

# EXHIBITION QLD

*Somewhere in the City: urban narratives by Robert Brownhall*

Museum of Brisbane

Brisbane

11 March–5 June 2011

*Robert Brownhall: Recent Paintings*

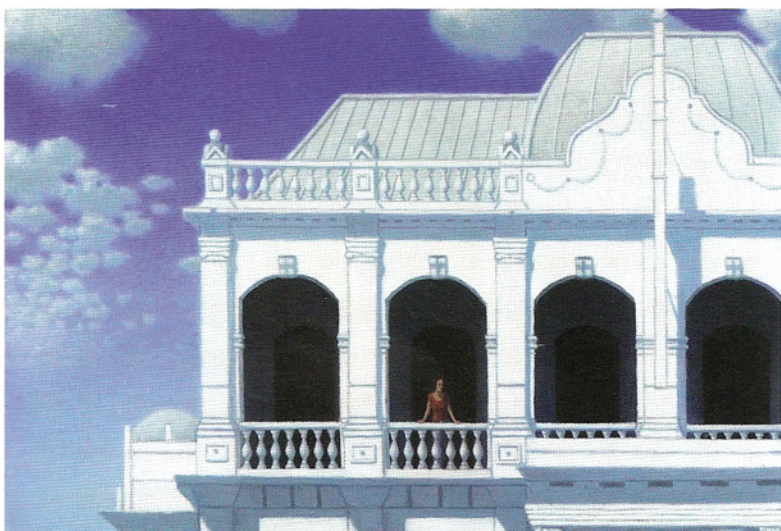
Philip Bacon Galleries

Brisbane

April 2011

# ROBERT BROWNHALL

LOUISE MARTIN-CHEW discusses an exhibition of an admired Queensland painter who renders views of Brisbane affectionately.



**When Alison Kubler and I were approached to curate an exhibition of Robert Brownhall's work for the Museum of Brisbane, we soon sensed the distinctive territory that we were about to enter. Brownhall is a much-loved Queensland son.**

From his earliest exhibition in 1991, people snapped up his scenes of Brisbane's shops, restaurants, cityscapes and car parks. By 1995, these scenes shifted to large and moody nocturnes, darkly resonant images of coastal strips, the capture of the long bridge that connects Redcliffe to the mainland and images of the coast — both north and south — almost always with a human presence. Panoramic images of the city, the river and familiar landforms have yielded corporate commissions for Brownhall with Brisbane business and government buying into this idiosyncratic record of locality.

Now forty-two, Brownhall has been painting for twenty years, but only recently gave away his day job. This focus has granted him "a huge surge of energy in the work", boding well for his artistic future.

Yet visiting Brownhall at the home he shares with wife Sarah and their three young children, we were astonished to see his working studio between the kitchen and the lounge room. However, there is something fitting about this working habit. His ability to focus amidst the chaos of family life is also evident in his ability to tune into the rhythms of the city as both participant and observer. He and Sarah share views and discussions about his work, looking at his current painting together last thing at night.

Brownhall possesses a strong abstract sense of architectural construction and signage but also evident are the hours of observation. His employment as a tree-lopper gave him an aerial view of apartment facades, quiet scenes and landscapes, and one night every week his habit is to drive the streets, looking for the scene, an incident, a thread that catches his attention. Sitting in his car, sometimes for hours, he constructs the drawing, making notes about colour, light and ambience. In the studio he translates the detail of this first impression into oil.

It is the connection of people with the urban vignettes to which viewers relate, the ability to bridge the scenes with an audience that Brownhall has always traversed. Brisbane has changed dramatically during his working life, and part of what entrances audiences is his ability to both record and transcend the poetry of place for which Brisbane is renowned.

Robert Brownhall is represented by Martin Browne Fine Art, Sydney and Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane. □