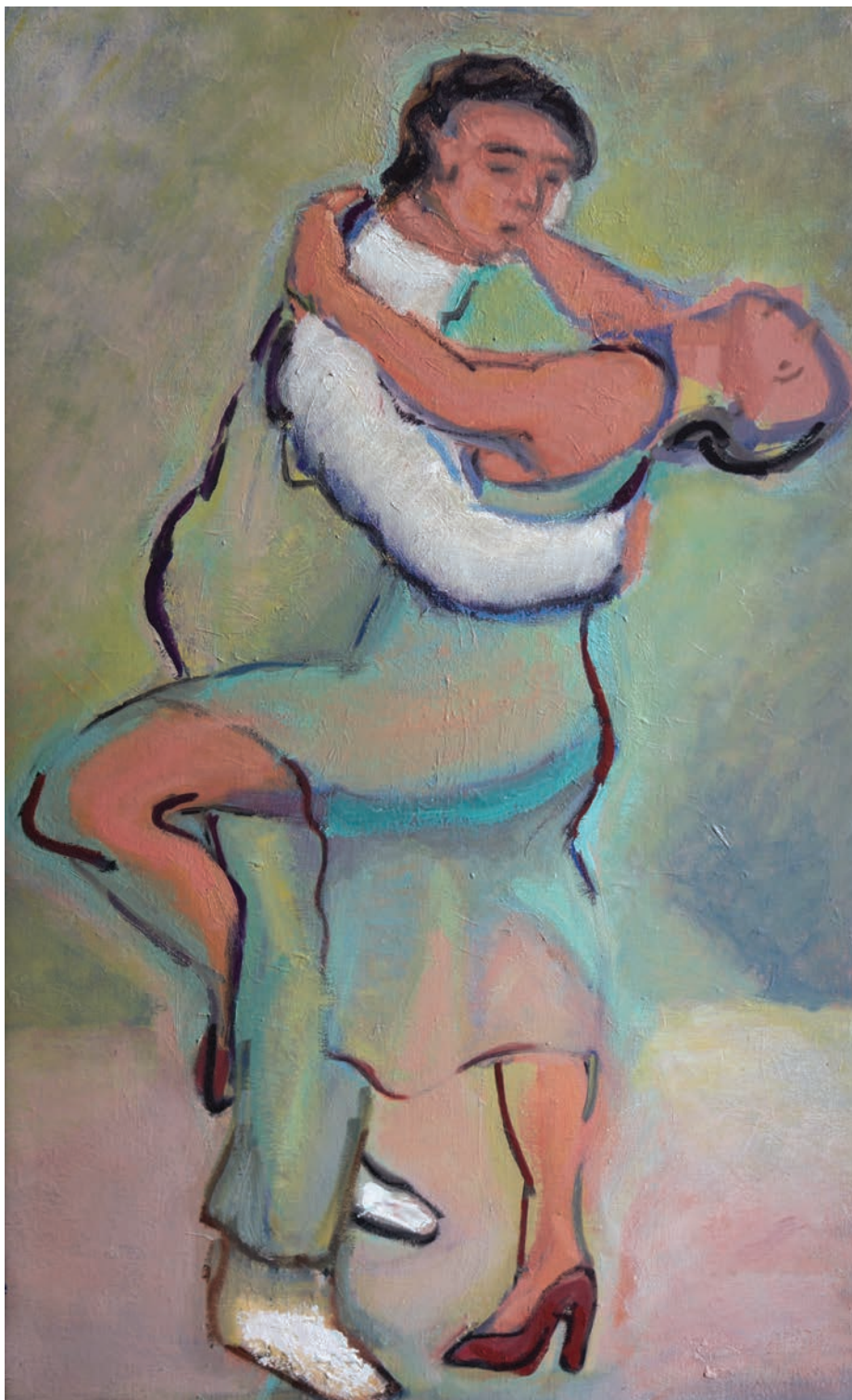
White Shoe, oil on linen, 24" x20", 2013



