

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

FINE ART | By Peter Plagens

## A Welcome to the Canon, an Artist's Groupies, a Light Fades

**Birgit Jürgenssen**◆ **McCaffrey Fine Art**

23 E. 67th St.,  
(212) 988-2200  
Through April 27

Viennese artist Birgit Jürgenssen (1949-2003) had a solo show of drawings at the prestigious Albertina Museum and taught for nearly two decades at prominent Austrian art schools. But she came of professional age in the wake of Viennese "actionism"—and though much of her Surrealist work also dealt with the human body, it seemed tame in comparison with the blood-and-guts performances ("actions") of the macho likes of Hermann Nitsch and Günter Brus, never getting the international attention it deserved. This modest gallery exhibition of about 30 works on paper—a museum show including her sculpture would be better—is a strange and lovely corrective.

Ms. Jürgenssen coupled her style to—this was the 1970s, after all—the doing-things-with-my-own-body impulse of that generation's feminism. An untitled work from 1977, for instance, is a photograph looking down at Ms. Jürgenssen's pantyhosed legs, a bird's nest containing two eggs resting between them.

Drawing with watercolor embellishments was her strong suit, though, and with it she could expand her vision to such things as a fried-egg moon shining through a bedroom window, or little airplanes

spiraling around, and sticking to, a strip of flypaper.

As with many underrated artists who get belated attention, the claims now being made about Ms. Jürgenssen—who was beautiful, a useful attribute in art about the artist's physiognomy—are a little strong. The oeuvre of Ms. Jürgenssen, who lived only into her 50s, doesn't have (to cite some current comparisons) quite the bite of Meret Oppenheim, the consistency of Cindy Sherman or the range of Louise Bourgeois. Still, she's an elegantly trenchant artist, and it's good to have exhibitions like this one putting her into the canon.