

House of Seiko

3109 22nd Street, San Francisco, CA
5827 N Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, CA

cole@houseofseiko.info
houseofseiko.info



Ariel Parkinson

December 7 - January 26, 2024

We are thrilled to announce an exhibition of rarely seen work by visionary Bay Area artist Ariel Reynolds Parkinson (1926 - 2017) organized by Zully Adler.

For every chapter of Bay Area bohemianism there was also Ariel, carving her own channels between what she called “Beat then Hip, then Rock, Love, the Natural World.” At first, in the late 1940s, she found herself among the poets and playwrights of the so-called Berkeley Bunch. Younger than many and one of few women, she maintained a sharp and sometimes ironic distance from their oblivious masculinity, even if she also enjoyed their “pacifist, anarcho-syncretist, syncretist, pan-cultural gatherings.” Then she studied at the California School of Fine Arts, painting under Hassel Smith when “Dream was in, and Cosmos.” After that, the dawn of the hippie movement, walking to the Human Be-In with her young friend Allen Ginsberg and holding a sign that read “I Represent the Lower Animals.”

Sensitive as she was to new tendencies and social change, Ariel also maintained old-world decorum and an archaic, arch-romantic sensibility. San Francisco critic Alfred Frankenstein compared her to William Blake, as if her work belonged to a previous century. Her style skews surreal and whimsical, with a grotesque undercurrent drawn from the darker elements of Art Nouveau. It is seductive but also repellent, producing what she called “the posture of cruel joy”—like the Worm Queen from her friend Helen Adam’s San Francisco’s Burning: A Ballad Opera:

My crown is crusted with carrion flies
And my head is bald and wet,
But the loveliest woman of living flesh
With you will quite forget.

Ariel’s imagery finds its closest companions with characters like this. For her, art was storytelling, and painting carried “the piercing, noble, haunted power to imagine.” Many pieces reference Shakespeare, the Brothers Grimm, and classical mythology. Others conjure what she called the “mists and tempests, sea foam, clouds, smoke, waves” found in the prose of Ruskin. It may have helped that she lectured in English at Mills College, that her husband was the revered

poet and professor Tom Parkinson, and that her friends were largely writers. Ariel herself wrote with the verbosity and prosody of a Victorian in recital: “Beyond the writhing fish and the live chickens, the glowing fruit, and the towering gold and cream of Italian baking, glimpses of city towers, glimpses of the grey-green, wind-battered surface of the bay.” That’s San Francisco. Over the decades, she committed increasing efforts to illustration and costume design for opera, ballet, and theater, her artwork put in the service of the stories that inspired her in the first place.

Ariel’s creative anchor was always nature. Specifically, “the California of John Muir, Ishi, and Kroeber.” When stuck in the city, she could turn to what Gary Snyder called the inner wilderness, an interior plain of marshes and tidepools overgrown with “Ur-vegetation.” The work that emerged from this wilderness allowed Ariel to found a movement of one: bio-classicism. And when one curator dismissed her painting as a puddle of swamp water, the artist was undisturbed. She drew harsh caricatures of industrial barons and other enemies of the planet. More becoming drawings graced protest banners and guidance on a new municipal project known as recycling. Ariel became a thorn in the side of the Solid Waste Management board. “Garbage is simply resources out of place, and I was its Joan of Arc.” Ultimately, she left the project of recycling behind and made convincing arguments for doing away with packaging entirely.

Whether fearsome, dainty, erotic, or in dissent, the artworks of Ariel are guided by the senses. Paintings and drawings emerged from what she called “various admixtures and applications of the pleasure principle.” Nature was something to safeguard in part because it was interesting to see, feel, smell, and taste. Watching her watercolor spread is satisfying; her human figures are voluptuous. The writers and artists in her company—Robert Duncan, Anaïs Nin, Jack Spicer, Jess, Kenneth Rexroth, Norman O. Brown—were not so different. They exalted feelings, even ugly ones, for how much they could be felt. Neither Ariel nor the Worm Queen play favorites in this realm. They provoke goosebumps as much as induce repose. In the inner wilderness, sensations are vital, but they won’t always make you feel better.

