

## ***Lyrical Paintings, Subtle Sculptures***

**By David L. Shirey**

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WATER MILL IT is always pleasurable to watch the development of favorite artists, especially their discoveries and breakthroughs. It is akin to watching the progress of our friends. James Brooks and Betty Parsons, whose works are on view at the Louise Himelfarb Gallery, are two of my favorite artists. They are to my mind worth seeing no matter what direction they are taking. 'Even when they are doing what must appear to be more of the same thing, they are never repetitive.

Mr. Brooks has produced a body of work for this exhibition that, while asserting a noticeable connection with his past endeavors, is nonetheless a strong modification of them. The artist, even in his most vigorous expressionist days, was an irrepressible romantic. His imagery and especially his color provide one of the most lyrical 'manifestations of Abstract Expressionism. The works on display push his lyricism to another height, emphasizing more strongly his painterly poetry but not forsaking his formal strength.

Miss Parsons's sculptures are very personal efforts and have not changed radically. One does not think of development in her work, but rather of different embodiments of an indefatigable imagination. In making related sculptural statements, she changes her visual syntax here and there enough to give various visual slants that reveal the subtleties of her imagination.

Both artists are blessed with a sense of freedom in their work. Although Mr. Brooks's paintings are lightly controlled, they have a fluidity and openness. nothing ever seems cramped in his art. Miss Parsons knows a great deal about compositional restraints, but her constructions appear spontaneously playful. They at once seem curiously predetermined and happenstance. And both also have a prepossessing sense of powerful form, a primary force that endows their work with a strongly defined presence.

In Mr. Brooks's paintings, done mostly this year, the form has become less dense than in previous paintings,

ART but its role has not been diminished. What his form used to achieve with robustness, it now achieves with a more pronounced lightness and more energetic activity. The artist's shapes have always suggested movement, but now they virtually seem to engage in it, dispersing, consolidating, radiating, tugging at one another across the picture surface. Because these works are of small dimension, their appearance of pictorial action is more concentrated and heightened.

Mr. Brooks has a palette of extraordinary lushness. His greens in the show are stunning, reduced to handwriting lines that build up into sensual accretions of color. He can do more with one color than most artists with an array of different shades.

Betty Parsons's constructions are dream treasures. The pieces of wood that she finds on the Island's beaches and paints over with catchy but simple shapes are incarnations of fantasy, of reverie. They look like miniature totems, a notion enriched by the seemingly pictographic symbols she paints on them.

Her shapes make geometry fun. Hers is a geometry cast slightly on its head. Circles are never quite circles. Rectangles refuse to be straitjacketed into perfection. The shapes have a mischievous mind of their own — they sometimes agree on a symmetry, but do it with a strong independent spirit.

Editors' Picks

The 'S.N.L.' Stars Who Lasted, and the Ones Who Flamed Out

Gadget of the Year: The Toaster Oven

The exhibition will remain on view through June 22. The gallery is open on Friday from 5 to 9 P.M. and Saturday and Sunday from 11 A.M. to 6 P.M. ■

Acrylic by James Brooks