

## ABOUT THE ARTIST:

A native New Yorker, Frederick Brosen studied at the City College of New York, the Art Students League, and Pratt Institute. His work is included in museum collections across the country, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New-York Historical Society, the Knoxville Museum of Art, the Frye Museum in Seattle, and the Museum of the City of New York, and in many private collections. He has taught at several prominent art schools, including Pratt Institute, the National Academy of Design, Lehman College and currently at the Art Students League of New York.

*Four Seasons of Central Park: Watercolors by Frederick Brosen* is made possible in part by a collective of generous individuals in celebration of Frederick Brosen's work. Special thanks to Bruno A. Quinson.

All images courtesy of Frederick Brosen.

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**SOMEWHERE ON THE UPPER WEST SIDE OF NEW YORK**, in an upper floor-second bedroom-turned-artist's-studio overlooking a quietly humming corner of Broadway in the 70s, Frederick Brosen—a youthful 70 himself—is intently and methodically translating nearly 400 years of city history into watercolor masterpieces of sublime power: piece by piece, place by place, vantage after vantage. The result is more than simply exquisite painterly valentines, which they also are, to a city he has lived in, roamed through, studied, and transformed, one way or another, for nearly his entire life. These are paintings of places at once filled with and haunted by change, time, and history—the impact of which is unobtrusively felt in almost every stroke and layer of his watercolor style: a painstakingly reiterative technique, itself a kind of mirror in reverse of the process of flux, change, and fleeting stability that has resulted in the city as we see it at any quiet moment in time.

The hushed and distilled drama of these extraordinary cityscapes can be almost erotically intense on any sustained viewing. But these are not theatrical paintings, in the sense that Reginald Marsh's New York paintings, for example, are theatrical. They are more about the drama of time, in the sense that Edward Hopper's paintings are about the drama of time—but in a strikingly different way. At the quickest first glance, they are often felt to be powerfully photographic, eliciting comments from casual viewers like, "Whoa! That's a painting, not a photograph?" and yet so much more is going on than that. "Although intensely realistic," Brosen himself has said, "the result is not intended to be photographic, but a more subjective and interpretive sense of each specific place." And so they are, and much of it has to do with the ticking time of history itself, so powerfully present in each and every painting Brosen has created.

When we think of the great historians of New York, most of us can be forgiven if we think first of writers: women and men wielding keyboard or pen who put down in words the shape and form and narrative arc

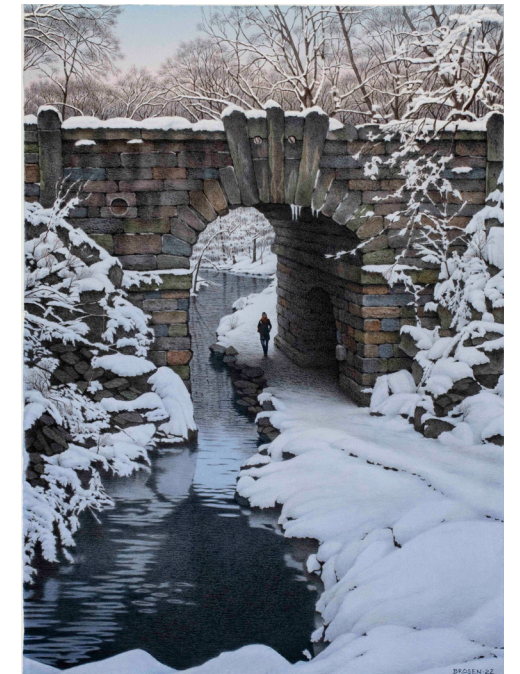
of the city over time—diarists like George Templeton Strong, novelists like Washington Irving, Edith Wharton, or Colson Whitehead, journalists-turned-scholars like Joseph Mitchell, Jane Jacobs, or Robert Caro, or historians such as Herbert Asbury, David Levering Lewis, Mike Wallace, Jill Lepore, George Chauncey, or Russell Shorto. But Brosen, in his paintings and in his artistic practice writ large, is without question one of the great historians of New York—and his resonant images, layered on 300-pound cold-pressed watercolor paper, are powerful chronicles of intense visual impact and historical depth at the same time.

