

SAN FRANCISCO

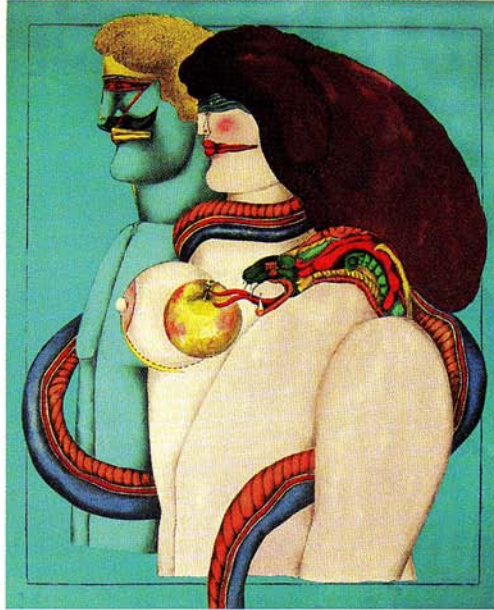
RICHARD LINDNER

George Krevsky Gallery

TENDERHEARTED ART lovers would do well to steer clear of the intoxicating stew of Richard Lindner's work, and set their feet the other way, to use Lautréamont's vividly comical phrase. Lindner, a German-born graphic artist who emigrated to New York during World War II, did not begin painting seriously until he was fifty, but his vision of a glitzy, tawdry urban playground inhabited by heartless, armored men and women engaged in mechanical sex and power games struck a chord with tough-minded collectors in America and Europe, and his work, hard-edged in every sense, was widely shown and collected in the nearly three decades before his 1978 death. Perhaps with our current economic doldrums, with belt-tightened disillusionment everywhere, such tough love as Lindner's is again in order. This show of drawings and prints (with one large knockout oil) is guest-curated by Dr. Peter Selz, Berkeley Art History Professor Emeritus, who knew Lindner and curated museum exhibitions of his work previously in 1969 at Berkeley's University Art Museum and in 1996 at Washington's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

Nearly thirty years after Lindner's death, his theme of sexual mercantilism and commercial amusement (with its echoes of the cabaret-life "divine decadence" of Lindner's youth in the Weimar Twenties) could not be timelier. While he paints both women and men as stylized, gigantic puppets that sometimes swell to Botero magnitude (while retaining their ferocious sex appeal), it is the women whom one remembers — jut-jawed, helmet-haired, Hollywood-lipped, and sporting erotic garments that reveal their breasts and pubises. Selz refers to them collectively as Lulu, after Franz Wedekind's dangerous temptress, famously portrayed by Louise Brooks in G.W. Pabst's movie, *Pandora's*

Richard Lindner, *How It All Began* (From *After Noon Portfolio*), 1970



Box; he also cites Eve, Lilith, Pandora and Lolita, other femmes fatales portrayed by 19th-century Symbolist painters like Stuck and Khnopff as gorgons, sphinxes and kelpies to delicious male shudders. Lindner inherits this tradition, but he incorporates Cubism into his style, along with a sexual evenhandedness that he learned from New Objectivity satirists like Grosz, Schad and Dix, scathingly impartial observers of hypocrisy; accordingly, Lindner's playboys, with their oily hair and garish suits (seemingly lit by flashing neon signs), are fit playmates for the females, and no longer their weak-willed victims as previously, stand-ins for safely titillated male art patrons.

While Lindner's characters are derived from the fatal dramas of myth, his sets and costume design come from Bauhaus and the Pop landscape of America, where nothing succeeds like excess. The world of the painter Lindner is a world of dressing up and packaging, a world of sensual temptations and suggestive desires, a world of cruel children and wicked toys, a world without a past that wants to live unseeingly into the future, that wishes never to grow up.

—DeWitt Cheng