

Abstract

This website documents the history of Grafton Tyler Brown, who is considered to be the first Black American landscape artist. Brown led a prolific career as an artist while passing as white. His art simultaneously exemplifies the settler-colonialist attitudes of his contemporaries, while also posing radical, nearly unparalleled compositional formats, in his later oil paintings. This website provides information on life and artistic career, including a compiled timeline of his oil paintings, and a biographical essay.

About Grafton Tyler Brown

Considered to be the first Black landscape painter in the United States, Grafton Tyler Brown led a prolific career as an artist while passing as white. His art simultaneously exemplifies the settler-colonialist attitudes of his contemporaries, while also posing radical, nearly unparalleled compositional formats, in his later oil paintings.

Beginning his artistic career in California, Brown originally worked as lithographer under the employment of C. C. Kuchel. Eventually, Brown founded and managed his own business, while traveling throughout the American West, along the Northern Pacific Railway. Across the West, Brown created maps and landscapes, finding success as both a businessman and an artist. Soon after, Brown sold his lithography business to his partner, and began his artistic career, as an oil painter.

Brown moved to Victoria, British Columbia, in Canada and joined the Bowman geological expedition. He surveyed the Cariboo region of Canada, acting as a draftsman, creating maps, and creating detailed oil paintings of the Canadian landscape. After garnering respect and high regard from Victoria audiences, Brown moved back to the United States. Briefly he lived in Tacoma, Washington, furthering his pursuit of landscape painting, before he moved onto Portland, Oregon.

In Portland, Brown incorporated himself into the local artistic community. He co-founded the Portland Art Club and served as its secretary, organizing artist gatherings and contests between Oregonian artists. During this time, Brown traveled to the recently established Yellowstone National Park, and captured the features of the landscapes in a plein-air style.

Eventually, Brown moved to Helena, Montana, for its proximity to Yellowstone, selling his works to the tourist market. Although Brown continued to draw inspiration from the Yellowstone landscape, he soon moved away from the American West. Brown married, and moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. Here, he worked as a draftsman for the state and national agencies, such as the United States Army Corps of engineers and the city's civil engineering department. After nearly two decades in St. Paul, Brown retired, and shortly thereafter, he passed away.

Artist Biography

Pennsylvania (1841-1858)

Grafton Tyler Brown was born on February 22, 1841, to parents Thomas and Wilhelmina Brown, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.¹ As documented in the 1850 American census, the Brown family—registered as “Black”—consisted of parents, Thomas and Wilhelmina, one daughter, Virginia, and three sons. Grafton Tyler Brown was the eldest.² On the following census, in 1860, however, Brown’s father falsified his responses. Four years prior to Brown’s birth, his parents moved across the Mason-Dixon line, leaving Maryland and arriving in the “free” state of Pennsylvania, which prohibited slavery, by law.³ Despite this, Brown’s father listed his own place of birth as Pennsylvania—obscuring his upbringing in South Carolina, and his prior residence in Maryland.⁴ Likely, this decision to deny association outside of Pennsylvania was influenced by the political milieu of mid-nineteenth century America. “The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850,” set legal precedent for the involuntary removal of Black people originally from the South to below the Mason-Dixon line, if crossed.⁵ Brown’s father’s decision would set an example for Brown himself, as in his adult life, he falsified official records, such as census responses, for his own protection from racial discrimination.⁶

The specifics of Brown’s upbringing and early life spent in Pennsylvania are not entirely known or well-documented. He lived with his family, including his parents who themselves were active in the abolitionist movement, and received an education from a young age.⁷ As Brown reported

¹ Lutz. 2017, 8; Chandler. 2014, 19.

² Lutz. 2017, 8.

³ Chandler. 2014, 19; LaFalle-Collins. 1995, 27.

⁴ Chandler. 2014, 19.

⁵ Chander. 2016.

⁶ Chandler. 2014, 19.