Capturing history in a painting is an intensely daunting challenge from first to last, and by history I'm not thinking in this case of the historical content of a painting that might, for example, show George Washington crossing the Delaware River. It's history as the movement of time itself, in demonstrably physical places and ways. This kind of history requires the painter to paint both what is and what isn't there at the same time—to reveal, as Wallace Stevens in his poetry sought to reveal, at once the "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." And so, we come to the four breathtaking images Brosen has created and chosen for this exhibition, depicting the four seasons in Central Park.

Cycling through Central Park across summer, fall, winter, and spring—from the widest to the most intimate of vantages—these four quietly iconic paintings capture a year in some of the most historic places in the verdant urban masterpiece Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmstead first laid out in 1857—in their anonymous entry (number 33, called "Greensward"), submitted as part of a design competition that had finally been established, to create a sorely-needed greenspace in the massively overcrowded, then nearly park-less city.

—Ric Burns, documentary filmmaker

# FOUR SEASONS of CENTRAL PARK



# WATERCOLORS by FREDERICK BROSEN





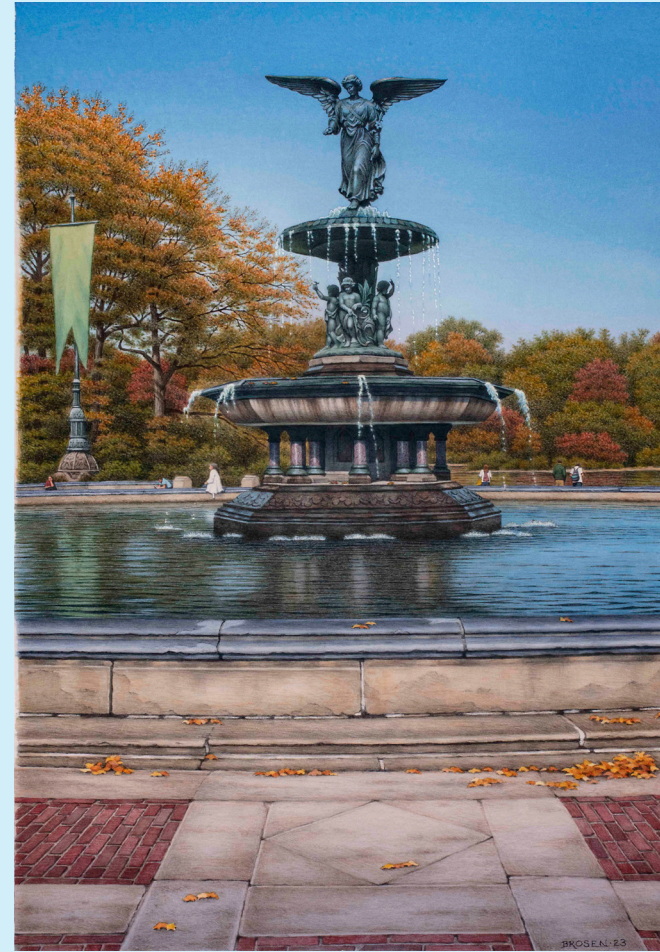
To begin, there is **SPRING**, Brosen's ravishingly beautiful painting of Burnett Memorial Fountain on the Park's east side at 104th Street, in the Conservatory Garden's South Garden. Dedicated to Frances Hodgson Burnett, renowned for her 1911 masterpiece, *The Secret Garden*, the fountain was created by Bessie Potter Vonnoh and completed in 1936. It shows two of Burnett's most beloved characters, Mary and Dickon, deeply at home in their own secret garden.

A masterpiece of color, light, composition, and reflection, the painting is almost Shakespearean in its boldness, its heartfelt, vernal softness, and its lilting optimism. It wordlessly captures a part of the Park dedicated to the renewing power of stories and storytelling—the narrative arcs that shape our lives and transport us, from the beginning, to the middle, to the end.



