

GEORGE ADAMS GALLERY

41 West 57 Street, 7th flr New York, NY 10019

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ART IN REVIEW

Joan Brown

George Adams
41 West 57th Street
Through Aug. 14

Joan Brown, who began exhibiting in San Francisco in the late 1950's, anticipated what in the late 1970's came to be called "Bad Painting" and "New Image Painting."

This selection of works from the 1960's through the 80's (Brown died in 1990) gives a good sense of her cheerfully unpredictable range, from Marsden Hartley-like portraiture to a triptych featuring rows of cartoon jaguars and Eastern temples cut out of copper sheets.

Her paintings have the bright, clear look of much abstraction as well as Pop Art of the 60's. Modernist purity or ironic cool were not for her, though.

Painting in glossy enamel paint with willful insouciance, she made pictures about her dogs and cats, her involvement with marathon swimming, her several husbands and her worldwide travels. Her flat-footed style suggests that of a self-taught artist, but her pictures don't have the visionary or obsessive weirdness associated with outsider art.

Still, they are often curiously idiosyncratic.

"Woman and Dog With Chinese Rug" is like a funky Alex Katz. Every piece of the picture is flat and crisply defined: the stylized clouds on the blue and white rug; the woman's red, high-heeled shoes and her green, polka-dotted dress; the black thronelike chair on which she sits holding a rigid white dog. Mysteriously, a massive ram's horn is displayed on a nearby stand and the woman has a clownish, toothy grin plastered across her face. We don't know what she's laughing at, but her smile seems to embody Brown's mischievous relationship to the conventional esthetic wisdom of her time.

KEN JOHNSON