

ARTnews

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reviews: national

William Brice

L.A. Louver

Venice, California

The work of William Brice, who died in 2008, is so well known in Los Angeles that this memorial exhibition of drawings was not expected to surprise. But the chronological survey of 35 works on paper, with additional pieces displayed in vitrines, was more than a respectful lineup of signature images. Unfamiliar early works and a group of bold, pictographic abstractions done in 2005 enriched our knowledge of the artist.

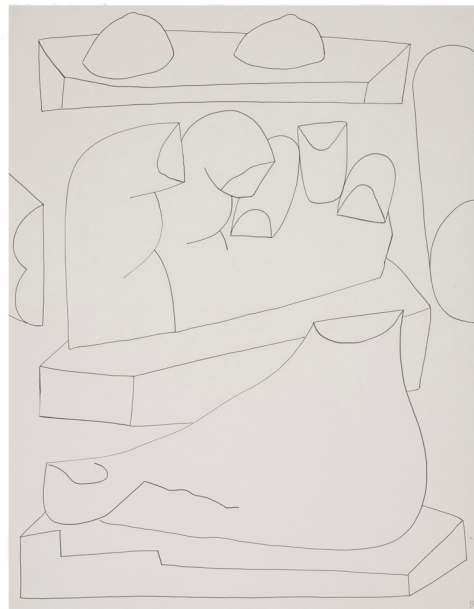
The show began with an uncharacteristically realistic 1960 charcoal image of a woman reclining on a rumpled bed. Luscious and sensuous, the work has the erotic air of the artist's later treatments of the female nude, and the fleshy model's direct gaze and finely detailed features are far from typical. Later on in the '60s, Brice fractured, exaggerated, and examined the female form from various angles and then summed it up in sure outlines.

All that changed in the early '70s, after a trip to Greece inspired him to take a radically new approach. In a 1973 ink-pen drawing, a foot, part of a hand, and two breastlike mounds sit on oblong

pedestals, like remnants of classical sculptures. As the idea took hold in subsequent works, Brice seemed to wander through gardens of ancient figurative art, focusing on its essence. He assembled and disassembled classical nudes and fertility figures, retaining primal forms and incorporating columns, flowers, and leafy vines among the motifs. The result is a weighty body of work that appears to have breathed itself into existence.

For Brice, drawing was an essential activity that established his painting vocabulary but developed independently of it. The powerful little 2005 drawings reflect the evolution of his personal iconography into a singular blend of antiquity and modernity. Suddenly, he was working in a more concrete territory of high contrast and strong pattern. But the mystery is still there, along with the authority.

—Suzanne Muchnic



William Brice *Untitled*, 1973,
ink pen on paper, 24" x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". L.A. Louver.