

**The Hispanic World of Jonathan Brown, Introductory Remarks, May 22, 2008,
Institute of Fine Arts, New York University**

Image #1—Hernán Cortés Portrait (2000)

Image #2—Goya Colloquium, Fall 1980

The year is 1980. The cigarette pack and ashtray on the table provide clues that we are still far off from the twenty-first century. But the place is not far away at all; as many of you already have noticed, this is the Institute of Fine Arts' seminar room, just next door to where we are gathered this morning. The occasion of the pictured scene is a colloquium on the artist Francisco Goya taught by Jonathan Brown, whose scholarship and teaching we have enthusiastically come together today to celebrate.

It is a tribute to Jonathan's outstanding qualities as a teacher that many of his students went on to become well known scholars in their own right. Some continued to work in his areas of expertise in Spanish, and more recently, Latin American, art. Others ventured—or, in some cases, strayed—moving East to Italy, North to Flanders or France, or forward in time to the late nineteenth, or even the late twentieth, century. Most of our speakers today were Jonathan's students, and their fine papers are a suitable thank you to an extraordinary mentor.

Before turning the floor over to the first speaker, I would like to relate a few of the characteristics that make Jonathan such a wonderful teacher. These are the very same qualities that make him an outstanding scholar, too.

First: clarity. Jonathan is lucid. He writes with precision, and he takes the time and trouble to push his students to say what they mean. Every word counts. Assignments to students are crystal clear. When I recently pulled out my file of notes from the 1980 Goya colloquium that you are looking at presently, I was reminded of (or perhaps understood well for the first time) the clarity of Jonathan's instructions to us. On the first day of class, he outlined exactly how he wanted us to prepare our presentations for the class. The presentations were to be historiographic, he told us, and they were to mention:

1. when the topic first became recognized as such;
2. what major scholarly material exists; and
3. which interpretation is most credible.

Furthermore, in reviewing with his students the bibliography he had prepared for the course, Jonathan created a model of the kind of historiographic work he was asking us to produce.

Image #3—Goya Colloquium, Fall 1980, page two of bibliography

Here is page two of said bibliography with my scribbles recording his pithy assessment of each item. Under “intellectual milieu,” for instance, he pointed out that José López-Rey was a pioneer of this approach and that Edith Helman made convincing connections between Goya and late eighteenth-century Spanish literature. Jonathan *instructed* us on how to proceed, and then he *showed* us, by example, how to proceed.

A second important quality of Jonathan Brown the teacher is an unusual combination of apprehension and open-mindedness. When, as a member of the 1980 Goya colloquium,

Image #4—Goya Colloquium, Fall 1980

I hit upon what I thought was a viable dissertation topic, on Goya and England, Jonathan was not immediately convinced. He wondered whether there would be enough material on this topic for an entire dissertation. “I’ll show him,” I thought, and I immediately went to work compiling information to build a case. Armed with documents to illustrate the Spanish interest in Great Britain, I presented my evidence to him, and, to my great relief, he agreed. By challenging his students, Jonathan taught us how apprehension is the companion of scholarly care, and showed us that a good teacher-student relationship contains a healthy give and take.

Another feature of Jonathan Brown the teacher, often commented on with wonder by his students, was that he was—well, the word we used back then was, “normal.” Our other professors at the IFA all seemed rather eccentric in one way or another, and of course we loved them for *that*. Jonathan, however, stood out for his measure, reason, and thoughtfulness. I remember well once being told by my classmate Dawson Carr, who

will be speaking in this morning's panel, that while Jonathan was the most sane professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, his students, by contrast, were the wackiest!

I suspect that a contributing factor to Jonathan's steady, rational manner as a teacher is a remarkable ability not to mix and mingle too many things. This ability goes back to the clarity I described earlier. I have heard him call it "compartmentalization." Let me show you, by way of an anecdote, what I mean. Soon after receiving my Ph.D., when restlessness led me to a new research project about Andy Warhol, I received a tip that a certain author of highly acclaimed studies on Velázquez and on royal patronage was spotted in a book of Nat Finkelstein's pictures of Warhol and his world. I couldn't believe it! So I marched to my bookshelf, pulled down the book in question, and turned its pages until I hit upon this image:

[Image #5—Nat Finkelstein, photo 1](#)

Could the person in the back wearing the bow-tie and lined up with the others as if in a rock band trio—could *that* be Jonathan? I looked more closely.

[Image #5a—Nat Finkelstein, photo 1](#)

[Image #5b—Nat Finkelstein, photo 1](#)

[Image #5c—Nat Finkelstein, photo 1](#)

[Image #5d—Nat Finkelstein, photo 1](#)

Then I turned the page and I came across this photograph:

[Image #6—Nat Finkelstein, photo 2](#)

Wait—that's the same guy from the rock trio, there between Duchamp and Warhol, in the background; and—hey, wait a minute—is that his wife, Sandra, next to him? I put my eyes closer to the page to see.

[Image #6a—Nat Finkelstein, photo 2](#)

[Image #6b—Nat Finkelstein, photo 2](#)

[Image #6c—Nat Finkelstein, photo 2](#)

The person who had tipped me off to the existence of these photographs also let me in on another relevant piece of information: Jonathan's parents had been major collectors of dada, surrealist, and contemporary art. This fact may explain how Jonathan and Sandra came to hang out with Duchamp and Warhol.

Image #7—Nat Finkelstein, photo 2 again, full view

When I later asked him why he never told me about this striking aspect of his background, Jonathan responded that he guessed he tended to “compartmentalize” the distinct areas of his life.

Yet I imagine there is a lot more unity and a lot less compartmentalization than is claimed. One place where I see this unity is in Jonathan’s cultivation of communities of students and colleagues. His love of intellectual discussion, of the “tertulia,” may well exist for the same reason he shows up in this 1966 photograph. But whatever the reasons may be for his passion for art, history, and ideas, we are here today to honor Jonathan Brown for the remarkable scholarship, teaching, and generosity that have been the fruits of this passion.

Before introducing our first speaker, I would like to take a few moments to thank the individuals and groups that have generously contributed to the organization of this symposium. At the Institute of Fine Arts, we are especially grateful to Mariët Westermann for her support, and to Kathy Heins and Christina Snylyk for most graciously handling all the nuts and bolts that have made the event cohere. A warm thanks, also at the IFA, to Kathryn Hagen and to Marc Cincone for their organizational assistance, and to Jenni Rodda, along with Jason Varone and Michael Konrad, for their expert help with our myriad (and too often, last-minute) technological needs. Thanks, also to the Center for European-Hispanic Studies in Madrid, to Wines from Spain U.S.A., and to anonymous supporters for their extraordinary generosity. We are grateful to Don Swanson of the Frick Collection for giving us his time and his talents in designing a most handsome program. A special thank you to José Luis Colomer, and, to Luisa Elena Alcalá, Lisa Banner, Susan Grace Galassi, Lisa Rotmil, and Sarah Schroth for all your contributions, too numerous and varied to name in full.

Reva Wolf