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For Kitty Brophy, freedom from authority in some wickedly sensuous lines

by David Pagel

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Back in the day, punks and hedonists did not rub shoulders.

Anger and outrage fanned the passions of the former, who could not stomach the hypocritical complacency of mainstream society. Pleasure and its unfettered indulgence drove the latter, who refused to put up with the prudery of polite society.

At the Los Feliz gallery Jenny's, 17 intensely intimate drawings by Kitty Brophy reveal that punks and hedonists have more in common than usually assumed: a love of freedom and the conviction that each of us must determine what that means, despite what is proscribed by the authorities or dictated by convention.

Most of Brophy's works on paper are no bigger than sketchbook pages. A few are the size of small posters or placards advertising underground events. Yet each packs a punch you feel in your gut.

Her palette is Spartan: nothing but midnight black, blinding white and blood red. The people in her pictures wear nothing at all, except, on occasion, a leather mask or a noose — or both.

Most are close-ups, with limbs extending past the paper's edges. Some depict individual figures in extreme — and extremely vulnerable — positions. Others show multiple figures, their torsos tangled together or stacked in stylized patterns. Genitals — often engorged — are anything but wallflowers.

The vulnerability of Brophy's subjects and the intimacy of their depiction never suggest that they are victims. Always powerful, self-possessed and cognizant of what they want, they are not to be messed with.

Their power is evident in the wickedly sensuous lines with which Brophy has drawn their contours, following the curves of thighs, cheeks, ribs and elbows with the same grace and decisiveness she brings to every inch of her compositions.

Think Egon Schiele stripped of the skewed power relations — and jaded world-weariness — of *fin de siècle* Vienna. Replacing anger with urgency, and treating pleasure with the complexity it is due, Brophy lays bare the reality of self-determination and the liberty at the heart of DIY rebellion. Punk hedonism and good old American ingenuity never looked better, nor ruffled feathers so effectively.

