

## Reviews: New York

### James Brooks

#### Greenberg Van Doren

Though he is included in the famous "Irascibles" photograph of Abstract Expressionist luminaries, James Brooks



James Brooks, *Fonteel*, 1974, acrylic on canvas, 76" x 76". Greenberg Van Doren.

wasn't considered one of the central figures. His work engages more with shape and form than with gesture. In this survey of mostly black-and-white paintings from the '50s through the '70s, a manipulation of the figure-ground relationship is a recurring device, as is the use of black over black, which yields nuanced tonal variations.

In *Fonteel* (1974), the rich overlay of paint, both opaque and translucent, results in passages of great depth and conflates spontaneous and intentionally created forms. The oscillation between figure and ground sets up tension, and movement is guided by Brooks's linear arabesques; form is kept from coalescing into an image.

Dark red-violet and ultramarine are brought into play with a large area of black in *Avery* (1971). Layers of paint emerge from beneath the black to reveal underlying tones responsible for the black's sheen. The upper left corner suggests infinite depth as the tone fades to gray. Brooks manages to keep his shapes evocative without crossing into the referential.

Blues accompany the black and white in *Minos* (1969), which struck the most lyrical note here. Brooks creates new shapes by painting out and over other forms. On the left a very narrow strip of blue turning gray, squeezed between two black lozenges, recedes until a white field pulls the eye back out. The result is an odd rhythm that compresses on the left and expands on the right. The device is calibrated for deep reflection. And Brooks makes it look as if it all just happened.

—Joan Waltemath