



# The Art of Joan Brown

*Karen Tsujimoto, Jacquelynn Baas*

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The prolific talents of painter Joan Brown (1938-1990) inform every page of this shining testament to a singular artist. For Brown, art was a means of self-revelation and self-investigation, a fact made abundantly clear by the autobiographical nature of her work. In the first book to fully explore Joan Brown's artistic career, Karen Tsujimoto provides an overview of Brown's life from her San Francisco childhood to her years as a mature artist and teacher. Jacquelynn Baas focuses on Brown's use of universal and personal symbolism by analyzing one of her most celebrated paintings, *The Bride*. Both authors make extensive use of interviews that let Joan Brown speak for herself about art and the creative process.

Brown greatly admired her teacher, Elmer Bischoff, and his style of Bay Area figuration. But she also was attracted to the freedom found in abstraction as expressed by de Kooning, Picasso, and Matisse. Finding her own way, she used images of family, animals, water, romantic relationships, and self-portraits to explore the complexities of human nature, often hiding her rigorous self-reflection beneath a facade of painterly spontaneity. She had a lifelong interest in philosophy and religion, and much of her later work reflected universal themes and symbols.

Serious, full of energy and passion, Brown approached both her personal and her professional life with characteristic intensity. Married four times, she was a devoted mother, a competitive swimmer, and an outspoken opponent of the art world's growing commercialism. Many issues she dealt with early in her career anticipated similar concerns raised by the women's movement in the 1970s.

In 1990, while installing an obelisk she had created for the Eternal Heritage Museum in Puttaparthi, India, Joan Brown was instantly killed when a concrete turret fell on her. What lives on in her work is her fascination with the human condition and a determination to record its essence as reflected in her own life.

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