⁷ Chandler. 2014, 19.

to a credit agency, in December, 1870, he moved from his home in Pennsylvania to California at seventeen years of age, in 1858, missing the initial boom of the California Gold Rush by nearly a decade, but arriving in time for the “silver boom,” of the American West.⁸

Sacramento, California (1858-1861)

At the time of Brown’s arrival, California was a state of approximately 435,000 recorded residents, among whom only 5,000 were Black, making Black Californians a minority of just over one percent of the population.⁹ The position of Black Californians as a racial minority was only further exacerbated by the general white public sentiment of, what Lizzetta LaFalle-Collins describes as, “extreme racial prejudice,” in her excerpt on Brown in the *International Review of African American Art*.¹⁰ Despite its admittance into the Union as a “free” state, the California that Brown arrived in still operated under the mid-nineteenth century American constructs of racial identity, which consigned African Americans (and other people of color) to economic and social subordination, on the merit of race alone.¹¹ The concept of “race” that governed American politics and social reality at this time functioned to eliminate uncertainty of American racial identities.¹² As Shirley Ann Wilson Moore describes in her afterword, “Passing,” in *San Francisco Lithographer*, race in nineteenth century America formed clear demarcations between “whiteness and blackness,” as not only demarcations of race but also of “social and economic mobility.”¹³ As Supreme Court Justice Taney ruled, one year prior to Brown’s arrival in

⁸ Chandler. 2014, 19; Lafalle-Collins. 1995, 27.

⁹ Chandler. 2014, 21.

¹⁰ Lafalle-Collins. 1995, 41-42.

¹¹ Lafalle-Collins. 1995, 41-42; Chandler. 2014, 183.

¹² Chandler. 2014, 183.

¹³ Chandler. 2014, 183.

California, in the infamous Dred Scott Decision, Black people in America were so far inferior to their white counterparts, that Black Americans “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.”¹⁴

It was in this political environment that Brown would come to “pass” as white, most likely not due to any “personal identification” with whiteness, but rather, “out of a desire for freedom and economic advancement,” that white American society had rendered ineligible to Black Americans.¹⁵ Upon his arrival in California, as a Black man, Brown gained employment in the service industry. The 1860 census documents Brown as a “B[lack] Porter,” working at a hotel in West Sacramento.¹⁶ This would be the last time official records would identify him as Black in his lifetime.

San Francisco, California (1861-1882)

One year later in 1861, Brown left Sacramento for San Francisco, where directories from September of that year left his race unlisted—either forgotten by the publishers, or purposefully omitted by Brown.¹⁷ Without this formal identification, Brown began “passing,” as a member of white society.¹⁸ In a location with such a minority Black population, white Californians regarded others with an implicit assumption of whiteness. As Robert Chandler describes in *San Francisco Lithographer*, this meant that, “unless something strongly and obviously indicated” otherwise,

¹⁴ Chandler. 2014, 24.

¹⁵ Lafalle-Collins. 1995, 41-42; Chandler. 2014, 15, 184.

¹⁶ Lutz. 2017, 8; Chandler. 2014, 28.

¹⁷ Chandler. 2014, 28; Lutz. 2017, 9.

¹⁸ Chandler. 2014, XIII.

white society considered the implication or questioning of a person who identified themselves as white, as “the grossest insult imaginable.”¹⁹

In this intensely stratified racial “caste system” of America, Brown’s subversion of the enforced barrier between white and Black society through “passing,” allowed him access to opportunities, privileges, and human rights that most other Black Americans, were denied on the basis of their race.²⁰ Brown’s move to San Francisco in 1861 coincided with the secession of the Southern states into the Confederate States of America and the American Civil War.

In San Francisco, Brown began his artistic career, a path undoubtedly made more obtainable to him as a member of white society. Prior to his arrival in the Bay area, and his “passing” as white, Brown had created artwork while in Sacramento as an amateur. A local newspaper reported on “some very excellent painting[s] done by Grafton T. Brown,” in 1859, during his employment as a hotel porter.²¹ A year later the 1860 California State Agricultural Fair repeated this sentiment, in their published description of a “water-color painting of a freight locomotive [...] by Grafton T. Brown,” and characterization of it as “remarkable, being very correctly and nicely drawn.”²² With his new racial identity, Brown could further pursue these evident talents as a career.

