

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein, “King of Lesser Lands”



Even for an outsider artist, the work of Eugene Von Bruenchenhein was strange. It wandered among several mediums, including painting, drawings, ceramics and sculptures. Oddest of all were Von Bruenchenhein's erotic pin-ups photos of his wife, Marie, who was ten years his junior. Those images, plus psychedelic botanical studies, ritual objects made of chicken bones and other works, were all part of an elaborate fantasy life the artist shared with his spouse, who often posed for him naked, wearing crowns and other headgear fashioned by her husband. He also wrote poetry, much of it, like his art devoted to Marie. Von Bruenchenhein's richly imagined world (over which he anointed himself king) contrasted sharply with the small, ramshackle house in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he lived with Marie, and also belied his ordinary existence working the night shift in a local bakery. As with many figures of self-taught art, Von Bruenchenhein's work was discovered only after his death in 1983—a body of work that bears witness to a passionate relationship between lovers that was also a form of performance art.

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