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January 5, 2012

Eye to Eye: An Exhibition Celebrates the Artistic Friendship of James Brooks and Dan Flavin



James Brooks, *Garamond*, 1958

Though it is not common knowledge that the two were even acquainted, it's likely Dan Flavin, the Minimalist artist best known for his fluorescent light sculptures, first met the Abstract Expressionist James Brooks in the 1970s on Long Island's East End. Both men were part of an intimate creative community where keeping up with the Joneses à la artiste meant casting a curious eye on what New York School painters such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko were dabbling in on the other side of the fence.

Once Flavin set his sights on Brooks's canvases and drawings, the two began a correspondence that led to a multi-decade friendship—the launching point for “Unlikely Friends: James Brooks and Dan Flavin” opening today at Manhattan's Greenberg Van Doren Gallery. Essentially an homage to Brooks, who died in 1993—an artist too often bypassed, but revered by one whose popularity continues to climb (Sotheby's record-breaking auction of a Flavin this past November sold for \$1.7 million)—the exhibition showcases sixteen of Brooks's paintings and works on paper, and two of Flavin's fluorescent sculptures.

“Flavin was interested in Brooks's drawings and use of the line,” says **Dorsey Waxter**, a partner at the gallery who thought of the show's concept when, in a private collection, she spotted a Flavin that had been dedicated to Brooks. Best known for his provocative light installations, which he produced from the 1960s until his death in 1996, Flavin was also a dedicated draftsman (the first retrospective of his drawings will open at the Morgan Library and Museum on February 17). Brooks's work, at times reminiscent of a honey-

Greenberg Van Doren Gallery

NEW YORK

coated, gentler version of de Kooning's frenzied lines, thrilled the younger artist, 27 years his junior, leading him to organize a solo exhibition of Brooks's oeuvre in 1984, and to dedicate numerous works, including the two light installations in the show, to the Expressionist and his wife, artist Charlotte Parks.

With pieces spanning in medium from ink to pastel, acrylic, and collage, the exhibition draws attention both to Brooks's frequently-overlooked work and Flavin's range of artistic inquisitiveness. "Brooks wasn't a hard liver or a hard drinker. He was a very steady, committed artist, which didn't get him the same kind of attention as some of his contemporaries," Waxter explains, adding, "We think of Flavin as a real pioneer in the movement of Minimalism. He took a completely different approach than Brooks did, but he saw something in Brooks that to him was very personal." **ANTONINA JEDRZEJCZAK**

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