- Zully Adler



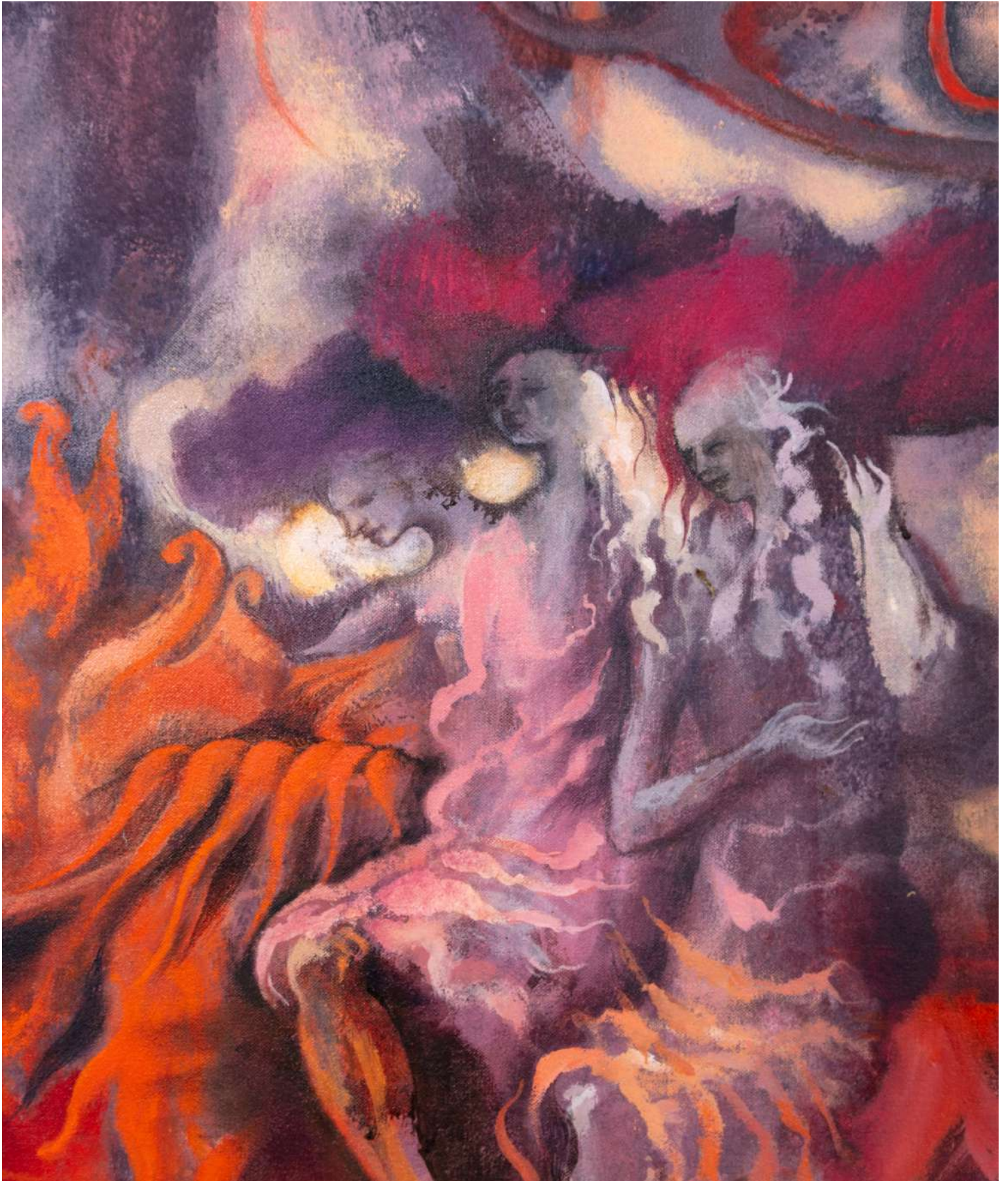


Red Foxes, c. 1994

Oil on canvas

60 x 80 in.





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Pride Rides Vanity, 1980

Oil on Masonite

50 x 43 in.





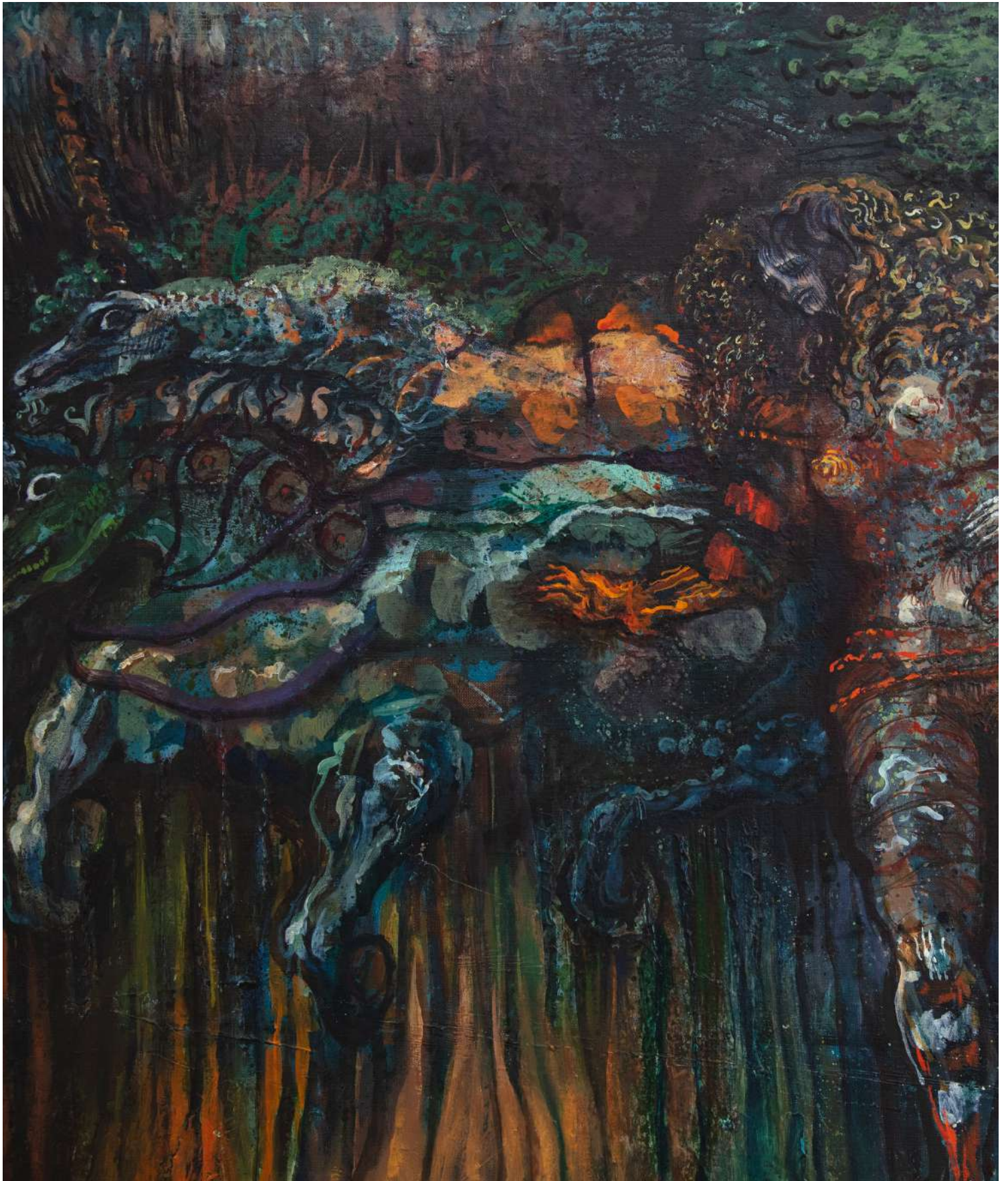


Angela Atalante and Two Unicorns, 1972-79

Oil on canvas

37 1/4 x 37 1/4 in.







