

SI



Time Out New York
David Weiss: Works, 1968-1979
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TIME OUT SAYS



While it's obvious that you can't have an artistic collaboration without a melding of individual sensibilities and practices, it's a point to keep in mind when considering the solo efforts of Swiss artist David Weiss (1946–2012). His works on paper made me wonder what might have happened had Weiss not teamed up with Peter Fischli in 1979 to form the conceptualist duo Fischli/Weiss.

Wry is the most frequently appended adjective to the pair's videos, installations and sculpture, and it's certainly true that very few artists have topped their sublime absurdism, with which they undercut conventional assumptions about art and life. They famously filmed a Rube Goldberg device that they'd cobbled out of wood, metal, Styrofoam and castaway objects (tires, jugs, buckets, ladders). The entire sequence consisted of following this contraption's seemingly perpetual actions in their studio, driven by the forces of fire, water, air and gravity.

On his own, Weiss was no less humorous, but the direction he took was bound up in drawing and painting. He possessed a deft hand, resulting in images that are at once refined and cartoonish, formalist and pop. Thematically, they range all over the place: cityscapes, beach scenes, storyboards, abstractions and groups of characters taking shape as anthropomorphic flowers or Giacometti-like figures smoking cigarettes. How he might have followed up is anyone's guess.

Weiss was in his twenties when he created these pieces, and

they're clearly influenced by his acquaintance with Sigmar Polke but also by German Expressionism and Zap Comix. They're of a piece with his generation's revolt against the austerity of postminimalism and, more particularly, of his own rebellion against Swiss sobriety. Smart, compelling and mordantly funny, they represent a road not taken that, however intriguing, leads to an unknowable destination.—*Howard Halle*