

ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Jay DeFeo

MARC SELWYN FINE ART
9953 South Santa Monica Boulevard
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If a certain mythos around Jay DeFeo circulates, it is due to the perceived centrality of her long-in-development, bombastic painting *The Rose*, 1958–66. With this piece often presented as an obdurate but nevertheless heroic and career-defining project, many of DeFeo's other efforts fall tragically by the wayside. This installation of the artist's "Samurai" series, 1986–87, begins to redress this narrative, as many of these large-format paintings on paper refute the notion of a singularly careful and slow-working painter. Instead, most of these pieces show the artist's improvisatorial hand, as she worked from source material provided by a 1985 trip to Japan and an exhibition in San Francisco (where DeFeo lived and worked) of Japanese samurai helmets. Many of the paintings are made up of only a few dozen brushstrokes, which mark out a geometric unfolding that is quixotically both crystalline and tectonic, while playfully reversing the sparse palette used by East Coaster Franz Kline. An air of experimentation pervades—in *Untitled (Samurai Series)*, 1986, a pair of black paper strips are collaged effortlessly into a decayed tangle of peaks and valleys, providing necessary structure. She never repeats this gesture in the series again—at least, not in the works on view here.



Jay DeFeo, *Untitled (Samurai Series)*, 1986, acrylic and charcoal on paper, 38 x 50".

A second room in the gallery presents a smattering of the artist's other works—the most surprising of which is a suite of three intimately scaled photographs. One, an untitled work from 1972, is a plumb line to the Surrealist photography of [Dora Maar](#), depicting a head of cauliflower on a svelte silver platter. Simple and arresting, it predates the "Samurai" series and underlines a quickness crucial to DeFeo's practice.

— [Andy Campbell](#)