

Charles Steffen



Nude with a Blue Pillow, 1990, 30 x 82 inches, colored pencil on brown wrapping paper

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to debut a solo exhibition of the drawings of **Charles Steffen** from **March 22 - May 5, 2007** with an opening reception **March 22nd from 6 - 8 PM**.

From the mid-1960s until his death in 1995, Charles Steffen (b. 1927) made art full-time while living with his mother, one sister and two brothers in a Chicago bungalow. Most of his work over the first 35 years of that period was destroyed, but drawings from 1989 through 1994 have survived thanks to the interest of one of his nephews who saved them.

Steffen made drawings with pencil and colored pencil on paper, mostly brown wrapping paper. Some of them are quite large, more than 8 feet tall. Steffen's highly original figures are characterized by curiously caricatured features including large, bulbous eyeballs, thick, gnarled fingers, and skin scored with deep creases and squared off with reptilian-like scales.

Steffen's drawings contain written accounts about his art and life as well as commentaries about the artwork itself. Some are recollections of past events. In one, "Red Headed Stripper", he wrote: "She was a wild dancer, taking your breath away, I still remember her to this day over forty five years ago." Invariably the text also thanks the Lord for His artistic assistance and inspiration.

The oldest of eight children, Steffen had just begun to study art at the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1949 and in 1950, he began hearing voices in his head and had a mental breakdown. He was institutionalized at Elgin State Hospital where he received electroshock treatments for schizophrenia. He remained at Elgin on-and-off until 1963.

Steffen continued to make art while hospitalized and after, he returned home to live with his family, but confined himself to drawings on paper. He averaged two-to-three works a day with a completely idiosyncratic approach that reflected almost nothing of his short-lived academic training. After they piled up, his sister Rita, fearing that they were a fire hazard, would periodically force him to throw them away. When his mother died in 1994, the remaining family dispersed and the house was sold. It was at that point that nephew Christopher Preissing volunteered to store them for his uncle. A year later, Steffen died of throat cancer.

The emergence of Charles Steffen's art at the 2006 Outsider Art Fair signaled a new and exciting discovery in the field of intuitive art.

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