

# Los Angeles Times

## Art review: John Altoon at the Box

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The imagery in John Altoon's 40 drawings at the Box is no more sophisticated than the stuff that often shows up on the walls of public restrooms: penises, vaginas and breasts, along with hastily scrawled figures who use body parts as if they were rudimentary tools.

But the way Altoon (1925-69) handles pens, crayons and brushes (both air and bristle-tipped) allows him to transform typically vulgar imagery into a humble love poem. Arranged in four rows on one wall, his 30-by-40-inch works, all made from 1966 to 1968, celebrate the pleasures of the flesh and the glories of knowing a good thing when you've got it.

The buxom babes and sleepy-eyed hunks in Altoon's drawings are often accompanied by guileless frogs and sanguine monkeys. Disembodied genitals appear regularly, often behaving no differently than the humans and animals they interact with.

Amused contentment spills from every square inch of Altoon's casually masterful compositions. Their riotous lines, blushes of color and whiffs of silliness soften the edges of what would otherwise be explicit, graphic, distasteful. Think of these hedonistic drawings as the long-lost relatives of Renoir's late paintings, the pneumatic cluelessness of their figures replaced with the experiential wisdom of a down-to-earth libertine.

-- David Pagel

The Box, 977 Chung King Road, (213) 525-1747, through Oct. 22. Closed Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays. [www.theboxla.com](http://www.theboxla.com).

Image: John Altoon, "Untitled." Credit: The Box