Yellow, oil on linen, 10" x 8", 2013



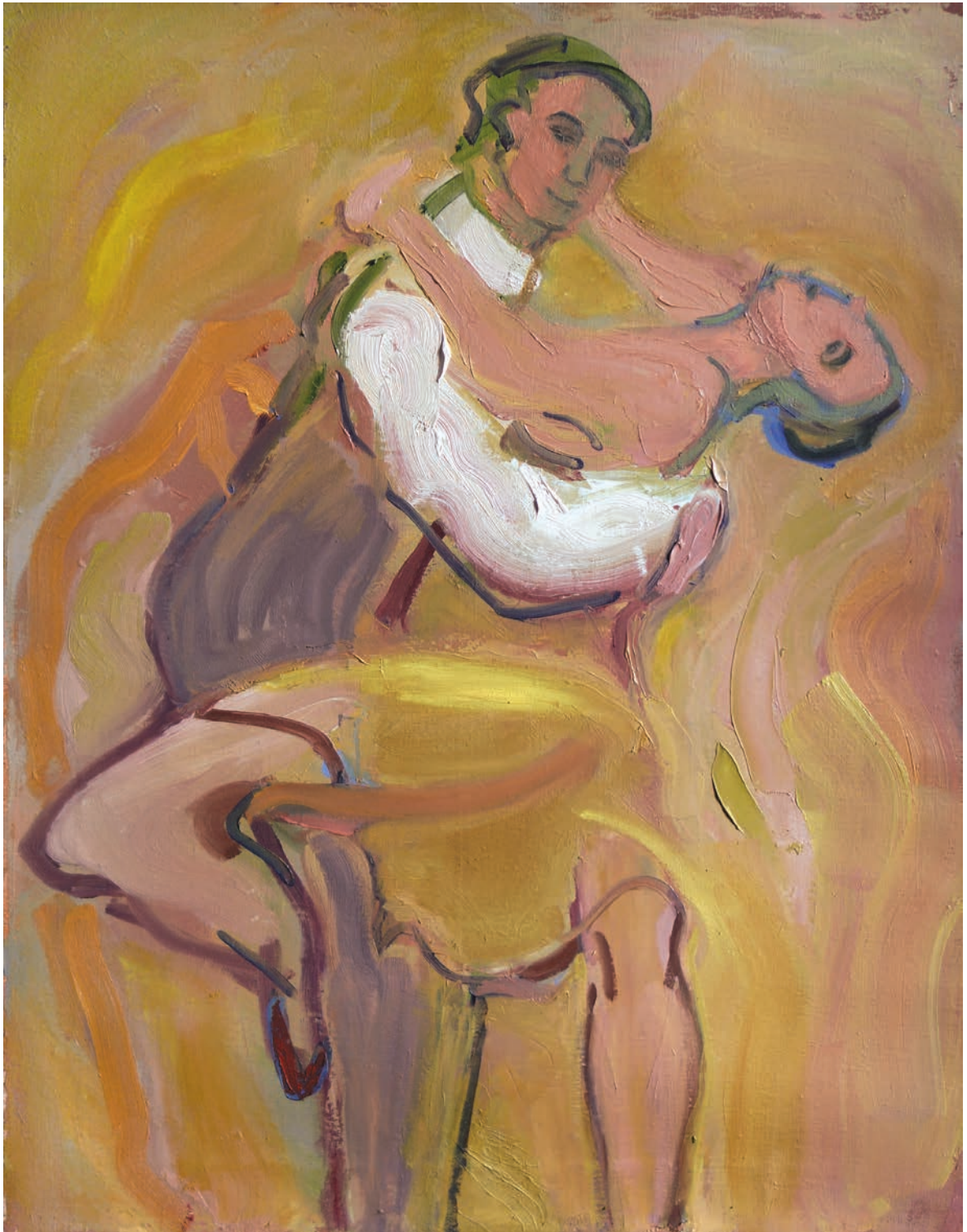
Pose, oil on linen, 10" x 8", 2013



Abandon 2, oil on linen, 42" x 25", 2012-2014



Primary, oil on linen, 36" x 30", 2013



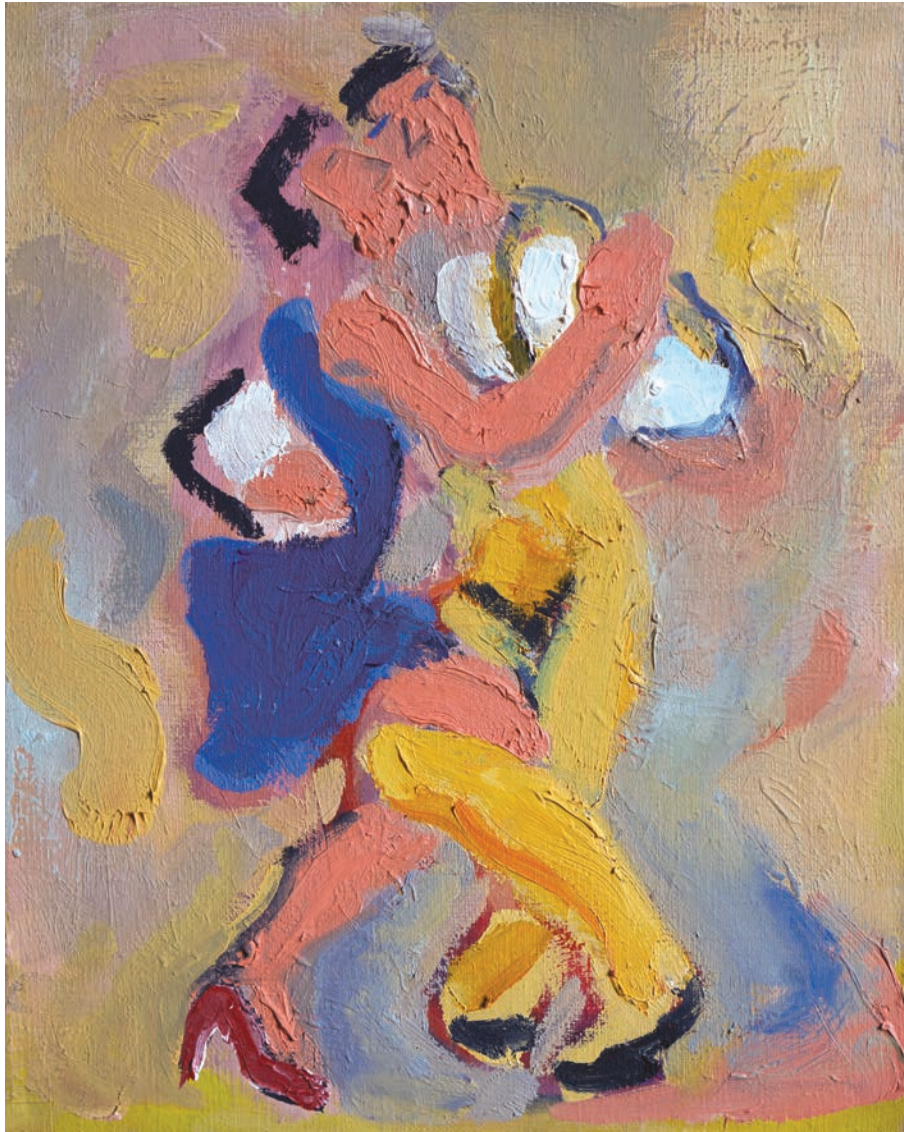
Abandon 3, oil on linen, 36" x 30", 2013



