

RAWVISION

O U T S I D E R • A R T • B R U T

RV 127

SUMMER 2026

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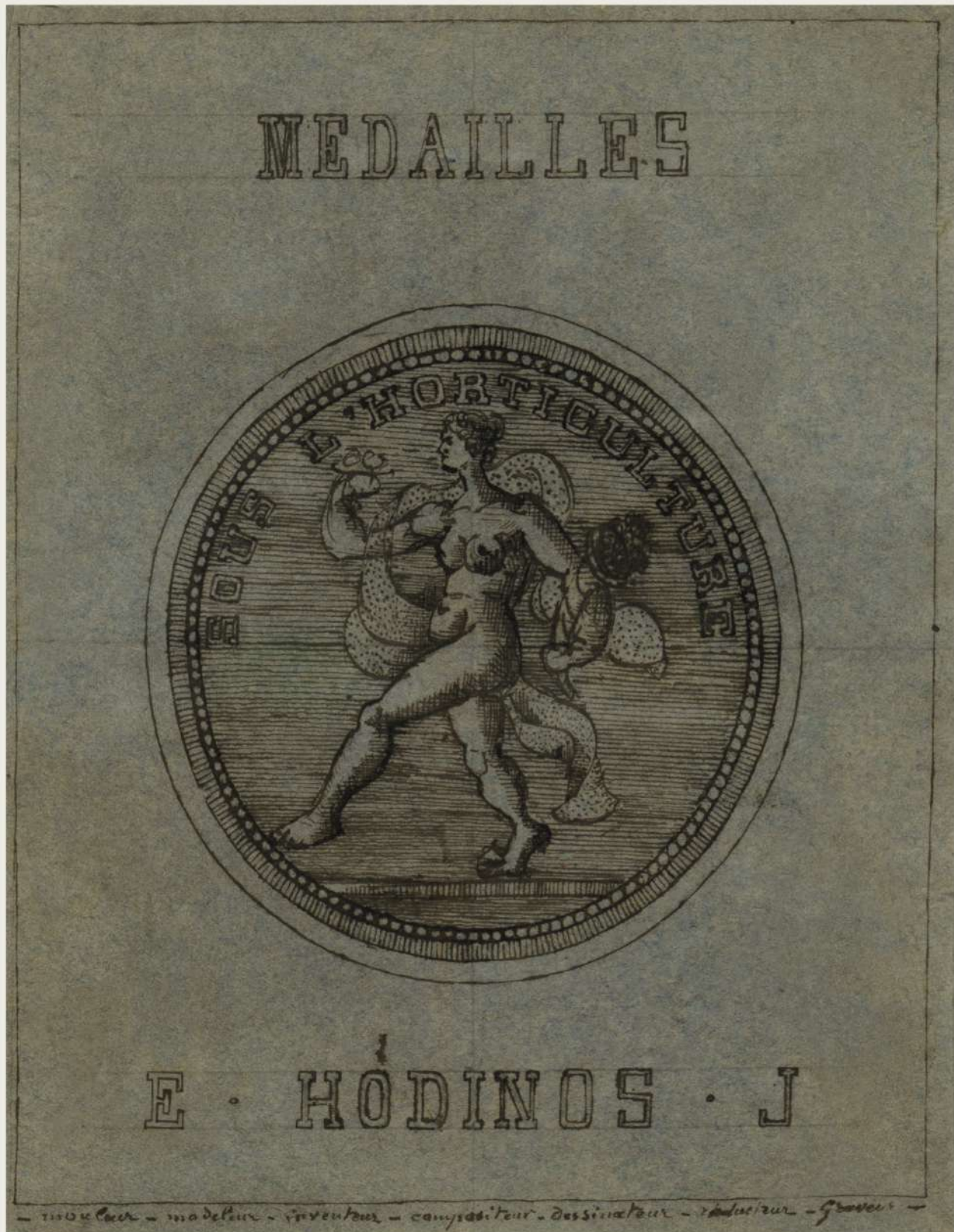


AUBREY CHALI'S AFRICA

COLLECTION DE L'ART BRUT AT 50 • CHOMO • JAMES "SON FORD" THOMAS

EMILE JOSOME HODINOS

(FRANCE, 1853 - 1905)



EMILE JOSOME HODINOS, UNTITLED (SOUS L'HORTICULTURE / UNDER HORTICULTURE), (C 1876 - 1896), INK ON PAPER, 20 X 16 CM, 7 3/4 X 6 1/4 IN

