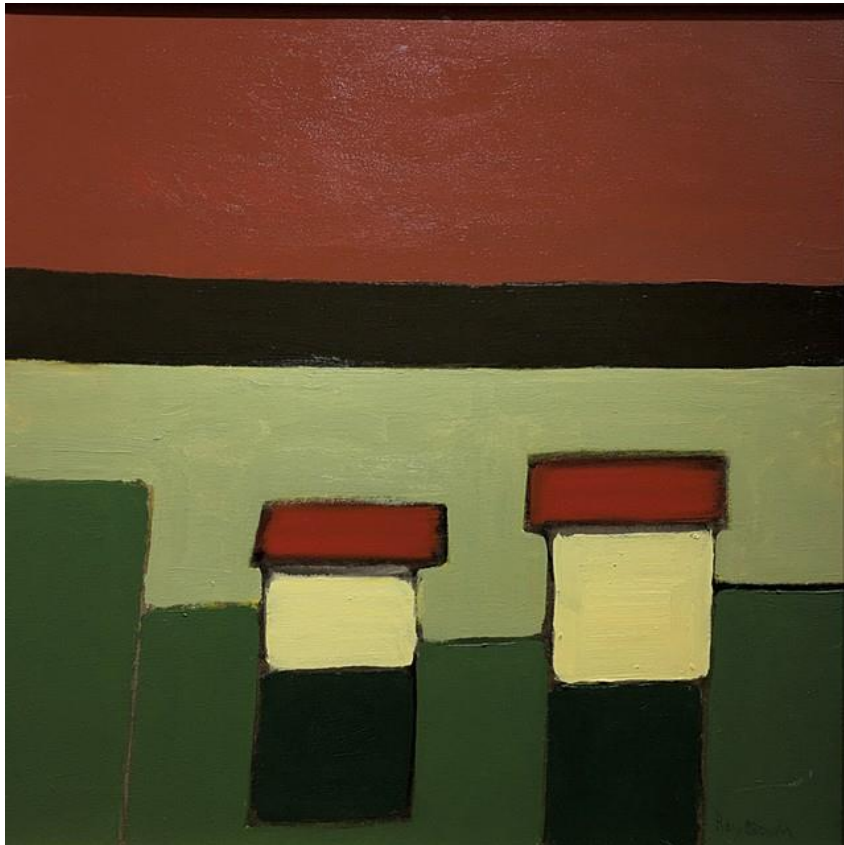


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Barre Becomes a Ray Brown Town in a Huge Retrospective Exhibit

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"Two Villas," from 2013, by Ray Brown

A retrospective exhibition of works by the late Montpelier artist **Ray Brown** requires a lot of space. Accordingly, his paintings, drawings and prints now fill the walls on two floors of **Studio Place Arts** in Barre, as well as nearby auxiliary sites at **Morse Block Deli & Taps** and **AR Market**. Brown was beloved in central Vermont not only as an artist but also as the ever-friendly proprietor of the **Drawing Board**, the Montpelier art supply and framing business that he and his wife, Jody Wilson, purchased in 1983.

Originally from Brookline, Mass., Brown attended the Massachusetts College of Art and Design (now MassArt) in Boston and the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. That formal training is evident in his earlier landscape and figurative works. But, according to a gallery statement by Mark Waskow, the exhibition curator and president of the **Northern New England Museum of Contemporary Art**, Brown longed to break away from traditional styles and "to develop works that were not so straightforward or realistic."

An unfortunate event ultimately forced Brown to do just that: A massive stroke in 2006 immobilized his dominant side. Undeterred, Brown learned to paint with his left hand. "Instead of viewing his new situation as a disability," Waskow writes, "Ray saw it as an opportunity to do what he had been trying unsuccessfully to do for about 15 years."

Brown's looser, more abstract approach to the canvas was not just a function of his less-disciplined hand; he also began to render landscape as blocks of color, many reflecting the palette he witnessed during multiple trips to Italy. These explorations in geometry and ebullient hue recall the midcentury paintings of Mark Rothko.

But if Brown's larger abstractions command more attention, visitors to the retrospective should not miss his exquisite little etchings from an earlier period. Appropriately, they're displayed in Studio Place Arts' Quick Change Gallery — a former phone booth repurposed as a venue for diminutive works.

Brown died just before his 80th birthday in 2020 — shortly after attending the reception for his small solo show at Montpelier gallery **the Front**.

"Transformative Moves" is on view at all three locations through October 29. Pictured: "Two Villas," from 2013.