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Eugene Von Bruenchenhein: King of Lesser Lands

March 24 – May 8, 2016

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of works by the renowned self-taught American artist Eugene Von Bruenchenhein (1910 – 1983), its first since becoming the exclusive representative of his estate. In the early 1940s, Von Bruenchenhein embarked on a prolific artistic journey as a maker of a diverse range of images and sculptural objects that included visionary paintings, photographic portraits of his wife, chicken-bone constructions, ceramic flowers and vessels, large-scale concrete masks, and poems—all of which will be on view in *King of Lesser Lands*. The title of this exhibition is taken from the artist’s own writings, a fictitious and humorous self-professed moniker arising from his belief that both he and his wife had indeed descended from nobility. Although Von Bruenchenhein might have felt like a “king,” he was not able to live like one. For many years, he earned a modest salary as a donut maker at a local bakery.

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein was born in 1910 in Marinette, Wisconsin. In his youth, he became deeply interested in science, botany, but also poetry, composing stanzas on themes of love, war, nature and imaginary travels through time and space. At the age of 29, Von Bruenchenhein met Evelyn Kalka who became his wife and life-long muse. Evelyn, who was nicknamed “Marie,” served as his model for a 20-year long series of erotic photo portraits, which he shot and printed himself in a darkroom he had installed in their home. Von Bruenchenhein designed and created his own sets and costumes for Marie. In the mid-1950s, the artist began to make abstract paintings using his fingers, sticks, combs, leaves and other makeshift utensils to push oil paint across the surface of Masonite boards or pieces of cardboard taken from boxes at the bakery where he worked. Von Bruenchenhein’s hallucinatory, abstract images offer explosions of vibrant color and evoke the forms of strange plants or fantasy creatures and architectural structures. Later in his career, the artist used hand-dug clay to produce crowns and vases, fired in the oven. He used chicken and turkey bones to create mysterious sculptures resembling towers or thrones. During his lifetime, only his closest family members and friends knew anything about his artistic pursuits and ambitions. In 1983, shortly after the artist’s death, one of his friends contacted the Milwaukee Art Museum and eventually the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, who meticulously documented and inventoried Von Bruenchenhein’s sizable body of work.

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein’s work has been featured in major museum exhibitions, including “After Nature” at the New Museum of Contemporary Art (2008), a solo survey at the American Folk Art Museum (2010-11), “Alternative Guide to the Universe” at the Hayward Gallery in London (2013), and “The Encyclopedic Palace,” the main, international group exhibition at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013). His works are included in the collections of the The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum and the American Folk Art Museum, New York.

This exhibition is accompanied by a catalog featuring an essay by Joanne Cubbs and distributed by DAP.