George's Wife, 1980

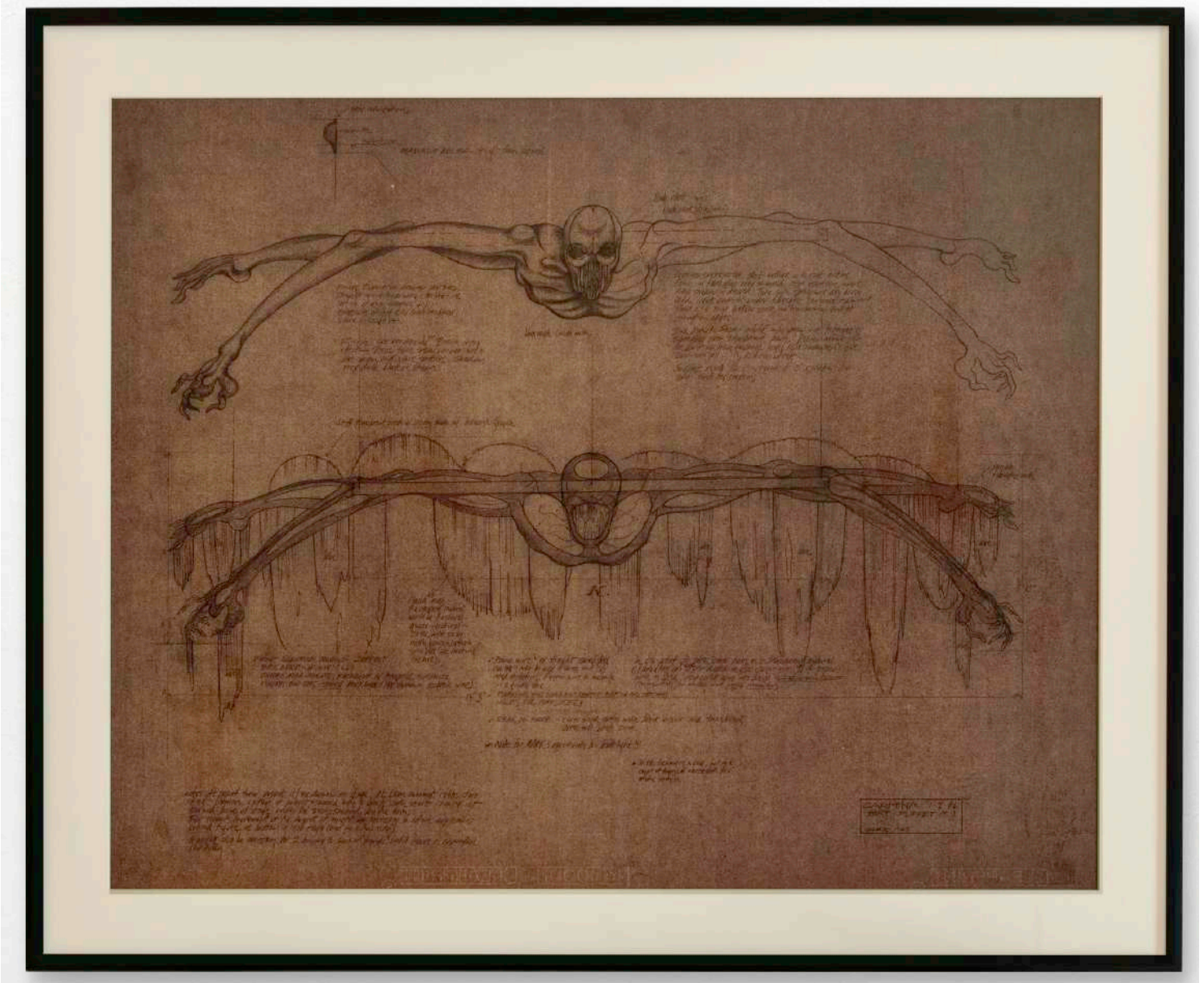
Oil on Masonite

34 x 36 in.





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Mechanical Drawing (Bat Puppet), 1986

