

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

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Joan Mitchell Foundation and Cheim & Read Gallery, New York

Gallery Gazing in New York

Four shows worth a gander this holiday season

BY LANCE ESPLUND

Despite the economic doldrums, there's much to catch the eye, if not open the purse-strings, at New York galleries this holiday season. Among the offerings: three shows on Chelsea's West 25th Street and an exhibition dedicated to Eros on the Upper East Side.

'Joan Mitchell: Sunflowers'
Cheim & Read
(547 W. 25th St.; 212-242-7727)
Through Dec. 20



The Abstract Expressionist Joan Mitchell (1925-92) owes as much to Van Gogh and Monet as she does to de Kooning and Pollock, a fact beautifully demonstrated by this invigorating though uneven show. In these 14 calligraphic paintings, prints and drawings from the late 1960s through 1991, Mitchell proves to be the most landscape-based abstract painter of the New York School.

The small drawing "Untitled" (1967) is a tangled mass of searching, widening lines—as if caught in brambles. Silvery brown and gray etchings, effigies or vestiges, evoke memories, stains or pressed flowers. In the spare, masterly triptych "Sunflowers" (1990-91), three abstract entanglements, in bruised, feathery reds, yellows and blues, flutter within their respective white rectangles like caged birds. The nearly 10-foot-high diptych "Two Sunflowers" (1980), an ecstatic, orange inferno, explodes outward, consuming the viewer. Mitchell brings us not the look of sunflowers (not always even sunflower yellow) but, rather, the essence—the fullness, freshness and actions—of nature.

Mr. Esplund is the former chief art critic of the New York Sun.