



JAN BRANCEWICZ

REPRODUCING THE OLD MASTERS

JULY 18 – SEPTEMBER 7, 2019

EXHIBITION: JULY 18 – SEPTEMBER 7, 2019

OPENING RECEPTION: JULY 18, 7:30PM

Curated by Alyssa Fearon

Exhibition Sponsor:



REPRODUCING THE OLD MASTERS

Interview by Deirdre Chisholm

Introduction by Alyssa Fearon

Reproducing the Old Masters is an exhibition of works of an ongoing project by Brandon-based artist Jan Brancewicz. The project explores Brancewicz's attempts to reproduce a series of Old Masters paintings, from Gauguin to Van Gogh, and Modigliani to da Vinci. For over a decade, Brancewicz has honed his artistic skills and painting techniques to render reproductions of well-known European artworks. The resulting pieces show Brancewicz's commitment and dedication to learning the techniques of the artists who have inspired him the most.

Born in Krakow, Poland, he has spent over 30 years at Brandon University as a Professor and has been involved in mentoring many young artists across southwestern Manitoba.

COVER: Jan Brancewicz, *Reproduction of 'Amedeo Modigliani - Young Girl with Blue Eyes', 1919*. Oil on canvas, 61 x 45.7 cm.



ABOVE: Jan Brancewicz, *Reproduction of 'Gauguin - The Yellow Christ', 1889*, oil on canvas 92x73 cm

Deirdre Chisholm (DC): You've been working on the series, *Reproducing the Old Masters* for a long time. How did this series begin? What attracted you to certain artists from the Western painting tradition? How do you 'begin' a painting for this project?

Jan Brancewicz (JB): The concept of the series of reproduction dates back for over a quarter of century. It started with the painting by Paul Gauguin - *The Yellow Christ*. As a young boy I had seen the reproduction of this painting in art books and immediately was moved by (Paul) Gauguin's innovating approach to the theme of crucifixion. I had never seen the original Gauguin painting since none existed in Polish museums. After immigrating to Canada I discovered that this painting is located in the collection of the Albright Knox Museum in Buffalo, New York. It was not until 1995 that I had an opportunity to travel to Buffalo to see the original. I repeated that trip three times, standing in the front of the painting for hours and analysing it in detail. After one of those trips I decided to paint a copy of the painting for my own enjoyment. That was the beginning. At the same time I visited the Albright Knox I discovered another fascinating artist - Amedeo Modigliani and his painting, *Young Servant Girl*. I was moved by the simplicity of form and fascinating colors, but the study of Modigliani had to wait for many years. The Gauguin painting was innovative, breaking with traditions of Impressionism and introducing the new concept of Symbolism.



ABOVE: Jan Brancewicz, *Reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci - Lady with Ermine*, 1489-1490 oil on wood panel 54x 39 cm.

Around 1995 I started the work on the copy of *Yellow Christ*. I built the stretcher to the same size as the original, stretched with a similar canvas material (rough burlap). The drawing took a long time. After blocking colours in the underpainting stage, the work halted as I got involved with other projects.

After many years I commenced a re-painting of Vermeer's - *Girl with Pearl Earring* at the request of my younger daughter. This took about two years to complete. After the painting was finished, I decided to go back to painting the *Yellow Christ* and completed it.

My older daughter suggested that I paint a masterpiece for her. I decided to paint a copy of Leonardo da Vinci - *The Lady with Ermine*. The painting is housed in a museum located in my home town in Poland. After completing these works, my grandson requested another Leonardo work for himself.

After completing the fourth masterpiece, an exhibition concept was born. Of the works I've selected, seven or eight paintings are accessible in international collections from Japan to California. I discussed the exhibition concept with colleagues from the local art community and asked them what they thought of my exhibition proposal. The response was enthusiastic, so the work began. The Brandon community and area will view copies that have been re-painted as faithfully as possible to the original works.



DC: When I look at the works you have re-painted, I'm conscious that you have selected works that have great currency in the canon of Western painting. How did you make a selection from these artists' works?

JB: To make a selection of works for the exhibition I studied numerous works of every artist and selected works that I liked and the works that were popular. Some works were rejected because I don't like them and would never paint them (example: *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo). Another reason for selection of the particular artist, was his contribution to the world of art. Most of them were unknown during their life time yet their contribution to art changed the way we look at art and understand it.

ABOVE: Jan Brancewicz, *Reproduction of Vincent Van Gogh - Irises*, 1889, 71 x 93 cm, Oil on Canvas

DC: Modigliani's portraits and figures, with elongated necks and flat faces, were not popular images during their time. How does this idea change your study of his works? Does it propose something different when it is repainted again?

JB: Modigliani was a unique artist in the sense that he never followed trends. He struggled to develop his own style. He did not fall under the influence of Braque or Picasso despite the fact that he knew them personally and their art. Early in his career, Modigliani determined that landscape painting was not a genre for him. Portraits and nudes comprise the majority of his production. He struggled financially and had poor health throughout his brief life. On the day of his funeral in 1920, prices of his paintings rose by 200 %. While the popularity of his work continues, some paintings in auction today are valued in millions of dollars.