Graphite on vellum

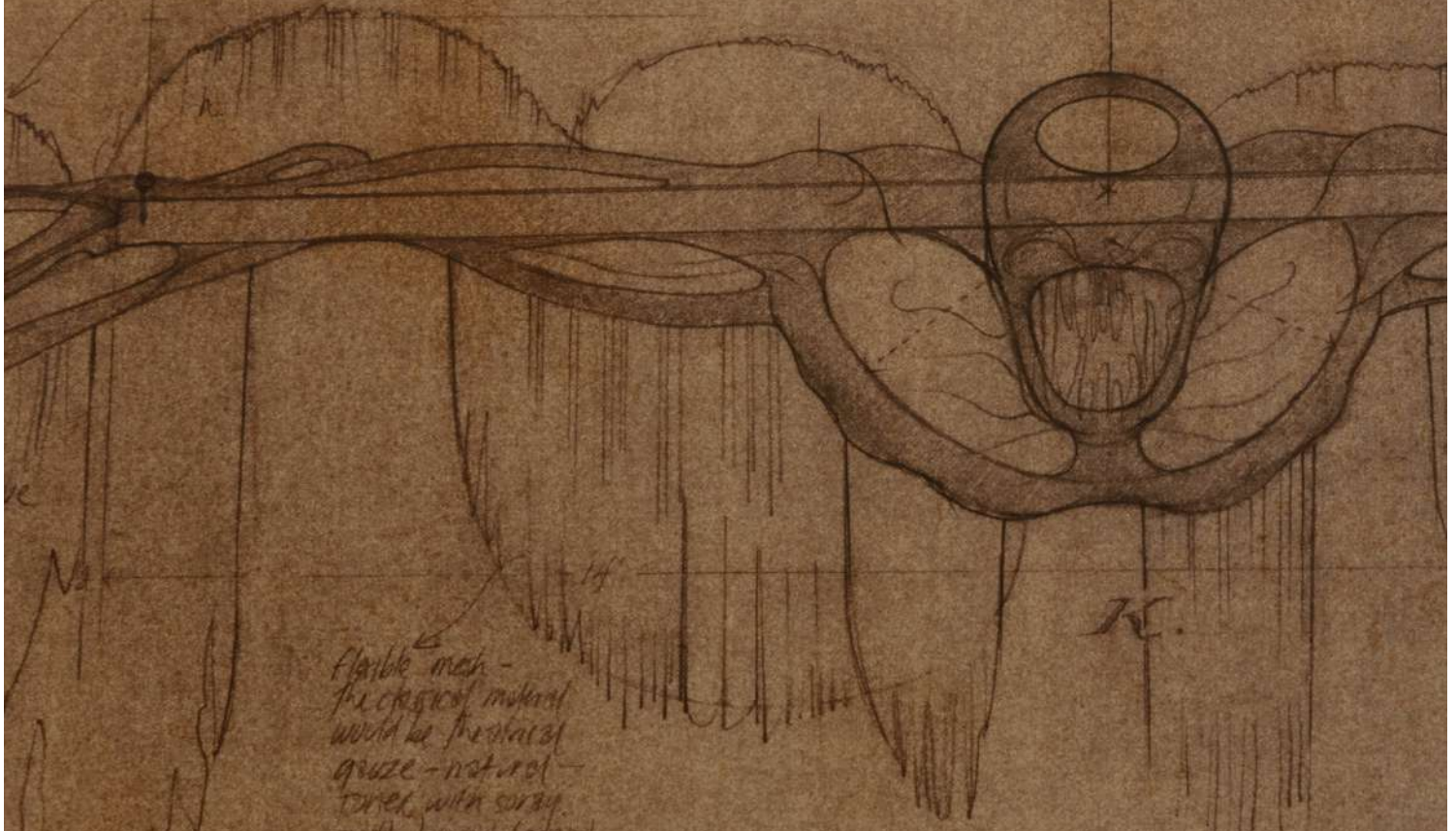
24 x 32 in.

active if any desired
Contours of left side (not rendered)
same as stage 12

black velvet (inside mouth)

Finish: see rendering. Brown ivory
effect - Bone tone raw amber with
the grain and a few splatters. Shading
very dark blackish brown.

Stiff translucent mesh or screen material - brownish/grayish



flexible mesh -
the original material
would be the ideal of
graze - not a rod -
tired with spray
mostly brownish/grayish
some blue (see rendering)
for use.

WIRE SUPPORT
(2.6)

FACING OF 1/4" TEMPERED MASONITE
OF THICK WIRE (USE ALUMINUM SCULPTORS WIRE)

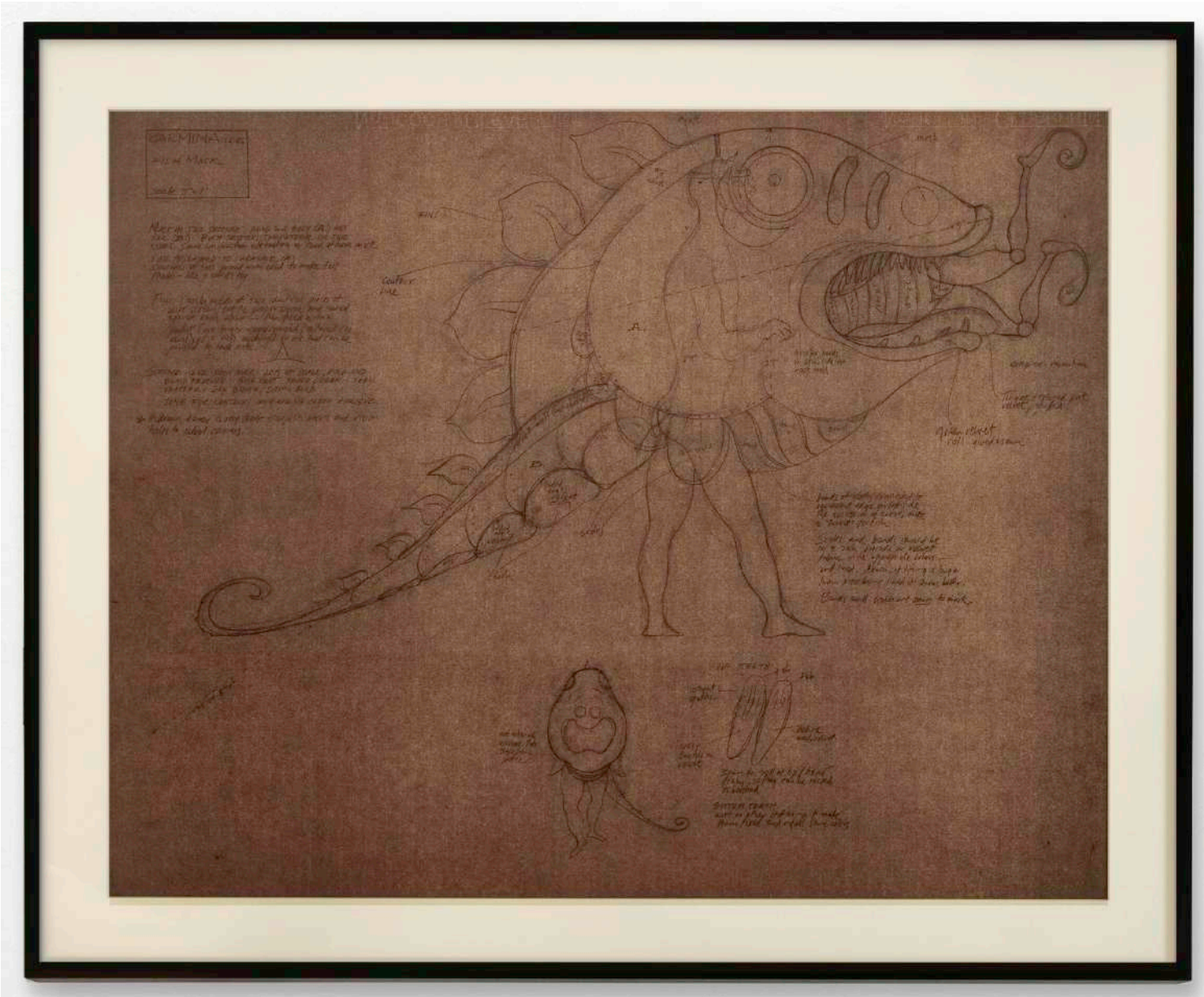
"Primo wire" or straight spring steel
(ca. 3/16") may be used if arms and legs
need reinforcing. Fasten wire to masonite
in a gentle arc.

