

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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GALLERIES



VIA MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

Joan Brown's "The Visitor" (1977) is in the show "Facts & Fantasies," at Matthew Marks.

Joan Brown

Through June 17. Matthew Marks Gallery, 522 West 22nd Street, Manhattan; 212-243-0200, matthewmarks.com.

You could call the mature style of the great American painter Joan Brown (1938-1990) extra-late Egyptian, with her figures often rendered fully frontal or fully in profile. This formality — along with expanses of startling solid colors — contributes to the

hypnotic stillness of her mainly autobiographical works. (Besides painting, her interests included her family, Hinduism, ballroom dancing, serious amateur swimming and Egyptian art.) It's not always clear what Brown, who appears in six of the paintings here, is thinking about, but the seriousness is undeniable.

So it's not surprising that this show of a dozen paintings, mostly from the 1970s, includes "The Visitor" (1977). It depicts the

artist seated with an Egyptian pharaoh at a restaurant. The pharaoh is deep turquoise — the color of Egyptian faience — as is the wall behind him, which is incised with hieroglyphs. If two worlds are colliding, it seems to be occurring in Brown's imagination. After all, the show is titled "Facts & Fantasies."

In "Self-Portrait at Age 42" (1980) we encounter the artist with arms folded, staring ahead. She wears a blue pull-over delicately smeared with paint and a clear plastic glove. Is she facing an unwelcome interruption in her studio? Then it dawns: Her hard stare seems like the kind artists reserve for paintings in progress. There are several other alluring works, but don't miss "Donald" (1986), a copper on wood sculpture of an extra-large tabby cat. As with the Egyptians, cats were another of Brown's favorite subjects.

ROBERTA SMITH