SHEBA ROSS DELANEY

formerly represented by Phyllis Kind Gallery
instagram: @shebarossdelaney



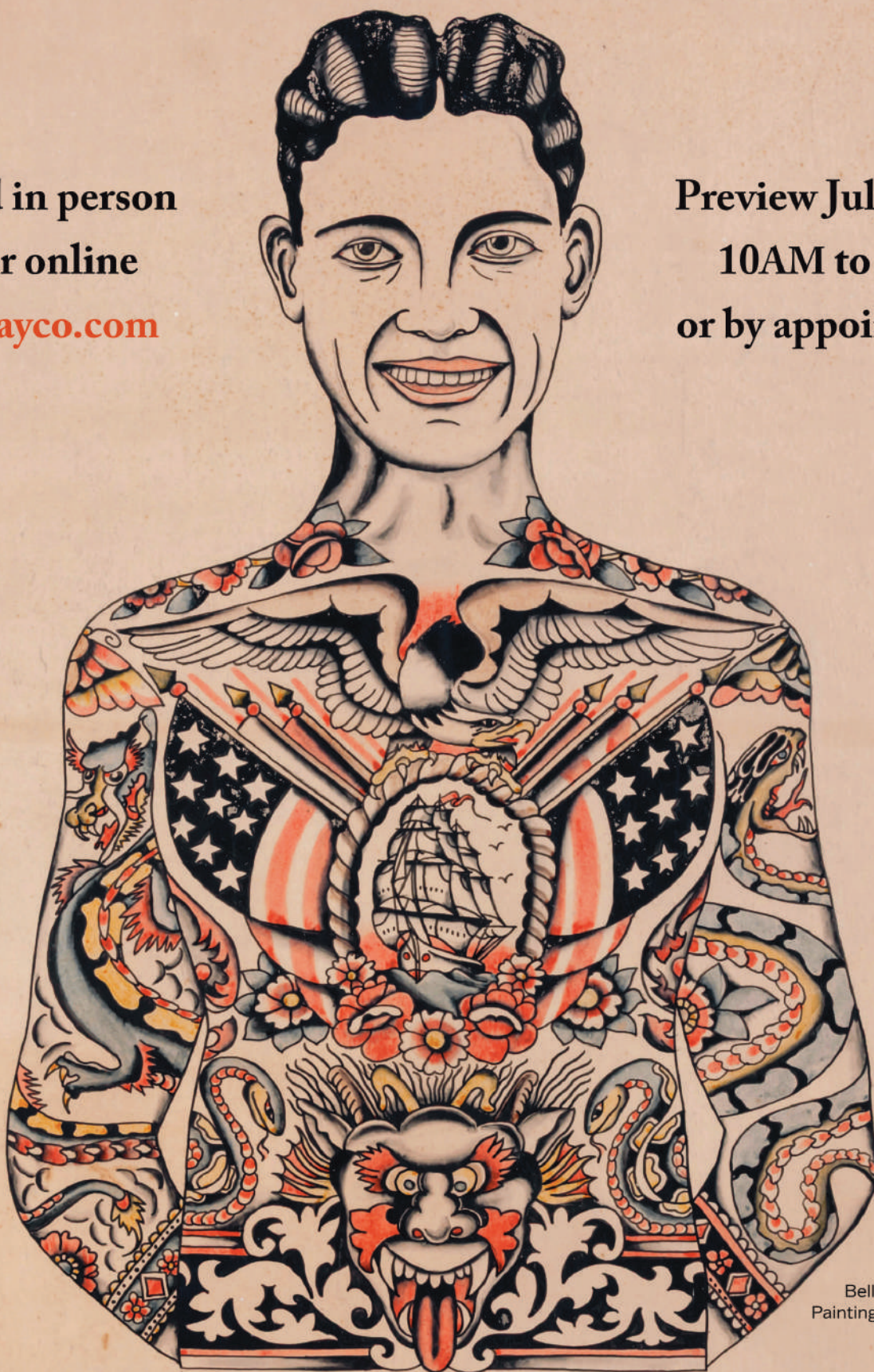
Prudence Cautioning Anarchy, oil on canvas, 60 x 48 ins.
Cold Storage Series

Tattoo, Lowbrow & Curiosities

AUCTION • SUNDAY JULY 26, 2026

Bid in person
or online
brayco.com

Preview July 22-24
10AM to 2PM
or by appointment



Tattooed Man
by Fred Marquand
Bellingham, WA, ca. 1925
Painting on board, 28 x 20 in.
est. \$6,000-8,000

RAWVISION127

SUMMER 2026

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Aubrey Chali, *Noble Friend*, 2015

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MEDAILLE DE LA
VILLE DE PARIS



BEST DESIGN
MEDIA AWARD



AMERICAN FOLK ART
MUSEUM VISIONARY AWARD



WORLD'S BEST
ART MAGAZINE



UTNE INDEPENDENT
PRESS AWARD



RAW NEWS

The latest in
the world of
outsider art



A JOYFUL FAIR OF FIRSTS

Always a highlight of the outsider art calendar, the **Outsider Art Fair** in New York seemed to have a particular spring in its step this year. From the vernissage and press day on Thursday March 19 until its doors closed on Sunday 22, the Metropolitan Pavilion in Chelsea, Manhattan, was buzzing with a joyful energy and excitement.

Under the leadership of new director Elizabeth Denny, the 34th edition of the annual event housed 68 exhibitors, 13 of which were newcomers. Galleries, dealers, progressive studios and non-profit organisations were all in attendance, numerous international visitors among them. Artists ranged from familiar names including Aloïse Corbaz, William Edmondson and Martín Ramírez to lesser known makers such as visionary Abraham Lincoln Walker, an evangelical speaker and house painter by trade.

Founded in 1993, OAF New York is the leading fair for self-taught and outsider art and, as Denny says: "...has long been a place for artists whose work challenges and expands our understanding of art." She continues, "We remain committed to increasing the visibility of these artists and fostering important conversations within and beyond the art world."

Evidence of this was the two curated spaces at OAF 2026: "From the North: Inuit Prints and Drawings from Canada, 1959–2025", and RUN STORE by artist and designer Susan Cianciolo, which brought outsider fashion to the Fair for

the first time. Another first was the expanded OAF Talks + Performances with three panel discussions and two shows, one from Norwegian theatre group Wakka Wakka, the second an excerpt from *Bughouse*, a play inspired by the life and work of Henry Darger, with actor John Kelly. The events were well attended, while overall the Fair broke its own attendance record with visitors pouring in nonstop, from museum professionals, cultural icons, artists and art buffs, to those just discovering the outsider genre, and families on a day out.

In a new position by the café, at the heart of the Fair, the *Raw Vision* stand was well placed to welcome friends and fans, new and old. Many artists also stopped by, several of whom have graced the magazine's pages, including Joe Coleman, Paul Deo, Susan Spangenberg, Justin Duerr and Issa Ibrahim, as well as Shane Drinkwater who was showing with Pulp alongside Kevin House.

After an event with record-breaking footfall, robust sales and a wonderful, vibrant atmosphere, Denny says:

"My first fair was an incredible experience. I witnessed first-hand the impact OAF has on New York's cultural scene. There was a lot of joy in the room and the appetite for self-taught art is clearly still growing... Our exhibitors help us to broaden our understanding of creativity. OAF is known for pushing boundaries, and we certainly demonstrated that again this year."

