

Andrew Edlin GALLERY

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein: Drawings 1964-67

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Tucked away in a ramshackle house in a suburban enclave outside of Milwaukee, Eugene Von Bruenchenhein (1910-1983) labored quietly to transform himself into a modern Renaissance man. Though he spent his days working as a humble baker, the text of a hand incised-plaque that he hung in his kitchen declared the identity he was fashioning for himself:

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein Freelance artist Poet and Sculptor Inovator Arrow Maker and Plant Man Bone artifacts constructor Photographer and Architect Philosopher.

True to his word, Von Bruenchenhein stuffed his modest home to the gills with fantastical finger paintings, reliquary-like sculptures fashioned out of TV dinner chicken bones, botanically inflected ceramics, reams of writing and poetry, tender erotic photographs of his wife, Marie, and ballpoint pen drawings of baroque filigrees and crystalline geometries. But as an autodidact, who was connected to the world of art and culture only through his extensive collection of books and magazines, Von Bruenchenhein's vibrant secret life was kept cloistered away from all but his wife and small group of their friends, much to his chagrin. Only after his death was his remarkable, variegated oeuvre discovered and installed in its rightful place in the canon of American self-taught art.

This exhibition brings together a selection of Von Bruenchenhein's drawings from the mid-1960s, a little-seen, yet vital piece of his peripatetic practice. These works can be divided roughly into two categories: the natural and the geometric. Collectively, the two drawing modalities elaborate on a host of aesthetic and conceptual concerns of his more well-known work in painting, sculpture and photography.

His loping, curvaceous drawings of Seussian plant life and psychedelically embellished animals, seem like they come from a naturalist's diary of an alternate dimension. They are, perhaps, part of a taxonomic catalog of the worlds that he rendered roughly and evocatively in paint or cousins of the strange botanical vessels that he fashioned in clay dug up from local construction sites and fired in his kitchen oven. Certainly, they are extensions of his interest in certain forms of demotic design, from the patterned textiles that he used to create backdrops for his photographs, to the wallpaper sample books that he would glue his drawings in to display them.

His more rigorously geometric works, on the other hand, resemble schematics for vast, futuristic buildings of the kind dreamed up by artist/architects like Constant Nieuwenhuys or Paolo Soleri. More than anything, they feel as if they have been beamed in from science fiction—technologically opaque alien craft, or the circuitry of some insectile cyborg from the vast reaches of space. In this way, they serve as a kind of obverse of the more organic, cathedral-like architectures found in his paintings and brought to life in his Gothically styled chicken bone spires, which appear to have been coughed up fully formed from the bowls of the earth.

But of course, his drawings cannot truly be said to hail from either the fairylands of children's book fantasies or the mysterious corners of the cosmos. Instead, like all of Von Bruenchenhein's work, they sprang only from the fertile confines of his unique mind. They are delicate tracteries of the patterns of thought itself.

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein's works have been featured in major museum exhibitions, including *After Nature* (New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 2008), *Eugene Von Bruenchenhein: Freelance Artist-Poet and Sculptor-Innovator-Arrow Maker and Plant Man-Bone Artifacts Constructor-Photographer and Architect-Philosopher* (American Folk Art Museum, New York, 2010-11), *Alternative Guide to the Universe* (Hayward Gallery, London, 2013), *The Encyclopedic Palace* (55th Venice Biennale, 2013), *Mythologies: Eugene Von Bruenchenhein* (John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI, 2017) and *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (National Gallery of Art, Wash. DC, 2018). His oeuvre is held in the collections of, among others, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum and the American Folk Art Museum, New York.