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James Brooks and Dan Flavin at Greenberg Van Doren



Lido I, 1965
Courtesy of the Estate and Greenberg Van Doren Gallery, New York

Although the CliffsNotes version of postwar American art trumpets the antagonism between macho abstract expressionists and later generations of artists, there were actually a number of affinities across the stylistic divides. James Brooks (1906–92) was a seminal ab-ex painter whose carefully considered, collage-like placement of forms led to more contemplative compositions than the visual Sturm und Drang expounded by his colleagues Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. The drippy grid in a 1974 acrylic drawing by Brooks segues from dense cobalt to pale blue to cool white against buff paper, a marriage of the nebulous and the evocative that resonates with the work of Terry Winters and Amy Sillman today.

But painters naturally influence one another; more intriguingly, this exhibit reveals how much the minimalist master Dan Flavin (1933–96) admired Brooks's graceful nuances, as in the subtle textural shifts of the burgundy polyp dangling amid a black-and-white expanse in a 1974 lithoprint. Just as rock 'n' roll king Elvis Presley highly respected the Rat Pack crooner Dean Martin, Flavin found kinship between his own radiant fluorescent light sculptures and his elder's virtuoso blend of emphatic form and supple color.

In 1984, Flavin curated a show of Brooks's drawings, and some of those works are on view here, such as *Lido I* (ink and gouache on paper, 1965), a lush black field that fragments as the brushstrokes ascend the page. While Brooks and Flavin were separated by age and tectonic upheavals in the formal dynamics of American art, their friendship was based on the artist's most elemental task: transmuting base material into transcendent form. Two of Flavin's sculptures—part of a series dedicated to Brooks and his wife, the painter Charlotte Park Brooks—dominate the gallery's entrance, their plumes of color illuminating one path through the roiling history of American art's postwar triumphs. **R.C. Baker**