

ON VIEW: SEPTEMBER 17 – OCTOBER 31, 2026

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 6 - 8 PM

GALLERY ONE

Kate Berry Brown: Holding Form

Kate Berry Brown has spent years moving between two and three dimensions, asking how a shape can become an object, and how an object can begin to feel like a presence. In this new series of works on paper, that movement folds back on itself. After several years devoted largely to carved wood and paper wall sculptures, Brown returns to drawing with a sculptor's understanding of volume, weight, edge, and touch. The forms in these works are emphatically flat, built from ink and colored pencil, yet they appear swollen, folded, paired, stacked, stretched, and compressed. They occupy the page less like images than like things that have arrived there.

Brown builds them slowly. Dense accumulations of tiny marks create surfaces that look woven, each line or point contributing to a gradual thickening. From a distance the forms can look smooth and sealed; up close they dissolve into thousands of minute gestures. This tension between wholeness and accumulation is central to the work. Nothing is actually modeled in relief, but the repetition of the hand produces the illusion of mass. The eye reads skin, shell, cloth, wood, stone, even flesh—without ever settling on one material. Their contours are precise, but their identities remain unstable.

Many of the drawings suggest vessels: bowls, urns, pods, reliquaries, containers whose purpose is less practical than psychic. Others resemble doubled bodies, organs, botanical structures, pieces of furniture, masks, or architectural plans. Symmetry appears repeatedly, but Brown rarely allows it to become rigid. A pair leans together; one side swells more heavily than the other; a central seam makes two forms feel joined and divided at once. Even the most self-contained shapes seem to carry a history of pressure and adjustment. They have been coaxed into balance rather than engineered into it.

Brown has described these works as portraits. She considered giving them human names before deciding that doing so might narrow their range. "I think of them as portraits—each one with its own inner life, its own temperament, its own quiet strangeness," she writes. The vessel became a more elastic proposition: a body capable of holding what cannot be seen. Within these shapes she imagines memories, stray thoughts, wasted hours, private griefs, small joys, and inherited ideas—the ordinary and extraordinary debris that accumulates inside a life.

That idea changes how the drawings are read. Their abstraction does not distance them from human experience; it becomes a way of approaching it without illustration. The forms are not symbols with fixed meanings, nor are they depictions of recognizable subjects. They behave more like containers for projection. Their rounded silhouettes can appear protective or burdened, intimate or monumental, comic or solemn. A shape can suggest an embrace in one moment and confinement in the next.

The surrounding fields are equally important. Brown often places a dense central form inside a softened rectangle or an enclosing border, creating a picture within the sheet. These zones can read as rooms, niches, stages, or simply spaces of suspension. In some works, repeated ticks, dots, grids, and bands produce the feeling of measurement or construction; in others, expanses of pale color seem to breathe around the darker mass.

Brown's new drawings also clarify the continuity between her work on paper and her sculptural practice. Her carved wood wall sculptures grew directly out of earlier abstract drawings and her desire to give those shapes physical dimension. During an extended stay on Cuttyhunk, a small island off the coast of Massachusetts, Brown began working in her father's wood shop, using available materials and learning to cut, sand, glue, and shape wood. She became interested in the way a piece could diverge from a sketch once material resistance entered the process: the design would begin in one place and then, as she has put it, "take on a world of its own." The resulting sculptures—often wrapped in paper or finished with restrained color—were polished, pared down, and tactile.

That sculptural chapter now seems embedded in the drawings. Brown has returned to paper, but not to the same paper practice she left. The new works carry the memory of cutting and sanding. Their edges feel carved even when they are drawn; their dark forms seem to push forward from the sheet, while the thousands of marks that construct them substitute duration for physical depth. If the sculptures translated drawings into objects, these works perform the reverse operation: they bring the lessons of objects back into drawing.

Brown's route to this body of work has been similarly nonlinear. Born in 1978 and raised in Evanston, Illinois, she studied fashion design at Washington University Art School. After working briefly in fashion, she turned toward floral design, eventually spending six months at the Boerma Instituut in the Netherlands. Years later, while living in Las Vegas and pregnant with her first child, she returned to painting. After moving back to the Midwest and having two more children, drawing increasingly replaced painting—partly because pencil and paper could be picked up and put down amid the practical demands of family life, and partly because she became deeply attached to the immediacy and meditative repetition of mark-making.

Ricco/Maresca first introduced Brown's work in the 2022 online presentation *Clarity*. Later that year, her sculptures were included in *Un/Related* in Gallery One alongside work by Christine Hughes and Lisa Ivory; in 2023, the gallery presented her solo exhibition *Wood, Paper, Paint* in Gallery Two. *Holding Form* marks another turn in that ongoing development.

Throughout this nonlinear trajectory—fashion, flowers, painting, drawing, woodworking—the constant may be less any particular medium than the act of forming: arranging parts, testing proportion, working through texture, and discovering when something is complete. Brown's practice is built on curiosity, but also on restraint. She has spoken about editing ruthlessly, removing anything extraneous until a form feels inevitable. The new drawings complicate that impulse, they are visually concise but materially obsessive: simple forms made through enormous accumulations of labor.