

JONATHON BROWN

AND THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Jonathon Brown is a Scottish artist based now in France. Born in 1955, he read philosophy at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and thereafter pursued a varied life as writer and arts journalist in Scotland before personal and professional motives brought him to the seclusion of a valley in the hills north of Nice, some fifteen years ago. By this time his life was almost exclusively concentrated upon his art as painter and draughtsman, though he has made forays into the world of his greatest other passion, classical music, as set-designer, writer and broadcaster — most recently as the earnestly light-hearted guest at Radio Three's Opera Box during Wagner's "Ring" Cycle.

In the past decade his landscapes have sought to express the notion of our experience of travel, of being on the move — seeing and feeling the country especially as if from a car — rather than from a fixed point; this vision was given the honour of a special one-man show devoted to Jonathon's so-called "RoadMovies" at the prestigious Talbot Rice Art Gallery at Edinburgh University in 2002.

When a couple of years ago a request for a large "Jazz Curtain" as a backdrop for a festival in France, took on a life of its own and led Jonathon to produce a shimmering, benign and almost classical vision of the Crucifixion, he followed this with a rumbustuous version of the drunken Noah. From these first unexpected skirmishes came a taste for what could be called narrative painting, even if Jonathon did not find exactly which great theme to tackle next. He went back to Tuscany to visit the work of the Italian religious artists he reveres — the Pisano family of sculptors and Donatello, Fra Angelico and Piero della Francesca — but it was only last autumn, visiting his old friend Father Martin Eastwood, that their conversation pointed him at last to the apt theme that has fired his imagination.

Namely, to do a set of the Stations of the Cross.

However, just as Jonathon had been unable to envisage a landscape except from behind the steering wheel of his trusty old car — the "RoadMovies" often include in the field of vision the dashboard or a rear-view mirror — he found he could only envisage this journey of Our Lord as if through His eyes, carrying the Cross, the rough wood inches from His beard, face to face with His many tormentors and His few friends, looking across in final exhaustion from that appalling angle upon the skull-laden Golgotha. The result is an unprecedented sequence of images of uniquely physical directness yet with an inner and intimate quality that we cannot avoid.

HERBERT GLENN