

## **John Brown at Olga Korper Gallery**

\$7,500-\$21,000. Until Feb. 5, 17 Morrow Ave., Toronto; 416-538-8220.

It tends to be the case that the more beautiful a painting is, the harder it is to say anything meaningful about it. That's how it is with this exhibition of new work from veteran Toronto painter John Brown.

Here are some bald facts about the work: All of the works are painted in oils on wood panels. There are four big paintings in the show and they are superb. They are called *Thing*, *Nothing*, *Something* and *Anything*. They look as distressed as old Tuscan walls. Distressed but not thereby depleted: The paint has been scraped and rasped away, only to reveal subtle new colour and new painted events underneath, as if Brown were an archeologist and his paintings were archaic sites. The rest of the paintings are small (53 centimetres by 53 cm) and are all subsets of a long numbered series of paintings Brown calls *Grimm* paintings, after, though not illustrative of, the fairy tales. According to gallery owner Olga Korper, there are 200 Grimm's fairy tales and 10 further "Parables," of which, she tells me, Brown has painted 48. "He only has 162 to go," she tells me gaily.

The small *Grimm* paintings are vignettes -- bizarre, beautifully painted heads, square hairy trees, something that looks like a tent set up on the desert. It doesn't matter. As Louis Armstrong used to say, it's not whatcha do, but the way 'atcha do it. Which is certainly true of John Brown's art.

Gary Michael Dault, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Globe and Mail.