Brown’s artistic career began when the established lithographer C. C. Kuchel sought out his abilities, employing him to draw, after seeing examples of Brown’s prior work.²³ Kuchel’s company printed embellished stock certificates, street maps, letterheads, sheet music, and diplomas, the standard fare for lithographers at the time.²⁴

¹⁹ Chandler. 2014, 34; Lafalle-Collins. 1995, 29.

²⁰ Chandler. 2014, 15, 184.

²¹ Chandler. 2014, 27-28.

²² Chandler. 2014, 27-28.

²³ Lutz. 2017, 8

²⁴ Fine. 1982, 61.

Most notable and relevant to Brown's artistic career were the maps that he would create during this time as an employee of Kuchel's business. Brown's early lithographic map-work documented the settlement of the American West in the mid-nineteenth century. These images combined the scenic imagery of landscape art with the visually informative legibility of cartographic maps. In a precise hand, Brown delineated the boundaries between newly settled territories, cities, and states, and the unsettled "wilderness" in sweeping bird's eye views, high vantage points, and aerial perspectives.²⁵ His lithographic maps fall neatly in line with the contemporary American, colonial vision of nation and land. They accentuate the contrast between the "domesticated and wild spaces," while promoting the expansion westward settlement of Manifest Destiny as an "effortless" and naturally inevitable reality.²⁶

This style of showcasing vast tracts of newly settled land rendered the American West as a once vast expanse of uninhabited land, now gradually becoming settled under the colonial occupation of the territory. Like other contemporary artists, Brown sought to depict the land as a legible and knowable commodity. In his lithographs, he used a high, imaginary vantage point to ensure his audience could see and visually possess the land. Brown emphasizes these themes, of settlement and proprietorship through the border of front-facing views of local businesses who often paid for their inclusion in Brown's art as advertisements.²⁷ His lithographs displayed the land as another commodified object, to be bought and sold, like the goods and services of stores and shops, an exemplification of the commercial attitudes that fueled the settlement of the American West.²⁸

²⁵ LaFalle-Collins. 1995, 27, 29.

²⁶ LaFalle-Collins. 1995, 29.

²⁷ Chander. 2016.

²⁸ LaFalle-Collin. 2003.

The attention to detail that Brown conveys in these works was appreciated by local audiences. A local newspaper reported early in 1863 of Brown's "correct and beautiful lithographic view [...], drawn by himself and lithographed by C. C. Kuchel [...] the first of a series of views which are to be taken of all the prominent cities and villages on the North Pacific Coast."²⁹ The rendering of land as a knowable and settled space appealed broadly to audiences in the American West. As Lizetta LaFelle-Collins described in the *International Review of African American Art*, Brown's landscape artwork confirmed "man's control (if not supremacy) over the physical world in which he lived."³⁰

Moreover, Brown's lithographic style was a popular and commercially viable one, which brought him success as a lithographer in San Francisco and beyond. To broaden his market, Brown worked as a "traveling artist," moving between different towns in the American West—in California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, and Washington—to offer his cartographic and lithographic services, advertising, "views of Mills, Mines, Business Houses [and] Residences drawn in the finest style, and with accuracy," to potential buyers.³¹ Soon, Brown's status within the company would change drastically: in 1864, Kuchel died leaving the business to fall into the Brown's hands. Under Brown's management, the business further expanded, now operating with a staff of eight employees and new technologies, such as the steam-powered printing press. Eventually, what was once Kuchel's business truly became Brown's own: in 1867, he found a new business partner, W.T. Galloway, and renamed the company, "G.T. Brown & Co."³²

At this point and time, Brown's ability to pass as white was central to his career and his livelihood. The local businesses, stores, and shops advertised in his prints were owned by white

²⁹ Chandler. 2014, 44.

³⁰ LaFelle-Collins. 1995, 29.

³¹ Chandler. 2014, 46; Chandler, 2024.

³² Lutz. 2017, 9; LaFelle-Collins. 1995, 29; Fine. 1982, 61.