Kiss, oil on linen, 36" x 30", 2013



Pose 2, oil on linen, 10" x 8", 2013



Blue Dress, oil on linen, 10" x 8", 2013



Orange Shoes, gouache, 6" x 6", 2013



Red, gouache, 8" x 6", 2012



Abandon, gouache, 6" x 6", 2012

Petey Brown

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ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
- 2009 SUNY, Morrisville, NY
- 1989 Hunsaker/Schlesinger Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 1987 David Brown Gallery, Provincetown, MA
- 1986 Patricia Heesy Gallery, New York, NY
David Brown Gallery, Provincetown, MA
- 1985 Patricia Heesy Gallery, New York, NY
- 1984 Newton Arts Center, Newton, MA
- 1983 Helen Shlein Gallery, Boston, MA
- 1981 Newton Arts Center, Newton, MA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY
- 2006 National Academy of Design, Invitational, New York, NY
- 2003 I-20 Gallery, New York, NY
- 2001 A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY
- 2000 A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY
- 1997 New Art Center, Newton, MA
- 1996 Gallery 148, New York, NY
- 1995 Gallery 148, New York, NY
- 1992 Artists Space, New York, NY
Kerygma Gallery, Ridgewood, NJ
- 1990 OIA Gallery, New York, NY
- 1989 City University, New York, NY
Hunsaker/Schlesinger Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Gallery 99, Miami, FL
- 1988 Van Straaten Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1987 Patricia Heesy Gallery, New York, NY
Hunsaker/Schlesinger Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 1986 Patricia Heesy Gallery, New York, NY
Helander Gallery, Palm Beach, FL
Edison Community College, Fort Meyers, FL
Appalachian State University, Boone, NC
Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD
- 1985 Patricia Heesy Gallery, New York, NY

- 1984 John Christian Gallery, New York, NY
Berkshire Art Museum, Pittsfield, MA
Provincetown Group Gallery, Invitational, Provincetown, MA
Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA
- 1983 Boston Visual Artists Union, Boston, MA
DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA
West End Gallery, Provincetown, MA
Provincetown Art Association, Provincetown, MA
- 1982 Helen Shlien Gallery, Boston, MA
- 1981 Danforth Museum, Framingham, MA
Northeastern University, Boston, MA
- 1979 Federal Reserve Bank, Boston, MA
- 1978 Keene State College, Keene, NH
Cambridge Art Association, Cambridge, MA
- 1977 Salem State College, Salem, NH

COMMISSIONS

Embassy Suites Hotel, Parsippany, NJ
Phyllis Miriam Residence, New York, NY
Loews Hotel, Santa Monica, CA
Four Walls Eight Windows Publishing Co., New York, NY
The Floridian Hotel, Vero Beach, FL
Conrad Hotel, Uruguay

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Coca-Cola USA, Atlanta, GA
DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA
Principal Financial Group, Des Moines, IA
Robinson's Department Stores, Los Angeles, CA
Checkers Hotel, Santa Monica, CA
Southeast Banking Corporation, Miami, FL
Westin Hotel, Kawaii, HA
Four Seasons Resort Club, Carlsbad, CA

REVIEWS

New York Times, April 19, 1985, Grace Glueck
Boston Globe, December 13, 1984, Christine Temin
Boston Globe, "Critic's Tip", December 6, 1984, Robert Taylor
Art New England, March, 1983, Eugene Narrett
Boston Globe, "Critic's Tip", June, 1983, Christine Temin
Art New England, May, 1981, Katherine Nahum
Newton Times, January, 1977, Katherine Nahum

EDUCATION

Boston University School of Fine and Applied Arts, BFA 1976
Boston University Graduate School in Painting, 1977



Legs, oil on linen, 36" x 30", 2013–2014

