

VAN DOREN WAXTER

James Brooks
Rendez-vous
Paintings 1972 - 1983

June 8 - August 19, 2022
23 East 73rd Street
2nd Floor Gallery



James Brooks, *Yarboro*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 74 inches (203.2 x 188 cm)

Van Doren Waxter is pleased to present *James Brooks: Rendez-vous Paintings 1972 - 1983*, an exhibition of paintings by the exemplary Abstract Expressionist James Brooks. On view from June 8 through August 19, 2022 at Van Doren Waxter's 23 E 73rd street townhouse gallery, this survey will showcase a series of paintings from the 1970s and 80s. These works display a period of Brooks' oeuvre where he opened up the pictorial space dramatically, all while maintaining a strong sense of drawing and line.

James Brooks (1906-1992) arrived in New York City in 1926. During the Great Depression, he worked as a muralist under the Works Progress Administration and studied representational painting at the Art Students League. In 1942—amidst the rise of Abstract Expressionism in America—Brooks was drafted to serve in the United States Army as an Art Correspondent. While based in Cairo, he photographed troops in Palestine, Benghazi, Libya, and throughout Egypt, creating drawings and gouache paintings from photographs.

His 1945 return to New York came with a shift away from figuration and towards the abstract paintings he is most known for. Brooks openly credited the artistic influence of his friends and peers—Jackson Pollock, Philip Guston, and Bradley Walker Tomlin were all influences as he explored abstraction. Rather than dripping paint across an entire canvas like Pollock, Brooks dripped paint onto a small region of a surface, shifting the canvas so each drip would dry in different directions. His 1940s paintings were influenced by the Cubism of Picasso and Braque. Later

in his career, he became interested in the surrealists pursuit of artmaking as an access point for unconscious thought.

Brooks' paintings from the 1970s and 80s included in this exhibition are marked by his continued experimentation and exploration. With a body of work defined by continued innovation, he strove to avoid "nausea with one's own pictorial cliches,"—often revisiting incomplete paintings that he began years earlier, reworking them until satisfied. This process lent itself to a style that was paradoxically visually consistent and ever-changing.

Well known for his restrained approach to painting, Brooks maintained an inventive practice. He regularly utilized atypical tools and processes. In earlier paintings from the 1950s, after accidentally dripping acrylic paint onto the backside of an absorbent Bennis cloth (used for grain feed bags), he would use a squeegee pushing the paint to the front creating fractured forms. Immediately drawn to the shapes created by these stains, he found them very compelling as a way to interrupt his own habits or ways of working. In the later paintings of the 1970s and 1980s he would continue to lay the canvas on the floor and use a squeegee but on the surface of the paintings, spreading the acrylic paint into sweeping fields of color. The line that he introduced became not a drip caused by swinging the paint laden brush, but as a decisive, hard line with intended direction.

About the artist

Born in St. Louis, MO (1906). Attended Southern Methodist University (1923-25). Moved to New York City (1926). Studied at the Art Students League with Kimon Nicolaides and Boardman Robinson (1927-30). Married to Mary MacDonald (1938-42). Served in the United States Army in the Middle East as an Art Correspondent, with headquarters in Cairo and traveled in North Africa, Palestine and Egypt (1942-45). Married the artist Charlotte Park (1947). Died in East Hampton, NY (1992). Museum exhibitions include *James Brooks at the Dallas Museum of Art: A Celebration*, Dallas, TX (2006); *James Brooks Revisited*, Hillwood Art Museum, Brookville, NY (2000); *Rediscovering James Brooks: WPA Murals & Other Figural Works*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY (1997); *James Brooks: A Retrospective*, Portland Museum of Art, Portland, ME (1983); and *James Brooks Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (1963), traveled to Rose Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Washington Gallery of Contemporary Art, Washington, D.C.; University of California Art Galleries, Los Angeles, CA. Selected museum collections include Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C., Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

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