

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

ANNOUNCING REPRESENTATION OF THE JAY DEFEO FOUNDATION

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JAY DEFEO THE ART SHOW PARK AVENUE ARMORY NOVEMBER 3 – 6, 2022



Jay DeFeo, *Summer Landscape*, 1982, oil on paper, 9 5/16 x 12 1/2 inches (23.7 x 31.8 cm) © 2022
The Jay DeFeo Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photography: Ben Blackwell.

Paula Cooper Gallery is delighted to announce the representation of The Jay DeFeo Foundation. Following the widely celebrated and critically acclaimed exhibition *Bruce Conner & Jay DeFeo: ("we are not what we seem")* at the gallery in the fall of 2021, we are thrilled to continue working with the Foundation. To mark this announcement, the gallery will present a one-person selection of works by Jay DeFeo at *The Art Show* in November. Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles, will also continue to represent the Foundation.

Jay DeFeo was driven by an unrelenting fascination with her surroundings and a restless drive to experiment with artistic tools and materials. From her first mature works produced in the early 1950s through the late 1980s, DeFeo fiercely resisted categorization and a signature style by producing a pointedly unchronological oeuvre. Working across discernible themes in a cyclical manner, the artist would often return to an earlier body of work after an extended period, incorporating earlier ideas into new pieces through the re-imaging and recycling of forms.

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Best known as a painter, most especially for *The Rose* (1958–65), her monumental marriage of painting and sculpture, DeFeo was a highly skilled draftsman, an exceptional photographer, and visionary in her use of collage and photocopy. Related motifs appear across media and many of DeFeo's individual works are cross-disciplinary, with drawings containing sections of gestural paint, objects embedded in paintings, and photocopies of collages blooming into new mediations on familiar ideas. Through an anti-hierarchical approach to unique versus self-appropriated images, and gelatin silver prints in relation to photocopies, DeFeo encouraged an unorthodox and egalitarian approach to the art object.

DeFeo gathered and drew inspiration from selected objects in her studio, which she considered her "models." Of particular note are the compasses, the tripod, the human eye and teeth, roses, a tissue box, and vacuum cleaners, improbable objects which each generated rich and imaginative bodies of work. Near the end of her life, DeFeo was able to fulfill her dream of traveling to Asia and Africa, experiences that proved inspirational both in retrospect and in anticipation, as with her *Impressions of Africa* series produced before a trip to Kenya, and the *Reflections of Africa* works that came after. The artist's fascination with the spiritual, symbolic, and surreal is palpable throughout, providing multiple points of access to the work and encouraging myriad interpretations.

The Art Show Park Avenue Armory November 3–6

At *The Art Show*, the gallery will stage a presentation of works by DeFeo from 1982–83, as well as a related work from 1952. Five small oil paintings on paper from DeFeo's *Summer Landscape* series demonstrate an unusually bold use of color. Executed in the year DeFeo returned to oil paint after a decade of working exclusively in acrylic, these works reveal the artist's renewed fascination with the medium through layers of gestural brushstrokes that emit a soft glow. DeFeo's self-professed fervor for dividing spaces within the picture plane is equally apparent in two works from the *Summer Image* series, produced the following summer and dedicated to her mother, who died the same year. Using tape to create literal barriers on the paper's surface, DeFeo allowed the lines to guide strokes of acrylic, enamel, and charcoal into amorphous forms with sharp edges.

Complementing both the *Summer Landscape* and *Summer Image* works is a single tempera painting from 1952, the pivotal year that DeFeo lived and worked in Florence. The artist found herself deeply moved by the ancient city, particularly "the gorgeous surfaces and textures of crumbling walls," and the proliferating Abstract Expressionist style.¹ In the few surviving paintings from this period the origins of DeFeo's visual vocabulary—notably the cross, triangle, circle, and spiral—are clearly discernable, along with the rich color that would resurface in earnest thirty years later in the *Summer Landscapes*.

¹ Jay DeFeo, *Biography of J. DeFeo*, 1975. Archive of The Jay DeFeo Foundation, Berkeley, CA (JDF no. Doc0028).

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Jay DeFeo (1929–1989) grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and attended the University of California, Berkeley, receiving her BA in 1950 and her MA in 1951, both in studio art. With a fellowship from the University, DeFeo traveled in Europe and North Africa from 1951 to 1952, settling in Florence for six months and producing her first mature body of works. Back in California, DeFeo settled into the vibrant Beat community in San Francisco, which was largely centered around 2322 Filmore Street, the building that housed her home and studio. It was there in 1958 that the artist embarked on her masterpiece, *The Rose*, a painting massive in both scale and concept that would occupy DeFeo until 1966.

The work DeFeo made after 1970 is distinguished by its agility and the use of new media such as photography, which the artist took up in earnest that year. DeFeo used the camera to explore her surroundings anew, producing delicate nature studies, intricate still lifes, and views of her studio and works in process. In the early 1980s, DeFeo moved from Marin County to Oakland to teach painting at Mills College. She returned to oil paint after a decade of working exclusively in acrylic, and continued her recurrent use of the photocopier. When she was diagnosed with cancer in 1988 she poured her energy wholeheartedly into new and inventive bodies of work.

In 1959, DeFeo's work was featured in "Sixteen Americans" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. *The Rose* was first exhibited in 1969 at the Pasadena Art Museum, California, and was subsequently installed at the San Francisco Art Institute, before being acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1995. In 2012 the Whitney organized "Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective," which traveled to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. One-person exhibitions of DeFeo's work have taken place at the University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA (1990), Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia (1996), and the San Jose Museum of Art, California (2019), among others. In 2018, Le Consortium in Dijon, France, organized "Jay DeFeo: The Ripple Effect," a show examining her legacy and lasting influence on contemporary artists working today, which traveled to the Aspen Art Museum. In the fall of 2023, the Maison européenne de la photographie (MEP) in Paris will present a major exhibition of DeFeo's photographic works.

DeFeo's enigmatic work has spawned a flurry recent exhibitions and publications, most notably *Bruce Conner & Jay DeFeo: ("we are not what we seem")* at Paula Cooper Gallery in 2021, the first exhibition to pair Conner and DeFeo, which was accompanied by a catalogue; the critically acclaimed *Rip Tales: Jay DeFeo's Estocada and Other Pieces* by Jordan Stein (SoberSCOPE, 2021); and *About The Rose: Creation and Community in Jay DeFeo's Circle* by Elizabeth Ferrell (Yale, 2022). DeFeo's works are in the collections of many museums, including The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, The de Young Museum, San Francisco; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; The Menil Collection, Houston; The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Tate Modern, London; and The Centre Pompidou, Paris.