



James Brooks: *Ballarat*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 60 inches square; at Artemis Greenberg Van Doren.

rented video, and the first of many drawings of herself making love with Debi. The list of Jan. 3 itemizes the signing of a lease, a finder's fee, first month's rent, security deposit, 50 cents for parking and a food purchase. Another day, groceries cost \$106, and a drawing of cars entering a tunnel illustrates the tolls at \$9.60. She draws herself eating soup for lunch at Matthew Marks Gallery. At the bottom of each list she paints careful, vertical bars of green, representing cash flow from the sale of each work, who bought the drawing, the gallery's price and her cut. The day's reckoning includes a similarly scaled row of red bars, accounting for each expense. Gray bars indicate amounts charged to credit cards. There are vellum tracing paper duplicates of works sold, with numbers to account for each.

And so it goes. If this mixed genre of performance and obsessive notation is not the first on the block, it is resolutely fresh and original, rigorous and fun.

—Edward Leffingwell

James Brooks at Artemis Greenberg Van Doren

Destined, it seems, to be perpetually overshadowed by his colleagues among the Abstract Expressionists, James Brooks

(1906-1992) may always be thought of as a good painter among great painters. An early practitioner (innovator, some would argue) of a staining technique now commonly associated with Helen Frankenthaler, Brooks made his most radical experiments in the late 1940s, splashing paint on the back of a canvas and then turning it over to work with the unpredictable configuration that seeped through. This show of nine moderately large and four small paintings from the second half of his career did not make a case for reassessing his standing among the Irascibles. But it was interesting to see how his adoption in the early 1960s of the then-new medium of acrylics allowed him to more easily keep his color areas clean and distinct, and to explore a vocabulary of translucent washes and glazes as well as fluid application—which clearly interested him more than autographic style.

This later work is no longer predicated on the Cubist-derived ambiguity of figure and ground that preoccupied Brooks, and a great many other painters, through the 1950s. The results are mixed. In *Ealand II* (1963, 74 by 80 inches), clunky, dark shapes float on a blank field punctuated by sparsely deployed lines. The result is an unthreatening painting, suitable for a hotel lobby. The weirder *Leen* (1974, 76 inches square)

dispenses entirely with the rounded, nest- or knotlike elements that the artist elsewhere favored. An oddly shaped white and yellow puddle of thinned pigment, its isolation heightened by an expanse of brushy, unmodulated blue, recalls Miró in its comic vulnerability. In *Devon* (1979, 60 inches square), great globs of black stretch and writhe across a blue and white ground suggestive of landscape. Color triads are everywhere in this work, and black is often a player. In the very late *Geomundo* (1983, 60 by 48 inches), a looming field of wiped and brushy blacks occupies a third of the canvas, crowding an antic red/green Dr. Seuss world.

There is a sense in these highly formal paintings, and throughout Brooks's oeuvre, that in developing surface and space, involvement in process is more important than self-expression. Given his temperament, it is unthinkable that his later works would become ego-driven.

Of all the paintings in the show, *Ballarat* (1978, 60 inches square) takes the greatest risks. Against a pale, luminous orange ground, a bulbous bluish green mass weighs in at the lower right corner, with two other floating lumps as satellites. A hazy reddish smudge blooms in the upper right, and a band of jagged electric lines charges across the top of the canvas. *Ballarat* is completely atypical of Brooks: unrelaxed. In this artist's cool world of calibrated pictorial pleasures, such a sweaty effort registers a pleasant shock.

—Stephen Maine

Fred Mitchell at David Findlay Jr.

The art of Fred Mitchell is very much a part of the New York School; however, as this show of his work from the 1940s to the 1960s made clear, Mitchell has always developed a feeling for his surroundings, wherever he has lived. In one of the stronger works of the show, *On Barren Ground* (1941), he portrays the weathered buildings housing his

Fred Mitchell on canvas