When studying Modigliani I was fascinated by his colours and unique shapes. The colours, especially the range of red hues, is very complicated. It took hours of mixing to get the right colour. It was a great learning experience.

DC: I sense your project is also about the reproducibility of images at a time when the internet can recreate, distort, and confuse the idea of what is original. What are your thoughts about the influence of photography and the internet on your personal work?



JB: You can find most images of these paintings on the Internet. However the small format and inaccurate colour, is rather defeating. Even reproductions from the best museums are not always correct. When I worked on Leonardo's *Lady with Ermine*, I discovered that the best detailed reproduction, was totally off colour. Since I knew the original work very well, I researched Renaissance colours to correct the inaccuracy of the Internet sources. Reproducing an image in the exact size as the original, can surprise you by how the size affects the overall composition. Cézanne painted seven versions of *Card Players*. I was always under the impression that these works were small paintings only to discover that a version I re-painted was large. The size makes the painting very powerful.

ABOVE: Jan Brancewicz, *Reproduction of Paul Cézanne – Card Players, 1892-1893, 97 x 130 cm, Oil on Canvas*

I am very familiar with electronic media since I worked in digital media for over 20 years, but I discovered that there are limitations. I missed the smell of solvents, paints and the brush strokes on the paper or canvas. I abandoned digital media and returned to traditional media to express my ideas.

I don't think that the Internet or photography has influenced my own work. My own ideas for painting and drawing are somehow different.

DC: I'm enjoying a sense of humour that goes with the subtlety of your work: re-painting famous works and then exhibiting them as re-paintings in the context of a rural public art gallery. What would you like people to know about this activity?

JB: The main idea of this exhibition is educational; to show people how the original masterpieces would look. My contribution to the exhibition is my technical knowledge of painting media and drawing skills to make these copies as close to the originals as possible. I do not take credit for the composition or the colour of paintings, but only for technical accuracy.



ABOVE: Jan Brancewicz, *Reproduction of Amedeo Modigliani - Portrait of Jeanne Hebuterne in a Large Hat*, 1918, 54 x 37.5 cm, Oil on Canvas

DC: The marketing of art and impact on artists is controversial and sheds light on difficult aspects of 'making a living' as a painter. Where do you situate yourself in this discussion? Is there an opportunity to bring a different perspective about the value of art?

JB: There is nothing wrong in making copies of other artists' works. For centuries making copies was a tool of learning. But the copy should always be identified as copy. Making forgeries is a crime. And I would never try to sell these works as originals. Every painting in this exhibition is identified as copy on the label attached to the back of the painting.

DC: 'It is your duty in life to save your dream.' How does this quote from Modigliani affect your practice as an artist?

JB: Every artist has a dream, and the result of this dream is his work. Without a dream you could not be an artist. Modigliani was right. Dreams make you an artist. The outside world is only a stimulus and your brain processes this stimulus to create your own world and your own ideas about the world. We live in the same world as everybody else, and because we are more sensitive to stimulus, our world is much richer and more colourful.

LIST OF REPRODUCTIONS:

- Amedeo Modigliani - Girl in a Sailors Blouse*, 1918, 60.3 x 46.4 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Nu assis sur un divan*, 1917, 100 x 65 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Nu couche*, 1917, 62 x 91.4 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Portrait of Jeanne Hebuterne in a Large Hat*, 1918, 54 x 37.5 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Seated Nude*, 1916, 92 x 60 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Seated Young Woman*, 1918, 71.1 x 45.7 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Woman with Blue Eyes*, 1919, 81.28 x 53.85 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Young Girl with Blue Eyes*, 1919, 61 x 45.7 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Young Servant Girl*, 1919, 152.4 x 62.9 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Head of a Young Girl*, 1916, 40.6 x 30.5 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Nu couche les mains derriere la tête*, 1917, 60 x 92 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Reclining Nude with Loose Hair*, 1917, 61 x 91.4 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Young girl in a striped shirt*, 1917, 92 x 60 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Nu couche sur le cote gauche*, 1917, 86 x 146 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Amedeo Modigliani - Jeanne Hebuterne with Scarf*, 1919, 88 x 56 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Paul Gauguin - The Yellow Christ*, 1889, 92 x 73 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Johannes Vermeer - Girl with Pearl Earring*, 1665-1667, 46.5 x 40 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Leonardo da Vinci - Lady with Ermine*, 1489-1490, 54 x 39 cm, Oil on Walnut Panel
- Vincent Van Gogh - Irises*, 1889, 71 x 93 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Paul Cezanne - Card Players*, 1892-1893, 97 x 130 cm, Oil on Canvas
- Leonardo da Vinci - La Belle Ferroniere*, 1490-1496, 62 x 44 cm, Oil on Walnut Panel

UP NEXT:

KEVIN EI-ICHI DEFOREST
OKASAN & PAPI: REMIXING HYBRIDITY
SEPTEMBER 19 - NOVEMBER 16, 2019

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THUR 10AM - 9PM
SAT, SUN, MON CLOSED