ML

Shane Drinkwater and Kevin House



Issa Ibrahim



Joe Coleman, Paul Deo and Whitney Ward



NNENA KALU WINS TURNER PRIZE

Self-taught, British artist Nnena Kalu has been announced the winner of the 2025 Turner Prize. She is the first learning disabled artist to win the UK prize since it began in 1984, and the first whose practice is enabled by a supported studio (**ActionSpace**, London). Kalu's facilitator Charlotte Hollinshead has worked with her since 1999 and, in an acceptance speech on the artist's behalf, said, "This award smashes the prejudice away. Nnena Kalu you've made history."

Kalu has a compulsion to make, to wrap and to work rhythmically to create beautiful pieces. Her swirling vortex drawings are often made in pairs,

and her huge, multi-coloured, hanging, cocoon-like sculptures and forms include materials such as coloured tape, VHS tapes, and strips of bright fabric.

Although Kalu's nomination and win may have ruffled a few feathers in the UK media, the positive statement and message they send about the importance of disabled artists being given respect and acknowledgement, far outweighs the outdated opinions of a small minority. Kalu's success shines a light on the importance of art made by all and by those who have not come to the arts through traditional routes. It also serves as a reminder that supported and progressive art studios should be cherished for the valuable, ongoing support they provide to disabled and neurodivergent artists.

Nnena Kalu, 2025; photo: James Speakman



Installation at Carl Freedman Gallery, 2022

FOLK ART MESSENGER COMES TO A CLOSE

After nearly four decades, *Folk Art Messenger* – the advertising-free, triannual journal of the **Folk Art Society of America** – published its final issue in 2025. Issue 116 marked the end of an award-winning publication devoted to self-taught and folk artists, featuring articles, reviews, news and an international events calendar.

Founded in 1987, the Folk Art Society of America has played a vital role in documenting, preserving and advocating for contemporary folk art. Memberships are no longer being renewed but the website will continue to host news, provide an online calendar of art exhibitions, and sell back issues of *Folk Art Messenger*.

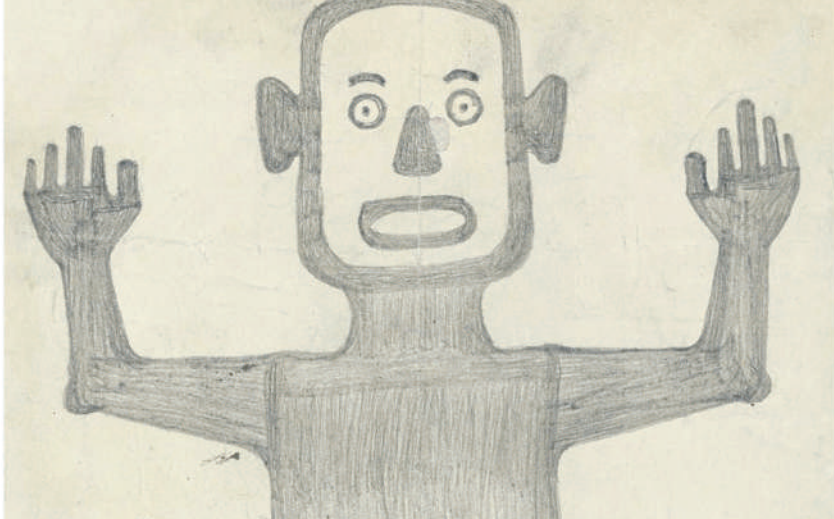
In a closing message, executive director **Ann Oppenheimer** paid tribute to the many contributors who shaped the publication over the years and helped make it a lasting record of the field, including editor and longtime collaborator William Oppenheimer, designer John Hoar, and the wide network of writers, photographers and supporters.

Ann Oppenheimer's book, *A Half-Century of Folk Art: My Recollections*, covering 50 artists, has been published by the Folk Art Society of America and is available for purchase at www.folkart.org.



