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## Jay DeFeo GALERIE FRANK ELBAZ



Jay DeFeo, *Untitled (Tripod series)*, 1975, acrylic, graphite, grease pencil, collaged paper on vellum and paper, 23 1/4 x 19 5/8".

In 1951, just after graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, and before settling into San Francisco's vibrant Beat community—where her cohorts included Allen Ginsberg, Wallace Berman, and Bruce Conner—Jay DeFeo traveled to Europe and North Africa on a fellowship. Bringing attention to rarely seen works from this prolific period, DeFeo's first solo show in Paris featured two drawings made in this city in 1951, presented in the company of twenty-two paintings, collages, drawings, and photographs made between 1972 and 1987 (all lent by the Jay DeFeo Foundation). The budding artist's experiments laid important groundwork for her genre-busting, media-mixing oeuvre.

Made on a humble piece of torn brown kraft, *Untitled (Paris)*, 1951, is an abstract black-ink-and-white-chalk drawing whose rough edges and scored surface suggest an excised cave painting. The work's artifactual quality makes it impossible to consider it in wholly two- or three-dimensional terms: It is adamantly both image and object. Similar material and conceptual fusions and contradictions inspired DeFeo throughout her career. In *Untitled (Tripod series)*, 1975, one of many portraits of her camera stand made between 1975 and 1977, a roughly hewn hole at the center of a graphite-and-acrylic composition beckons to a realm beyond. Instead of dissolving or disowning the picture plane, however, DeFeo fills the void with a black paper backing. More complex than Lucio Fontana's slashed canvases, DeFeo's meta-paintings refute objecthood with painterly allegiances to flatness and, in some cases, even figuration. The most sculptural painting on view was *Pend O'Reille No. 2 (Eternal Triangle series)*, 1980. To create its subtly undulated surface, DeFeo added layers of black, white, and gray paint as well as collaged elements to a Masonite panel and then sanded down and carved into certain areas. Some aspects of the grayscale triangular and curvilinear composition appear swollen, desperate to escape their two-dimensional support, whereas others—swaths of smooth matte paint, runny drips, and powdery sprays—remain resolutely attached to their surface.

Not only a favorite subject, DeFeo's tripod served her well as a tool. In 1971, following a long hiatus after completing her magnum opus, *The Rose*, 1958–66, she returned to artmaking via photography. A dozen small gelatin silver prints made between 1972 and 1975 illustrate various natural and artificial texture combinations: a riverbed's sparkling water and matte sand; a shiny plastic parcel tied with rough twine. Like her paintings, DeFeo's photographs are essentially tonal studies of superficial contrasts. The two kinds of works also share similar compositions. For example, a still life of broken glassware (*Untitled*, 1972) presages the arrangements of angular and curvaceous forms in DeFeo's 1980 "Eternal Triangle" paintings. In one of her most successful cross-pollinations, DeFeo photographed her own paintings and sculptures in various stages of completion (and destruction). Three 1973 photos of *Tuxedo Junction*, 1965/1974, a large triptych of layered oil paint on paper, which was concurrently on view in Paris at the Centre Pompidou's "Beat Generation" exhibition, were taken before the artist mounted each of the triptych's irregular fragments (themselves salvaged from an unfinished painting on paper) onto Masonite supports. Astonishingly, the photographs enhance the delicate flakiness and sedimentary quality of her layered paint sheets so that they appear more haptic on paper than in person. Leave it to DeFeo to make such photogenic sculptures and sculptural photographs.

—Mara Hoberman

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