Americans, many of whom might not have commissioned their inclusion in his maps, or sought his printwork to use in their businesses, had they known about his Black identity.³³ Passing for white, Brown worked with large corporations, including Folger Coffee Company (then J.A. Folger & Co.), Ghirardelli Chocolate Company, and Levi Strauss & Co, embellishing utilitarian print goods, such as invoices, stock certificates, and letterheads for these and numerous other Western businesses.³⁴ Moreover, his ability to pass as a white man in the American West brought him into contact with business associates who “advocate[d for] slavery and Black inferiority,” and state governments, neither of whom would have commissioned a Black lithographer to produce official maps of territories of interest.³⁵ One such commission was Brown’s mapping of the San Francisco Bay tidelands and marshes for the California State Legislature, including the virulently racist Benjamin Franklin Washington, who unknowingly hired the first Black state contractor in California’s history.³⁶

The centrality of Brown’s ability to pass as a white man for his career and his life warranted more than the original omission of his race from his census records. Perhaps in part to create publically available evidence of his racial identity, Brown registered to vote in 1867, at a time when Black male suffrage was illegal and “neither the state nor the nation allowed Black men to vote.”³⁷ Two years after the end of the Civil War, and three years prior to the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, Brown became the first Black man to vote in California. He voted for the Democratic Party, a party that, at the time, advocated the notion of Black people as “inferior beings.”³⁸ Despite the evident contradictions between Brown’s existence as a Black person in

³³ Chander. 2016.

³⁴ Chandler, 2024.

³⁵ Chandler. 2014, 51 Chandler, 2024.

³⁶ Chandler, 2024.

³⁷ Chandler. 2014, 49.

³⁸ Chandler. 2014, 49-50.

mid-nineteenth century America, and his vote for the Democratic Party, the public availability of voting records, and his close business ties with white society, might have motivated him to further embellish his new, white identity through the strategic support of a party, that would not have supported him as a Black man.³⁹ By the census of 1880, Brown was formally listed as being “white,” only twenty years after the 1860 census recorded him being a Black man.⁴⁰

This central tension around Brown’s racial identity might have motivated him further as a landscape artist in his travels in and out of the Bay Area to capture new and viable landscapes. In this time period, it was not uncommon for Black men, including those who did not pass for white, to adopt mobility as defense against the ever-present potential to become “victims of racial discrimination, first during the antebellum period and again during Reconstruction.”⁴¹ Perhaps in this manner, Brown lived and worked in the Bay Area for twenty years, frequently traveling to other states and territories for brief periods of time for work.⁴² During this time, Brown’s career, as a businessman and an artist, flourished. However, the financial instability of the American West, a settlement founded on booms and busts, eventually became too fraught for Brown. By the late 1870s, an economic depression—in part caused by an exhaustion of ore mines, an industry that Brown’s lithography relied on—had a severe effect on production, drastically reducing the demand for embellished printwork and real estate maps.⁴³ By the end of the decade, in 1879, Brown sold his company to his business partner, Galloway. By 1882, Brown left not only the state of California, but the United States as well, moving to Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.⁴⁴

³⁹ Chandler. 2014, 54.

⁴⁰ Lutz. 2017, 9.

⁴¹ LaFalle-Collins. 1995, 34.

⁴² Chandler. 2014, 160.

⁴³ Chandler, 2024.

⁴⁴ LaFalle-Collins. 1995, 34-35.

Victoria, B.C., Canada (1882-1884) and The Bowman Survey (1882-1883).

Brown's move to Canada also coincided with a change in career. In Victoria, he would come to turn his attention to landscape painting, no longer working in the medium of lithography. Brown arranged to join a surveying expedition across the border. Once there, he worked as a draftsman with the Bowman Geological Survey of British Columbia, an expedition that sought to gain insight into a territory "almost unknown" to settler colonists and the Canadian government.⁴⁵ Traveling into the Cariboo region, with the expedition led by Amos Bowman, Brown drafted maps of "unknown" terrains east of the Cascade Mountains, and painted landscapes of various locations across Western Canada, including Lake Okanagan, the Spallumcheen River, Shuswap Lake, Similkameen valley, Mount Baker, and many other locations previously undocumented by settlers.⁴⁶

