



**Brinsley Tyrrell**  
Ohio Lands Forever

Cover:  
detail, *Path Behind the Kiln*,  
2011  
glass enamel on steel,  
36 x 48 in.

Right:  
*Raining*, 2011  
glass enamel on steel,  
36 x 48 in.



Right:  
*Tried to Go Back*, 2011  
glass enamel on steel,  
36 x 48 in.

Opposite:  
*Rain Over the Broken Concrete  
Wall*, 2009  
glass enamel on steel,  
36 x 48 in.



## Ohio Lands Forever



About forty years ago Brinsley and Lilian Tyrrell bought a rambling mid-nineteenth century farmhouse on four acres of land. It was surrounded by fields and woods and needed all kinds of work, but it wasn't impossibly far from Tyrrell's new job as Head of the Sculpture Department at Kent State University—and it was cheap. They made an offer, which was accepted. Soon they moved in with their two small children. Later they learned the house would have been bulldozed the next day if the deal hadn't gone through.

The structure is updated by now, but still retains its original Victorian-era features including high ceilings and hand-wrought hardwood moldings, curving around double doors that open onto formal downstairs chambers. One of those rooms still contains a large loom that Lilian used to make tapestries, like her widely acclaimed *Disaster Blankets* of the 1980s and 90s; she died in 2007.

It's not hard to fall in love with the earth wherever you are, but it may be especially easy in the fields and byways around Ravenna. Brinsley is British originally, and the Ohio countryside reprises the English landscape in many respects. But the long flanks and sinews of the earth, and the grand stretches of beeches and oaks, the broad palette of native plants near the Tyrrell's farmhouse, are seductive by any standards, even when winter scrubs it all away and leaves only the sketch and bone of other seasons. At some point in the 1980s Brinsley began to make portraits of the fields and trees that he saw every day driving into Kent. He was known for his imaginative, surrealistic sculptures, but he felt a need to do another kind of work about the land.

He began by making large-scale pastel drawings, which depict the wide gestures of the land itself, the swirling motions of fields and the fingerprint-like whorls of woodland and stream eddy. His drawings are almost like rubbings, intense efforts to simplify and say only what needs to be said about the mixed majesty and intimacy of place. These aren't *plein air* or observational nature studies, nor for that matter are they merely memories; they're epitomes of landscape, like genomes of a country walk, templates for a solitary and rare beauty.

In 2007 Tyrrell had a chance to do something a bit more sculptural along these lines, with a long-delayed commission for the West 117th Street Rapid Station in Cleveland. As he imagined possibilities, thinking all the while about the durability that is an essential requirement for public art, he started to think about what he could do with a large enameling kiln at Kent State University. Again the terrain around his home was his inspiration, and the results of his experiments with unfamiliar, often unpredictable materials were exciting. No one can predict exactly what will happen inside a kiln. Streaks of powdered oxides vaporize and re-manifest feet away from where they started, explosive shrapnel marks of chemical reactions rain down in a *tachisme*-like fury, exotic colors bloom improbably. The new works were highly expressive and full of surprises.

Tyrrell's most recent panels display an ever-increasing mastery of this challenging medium, packed with a wealth of graphic incident and etched in the hues of a jewel-like palette. After successive tinkering and multiple re-firings, Tyrrell's heat-forged visions outdo even the natural exuberance of ironweed and chicory and dozens of other native plants that paint the fields at this time of year. One of these pictures, rendered in resonant tones of yellow and blue-gray, milky white and raw umber, depicts a few tree-like forms, their foliage blowing upward as if caught in a strong wind. They're immersed in long lines of rain or sleet spotted with snowflakes. Tyrrell often shows several seasons at once, mixing the weather together with the colors. Some images, like this snowy one, have the stylistic verve and drama of an *Ukiyo-e* print. Others are more about color and dynamic juxtaposition, exploring an achingly beautiful range of warm and cool pastel tones. Sometimes the polished gleam and hardness of the enamel can be reminiscent of stone and the rhythmic patterns of geological formations, offering a longer perspective on interlocking natural and technical processes.

—Douglas Max Utter

# Brinsley Tyrrell

Born 1941, Godstone, England  
Lives in Freedom Township, OH

brinsleytyrrell.com

## Education

Camberwill School of Arts and Crafts, The University of London, England; Intermediate Degree in Fine Arts. National Diploma Design.

## Selected Public Art Projects

- 2013 *Dike 14, Lake Overlook*, Cleveland, OH.
- 2007 *Ohio Lands Forever*, five glass enamels on steel, 117th St. railway station, Regional Transit Authority, Cleveland, OH.
- 2007 *Cells*, time-based outdoor sculpture, SPACES, Cleveland, OH.
- 2006 *Entrance Gates, Tree of Hope* (collaborations with Steve Jordon, blacksmith); *Buried Dinosaur*, Preston's Hope Playground, Beachwood, OH.
- 2005 *Grinding the Harvest*, wrought iron railing; *Restoring the Land*, wrought iron bicycle rack (collaborations with Steve Jordon, blacksmith). Mill Creek Falls Park, Cleveland, OH.
- 2003 *Coventry Tales*, 59 wrought iron tree guards (collaboration with Steve Jordon), Cleveland Heights, OH. Commissioned by Coventry Merchants Association and ODOT.
- 2003 *Cleveland West Park Police and Firefighters Memorial Walkway* (collaboration with Steve Jordon, blacksmith), Rocky River, OH. Commissioned by the Police and Firefighters Union.
- 2002 *Orchard Fence* (collaboration with Steve Jordon), Orchard School, Cleveland, OH. Organized by Cleveland Public Art and Parkworks.
- 2000 *Behind the Brain Plaza* (collaboration with Mike Norman, horticulturist), Beck Memorial Gardens, Kent State University. Commissioned by the Ohio Percent for Art Program.
- 1999 *Butterfly Gates, Fly Gate, Praying Mantis Gate* (collaboration with Steve Jordon), Cleveland Botanical Gardens, Cleveland, OH. Commissioned by Hershey Foundation.
- 1995 *Gates of Great Americans*, Public School 15, New York. Commissioned by New York City Percent for Art Program and New York City School Construction Authority.

## Selected Exhibitions

- 2011 *Ohio Lands Forever* (one-person), William Busta Gallery, Cleveland, OH.
- 2010 *Ohio Lands Forever* (one-person), William Busta Gallery, Cleveland, OH.
- 2008 *Ohio Lands Forever* (one-person), William Busta Gallery.
- 2007 *Stacking and Carving* (one-person), Eells Gallery, Blossom Music Center, Cuyahoga Falls, OH.
- 2007 Public Art, six wrought iron storytelling panels. Massillon Civic Center. Organized by the Massillon Museum, OH.
- 2005 *NEO Exhibition*, Cleveland Museum of Art, OH.
- 2004 Gallery 138 (one-person), Kent, OH.
- 2001 *Coming of Age*, The Riffe Gallery, Columbus, OH.
- 1996 *Urban Evidence: Contemporary Artists Reveal Cleveland*, the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, and SPACES, OH.

## Selected Awards

- 2011 Cleveland Arts Prize Lifetime Achievement Award for Visual Arts.
- 2002 Lilian and Brinsley Tyrrell, Governor's Award for the Arts in Ohio.
- 1992 Ohio Arts Council Fellowship (also 1991, 1981, 1978).
- 1989 *The Cleveland Museum of Art May Show*, The Sculpture Award (also 1988).

## Professional

- 1968–1996 Professor of Art, Kent State University School of Art, OH