

## DAVID NOLAN **NEW YORK**

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Ryan E. Steadman. "Critics' Picks: Eugen Schönebeck." *Artforum.com*. October 2012.



Eugen Schönebeck, *Majakowski*, 1966, graphite on paper, 38 1/4 x 28 3/4"

In our politically divided country slowly recovering from a costly war, it is unsurprising that inward-facing abstraction has become the language of choice for many artists wanting to escape their circumstance. In 1961, two fledgling art school graduates named Georg Baselitz and Eugen Schönebeck were in a similar situation when they decided to countermand the German art establishment by publishing their *Pandämonium* manifestos (two rambling, poetic diatribes on the state of German art), while their brash figurative paintings and drawings became some of the first to reference the bitter realities of postwar Germany. Baselitz matriculated to international art-world success, while Schönebeck, torn between the art market (with its perennial excesses) and his growing concern for the political climate, abandoned artmaking altogether in 1967. His thirty-one works in this stunning exhibition reveal an artist with an exceptional ability to digest and disseminate influence, primarily through the humble sketching technique of hatching.

*Baum (Tree)*, 1957, gives us a glimpse of a precocious twenty-one-year-old enraptured by the transcendental markmaking of Vincent van Gogh and Henri Michaux. Postmanifesto, Schönebeck confidently moved into a signature style that blended the angst of German Expressionism and the automatism of Surrealism. *Ginster (Broom)*, 1963, one of the two paintings in this show, emits a shocking rawness through fleshy color and gruesome deformity, rivaling even the more carnal Francis Bacon paintings. Hints of stumped appendages and decaying tissue powerfully reify Germany's loss during and after the Great War.

Schönebeck's final works meditate on the heroic aesthetic of Marxism through a technique of layered cross-hatching, as in his deftly rendered portrait *Majakowski*, 1966. Perhaps Schönebeck's new focus on social realism forced him to question art's ultimate function in a country undergoing political unrest, triggering his premature retirement. Whatever the case, we are fortunate that this artist was able to find his voice, even for such a brief moment in time.