above: cover of the final issue of *Folk Art Messenger*

left: Ann Oppenheimer in 2023; photo: Clair Hamner



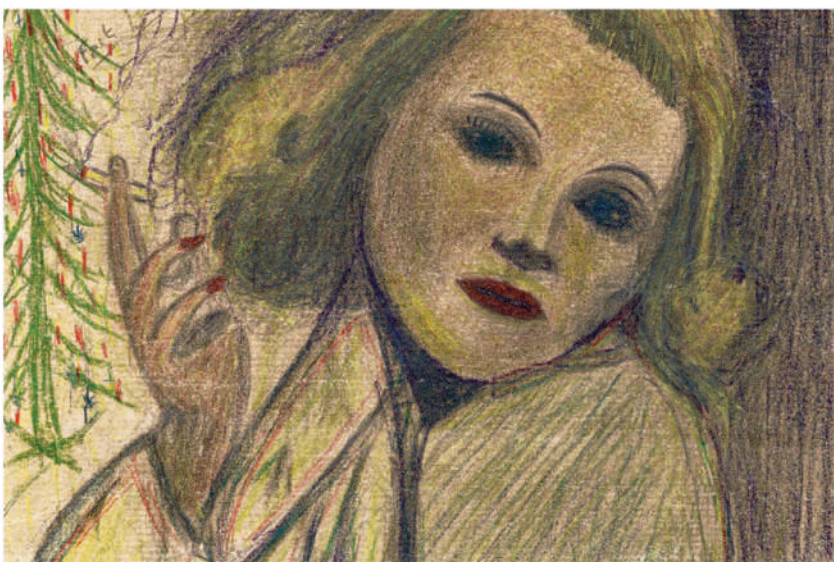
**ART BRUT
EN SUISSE**

**DES ORIGINES
DE LA COLLECTION
A AUJOURD'HUI**



**50 ANS
1976-2026**

50



**COLLECTION
DE L'ART BRUT
LAUSANNE**

**28.02.-
27.09.2026**



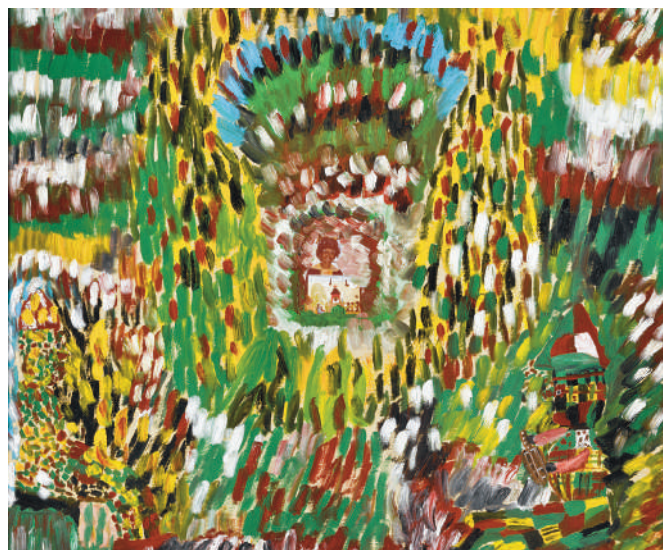
JUST FOLK GALLERY WINDS DOWN

After more than two decades of activity, Just Folk has announced that it is winding down. Founded by Marcy Carsey and Susan Baerwald, the venture began in 2002 with the acquisition of a site and the gradual building of a collection, followed by exhibitions in Los Angeles and New York, before the opening of a dedicated gallery space in Summerland, California, in 2007.

The physical gallery operated until 2017, after which Just Folk continued through online sales and private placements, maintaining a devoted following through a distinctly personal approach, championing works they believed in, and placing them with collectors and institutions.

The collection is now being dispersed through auctions at Christie's, where strong interest reflects a sustained appetite for self-taught art. Remaining works will continue to be available via the gallery's website, as Carsey and Baerwald invite others to acquire pieces assembled over nearly 25 years.

justfolk.com



Clementine Hunter

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

until Sep 13, 2026

The American Folk Art Museum presents **"Self-Made: A Century of Inventing Artists"**, an exhibition examining how formally untrained artists in the USA have represented and defined themselves from the early twentieth century to the present. Bringing together 90 works, largely drawn from the museum's collection, the exhibition considers acts of self-invention through portraiture, alter egos and distinctive visual languages. Key American figures such as Henry Darger, Martin Ramírez and Thornton Dial are shown alongside international artists including Aloïse Corbaz and Adolf Wölfli.

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

2 Lincoln Square, New York, NY 10023, USA

folkartmuseum.org



Anonymous

CHRISTIAN BERST ART BRUT

Sep 5 – Oct 10, 2026

"Josef Hofer: The Man in the Mirror" marks the gallery's third monographic exhibition dedicated to Josef Hofer, following his 80th birthday in 2025. Now represented in the collection of the Centre Pompidou, Hofer has become one of the most widely exhibited Austrian *art brut* artists, with major retrospectives at the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne. Curated by Fabrizio Donini Ferretti, this latest show coincides with the launch of a digital *catalogue raisonné* of Hofer's work, as well as the publication of a new, 60-page essay by the curator.

CHRISTIAN BERST ART BRUT

3/5 passage des Gravilliers

75003 Paris, FRANCE

christianberst.com



Josef Hofer



Lucien Simart

SIC12

until Jul 29, 2026

"Scrivere la notte. Cartografie notturne tra art brut e arte contemporanea" ("Writing the night: Nocturnal cartographies between art brut and contemporary art") brings together four artists: Ulises Canales Sáenz, Serge Cantero, Massimo Nota and Lucien Simart. Developed through encounters in studios and private refuges, the project highlights practices shaped at a distance from the conventions of the art world, where drawing and painting emerge as instinctive forms of writing that map inner terrains of memory, dream and imagination.

