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# ARTS & LETTERS

## GALLERY-GOING

### **JOAN BROWN: PAINTED CONSTRUCTIONS** *George Adams Gallery*

By **MAUREEN MULLARKEY**

Joan Brown's work was a fey offspring of Bay Area figuration and funk art. Making and breaking rules to suit herself, she could be exasperating but she never bored. On view at George Adams are works from the early 1970s: cardboard sculptures (begun in her kitchen from household materials while her studio was under renovation); a metal cutout; and large-scale paintings and drawings.

The more distant the post-1960s counterculture becomes, the more the paintings recede into the era and movements that generated them. But the constructions, rarely exhibited in her lifetime (1938-90), convey in full Ms. Brown's distinctive inventiveness and humor. The fun of their making is still there to be seen.

Assembled here for the first time as a body of work, the constructions articulate a nimble, faux-naïf sophistication that survives the tropes of their times. Cutout couples dance around the deck of "Luxury Liner" (1973), a Noah's Ark for party animals. The smokestack belches a musical score. "Divers" (1974) hangs from the ceiling so we can see the swimmers from above and below the water line. "Dancers on a Car" (1973) is just that: a couple waltzing across the hood of a 1940s-style sedan, a Florine-Stettheimerlike fantasia in 3-D.