The style that Brown developed and utilized in these Canadian paintings exhibited a similar attention to detail that he expressed in his lithography. Pristine, sweeping views of wide open expanses of land reach across to the edges of the tableau, and seemingly, beyond.⁴⁷ Rendered by Brown's brush, the Canadian landscape was an untouched Eden, newly discovered by Brown and the men of the expedition. As art commissioned as part of a government expedition, Brown's paintings embellished the myth of the Americas as an unoccupied, unblemished land, extant for colonial control and surveillance. The high vantage points—a feature carried over from his lithographic maps—and his rendering of fine details in smooth, vibrant oil paint places the audience as if they had accompanied Brown on the expedition itself, positioning them as

⁴⁵ Lutz. 2017, 12.

⁴⁶ Chandler. 2014, 162.

⁴⁷ Chandler, 2024; Chandler. 2014, 162.

surveyor and possessor of the land. Brown's Canadian landscapes depict Indigenously inhabited lands, but present them as uninhabited spaces, ready and available for further Canadian settlement.⁴⁸

Once Brown returned from the Bowman Expedition to Victoria, he hosted his first art show in the summer of 1883. He advertised himself as a "pioneer of this intellectual and refined art [...] the first to supply the young people of this city with the grand ideas of the noble art" of landscape painting.⁴⁹ A local newspaper reported on "the exhibit from the brush of our local artist Mr. G.T. Brown," describing his offerings of twenty-two paintings, "comprising views of Victoria, surrounding area and the mainland," making note that, "several of the paintings have been already sold," by the time of the article went to print.⁵⁰ Whereas Brown's American patrons considered him as one of many talented lithographers in a competitive field, as a Victorian, and an oil painter, his Canadian audience recognized him as an innovative, pioneering artist.⁵¹ However, despite this appreciation for his art in British Columbia, Brown soon set his sights back on the United States, and crossed the border, to Tacoma, Washington, in late 1884.⁵²

Tacoma, Washington (1884-1885).

Upon his return to America, Brown stayed briefly in Washington, and continued to hone his craft as an artist. He further pursued plein-air landscape painting, continuing the style he developed while residing in Victoria and traveling with the Bowman Expedition. In Tacoma, Brown used

⁴⁸ Lutz. 2020.

⁴⁹ Chandler. 2014, 162; Lutz. 2017, 12.

⁵⁰ Lutz. 2020.

⁵¹ Chandler, 2024; Chandler. 2014, 164.

⁵² Lutz. 2017, 8

this style to depict natural landscapes—most notably, Mt. Rainer.⁵³ His time here was limited, and by 1885, Brown followed the North Pacific Railroad line and arrived in Portland, Oregon.⁵⁴

Portland, Oregon (1885-1887).

Brown spent a limited amount of time in Portland just as he had in Tacoma. However, in this short period, Brown established himself as an integral part of the local artist community. Almost immediately after arriving in Oregon, he founded the Portland Art Club. He officially served as their secretary, and in practice, he ran the club. Brown organized and facilitated “the encouragement of art in the city,” fostering an environment of “mutual improvement by association.”⁵⁵ These associations, for a self-trained artist such as Brown, gave him access to the styles and techniques utilized by European-trained artists. These painters, who Brown came into contact with through the Portland Art Club, often incorporated methods of abstraction into their renderings of landscapes—something not generally practiced by commercial map-makers, such as Brown, who at this point, had mainly rendered naturalistic, highly detailed images.⁵⁶

In Portland, Brown became an important figure central to a broader community of independent artists. This opportunity might not have been made available to him as a Black man, in the late nineteenth-century, without him passing as white. He had become an independent artist, with a private studio, as an 1886 article noted, “adjoining the rooms of the Portland Art Club, of which this talented gentleman is secretary [...] abound[ing] in selected sketches in oil of scenes in California, Oregon, Washington Territory and British Columbia,” in addition to his multiple

⁵³ Chandler, 2024.

⁵⁴ Chandler. 2014, 164.

⁵⁵ Lutz. 2017, 13; Chandler. 2014, 164.