In this job
(fiber glass
wire is US
meritpoint)

25" 3"

FIBERGLASS RODS COULD ALSO CONNECT EAST-ARM SECTIONS
HOLES FOR TRANSLUCENCY

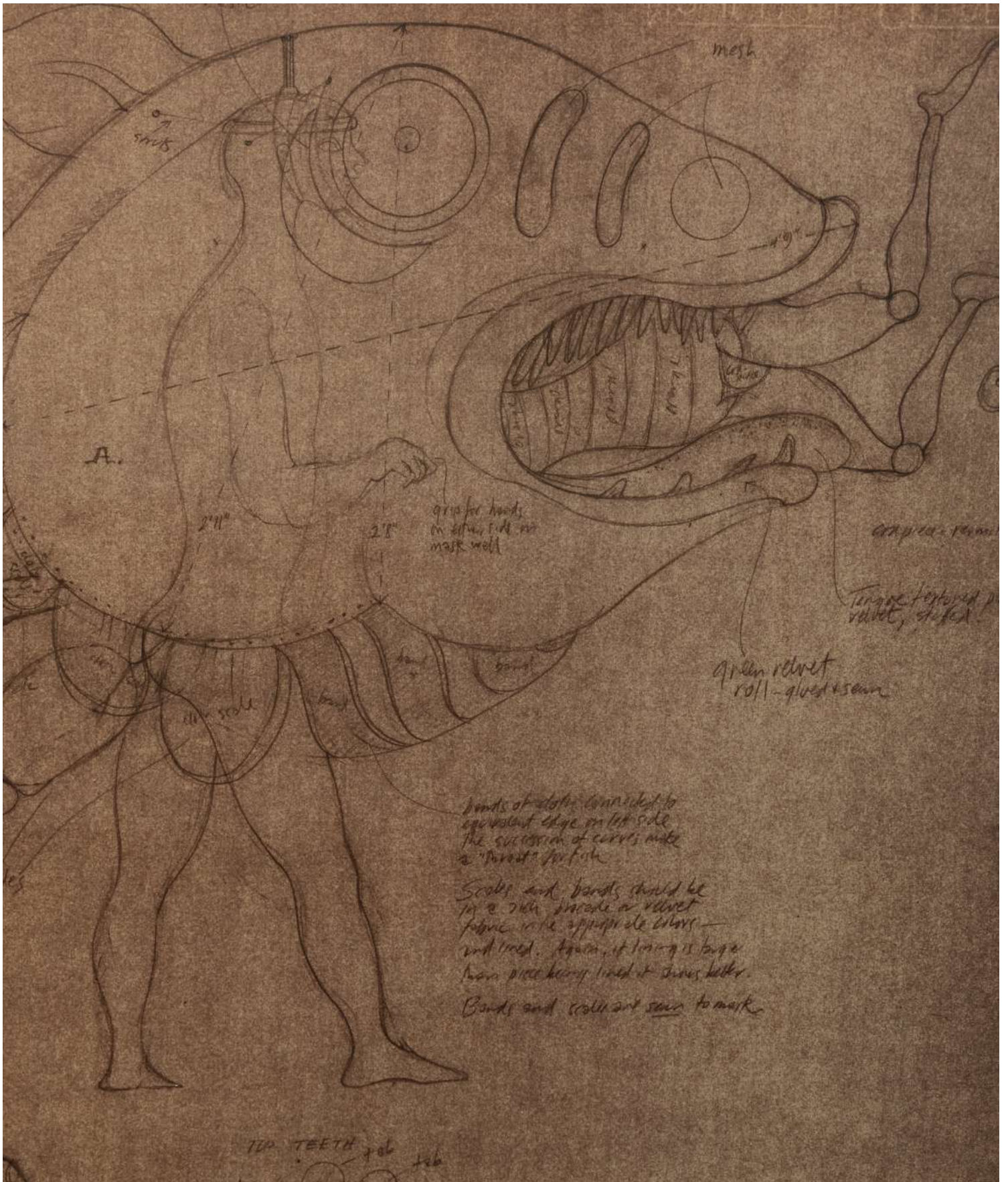
REAR OF PIECE - COVER SOLID AREAS WITH BLACK VELVET
AREAS WITH BLACK GRIM.



Mechanical Drawing (Fish Mask), 1986

Graphite on vellum

24 x 30 1/8 in.



bands of cloth connected to
 equivalent edge on left side
 the succession of curves make
 a "burst" for fish

