

# BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

## Nancy Brooks Brody: Ode

By [Ann C. Collins](#)

Ovals of color hover in pairs, one above the other, close but rarely touching. Torn from sheets of tissue paper steeped in hand-mixed ink and adhered to untreated canvases, they interact in formal and narrative relationships that speak to interdependence, hierarchies, and the straightforward connection of maker to materials. In their final body of work, artist Nancy Brooks Brody, who died of ovarian cancer in December of 2023, retains their fidelity to minimalism and a deeply personal studio practice, creating seven vertical works of tissue paper on canvas that make up *Nancy Brooks Brody: Ode* at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery. Brody's assertive use of color and shape to create a compositional template that repeats across iterations is immediately engaging, but look closer and more intimate traces of the artist's hand are revealed in the small tears and puckered surfaces of their delicate materials.

In *Untitled* (2023), a large work measuring five by three feet, a vibrant red oval of tissue floats above an almost identical one in black. Sized to fit as much of the canvas as possible, the forms feel a bit cramped. The edges of the red oval are frayed. Small tears in its surface show where the crimson ink has bled into the canvas to which it is affixed. Slightly larger than the picture frame, a small bit of the black oval wraps around the side, quietly underscoring the three-dimensionality of the object itself and recalling an intimate moment in Brody's process when they decided to gently tuck the



Nancy Brooks Brody, *Untitled*, 2023. Tissue paper on canvas, 60 x 38 inches. Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery.

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still-wet tissue around the corner of the canvas. In another untitled work from 2023, a slightly more generous channel of space running between the green and black ovals creates a sense of distance that suggests an entity and its shadow, a presence and its effect. The vibrant green oval easily becomes the dominant subject as the black oval recedes in importance—and yet it continues to intrigue me. Is it a shadow or a hole? A second object or a space from which the green ovoid has risen or into which it might fall?

Two works hanging next to each other, *Untitled* (2023) and *Vernal Violet no. 2* (2023), contain deeply saturated purple and black forms. The first work is more than twice the size of the second; seen in close proximity to its diminutive twin, it takes on a more confident tone. Measuring twelve by eight inches, *Vernal Violet no. 2* seems quiet in comparison, and yet this is the only work in the exhibition in which the edges of the two forms actually touch, a charming detail.

With its rounded patch of gray placed above another of black, *Untitled* (2023) offers a stripped-down, more prototypical form within the series. In this work, the black oval does not yield power to what is placed above it; instead, both forms hold my attention equally, and with no spark of bright color to distract, I more easily discern the presence of the canvas and how the tissue has sunk into its texture, acting as a skin that forms over its surface. Here, the beige tone of the cotton interacts with the neutral gray and black ovals, allowing

what is merely background in the other works to become a third and more integral element in the overall image. Brody finds balance in this muted version of their established pattern: all three elements—the gray oval, the black oval, and the field of raw canvas—create a nuanced harmony, a calm abstraction within which I don't seek to find connections or storylines.

Brody was a founding member of fierce pussy, a lesbian feminist art activist collective founded in 1991 in association with ACT UP, and they remained a core member, continuing to collaborate alongside Zoe Leonard, Carrie Yamaoka, and Joy Episalla. In early work that addressed lesbian identity and visibility, the collective employed crack-and-peel stickers and wheat-paste posters, adhering their messaging to surfaces throughout New York City in a practice that echoes through Brody's last works. In the exhibition catalogue, Jill H. Casid reports in her essay, "Come Flying" that Brody continued working in their studio until the very end of their life, completing *Joy For Joy* (2023) a week before they died. In this work, a gray oval floats in the top position, but here a patch of deep blue replaces the expected black oval. Circular swirls, perhaps of ink applied to tissue, is evidenced in both forms. As is the case here, there are times when the pureness of abstraction eclipses language, yet as I step back from the work, my mind continues to see a silver cloud above a blue sea, a soul rising over a watery planet.