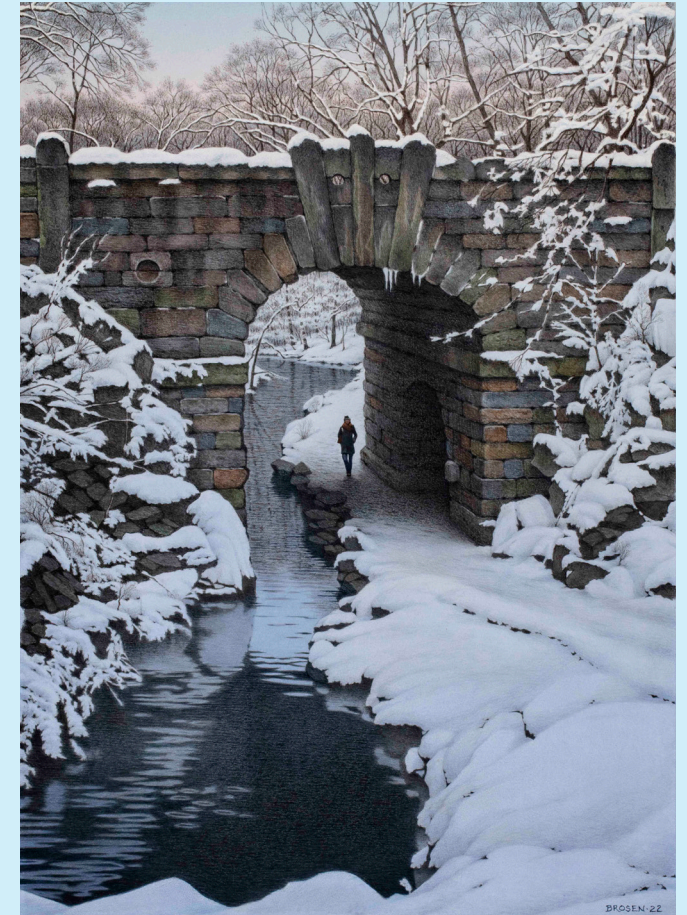
**SUMMER** presents the Belvedere Castle just after sunset—its turret, the highest structure in the Park, looming above what was once the Croton Reservoir and is now the Ramble and the Turtle Pond behind the Delacorte Theater at 79th Street. An addition to Vaux and Olmstead's original plan, this gothic folly was designed by Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould in 1867. It was constructed of Manhattan schist quarried from the Park and completed slowly across the following decade.

The twilight moment Brosen has captured is luminous with the brief long light of a summer evening in the Park, a midsummer night's dream at onset, as vivid as it is haunted by its own fleet passing.



**FALL** shows an intimately proximate view of the iconic Bethesda Fountain, bravely depicted in full autumnal daylight and poignantly poised at a moment exactly equidistant between summer and winter. The movingly ordinary angel that stands above the fountain is the *Angel of the Waters*—a memorial to the Union naval dead, and one of Brosen's favorite subjects. The statue itself completed in 1873 by the sculptor Emma Stebbins, the first major public work in New York created by a woman, and an openly gay woman at that.

The angel stands in many ways not only at the heart of the Park but at the heart of New York City itself; Brosen has somehow managed to paint not only the angel, but the sound of quietly rushing water and nearly still mid-park fall air as well.



Finally, **WINTER** comes in closer still, and shows a stunningly cold, indeed shivering vantage of the exquisite Glen Span Arch following a snowstorm. The astonishingly beautiful snowclad stonework of the arch, rising on the Park's west side near 102nd Street, was designed by Vaux to mark in part the westernmost edge of the Ravine. In this intimate place, the waters of the Park—all of them created not by nature but by Vaux and Olmstead themselves—connect the Pool on the west side to the North Woods above, and beyond them to the Harlem Meer at the Park's far northeastern corner, just blocks from the Museum of the City of New York.