

Karma is pleased to announce Ida Applebroog, *Mercy Hospital*, a comprehensive selection of 97 drawings the artist made in 1969–70, while she was a patient in the eponymous hospital in San Diego.

“When Ida Applebroog’s assistants found a box titled ‘Mercy Hospital’ in 2009, the artist couldn’t have been more surprised at their contents. Inside they discovered over one hundred drawings, bound in large sketchbooks, made from India ink, pastel, graphite and watercolour. These drawings were works Applebroog had put to the back of her mind, all but forgotten since she made them. For their production was precipitated by the catastrophic breakdown Applebroog experienced in 1969, when she was living in San Diego, California, a forty-year old wife and mother of four. Applebroog had become increasingly depressed since her family moved to California from Chicago the previous year, a move precipitated by her husband being offered a teaching position.

Applebroog remembers the day things fell apart with remarkable clarity. She recalls waking up one day and deciding to take her two young sons to the zoo: ‘We liked to watch the tortoises at the zoo because they were always fucking’ she says. At some point during the visit, however, Applebroog realized ‘I had to get home’. By the time they returned to the car she was in a bad way, her sons having to guide her back to the house, alerting their mother to when the traffic lights changed colour, directing her when to stop and when to go. ‘I wasn’t really fit to drive’, Applebroog says, ‘I remember getting there with my sons telling me “mom, there’s a red light, a green light, we can go now. Be careful of the car next to us.”’ While Applebroog struggled to negotiate the roads home, she was able to recognize the signs that she was entering a state of psychological crisis. Calling her psychiatrist as soon as she returned, a suicidal, depressed Applebroog committed herself, on his advice, to San Diego’s Mercy Hospital, where she spent the next three weeks as an inpatient. After a brief return home she was quickly readmitted for another three-week stay: ‘Back again’ reads the deadpan penciled title running underneath a black ink drawing of a monumental female figure, trapped in a bubble, and clasping in its left hand a smaller effigy of another slumped, female form.

[...]

Although a nascent, contemporary psychedelic hue haunts the drawings, the black, spindly lines and semi-abstract forms also evoke earlier works on paper by European artists such as Wols or Artaud, who around mid-century had produced similarly disturbed and disturbing imagery in the midst of their own psychological breakdowns. We might, then, think of Applebroog’s *Mercy Hospital* drawings as belonging, at least in part, to a longer history of investigating what it means to make art at a time of breakdown. We could also think of the drawings themselves as symptomatic, recording

a visual vocabulary of crisis produced, and used, by the troubled artist as a means of making sense of the nonsensical, illogical and mad world in which she found herself plunged: ‘Over The Brink’ is the title Applebroog appended to one squashy, towering soft-stacked form.”

—Jo Applin, Over the Brink

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