

**THE END OF A CRAZY SUMMER
& OTHER PERSONAL REFLECTIONS
JOAN BROWN
November 7, 2021–January 8, 2022**

Parker Gallery is proud to present *The End of a Crazy Summer & Other Personal Reflections*, a solo exhibition of works by Joan Brown, organized in collaboration with Modern Art West.

Joan Brown (1938-1990) was born in San Francisco, CA, the city-become-attitude with which she remains identified, having worked there throughout her career. She lived on Fillmore Street in the mid-1950s, with friends and neighbors, including Bruce Conner and Jay DeFeo, and showed at the 6 Gallery. Brown helped to establish a creative community long since mythologized as Beat. Wally Hedrick favorably described her as “funky,” a favorite generational epithet, and one rendered historical in *Funk* at the Berkeley Art Museum in 1967, long after it had served its utility for Brown. During these same years, Brown earned her BFA and MFA at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute); she studied there with mentor Elmer Bischoff and alongside William T. Wiley and Manuel Neri, whom Brown married in 1962 and divorced four years later. Brown’s first solo shows, in San Francisco, at the Spatsa Gallery in 1958, and in New York, at the Staempfli Gallery in 1960, led to her participation in *Young America* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1960 and the Carnegie International in 1964.

The End of a Crazy Summer & Other Personal Reflections brings together a dozen rarely seen works from private collections that Brown completed between the late-1950s—textured oils of quotidian subjects quivering with the vitality of recognition—and 1976, by which time she had turned to modeling simplified, frieze-like figures, often in stylized profile recalling the Egyptian art that she long-revered. Early works made in the wake of encountering Bischoff’s pedagogy evidence an intensity of observed feeling; the paint, bright and thick, cloaks and constitutes form. Often freely autobiographical, domestic tableaux and intimate subjects model the self-revelatory nature of psychic response as Brown reckoned with a period of personal and professional shifts. Later, skeletons and scenes of swimming (specifically of a failed attempt to swim to Alcatraz), doctor appointments and art openings, further contributed to this burgeoning iconography.

The End of a Crazy Summer, 1959, which lends this show its title, refers to the interval between Brown’s undergraduate and graduate study; it was also when she met dealer George Staempfli, who bought works on the spot and would host her in Spain, as well as giving her the aforementioned show the next year. The latest work in the group, *Running at McAteer Park*, 1976, places Brown on a neighbor-

hood track in the shadow of Sutro Tower, exercising in the benevolent company of roving dogs. A frequent subject in her art, Brown described “human characteristics in animals” and also believed fervently in the reverse.

More broadly, these years bracket many formal developments, including Brown’s decision to stop using the impasto for which she was becoming known. She developed other techniques and took up new materials, like the glossy enamel that became a staple in 1970. Beyond this, they also contain Brown’s withdrawal from the art world, a removal registered in response to the stultifying demands of production and her acquiescence to routine, however seemingly, even defiantly, expressive. (In her words in 1975, looking back on her separation from the Fillmore scene: “You can’t keep working if you’re just rebelling. Nobody can keep on going. That runs out. That’s not an interior reason, that’s an exterior reason[...] but the interior reasons are what made people keep going.”) She emerged again with self-portraits and nudes, recent works prepared for her first museum exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1971. A mid-career survey curated by Brenda Richardson at the University Art Museum, Berkeley, in 1974, coincided with her appointment as a professor at Berkeley.

Taken together, then, the pieces collected here trace years of transformation and independence, both hard won.

- Suzanne Hudson

Joan Brown (b. 1938 in San Francisco, CA; d. 1990 in Prasanthinilayam, India). The artist’s first mid-career retrospective was held at the Berkeley Art Museum in 1974, followed by posthumous retrospective exhibitions at the Berkeley Art Museum and the Oakland Museum of California (1998) and the San Jose Museum of Art (2012). In 2022, Brown’s work will be the subject of a third, career spanning retrospective organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (travels to the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA). Her work is included in museum collections across the US, including the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Oakland Museum of California; Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.