

REVIEWS

FILM REVIEW

An Affectionate Tribute to an Artist's Artist

By LAWRENCE VAN GELDER

A mystery. Elusive. Isolated. Many people in the world of art knew Ray Johnson. Their descriptions, listed above, make clear that no one knew him well.

But if the public was barely aware of him, his colleagues knew and admired his art — his paintings, his collages, his creative mail, his performance pieces. They remembered the time he dropped footlong hot dogs from a helicopter over Ward's Island and the time an admirer sought to buy one of his collages. The prospective buyer said he had \$1,000 to spend. Johnson asked \$2,000. The prospective buyer offered \$1,500. He got the collage. But Johnson had cut away a quarter of it.

Who was this talented, enigmatic

HOW TO DRAW A BUNNY

Directed and edited by John Walter; director of photography, Andrew Moore; music by Max Roach; produced by Mr. Moore; released by Mr. Mudd and Moticos Motion Pictures Elevator Pictures. At the Film Forum, 209 West Houston Street, west of Avenue of the Americas, South Village. Running time: 90 minutes. This film is not rated.

man found dead at 67 on Friday, Jan. 13, 1995, an apparent suicide in the waters off Sag Harbor on Long Island? No answers will be found in "How to Draw a Bunny," the affectionate and interesting tribute that opens today at Film Forum.

But for the uninitiated, this documentary, directed and edited by John Walter, produced and photographed by Andrew Moore and accompanied by music written and

performed by Max Roach, provides an intriguing and entertaining introduction to Johnson through his varied art; the mystery surrounding his death, which may have been his final performance piece, and the reminiscences of contemporaries like Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Chuck Close, Richard Feigen, Morton Janklow, Judith Malina, Roy Lichtenstein, and James Rosenquist.

Tracking Johnson from his childhood in Detroit through Black Mountain College to New York at the birth of Pop and performance art and to his death, the film depicts a man without interest in gallery shows and the wealth and fame they might have brought him. But he had a rare sense of humor, and if in the end no one could claim to know him well, it was probably because he made his life a work of art and preferred to let all of his art speak for him.