

BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

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As contemporary artists on paper go, Richard Diebenkorn (1922-1993) had few peers. So John Berggruen's small survey of seldom-seen figurative drawings and gouaches by Diebenkorn is a big event.

As every viewer of his "Ocean Park" series knows, Diebenkorn's big abstract paintings tend to be thin materially but dense with revisions.

The best of the drawings on view -- by no means does everything here belong on the A list -- remind us that the pentimenti of the "Ocean Park" abstractions incorporate figure drawing as well as self-referential formalities.

Several gouaches, nominally portraits, suggest that Diebenkorn had playing cards in mind not only when he toyed with their symbolic suits.

But in a drawing such as the great undated charcoal of a clothed model slouching on a couch, we can easily recognize echoes of the "Ocean Parks' " sorting of curves and edges, recession and surface, in scissored legs and folded arms and the landscape-like spread of the figure.

Equally striking are gouaches in which Diebenkorn brushed intense color into an almost emblematic pattern that just happens to describe a figure.