

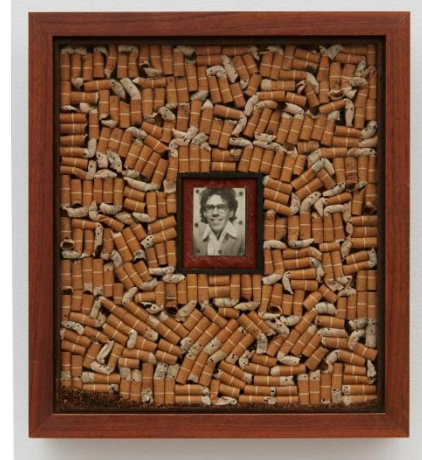
## ARTFORUM

## CRITICS' PICKS

Joe Brainard

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY  
15 Rivington Street

April 20-May 26

Joe Brainard, *Untitled (Portrait of Joe)*, n.d., mixed media collage, 11 x 9 1/2".

Those needing a dose of gaiety—both the festive *and* the faggy kinds—should make their way to “100 Works,” a survey of paintings, drawings, and collages by the late Joe Brainard (1942–1994). Most are no bigger than a notebook page, and the dense hang is perfectly in keeping with the artist’s aesthetic of accumulation. He was, after all, the author of *I Remember* (1975), an expansive inventory of memories ranging from sad to sexy, beautiful to banal.

Take *Untitled (12 Madonnas)*, 1966, a collage that is an unholy combination of church, drag, and thrift store. It’s decked out with hypnotic overlays of sequins and dime-store cards featuring the titular virgin, all of which is topped off by a Pollockesque skein of white paint. Though overflowing with gay signifiers, it short-circuits any tidy notion or classification of a “gay” aesthetic. *Chewing Gum Wrappers*, 1971, is a teeming explosion of color and texture built out of layers of detritus, calling to mind Anne Ryan’s intimate painterly collages and Robert Rauschenberg’s combines (but on a rather reduced scale, of course). Even when Brainard’s images border on being twee, they never slip into outright mawkishness. The artist always made a habit of slipping razors into his frosting.

Like his cohorts—including the poet James Schuyler and the painter Jane Freilicher—Brainard gravitated to homely spaces: cottages in Vermont; the seaside town of Southampton, New York (prior to its current billionaire infestation); or cluttered kitchenettes in dim Manhattan apartments, likely full of overstuffed ashtrays (as the many cigarette-heavy pieces here suggest). Not exactly a man of the world, Brainard was full of enough love to both fuel and consume it.

— *Nicholas Chittenden Morgan*