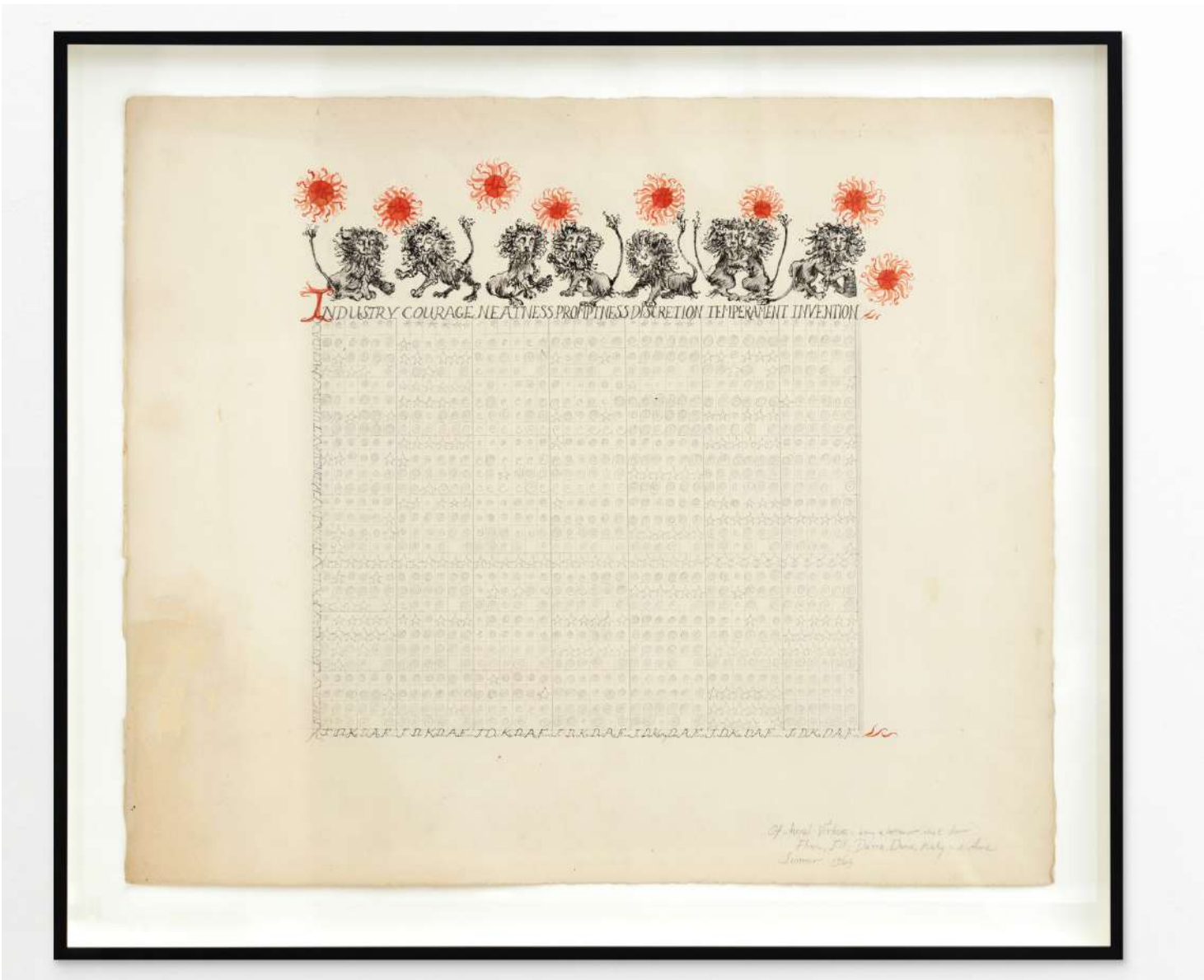
Scales and bands should be
 in a roll made of velvet
 fabric in the appropriate colors
 and lined. Again, if lining is large
 than piece being lined it shows better.

Bands and scales are sewn to mark

TOP TEETH job job



Family Behavior Chart (I), 1965
 Ink on paper
 15 1/2 x 19 3/4 in.



Family Behavior Chart (II), 1963

Ink on paper

22 1/4 x 26 in.



Family Behavior Chart (III), 1972

Ink on paper

17 1/8 x 24 1/2 in.



