

Drawings move to their own beat

■ **Alden Mason**, drawings, on view today through April 6 at the Seattle Art Museum Pavilion, Seattle Center. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, until 9 p.m. Thursday, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.

by **Deloris Tarzan**
Times art critic

I have always been convinced that Alden Mason boogies as he draws. His drawings have that loose, rhythmic loopiness that looks as if it were the byproduct of an ecstatic brand of perpetual motion.

His new show at the Seattle Art Museum Pavilion — part of the ongoing Documents Northwest series — samples drawings from the past 20 years and bears out a note Mason once wrote to me: "Com-

bining the cosmic and the supernatural with the grim comic hilarity of everyday living is the painting ritual for me."

Mason has been exhibiting regularly in the Northwest for some 30 years, and it is a tribute to energy of his work that every show looks fresh and contains surprises. Pieces drawn from the past 20 years are in this show. Because his recent paintings have been wall-filling giants, it is a pleasure to see drawings that can be taken in from arm's length rather than from across the room.

No label works to describe his imagery. Neither real nor abstract, the figures that bounce and vibrate their way through his sketches are close kin to a kindergarten's illustration of "How I spent my weekend."

Joy pervades every line, and anxiety lurks in every puddled

wash. The images are rife with sexuality; any arm or leg is likely to grow into the suggestion of a penis. An odd-looking fish tops the head of one figure; a butterfly rests on the shoulder of another. Bad puns, both visual and verbal, abound: A 1983 figure is dubbed "Yankee Noodle" for the squiggled lines that form it.

Funny and frightening often merge. It would be hard to say whether the sappy white figures of the 1976 "Larry, Mary and Child" most resemble ghosts or insouciant cartoon mice.

Two 1972 drawings, both titled "William," illustrate his dual approach to a subject. It is a pity they are not displayed side by side. The black-and-white version is drawn with a trail from a squeeze bottle, giving the line a long, looping continuity — an uninterrupted flow from the unconscious.



Greg Kucera Gallery

'Larry, Mary and Child' is among the drawings featured in Alden Mason's show at the Seattle Art Museum Pavilion, Seattle Center.

The colored version is a jollier, brighter figure dreaming pink dreams of flying boats. Distinct line gives way to lucent color.

The progress is from many small figures 20 years ago to single figures, and finally simply to giant heads in Mason's newest drawings. They seem simultaneously to be seen full face and in profile, filled with blurred images of unrecognizable occurrences. Everything seems to be in process of coming

into being; half real, half imagined.

Mason's show is in the Poncho Gallery at the Seattle Center Pavilion, and seeing it is a wonderful bonus to the "Treasures from the National Museum of American Art" which fills the rest of the Pavilion. That show has been enormously popular in the past week, occasionally with lines stretching out the door; just the kind of crowd-pleaser SAM has been needing.