

ARTNEWS

VASARI DIARY

Vasari Diary: On John Gibson (1933–2019), Rob Wynne, Jane Benson, Robert Murray, and Film Forum

BY *Barbara A. MacAdam* POSTED 03/15/19 3:59 PM



Rob Wynne, *THE PLASTER CAST OF MY EMOTION*, 1999, thread and archival velum.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND LOCKS GALLERY, PHILADELPHIA

The Mind of Rob Wynne

It's easy to underestimate the persistence of visual impressions, and how much they can influence us, subliminally and not. They embed themselves in our minds and appear unbidden in our thoughts and creative work. We don't have to understand or even like them, but once there, they assume control. Consider the strangely un-categorizable work of Rob Wynne. It suggests many strands of subconscious, ever-enigmatic narratives.

Wynne, who just had [a show at the Brooklyn Museum](#) of his inimitable hand-poured mirrored-glass pieces and sculptures of insects installed amid historical American paintings and objects, is a conceptual artist with deep, tangled roots in literature, painting, sculpture, drawing, embroidery, and glass-making. He activates the past through light, reflection, and interspersed words, and, in so doing, re-contextualizes the present, often ironically. Punctuating one room was the word “Masquerade,” in lurid-colored bubbly letters. He recently discussed with me the nature and power of his artistic sources by tapping into his memory bank and pulling up images and descriptions of images that moved him growing up.

Here's Wynne:

I think a lot of the illustrators that I was interested in were mental more than visual influences. As an adolescent, I had almost no interest in the typical comic books that children of my generation read. I was very interested in music and then, when I first became aware of 'illustration,' the biggest influence on me was Aubrey Beardsley—you could even say I was obsessed. The Yellow Book became my book. My eyes went out on stalks as I took in his erotic and fascinating vignettes. I was also somewhat subversively interested in Beatrix Potter, in the sheer magic of her combination of stories and creatures. Also Dr. Seuss, Jesse Wilcox Smith, Kate Greenaway, and Maxfield Parrish come to mind.

I had a difficult childhood . . . and when I first saw these artists, the quivering narrative that runs through so much of their work calmed me, it gave me a secret fantasy place—seeing myself reflected in a story or a picture and realizing it could be me . . . I think that, by looking at art, I learned how to see—to make work myself, and the 'influence' is actually internalized for me in the making of my work. I think work comes out of working and trying to make something, rather than being a traceable line from here to there.