



James Brooks, *Sull* (1961)

James Brooks, Fumiko Amano

Written by Peter Frank

Abstract expressionism was, and is, not at all a matter of sloshing paint around in a fit of “self-expression.” The original action painters, and serious latter-day ab-ex acolytes, have nothing to do with such a mud-’n’-guts approach. James Brooks’ work is a particularly good example of the refinement, even elegance, that genuine abstract expressionist painting can manifest. When his restless, sinewy forms combine to create a deep, aqueous field — which they do most of the time — Brooks maintains a remarkably dynamic kind of poise, a visual momentousness that makes you stand in front of the painting eagerly anticipating the next thing to happen, but entirely unsure what that next thing might be. It’s surprising how much surprise Brooks has packed into his muscular, logical paintings.

Several generations later and a continent away, Fumiko Amano holds high the ab-ex standard. Her paintings are not as large as Brooks’, and her often exaggerated horizontal formats bespeak not the American mural but the Asian scroll; indeed, a lot of Amano’s cryptic scribbles seem like unraveled calligraphy. But her excited yet reasoned painterly gestures — what you might call her carefully reasoned impulsiveness — demonstrate an awareness of abstract expressionism’s underlying logic and self-reflection — as well as that inherent in the even more explosive Japanese version of action painting, the bordering-on-performance canvases of the Gutai painters. Makes sense that Amano would situate herself somewhere between Osaka and New York. *James Brooks at Manny Silverman, 619 N. Almont Dr., W. Hlywd.; Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; through Nov. 15. (310) 659-8256. Fumiko Amano at Lawrence Asher, 5820 Wilshire Blvd.; Tues.-Fri., 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sat., 12-5 p.m.; thru Nov. 11. (323) 935-9100.*