⁵⁶ Chandler. 2014, 164; Lutz. 2017, 13.

other successful artistic careers.⁵⁷ However, despite the connections he made, and the supportive, artistic community he himself built in Portland, he only remained there for two years, leaving in 1887. The Portland Art Club dispersed upon his move from the city, unable to function without its central figure.⁵⁸

Yellowstone (1886) and Helena, Montana (1889-1892).

While living in Portland, Oregon, Brown spent the summer of 1886 documenting the then relatively recently established Yellowstone National Park in plein-air oil paintings.⁵⁹ Brown captured the park in a more impressionistic, abstracted style than that of his prior works.⁶⁰ In his paintings of Yellowstone, his brushstrokes convey a sense of movement, texture, and immediacy not seen in his prior landscapes, both printed and painted. A peculiarity of the work Brown created of Yellowstone is his accentuation of verticality, especially in his subject matter of waterfalls and geysers. Often, Brown depicts these features on elongated, vertical canvases. This compositional choice, made repeatedly by Brown, instilled into his artwork a motion of viewing uncommon in contemporary American landscape artwork (i.e. the Hudson River School). At the time, landscape art typically emphasized horizontality and wide expanses of detailed land, as had many of Brown's previous works.⁶¹ In his depictions of Yellowstone, Brown guides his audience not to view the land as the knowable, detailed surface of a map, but rather as a momentary visual experience in a single upward glance. Whether Brown faced limitations from plein-air painting in a remote, national park, or if he made these decisions with full artistic intent, cannot be known

⁵⁷ Chandler. 2014, 173.

⁵⁸ Chandler. 2014, 168.

⁵⁹ LaFalle-Collins. 1995, 41; Chandler, 2024.

⁶⁰ Chandler, 2024.

⁶¹ Chandler. 2014, 164.

in the present age. But the impact this had on his painting career is evident. Brown took immediate and lasting inspiration from the Yellowstone landscape itself. After returning from his first summer visit, Brown continued to render the natural features of the park for years to come, taking direct guidance from his sketches he composed while at Yellowstone. Even after arriving back home in Portland, Brown remained captivated by his own experiences there, having found creative inspiration to develop and innovate his prior artistic style.⁶²

Eventually, after his initial return, Brown's appreciation for the landscape of Yellowstone motivated him to move to Helena, Montana—in part, for its proximity to the national park. In Helena, Brown made money as an independent landscape artist, selling many of his paintings to the tourist market near Helena, capitalizing on his own personal, artistic interests, as well as the mass appeal Yellowstone had obtained with the American public as a supposedly pristine, untouched Eden on American soil.⁶³ In his move from Oregon to Montana, Brown was joined by Albertine Epsey, the widow of his friend, studio-mate, and fellow leader of the Portland Art Club, Edward Espey.⁶⁴

St. Paul, Minnesota (1892-1918).

After a brief time in Montana, and nearly three-and-a-half decades in the West, Brown would move back East, to St. Paul Minnesota in 1892. Once again, Brown was joined by Albertine, who he had now married.⁶⁵ This move signaled the end of his career as an oil painter.

⁶² Chandler. 2014, 178-179.

⁶³ Lutz. 2017, 13; Chandler. 2014, 179.

⁶⁴ Lutz. 2017, 13.

⁶⁵ Lutz. 2017, 13.

In St. Paul, Brown began working as a draftsman for the Army Corps of Engineers, until 1897. After this, he would work for the city's civil engineering department, until 1910.⁶⁶ For both of these jobs, Brown relied heavily on his prior artistic work, especially the commercial landscapes he made as a lithographer and his work on the Bowsman Survey of the Cariboo region of Canada. During his time as a draftsman, Brown crafted maps of the northern Mississippi River, in part for the construction of reservoirs in the Midwest. Brown continued this line of work as a government employee until 1916, when he retired at age seventy-five.⁶⁷ Brown's life in St. Paul was middle-class, living on a street with "a physician, a bank teller, a music teacher, two bookkeepers, and a variety of managerial railroad employees," and as census records from 1900 indicate, his own hired help.⁶⁸ A few years after his retirement, in 1918, Brown died, at the age of seventy-seven, succumbing to illness. A local newspaper reported that Brown was "survived by his widow," Albertine, after living in St. Paul for twenty-five years. His death certificate listed his race as "white."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Fine. 1982, 62; Chandler, 2024.

