

ARTE FUSE

LOWER EAST SIDE NYC, NEW YORK, OUTSIDER ART, REVIEWS, REVIEWS AND PHOTO STORIES

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein at Andrew Edlin Gallery

by JONATHAN GOODMAN



Eugene Von Bruenchenhein at Andrew Edlin Gallery

While not absolutely an outsider artist, neither did Eugen Von Bruenchenhein fit into the artworld's mainstream. Self-taught, working in Milwaukee, the artist is likely best known for his erotic photos of Marie, his wife. This show, though, concentrates on the ballpoint-pen drawings he did during a short period, from 1964 to 1967. The drawings are exquisite examples of embellishment: decorative flourishes mostly composed of lines ending in small solid circles of color. These works are regularly abstract, although there is one that resembles a fish; another, a squid; and a third could be read as a landscape. These drawings demonstrate both an economy and a sense of ornamental beauty that are compelling. Self-sufficient, the group of works, in their informal use of a pen and their unusual trellis-like geometries, evidence a florid but also controlled sense of order.



One image, *Untitled (June 67) (1967)*, looks very much like a fish, with the head on the right, the body in the middle, and a tail fanning outward on the left. Most of the image consists of outlines that capture the shape to some extent by implication. Gently curving lines abound, some of which end in the filled-in spheres found regularly in the drawings. The embellishments convince Von Bruenchenhein's

audience that he was seeking both a visual language bordering on the hieratic and, at least, in this case, a recognizable image whose abstract decorations enhance our feeling for the composition as art. Another untitled drawing from 1965, of a horizontally aligned schematic pattern that might be an abstract, futuristic landscape, is truly impressive and, despite its relatively small size, manages to look large. This is achieved by Von Bruenchenhein's angled lines rising from a horizon line, in front of which are rows of the colored spheres. The lines veer upward, toward the left, while the blue outline of a triangle sits on the very left edge of the drawing. It is a particularly excellent example of a broadly architectonic work of art, unfolding into a point of view suggestive of topography.

This final work is fully abstract. *Untitled (Nov. 1966) (1966)* is a violin-shaped, highly symmetrical decorative drawing, whose sides are contained by curving lines and dark spheres. The middle of the construction is complex, consisting of a dark, not fully connected parabola in the middle, and at the top, an image like an open wishbone with a sharp point rising from the middle. Embellishment takes over here, but in a way that accentuates its ability to create a nearly object-like realism—even if we have no idea what the object is supposed to be. Von Bruenchenhein was an original, but also an eccentric; these drawings and the other works place him on the margins. While he is considered an outsider artist, maybe it makes more sense to see him as an idiosyncratic improviser, someone whose output broke through boundaries of traditional aesthetics and visual decorum.

