

# The New York Times

**WEEKEND Arts** FINE ARTS  
LEISURE

FRIDAY, JANUARY 11, 2008

## William Anthony

Retrospective, 1961-Present

*Christopher Henry Gallery  
127 Elizabeth Street, near Broome  
Street, NoLIta  
Through Jan. 27*

This exhibition does not completely survey the 40-year span of William Anthony's mordant drawings, but it does reveal a second style, different from the frazzled, rubbery figures for which he is best known. Several works from the early 1960s are suavely fragmented portraits reminiscent of the art of Larry Rivers, with faces that are incomplete yet reasonably realistic.

Nothing is reasonable or realistic in the style that Mr. Anthony developed in the 1960s by combining the errors he found in drawings by his students: no necks, wrists or waists; bad noses; stubby fingers and toes; flat faces with feral eyes and high foreheads; and, perhaps strangest of all, knobby breasts years ahead of the rage for implants.

Most important, however, are his cautious, scratchy line and the grubby aura of excessive erasures. The totality dovetailed perfectly with Mr. Anthony's view of human haplessness, of people as creatures bungling their way, often cruelly, through life.

Touching on all his major subjects, the show suggests in its

own quiet way that Mr. Anthony finds few subjects off limits. There are send-ups of famous works of art, illustrations of scenes from Greek drama, news articles played straight and also twisted. ("Insatiable" recasts torture victims as masochists who just can't get enough.) There are drawings from "War Is Swell: A Kid's Idiotic Vision of World War II" (2000), which show the German general staff looking befuddled and Hitler quaking.

Also in evidence is Mr. Anthony's penchant for making identical copies of amusing magazine covers, movie posters and advertisements. The ads are represented by startlingly contrived come-ons from the 1930s for Spam and soft toilet paper.

My tiny quibble is the frequency of female nudity, yet the virtual lack of the male variety, but then 42 works do not really constitute a retrospective. But this is a terrific show, right down to the checklist, which is illustrated by the artist.

ROBERTA SMITH