⁶⁷ Chandler. 2014, 180.

⁶⁸ Chandler. 2014, 180; LaFalle-Collins. 1995, 42.

⁶⁹ Lutz. 2017, 13; Chandler. 2014, 181; LaFalle-Collins. 1995, 42.

Visual description and analysis of *A Yellowstone Geyser* (1887)

In his painting *A Yellowstone Geyser* (1887), artist Grafton Tyler Brown captures the moment of eruption for a thermal geyser at Yellowstone National Park. Brown centers the composition of this work around the assurgent momentum of the geyser's spray – dividing the canvas in two with swift, upward brushstrokes of white, gray, and blue. With the eruption spanning a majority of the image's height, Brown utilizes this titular feature of the work to guide the viewer's eye in a sudden and singular moment from the bottom portion of the image to the top.

Perpendicular to this vertical motion, Brown incorporates a low horizon line at a point of intersection with the summit of the geothermal vent. This directional contrast captures the viewer's eye after their initial ascensive glance, drawing them both across the painting, as well as further into the illusory depth of the image. Brown composes and differentiates the receding space into three distinct parallel bands of paint. The lowest, a muddled, grassy field in sweeping strokes of yellow-green and brown, rests beneath a line of trees abstracted in distance, recognizable through thin brown trunks, shrouded in dark green paint. Brown situates these under a stark line of nearly solid white paint, applied in broad, lateral motions. Emerging from this brief horizontality, Brown continues the heightened verticality of the geyser's eruption, surrounding it with an active, stormy image of the sky. Here, Brown interweaves shades of blue, pink, purple, and gray in brushstrokes leading in a multitude of directions, all encircling the sharp rupture of the geyser at its center.

Brown's configuration of the image accentuates the geyser's dynamism and motion. In his depiction, he conjoins the abrupt movement of the geyser with that of the viewer's gaze, allowing for his audience to experience the painting as if it were an existent geyser erupting in

nature, as opposed to the flat surface of a tableau. This dynamic composition begins at the lowest edge of the canvas, as Brown guides the viewer toward the peak of the geothermal vent.

Reinforcing the upward motion of the geyser's eruption through the cropped, triangular contours of the pooled water at its foot, Brown shapes the foreground into an inviting path for the viewer's eye to follow. This initial ease into the painting's central motion, however, is simultaneously denied by Brown through the bright blue and orange hues utilized in the foreground – revealing the supposed 'path' as boiling water, typical of a geothermal vent. With the complication of this supposed direct path into the painted space, Brown keeps the viewer at a distance from the subject matter of his image, further emphasizing the depth constructed on the flat surface of the canvas.

To further the illusion of perspective and dimension on the flat, canvas surface, Brown incorporates a variety of brush strokes styles in this painting. Closest to the viewer, Brown depicts the painting's foreground with a clarity of shape, defining stone with precise shadows and highlights. Further out toward the horizon, Brown's brushwork takes on a more painterly, abstracted style, capturing vast amounts of area in simplified swaths of color – mimicking the eye's weakened perception of distance. Above this, Brown creates the sky through a series of dramatic brush strokes, with an attention to illumination and contrast similar to the technique utilized in the image's foreground. Interconnecting and leading the viewer through these spaces, Brown depicts the eruption of the geyser in gestural, rapid brushstrokes – capturing the movement of the water in both its initial upward spray, as well as those drafting backwards, caught in the wind.

Moreover, Brown again accentuates the geyser and its eruption through the shape of the canvas itself. In stark contrast with the conventional horizontal dimensions favored by his

contemporaries of landscape painting, Brown uses an exaggerated vertical canvas – one nearly triple in height what it measures in width. The unique size and display of this tableau echo the verticality of the geyser's eruption, visually encouraging the viewer's eyes to follow water as it jets upward – rather than following the width of the canvas, and horizontally surveying the land.

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