



THE NEW YORKER

## GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

### Janet Sobel and Pearl Blauvelt

These figurative artists—both born in 1893 and self-taught—fascinate in very different ways. Sobel, a Ukrainian immigrant and Brighton Beach housewife, took up painting at the age of forty-five and became a sensation of the postwar avant-garde: her vivacious tangles of dripped paint predate those of Jackson Pollock by several years and were an acknowledged influence. In the dense compositions here, from the nineteen-forties, faces float above busy areas marbled with streaming color or blanketed with wildflowers. Blauvelt's drawings, which went unnoticed until after her death, in 1987, have a strangely storybook quality, faithful to their own rules of proportion and perspective. The colored-pencil drawings in this exhibition favor characters in the countryside; in one dynamic example, a hunter, his dog, and a flying turkey are all depicted as being the same size. Sobel died in 1968, forgotten, but she was briefly at the heart of the New York art scene; not too far away, in northeastern Pennsylvania, Blauvelt spent a quiet life, observing from the sidelines.

—*Johanna Fateman*