

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Karl Wirsum

Drawings: 1967-70

Co-curated by Dan Nadel

September 9 - October 9, 2010

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 9, 6 - 8 pm

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of Karl Wirsum's drawings. Culled from dozens of the artist's historic sketchbooks dating from 1967-70, this will be the first New York City solo presentation of Wirsum's work in over two decades.

Karl Wirsum (b. 1939) is a Chicago native who first emerged in the mid-1960's, creating paintings suffused with the energy of his urban environment, comic strips, and South American patterning. An original participant in the *Hairy Who* activities of the 60's, Wirsum along with fellow youthful artists Suellen Rocca, Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson, Art Green and Jim Falconer, marked a generational shift in Chicago art. *Hairy Who* announced a unique and Chicago-based pop style to the world. As they branched out to San Francisco, Washington D.C., and New York City, Wirsum's imagery found its way into pop culture via record covers, art publications, and even the occasional illustration gig for *Playboy*.

The drawings in this show roughly coincide with the five *Hairy Who* exhibitions and four offset printed comic book-style catalogues which came about between 1966-1969; they are among the only drawings Wirsum made during this important period. For Wirsum, drawing is and was a daily activity, depicting and cataloging his visual and verbal ideas. He explains,

Drawing is an end in itself in terms of connecting to my creative energy. Painting and such carry the images to further elaboration and refinement which I find satisfying in terms of a certain obsession or compulsion to really get things right. I always see drawing as potential. They always have a possibility of being something more. Even though I complete drawings there's still that potential out there to bring them to another realm.

Wirsum is an inventor of complex visual languages. In his drawings, bulbous insects, tortoise shells, and feathered bird wings become human body parts, and forms derived from crustacean and beach ecology give way to male weightlifters and female pin-ups. Wirsum's contour lines, rooted in the boldness of sign painting and mechanical reproduction, drive his drawings and inform his interior volumes. This push and pull between interior and exterior becomes more aggressive given the intensity of his pen marks, which leave grooves in the pages. These drawings highlight a visual thinker and compulsive draftsman at an early peak. As they are introduced to a new audience some four decades later, they look as alive today as the day they were formed.

Karl Wirsum's work is included in museum collections throughout the world including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and the Museum des 20 in Vienna.

A full color catalogue for the exhibition *Drawings: 1967-70*, published by PictureBox, will be available.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 615 West 27th Street, between 11th and 12th Avenues. Hours are Tuesday - Saturday from 11am - 6pm. For further information or visuals, please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com