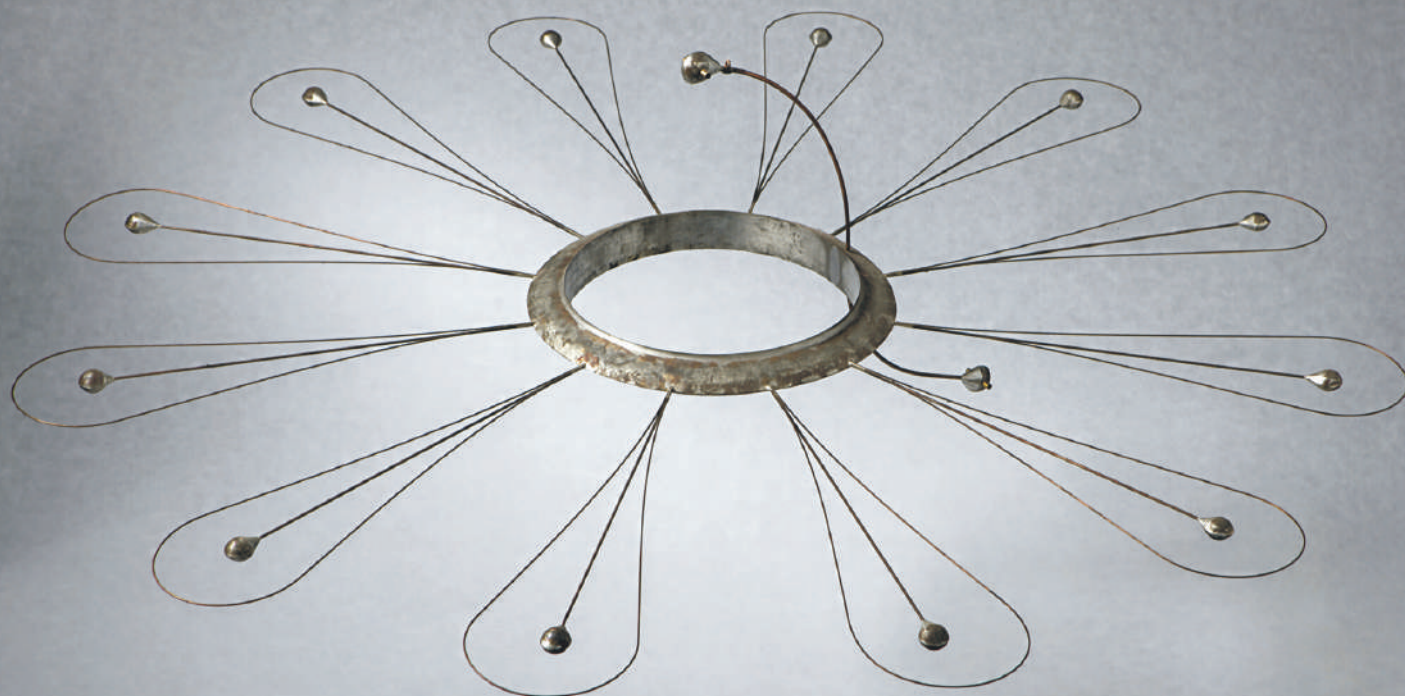
SIC12 ARTSTUDIO

Via Francesco Negri, 65, 00154 Roma RM, ITALY

en.sic12.org/art-studio-1

iam

**The art museum
reimagined**



**Intuit Art
Museum**
outsider | self-taught | art brut

*Drawing with Metal
Sculpture by Bill Brady*
Apr 9 – Oct 4, 2026
Art.org

William "Bill" Brady (American, b. 1943). Untitled, n.d. Roofers tin and welding rods, 17 x 44 x 44 in. Collection of the artist

PRESERVATION OF GEIRIHÚS

A major preservation project is underway in East Iceland, centred on the home of **Ásgeir Jón Emilsson** (1931–1999), also known as “Geiri”. Led by **Skaftfell Art Center** in Seyðisfjörður, the initiative focuses on the artist’s remarkably intact house and studio, left virtually untouched since his death, with artworks and personal belongings still in place.

In collaboration with the Technical Museum of East Iceland, and Safnasafnið (the Icelandic Folk and Outsider Art Museum), conservation work is now underway ahead of structural repairs. The house will reopen to the public during summer 2028, as “Geirihús”, a permanent museum preserving this rare, complete artist environment.

SKAFTFELL ART CENTER

Austurvegur 42, 710 Seyðisfjörður, ICELAND
skaftfell.is



Inside Geiri's house; photo: Damian Luczak



Junius Wilson, photo: Frankie Marsh

AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM

until Sep 6, 2026

“**Fantastic Realities: Truth Stranger than Fiction**” explores imagined worlds shaped by intuition, invention and speculative thought, bringing together artists and thinkers who blur the boundaries between fact and fiction across immersive, handcrafted environments.

AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM

800 Key Hwy, Baltimore, MD 21230, USA
avam.org

PROJECT ONWARD

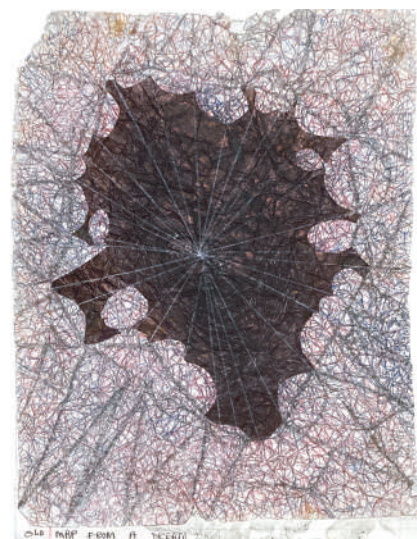
Aug 21 – Oct 9, 2026

“**Ethereal Renderings: The Hand as Conduit**” brings together twelve artists from Project Onward and explores visions, mythic figures, and subconscious imagery through automatic drawing and writing techniques.

Artists include Bill Douglas, Luke Shemroske, Catherine Butterfly, Sheila Smith, Sereno Wilson, John Behnke, Cherylle Booker and Frederick Nitsch. Developed with input from the College of Psychic Studies in London, the exhibition also includes a public workshop inviting visitors to explore their own subconscious processes.

WHITNEY R. OLIVER GALLERY

1200 W 35th St., 4th Floor, Chicago, IL 60609, USA
projectonward.org



Bill Douglas



Hannes Lehner

GALERIE GUGGING

Jun 3 – Sep 13, 2026

The exhibition “**comics brut**” explores the intersection of comic art and *art brut*, bringing together works by Didier Kassai, Basel Al-Bazzaz, Manuel Griebler and Hannes Lehner. At the centre are Griebler’s dense drawings, where figures from popular culture emerge within his characteristic “sea of heads”, alongside Lehner’s works inspired by *Star Trek*. In contrast, Kassai and Al-Bazzaz depict animals in human guise, forming a shared visual language that ranges from playful to sharply socio-critical. The exhibition highlights individual approaches to narrative, moving between humour, pop-cultural reference and personal imagery.

GALERIE GUGGING

Am Campus 2, 3400 Maria Gugging, Klosterneuburg, AUSTRIA
galeriegugging.com



HOUSTON ART CAR PARADE AND FESTIVAL

Apr 9–12, 2026

The annual Houston Art Car Parade is the city's biggest and boldest free community event, taking over the streets of downtown every April with more than 250 mobile masterpieces that articulate their makers' tastes and personal vision. Sponsored by Team Gillman and produced by the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, the 39th edition showcased more than 50 cars created in classrooms and youth groups over the region; showstoppers made by nationally regarded artists such as Mark "Scrapdaddy" Bradford and Randy Grubbs; and vehicles made by locals. An interactive puppet theatre truck by the Orange Show Center's 2026 artists-in-residence, the Puerto Rico-based Poncili Creación Art Collective, grabbed attention all weekend, while Curtis Paskey of the Rooster Wrench Garage in La Porte took home the grand prize – the Ann Harithas Legacy Award – for his *Dreamliner/Cosmic Love Shack*. Other elements of the event included the Main Street Drag (a mini-procession that takes the parade to hospitals, schools and senior centres) and the Legendary Art Car Ball (a costumed extravaganza with light sculpture, fire dancing, and a New Orleans Mardi Gras Indian funk collective).