Red Riding Hood, 1964

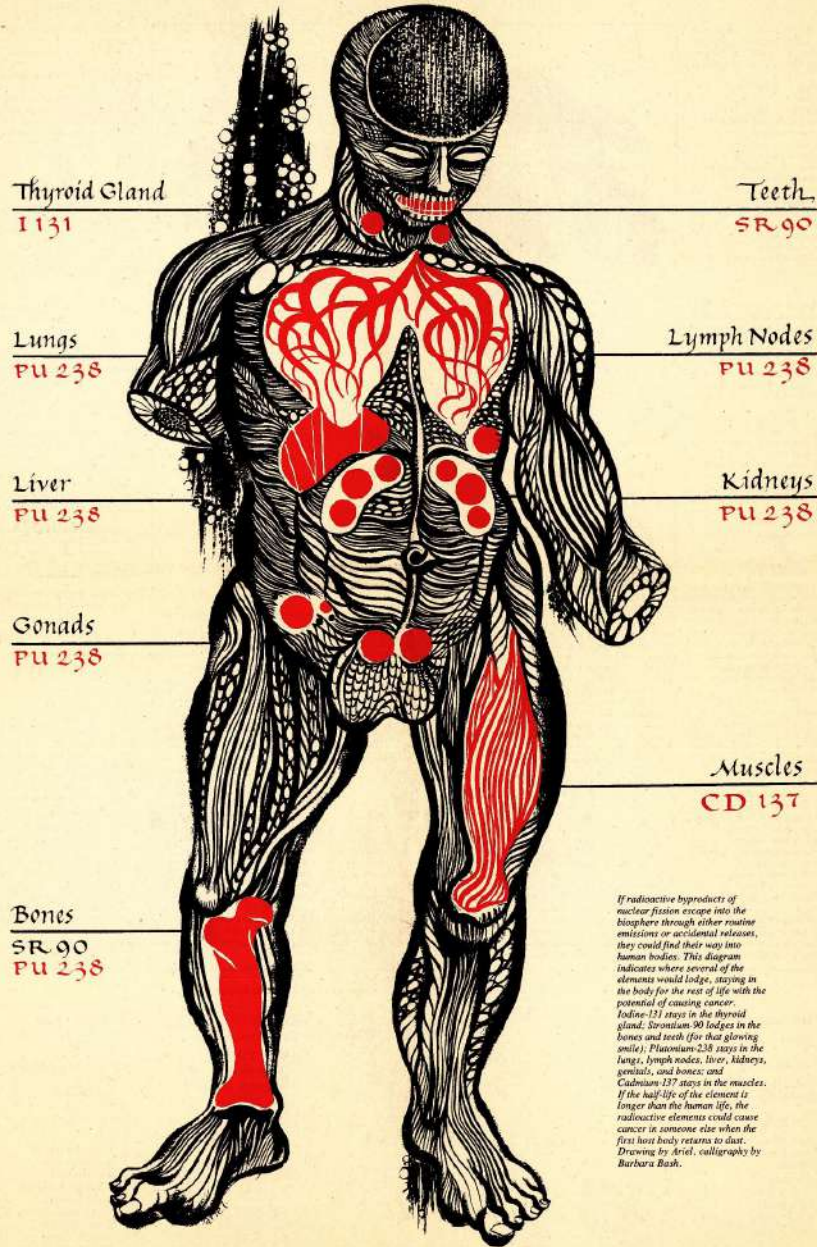
Ink and watercolor on cardstock

9 3/4 x 7 1/4 in (image)

15 3/8 x 12 1/4 (matte)

Ephemera

NUCLEAR MAN



Nuclear Man, 1972
Offset on newsprint
22 3/4 x 15 in.



Yes on 9, 1972

Offset on newsprint

10 3/4 x 28 in.



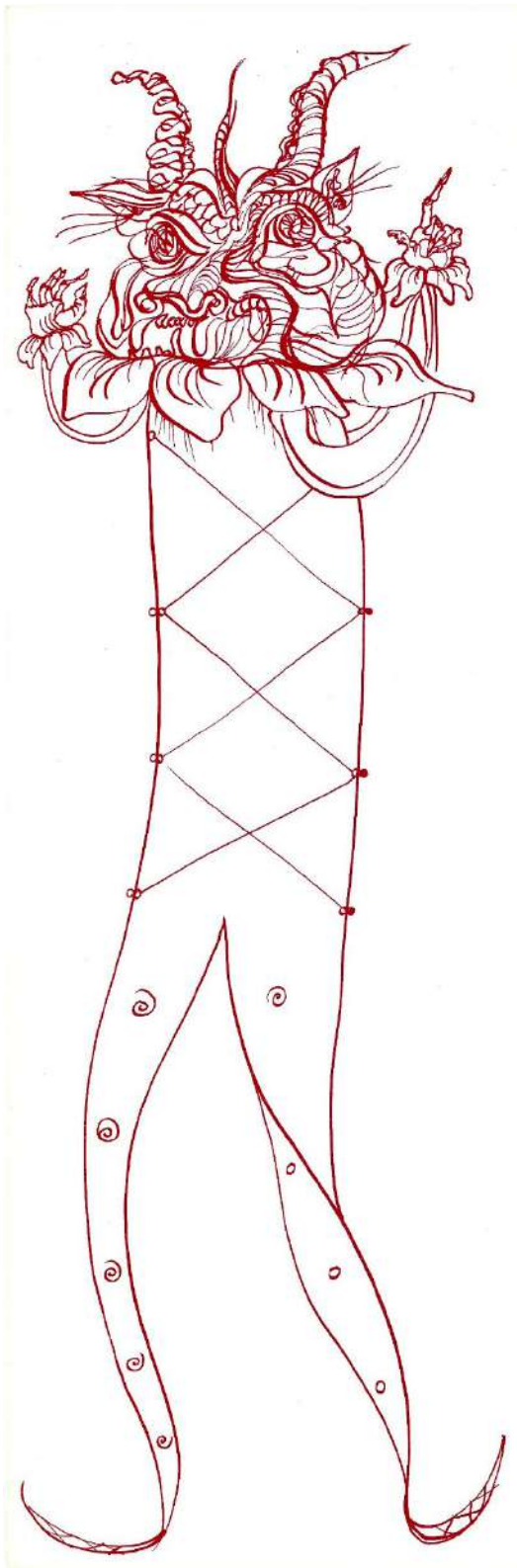
I Recycle, 1974
Ink on paper
13 1/4 x 9 1/2 in.



The Driver's 23rd Psalm, 1971

Offset print on cardstock

22 1/2 x 15 1/4 in.



TRIAL and VERDICT

& Rump Parliament to
be convened Friday, March
8, 1974 from seven-thirty
to ten P.M. at the Berkeley
City Council Chambers,
Grave Street at
Allston Way.

On the occasion of exhibition
in the Council Chambers of
the triptych MEAT, VIET
NAM and other paintings
by **ARIEL**; and WHAT THE
BLINDMAN SAW by Thomas
Penterson.

This is the ugly state of more and more
the terrible politics of constant war
Rank nightmare riding on the dreaming
child.

COME MASKED AS JUROR, OR AS THE
ACCUSED
AS JUDGE OR PROSECUTOR, ABUSER OR
ABUSED
SAY WHAT THE LAW SHOULD SAY
CONSTRUCT, PROPOSE
YOUR OWN CONSIDERED VERSION
OF THE LAWS

A certain Head of State will be
present in effigy, along with
the Beast of the Apocalypse,
the Whore of Babylon, a Gorgon,
and other Grotesque Personages.

Music, poems, speeches.
Your Active participation
Requested - if possible,
in Costume or in
Mask.

Trial and Verdict, c. 1974-75

Offset print on paper

16 x 5 1/4 in.



