

ARTFORUM

Magazine

September 2016

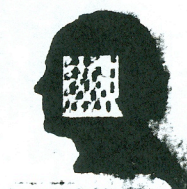
"How to Draw a Bunny: Ray Johnson"

FEIGEN CONTEMPORARY

535 West 20th Street

September 26 - October 26

Ray Johnson, who died under mysterious and probably self-designed circumstances in 1995, was an omnivorous collagist: a diarist who thought in pictures and whose thoughts piled up and stuck together in whimsical, prolix, consummately balanced compositions. A small but delicious selection of these thought-things are on view in "How to Draw a Bunny," while a documentary of the same name by John Walter and Andrew Moore plays at the Film Forum through October 22. Johnson's "bunny" is a long-eared, floppy-nosed, bug-eyed ideogram that, like an Artschwager bjp, stands for the artist transmuted into graphic terms and deployed into the world to mirror, mock, and extend his human persona. Johnson worked in series and was inspired by voluminous correspondence with all kinds of people (he was the founder of the intentionally misspelled mail-art extravaganza known as the New York Correspondance School). Included in the Feigen show from a group of works involving famous people's mother's potato mashers are *David Hockney's Mother's Potato Masher*, 1972-80-88, and *Untitled (Marilyn Monroe's Mother's Potato Masher)*, 1971-90. We get glimpses of William Burroughs and Paloma Picasso in "The Silhouette Project," 1976-1995; and, in the "Marianne Moore Hats," 1966-1988, an abstraction of the poet's famous tricorne floats like a cheerful black cloud through other complex images. The film, meanwhile, is a valentine to Johnson's Buster Keaton-ish demeanor and protean productivity—its makers have imbibed his aesthetic and transmuted it with great dexterity into the moving image. Interviews with Richard Feigen, Billy Name, James Rosenquist, and the police captain who presided over the inquest into Johnson's performancelike suicide are accompanied by commissioned compositions by Max Roach and Thurston Moore.



Jim Rosenquist, 1977.

—Frances Richard