Despite the rain, over 300,000 people attended this year's parade, and anticipation is already building for the 40th edition in 2027. The Orange Show Center is also working on a major site expansion that will allow for year-round interdisciplinary programmes and exhibitions of work by self-taught artists, as well as the re-establishment of the Art Car Museum. thehoustonartcarparade.com



above: *Dreamliner/Cosmic Love Shack*, Curtis Paskey, La Porte; photo: Orange Show Center
left: *Reality Breaker*, Poncili Creación Art Collective, Puerto Rico; photo: Larry Harris
top, left: *2Bah Booty*, Mark "Scrapdaddy" Bradford, Houston; photo: Orange Show Center

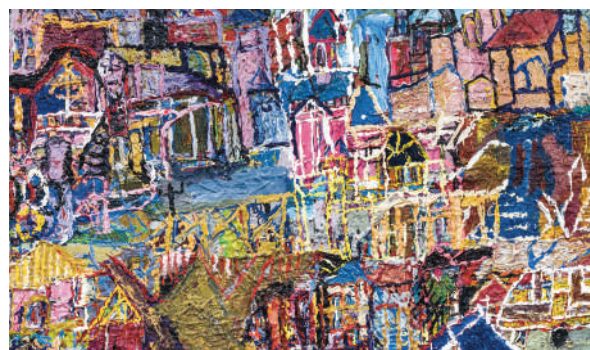
GALERIE ATELIER HERENPLAATS

Jul 3, 2026 – Sep 12, 2027

Galerie Atelier Herenplaats celebrates 35 years with the exhibition "**35 Years of Herenplaats**". Drawn from the gallery's collection, the show brings together decades of work by neurodiverse artists whose independent practices have become integral to the *art brut* canon. Since 1991, Herenplaats has supported around 50 artists in developing sustained careers, with many of their works now held in major collections.

GALERIE ATELIER HERENPLAATS

Schietbaanstraat 1–15, Rotterdam, THE NETHERLANDS
herenplaats.nl



Livia Dencher

Vreni Müller

OPEN ART MUSEUM

Jun 24 – Oct 18, 2026

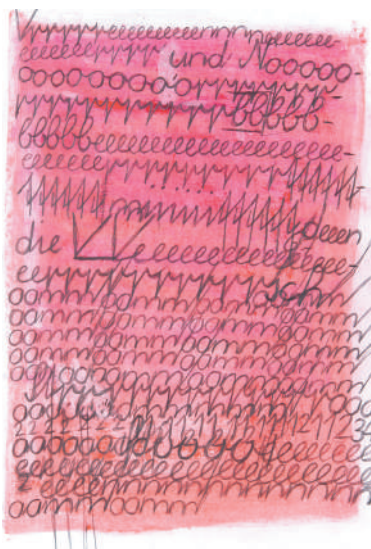
"**Komm Glückck – Word**

Treasures" presents a wide-ranging exploration of the shifting boundary between word and image, bringing together texts and visual works from the museum's collection.

Thoughts, greetings, poems, picture stories, mail art and conceptual approaches to language unfold in dialogue, as artists move fluidly between writing and image-making – probing what can be said, and what must be shown instead.

The museum also continues its exhibition of Adelheid Duvanel until October 18.

OPEN ART MUSEUM
Davidstrasse 44, 9000
St. Gallen, SWITZERLAND
openartmuseum.ch



MUSEUM SAMMLUNG PRINZHORN

Jun 28, 2026 – Jan 31, 2027

Marking 25 years since its opening, the Museum Sammlung Prinzhorn presents **"All Art?"**, an anniversary exhibition examining key works from its renowned collection. Highlights of the show include Else Blankenhorn's handmade banknotes, a reconstruction of a textile floor work by Marie Lieb, and the first presentation of a hand-embroidered carpet by Emma Mohr. The exhibition reflects on how such works have been displayed over the past century, questioning the framing of "institutional" production as art while exploring the original contexts and lived experiences behind their creation.

MUSEUM SAMMLUNG PRINZHORN

Voßstraße 2, 69115 Heidelberg, GERMANY

sammlung-prinzhorn.de

Else Blankenhorn



Issa Ibrahim in "Coming Out of Isolation"

FOUNTAIN HOUSE GALLERY

Jul 23 – Oct 28, 2026

"Coming Out of Isolation" (July 23 – August 15) highlights a year-long collaboration between Fountain House artists and those from **Bethlem Gallery**, London, with a parallel presentation at Bethlem Gallery (July 21 – September 5). Later in the season, **"Go! Figure!"** (September 10 – October 28) at Fountain House explores interpretations of the human figure.

