

Erin Cosgrove

HAMMER MUSEUM

10899 Wilshire Boulevard

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Artists have long infused social and political commentary into caricatures and cartoons; take Honoré Daumier, Art Spiegelman, and Keith Haring, to name a few. The latest addition to this list is Erin Cosgrove and her animation *What Manner of Person Art Thou?*, 2004–2008, a daring, postmodern depiction of quintessential philosophical themes. Over an hour long, the idiosyncratic work is a creation myth, a parable of good and evil, love and learning, faith and ideology, and a tour de force of traditional storytelling with an encyclopedic collage of visual and aural references. Cosgrove references American folk art, Japanese woodblock prints, Indian miniature paintings, medieval engravings, Gregorian chants, bluegrass, indigenous African music, and much more.

The protagonists Elijah Yoder and Enoch Troyer—sole survivors of an ancient community annihilated by proverbial vices and plagues—time-travel to search the modern world for descendants of the Yoder and Troyer clans. They encounter talk-show guests, corrupt CEOs, anorexic cultists, role-playing gamers, and many other manners of person. Relentless in his zealous orthodoxy, Elijah violently slays anyone whose ideology opposes and disappoints him, while Enoch follows unconditionally, meekly protesting but not daring to intervene. In the end, we learn he was blinded by love. Cosgrove balances the harshness of Elijah's immutable dogma by peppering the tale with humorous winks and nods to the viewer (a poster depicting an organization chart for the "Bush Crime Family," for instance), infusing the allegories and footnotes that enrich, entertain, and complicate the message. The animation is a biting commentary on the modern quest for meaning and on the oft-confused definitions of *religion* and *politics*, *desire* and *ideology*, *selfishness* and *selflessness*.

— Micol Hebron



Erin Cosgrove, *What Manner of Person Art Thou?*, 2004–2008, still from a color animation, 64 minutes 40 seconds.