

## DAVID NOLAN **NEW YORK**

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# ARTnews

EMILY NATHAN. "REVIEWS: NEW YORK, EUGEN SCHÖNEBECK." ARTNEWS. DECEMBER 2012.



Eugen Schönebeck, *Untitled*, 1962, tusche on paper (double sided), 11 5/8 x 8 1/4". David Nolan

In 1966, at the age of 30, German artist Eugen Schönebeck stopped making art. Little known in the United States, despite his postwar prominence in Germany, he has spent the last 46 years "simply living his life," says the Berlin-based curator of the intriguing show, Pamela Kort.

Born in Dresden, Schönebeck attended art school in West Berlin in 1955. After a brush with *art informel* during a 1956 visit to Paris, he adopted the urgent, dash-and-stroke method of French tachism, and the show's abstract black-and-white drawings from this period are dizzyingly wild. Rendered in tusche and pencil, they display a masterful command of space and composition—notwithstanding their apparent spontaneity—and possess the gestural energy of Fauvism, though without its vibrant color. From their turbulent surfaces emerge harmonious constructions that conjure landscape, architecture, and even written language.

The mostly untitled words on paper from 1960 onward are darker and seethe with the traumatic inheritance of World War II. Tangles of gnarled black lines writhe around tumescent masses; in 1961, the tortured forms begin to uncoil into figuration, all etched in frenetic crosshatches. In compositions such as *Hanged Man* (1962), the artist introduces deformed figures with faceless heads on thick necks and bulbous protrusions in place of severed limbs. The look is familiar, recalling the grotesque style of Georg Baselitz, who was in fact Schönebeck's friend and collaborator.

All of Schönebeck's work, much of it never seen outside Germany, is infused with melancholy. Channeling his bleak view of humanity, these rare drawings and paintings—with their fraught, sinewy lines and sickly palettes of pink and green—capture the spirit of the artist in a spasm of sublimation, engaging childhood traumas and fears at the most volatile, and potentially fecund, point.