FOUNTAIN HOUSE GALLERY

702 Ninth Avenue, New York, NY, 10019, USA

fountainhousegallery.org

CREATIVITY EXPLORED

Jun 25 – Aug 22, 2026

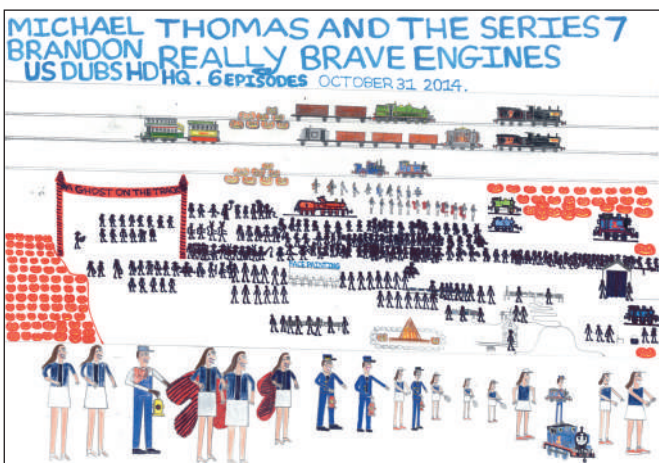
Creativity Explored presents a group exhibition of studio artists that utilise existing cultural iconography to map out their daily lives and experiences. The title, **"Downs the Hills and Around the Bends"**, is an excerpt from the theme song for the children's television series *Thomas & Friends*, a narrative that artist Grayson Kop uses to discuss his friendships, interactions, activities and routine.

CREATIVITY EXPLORED

3245 16th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103, USA

creativityexplored.org

Grayson Kop



Paul Amar

MUSÉE D'ART BRUT, MONTPELLIER

until Aug 29, 2026

The Musée d'Art Brut presents an exhibition of **Paul Amar**. Born in Algiers, Amar turned to art in 1974 after a chance encounter with shell souvenirs. Using mussels, coral and sea urchins, he created vivid, illuminated reliefs shaped by memory and personal symbolism.

MUSÉE D'ART BRUT

Rue Beau Séjour, 34090 Montpellier, FRANCE

musee-artbrut-montpellier.com

SAFNASAFNIÐ

until Oct 4, 2026

Safnasafnið presents three concurrent exhibitions. **"Kíko Korriro"** focuses on the work of Þórður Valdimarsson who, under the name Kíko Korriro, worked in relative isolation and created intricate, collage-based images, exploring worlds that shift from the microscopic to the cosmic. **"Iceland Imagined"** brings together 24 rare paintings from the National Gallery of Iceland, by an unknown eighteenth-century artist, offering a vision of the Icelandic landscape made from afar. **"Such a Collection"** presents new research into Bjarni H Þórarinnsson whose work combines image, language and philosophy through a highly individual conceptual system.

SAFNASAFNIÐ

Svalbarðseyri, 606 Akureyri, ICELAND
safnasafnid.is

Kíko Korriro



JENNIFER LAUREN GALLERY

Jul 9 – Aug 18, 2026

Jennifer Lauren Gallery presents **"Terence Wilde: Undertow"** from July 9–12, featuring much of the artist's work created since August 2025. The original working theme of "Clay, Scale and Spirituality" has led Wilde through the elements to the undertow of the sea, where he has begun to make art more from the inside of an experience, rather than about one.

From July 30 to August 18, **"Sunflowers and Quicksand: Fishing for the Trickster"** is a solo exhibition from Margate-based, self-taught artist **Valerie Potter**, showcasing drawings, paintings and stitched works, from the eighties up to the present day. Pieces reveal fantastical landscapes and microscopic worlds fuelled by the artist's love of botany, and tying together symbols of birth, death and love with non-religious iconography.

POST OFFICE MARGATE

22-23 Cecil Square, Margate, CT9 1BA, UK
jenniferlaurengallery.com

Valerie Potter



Hans Krüsi

COLLECTION DE L'ART BRUT

until Sep 27, 2026

Marking the Collection de l'Art Brut's 50th anniversary, **"Art Brut in Switzerland. From the Origins of the Collection to the Present"** looks back to 1945, when Jean Dubuffet coined the term *art brut* following his visits to psychiatric institutions, prisons and ethnographic collections – experiences that later led to his 1971 donation of artworks to the City of Lausanne. Featuring more than 300 works, the exhibition combines pieces from Dubuffet's original holdings with later acquisitions, charting the Collection's development to the present day.

COLLECTION DE L'ART BRUT

Av Bergières 11, 1004 Lausanne, SWITZERLAND
artbrut.ch



Antoine Oleyant

CAVIN-MORRIS GALLERY

Jul 9 – Sep 4, 2026

"Endangered Spirits: Art from Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, and Iran" brings together rare ceremonial banners alongside contemporary works by Antoine Oleyant, who transformed the commercialisation of sequined flags to a high art form. Paintings by André Pierre, Robert St Brice and Philomé Obin are shown alongside sculptures and paintings by Jamaican masters Leonard Daley, Everal Brown, Ras Dizzy, Vincent Atherton and Errol Lloyd Atherton. The exhibition also includes an early work by Mallica Reynolds, reputed to be among his first paintings.

CAVIN-MORRIS GALLERY

529 West 20th Street, 3W, New York, NY 10011, USA
cavinmorris.com

JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER

until Dec 6, 2026

"Guadalupe Maravilla with Emery Blagdon: The Star Exploding in the Body" brings into dialogue two artists devoted to healing through art. Blagdon's *Healing Machine* – a decades-long construction of wire, foil and found materials, intended to channel unseen energies in response to illness – is now held by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. Alongside, are Maravilla's sculptural "healing machines," activated through sound and rooted in the artist's experiences of migration and recovery from cancer. At the centre of the show stands Maravilla's *Mariposa Relámpago*, a transformed school bus that becomes an immersive site for ongoing sonic healing rituals.

JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER

608 New York Ave, Sheboygan, WI 53081, USA

jmkac.org

Guadalupe Maravilla



TAPU SINGOLARE

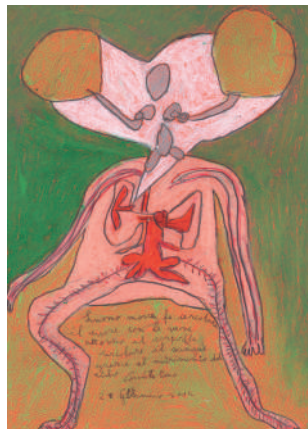
Jul 11 – Oct 4, 2026

From July 11 to August 31, Venice's Tapu Singolare presents **"Formae Mentis Vol. IV – In signs, in forms"**, bringing together works by Luigi Lineri, Martina Emorano, Luigi Gaiotto and Simona Raimondi in an exhibition exploring repetition, symbolic language and poetic narrative forms. A collaboration between Tapu Singolare and curatorial project Lens Art, also based in Venice, the show highlights four singular and previously unpublished artistic voices.

