

Andrew Frieder's blunt poetry born of the urgent and intimate



Untitled mixed media work on paper by Andrew Frieder at The Good Luck Gallery.

(The Good Luck Gallery)
By Leah Ollman

Andrew Frieder was an outsider to the art world's educational and institutional structures, but an insider to the animating forces of art itself.

His work has an immediacy to it, a blunt poetry born of the urgent and intimate. A deeply absorbing show at the Good Luck Gallery introduces Frieder, who was largely unknown before his death last year, through 20 mixed media works on paper.

All of the images here follow a similar physical format: vertical, roughly 20-by-16 inches, the sheet filled with a single central scene articulated mostly through line, complemented by color.

Each depicts an encounter of some sort, between two people or between a human and an animal. Ultimately, the stories tell of the meeting between impulse and action. They swing toward the poles of violence and tenderness, both often encompassing a comedic edge. ("Well, if you were to ask her, the mermaid doesn't really like all the things her shark friend does," reads the internal caption in one piece.)

In another (all are untitled), a kneeling nun raises her shoe in one hand, poised to pound the snake curling on the ground before her. Her brilliant blue habit gleams against a background of drab ocher and dark brick. The proverbial dove of peace flies or perhaps drops across another sheet. Beheaded, its neck spills a long scarlet dollop of blood, its olive branch in free-fall.

In another work, Cain murders Abel above the words "It's a very old story," nested in concentric parentheses.

Throughout, the simply drawn faces remain neutral, just shy of cartoonish. Even if Frieder adopts biblical or mythical themes, he renders them less as high drama than as the familiar theater of everyday life. They take place in undefined time and space, as parables of struggle and domesticity.

He draws a couple reclining, man's hand cupping woman's breast, in tautly elegant line emboldened by passages of yellow and chalky pink. Eroticism slips in, almost covertly, under cover of visual humor, a play of forms.

In one engrossing piece, a man, standing, embraces a woman from behind, his hands multiplied into a dozen that alight, as if simultaneously, on her every body part, hers responding like reverberating echoes. The image beautifully fuses stillness and motion, the actual and the aspirational.

Here, Frieder amplifies his distilled line with dilute color. He worked on paper that appears to have been prepared to bear layers of wash, pastel, ink and graphite.

Diagnosed with schizophrenia as a young adult, Frieder was self-taught, but not necessarily untaught. His home was packed with art books and tools for making all manner of things (including hats), and he was a regular visitor to the Museum of Art & History in Lancaster, where he lived. His only substantial show until this revelatory one at Good Luck opened there just weeks before his death of cancer at 55.

The Good Luck Gallery, 945 Chung King Road, (213) 625-0935, through Aug. 29. Closed Sunday through Tuesday. www.thegoodluckgallery.com