

The Swiss artist David Weiss (1946-2012) is best known for the sly, jokey photographs, sculptures and videos he made with Peter Fischli under the name Fischli/Weiss. Among these is the classic film [“The Way Things Go” \(1987\)](#), a Rube Goldberg lineup of everyday objects arranged into a flaming, foaming, combustible chain reaction.

Before Fischli/Weiss started in 1979, however, Mr. Weiss published artists’ books. Included [in this exhibition](#) are more than 60 comics, abstractions and psychedelic landscapes peppered with anthropomorphic insects, plants and animals. Many of the works here served as sketches or prototypes for the books Mr. Weiss published in the ’70s, which were gathered in the recent publication “Nine Books 1973-1979” (2014). Vestiges of Sigmar Polke, whom Mr. Weiss knew in Zurich, are apparent, as well as alt-comic artists like R. Crumb — particularly in the board-game-cum-comic “The Big Society Game or the Story of the Beagle Commune” (date unknown), which finds Minnie Mouse frolicking among a commune of dogs.

American viewers will immediately see overlaps with Philip Guston, Raymond Pettibon, Mike Kelley or the Chicago Imagist Christina Ramberg; Mr. Weiss cited Walt Disney and the European illustrators Wilhelm Busch and Ernst Kreidolf as inspirations.

What’s really on display here, though, is an ethos: call it post-’60s exhaustion or countercultural ennui. An undated ink-and-gouache drawing, not unlike a cartoon in *The New Yorker*, finds two longhaired types walking through an urban landscape. “I’m fed up with drugs,” one man says. “Me, too,” the other responds. Shortly after this, Mr. Weiss and Mr. Fischli would make the work they’re known for, couched in photographic irony and humor rather than hand-drawn hippie existentialism.

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David Weiss: Works, 1968-1979
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By **MARTHA
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"Untitled" (date unknown), by David Weiss, whose show at the Swiss Institute comprises works on paper from 1968-79, including comics and psychedelic landscapes. Estate of David Weiss

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