

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950

ARTFORUM

Joe Brainard

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY
724 Fifth Avenue
March 15–April 21

Much like *I Remember* (1970), his now classic and deceptively simple book of succinct, isolated memories, Joe Brainard's paintings and collages from the late 1960s and mid-'70s are instantly familiar and expansive. One work in "Painting the Way I Wish I Could Talk" features a string of pale green Zs rising, each bigger than the last, above La Siesta Motel. In another collage, the key in a sardine tin has been rolled back to reveal a male torso. Yet another offers two conjoined guest checks, one bearing a green-stemmed rose, the other a pink heart, creating an unexpected but suddenly obvious romance.



"Spirit" is something Brainard prized about Pop art, along with joy, though if he belonged to one particular movement, it was the New York School of poets. For all the comic book and commodity influence—from Nancy cartoons to Tareyton cigarettes—Brainard's images are more giddy than ironic, more impromptu than polished. This year the Library of America published his collected writings; a copy is included in a vitrine here, along with scrapbooks, journals, and index cards. Brainard's artwork bears many of the hallmarks of his writing—it is deadpan, whimsical, off-the-cuff, sincere, unpretentious, queer, funny.

"Painting is a big place," he wrote on a sheet of green paper on view. Brainard, who died in 1994 of AIDS-related pneumonia, frequently worked on a small, intimate scale, and most of the twenty-two works on display are the size of a postcard. In one case, he has even drawn a "Mini-Art Exhibition," featuring a tiny glove, a tattooed arm, a mug of coffee, and a comb with a broken tooth. But the spirit of the entire show is certainly large—that is to say, generous.

— Liz Brown

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