

THE LISTINGS



Ubu Gallery

UNICA ZÜRN: DRAWINGS FROM THE 1960'S' The artist and writer Unica Zürn (1916-1970) worked as a film editor and journalist before turning her attention to fiction, poetry and art. In 1953, divorced and the mother of two children, she met the artist Hans Bellmer, 14 years her senior, with whom she began a long, fruitful but tormenting relationship. She moved with him to Paris, where she met members of the Surrealist circle, including Henri Michaux, then immersed in his decadelong experiments with mind-altering drugs. Zürn called their encounter a "miracle," but it marked the onset of the mental illness the plagued her for the rest of her life. Despite repeated confinements to psychiatric hospitals, she wrote books of poetry, fiction and autobiography, and during a brief period in the 1960's produced the extraordinary drawings on view at Ubu Gallery. Inspired in part by Surrealist automatic techniques and by Asian and African objects that she remembered from her childhood home, the pictures are a cross between extravagant doodles and minutely controlled images of fantastic beings: human and bestial; figurative and abstract; composed of webs of delicate pen strokes in red, black or white ink. Like run-on nightmares, they are at once grippingly varied in detail and almost crushingly similar in overall tone. In 1970, with an autobiographical novel, "Dark Spring," completed, Zürn once again left a clinic to return to Bellmer, who, paralyzed from a stroke, ended the relationship. Having nowhere to go, she jumped from the window of his apartment to her death. (Ubu Gallery, 416 East 59th Street, (212) 753-4444, through April 16.)

HOLLAND COTTER