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Old Master

BY JENNIFER HIGGIE 05 MAY 2001

The unpublished work of Robert Crumb



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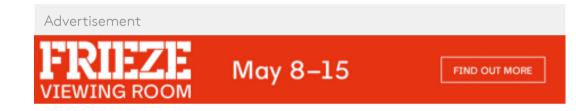
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In 1963 Robert Crumb made a drawing of The Crucifixion and Death of Puff the Magic Dragon. It was intended as a 'sarcastic' gift for a girl who loved the song, but, according to Crumb, 'When she saw it she cried and did not want it.' Previously unpublished, this and other unknown gems by Crumb from the last 40 years or so have been gathered together in the book Odds & Ends (2001). The collection includes the artist's commercial work ('There's no place like the Winters Bike Shop!'); birth announcements ('Betsy and Jeff announce the arrival of their first edition!'); invitations ('Who knows? Who cares? We're celebrating anyway ...'); greetings cards ('I love you in spite of all your weird habits'); business cards ('Professor Gizmo One Man Band ...'); some wonderful 'straight' portraits of friends, strangers and musicians; and the commissions he did for small magazines such as Winds of Change and Weirdo and not-so-small ones such as Screw and The New Yorker.

Arranged chronologically, Odds & Ends is a fascinating study in the development of Crumb's brilliance. As you turn the pages, the years go by, the drawings get better and better, and the humour gets darker and darker. They're by Crumb, so of course practically every drawing - even the early advertisements - is funny, but it's a humour shot through with a kind of bonkers compassion for the plight of his fellow man and large-thighed woman. In his pantheon of human nature life is difficult, love even more so, the modern world abrasive, and then you die. The only things that make life bearable seem to be children, 'big healthy girls' and that 'wonderful drug: old 78 rpm phonograph records'. Flipping through this book is like being given permission to rifle through Crumb's desk and sketchbooks - you feel a little nosy, but you just don't care. It's too interesting.



JENNIFER HIGGIE

Jennifer Higgie is editor-at-large of *frieze*, based in London, UK. She is the host of frieze's first podcast, Bow Down: Women in Art History. Her book The Mirror and the Palette is forthcoming from Weidenfeld & Nicolson.



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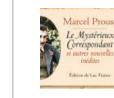
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