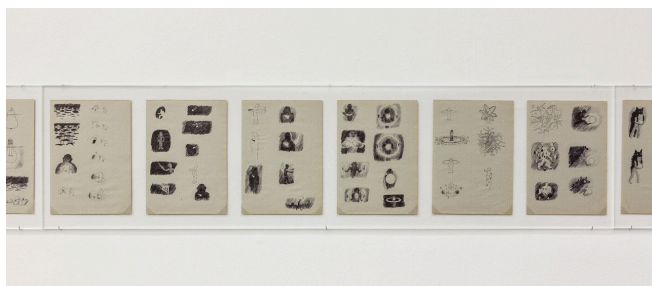




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David Weiss: Works, 1968-1979
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David Weiss: 'Works, 1968-1979' PHOTO: SWISS INSTITUTE

David Weiss : Works, 1968-1979

Swiss Institute

18 Wooster St., (212) 925-2035

Through Feb. 22

Art students ought to hurry down to the Swiss Institute and steal ideas from its exhibition of the early works of David Weiss (1946-2012). Rarely will they, or anyone else, encounter such a rich trove of high-level whimsy, visual wit and gentle irony.

Weiss, the Zurich-born son of a minister and a schoolteacher, essentially began as a hippie. He was a member of a famous commune, ran a macrobiotic store, and palled around with anarchists. In 1979, he began collaborating with Peter Fischli, and together they made one of the most popular art films ever, "The Way Things Go" (1987). It is a 30-minute Rube-Goldbergesque sequence of ordinary objects causing ramps to teeter-totter, chemicals to spill and things on wheels to roll downhill, all with comic consequences. (Everybody I know who has seen the film loves it.)

Before his long partnership with Mr. Fischli, however, Weiss was a painter, printmaker, draftsman, designer and fount of visual ideas meriting mention in the same breath as Paul Klee. Lyrically simple gouache-and-ink renditions of pools of streetlamp light, sketchbook riffs on Mickey Mouse and bits of handwritten poetry—well, words—are present in abundance, in vitrines and on the wall. Some might quibble that there are too many items in the show and, yes, the friezes of small drawings go on a little long. But the exhibition is so much fun—yes, fun—that too much is almost not enough.