Planetary Disease (Drawing 1), 1970

Ink on paper

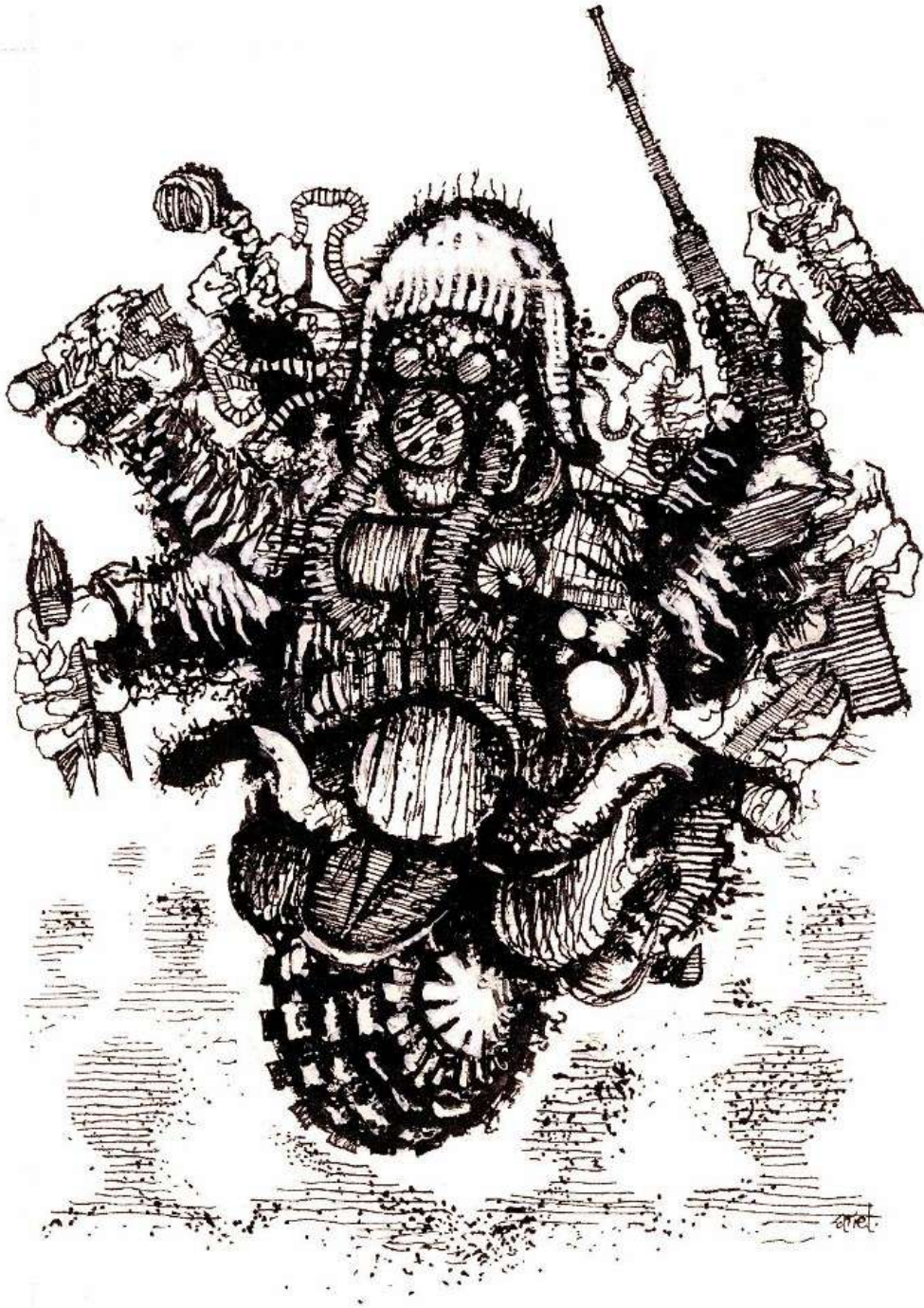
17 1/2 x 14 1/2 in.



Planetary Disease (Drawing 2), 1970

Ink on paper

11 1/4 x 15 in.



Planetary Disease (Drawing 3), 1970

Ink on paper

11 1/4 x 7 5/8 in.



The Driver's 23rd Psalm (drawing), 1971

Ink on paper

11 1/2 x 11 5.8 in.

IS THE UNITED STATES A PLANETARY DISEASE?

Imagine that we could compress the world's present population of over three billion persons into one town of 1,000 persons, in exactly the same proportions. In such a town of 1,000 persons there would be only 70 (United States) Americans.

These 70 Americans -- a mere 7% of the town's population -- would receive half of the town's income. This would be the direct result of their monopolizing over half of the town's available material resources. Correspondingly, the 70 Americans would have fifteen times as many possessions per person as the remainder of the townsmen.

The 7% Americans would have an average life expectancy of 70 years. The other 930 would average less than 40 years. The lowest income group among the Americans, even though it included a few people who were hungry much of the time, would be better off by far than the average of the other townsmen.

The 70 Americans and about 200 others representing Western Europe, and a few classes in South America, South Africa, Australia and Japan would be well off by comparison with the rest.



Could such a town, in which the 930 non-Americans were quite aware of both the fact and means of the Americans' advantages, survive? Could the 70 Americans continue to extract the majority of the raw materials essential to their standard of living from the property of the other 930 inhabitants?

While doing so, could they convince the other 930 inhabitants to limit their population growth on the thesis that resources are limited?

How many of the 70 Americans would have to become soldiers? How much of their material and human resources would have to be devoted to military efforts in order to keep the rest of the town at its present disadvantage?

Chances are the 70 Americans would have to organize into a military camp in order to maintain their material dominance of the remainder of the town. Chances are most of the Americans would be too insecure or guilty about their situation to enjoy their dominance.

Chances are this guilt and insecurity would lead some of the Americans to protest the situation and call for a change. Chances are that the protesting Americans would find themselves subjected to variations of the same repressive forces being used to subdue the other 930 townspeople. Chances are the military camp would also be a police camp.

The most regretful thing about the situation you have been asked to imagine is that it is not imaginary. For such is the present material relationship and incipient political relationship of the United States to the rest of the world.

The material relationship is very clear: the United States is systematically plundering the planet's physical resources.

And if the political conclusions drawn above are not yet so, they are rapidly becoming so. The logical complement of a nation of plunderers is a nation of police.

by Noel McInnis, Spaceship Earth Curriculum Project,
Center for Integrative Curriculum Design,
Kendall College, Evanston, Ill. 60204



design by Ariel

Planetary Disease, 1970

Offset print on paper

17 x 11 in.