Charles Steffen: *Drawing Nudes is Like Saying a Prayer*, *Amen*
January 21 – February 27, 2010
Opening Reception: Thursday, January 21, 6 – 8 pm

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to announce the upcoming exhibition, *Charles Steffen: Drawing Nudes is Like Saying a Prayer, Amen*.

Chicago artist Charles Steffen (1927-1995) created a remarkable body of work featuring strange figures that he depicted in pencil and colored pencil on large sheets of brown butcher paper and other surfaces — some as large as eight feet in height. He completed thousands of works of art while living with his mother and two siblings from 1963 to his death in 1995, however, only those made from 1989 on have survived.

Steffen's subject matter consists of self-portraits, portraits of his mother and other people, botanical subjects, religious works and nudes. Early drawings of figures are fairly realistic, yet a strange webbed netting of lines upon their skins give them an outlandish, scaly appearance. Many of his later figures depart dramatically from this approach and take on a highly stylized, peculiar and idiosyncratic quality that borrows elements from sources as disparate as French symbolist Odilon Redon and American newspaper cartoonist Fred Lasswell's "Snuffy Smith" character. Eventually, these evolve into surrealistic hybrids of humans and sunflowers.

As a young man, the artist was employed for several years as a draftsman for a design firm and briefly attended the Chicago Institute of Design, but suffered a mental breakdown. He was diagnosed as a schizophrenic and spent 13 years in a psychiatric hospital where he first began making crayon drawings of the men on his ward. He continued to make art — often as many as three drawings a day — after he was released and back home living with his family. Almost all of his works include written texts describing his daily activities and thoughts about his life.

Steffen is a true original, an artist whose vision is unprecedented and incomparable.

— Michael Bonesteel