This will be followed by **"The Devil of Bongozona"** (September 5 – October 4), an exhibition of works by Dario Condotta, an independent artist currently living in a psychiatric hospital in Treviso. Presented by Tapu, which preserves and promotes his work, Condotta's drawings confront the tensions between bodily existence, transformation, heaven and hell, with the artist describing life and death alike as states of transformation.

For information: @tapu.singolart or +39 353 475 3389 (text only).

Dario Condotta



James Gladwell

PROJECT ABILITY GALLERY

Jun 5 – Sep 5, 2026

From June 5 until July 18, as part of the Glasgow International Festival, Project Ability presents **James Gladwell's** cross-stitched drawings which, of varying scales, feature intricate, colourful images inspired by the artist's life.

From July 25 until September 5, the young artists in the Project Ability Create studios host their annual **Young Talent** exhibition with a theme of athletics to coincide with the Commonwealth Games.

PROJECT ABILITY

Trongate 103, Glasgow G1 5HD, SCOTLAND

project-ability.co.uk



Samaneh Atef

EUROPEAN ART PRIZE EUWARD10 OPENS FOR ENTRIES

The widely recognised European Art Prize – awarded every three years by the **Augustinum Foundation** – is open for entries this year for the tenth time. From June 10, application forms and further information will be available to download at euward.de. The application deadline is October 10, 2026. The three prize winners will each receive a solo exhibition at Haus der Kunst in Munich, accompanied by a personal exhibition catalogue, as well as a cash prize of up to € 6,000. Previous Euward laureates include Josef Hoffer, Michael Golz and Samaneh Atef. euward.de



photos: Ted Degener

PETE FELTEN (1933–2026)

Celebrated artist Pete "Fritz" Felten, born on April 14, 1933, passed away in February at the age of 92 in his home town of Hays, Kansas. Though he worked in various mediums – including pottery, painting and photography – Felten was most devoted to sculpture, for which he became best known. His limestone carvings of animals, historical figures and ordinary people can be seen throughout his home town and state.

After graduating from Hays High School, Felten joined the US Navy. During his four-year tour, he travelled extensively, visiting museums across the continental United States and Hawaii. Those experiences sparked his interest in art and, shortly after his service, he began sculpting. He later enrolled at Fort Hays State University but left in 1957 to focus on sculpture full time. Largely self-taught, Felten became a master through extensive research and daily practice.

In 1961, the Hays Public Library commissioned Felten to create a bust of Buffalo Bill Cody, co-founder of the town that would later become Hays. The sculpture marked his first commission and the beginning of his public career. Other major commissions followed, including the 18-tonne buffalo sculpture *Monarch of the Plains* at Fort Hays Historic Site. Some years later,

the Kansas State Capitol issued a call for artists to submit proposals for artworks to line the rotunda of the statehouse. After a rigorous selection process, Felten was chosen, and his sculptures were installed in 1981.

The Four Kansans – Amelia Earhart, William Allen White, Arthur Capper and Dwight D Eisenhower – were carved from Silverdale limestone mined in southern Kansas. Felten declined to sign his work, stating the sculptures belonged to Kansas, not him; a plaque acknowledging his authorship was added in June, 2024.

Later in his career, Felten worked out of the Stone Gallery, a two-storey studio and exhibition space, in Hays. His miniature sculptures – crafted from wood, clay, plaster, limestone and marble – are displayed throughout the building. Outside stands his famous garden wall made from various stones, which he worked on for years. Carved into the façade are animals, Latin phrases and geometric patterns. People in Hays recall seeing Felten outside carving most days, often listening to his radio. There are plans to preserve the space as a museum and sculpture garden.

Two days before his passing, Felten received the Governor's Arts Legacy Award, recognising his lifetime of significant impact on the arts in Kansas.

EMMIE FOSTER

ISAIAH ZAGAR (1939–2026)

Philadelphia artist Isaiah Zagar passed away at his home in February, aged 86, leaving a singular artistic legacy represented by over 200 murals, hundreds of paintings, thousands of drawings, and more than 150 etchings. In addition, he created two monumental sites that are open to the public and administered by the nonprofit organisation Philadelphia's Magic Gardens.

Although trained at the Pratt Institute, Zagar's reverence for outsider art is reflected in the sites he built and his murals. These walls of tile fragments and broken mirrors are the result of a formally trained artist responding to and reimagining outsider art environments. By exploring the conceptual underpinnings of the self-taught artists he admired, Zagar found a way to create intuitively, rather than relying on an orientation acquired through formal training. While it would be inaccurate to refer to him as an outsider artist, his affinity with the field was substantial.

Zagar mined the personal narrative from every conceivable angle. It is impossible to count the number of times he rendered his children, grandchildren, parents, friends, acquaintances, and even his dogs and cats. But the images he depicted more than any other were those of his wife, Julia, and himself. The most intimate of life's moments are honestly chronicled, recorded with an urgent imperative. His art is completely unfiltered, often exposing emotions that are visceral and raw.

Philadelphia's Magic Gardens, which attracts about 150,000 visitors each year, has acquired several buildings filled with murals by Zagar. In the future, his home will also come under the organisation's ownership. In addition, Philadelphia's Magic Gardens has received a significant collection of the artist's works, which it plans to catalogue, conserve and exhibit.

The murals Zagar created transformed a neighbourhood of mundane houses into an unorthodox, outdoor gallery. Possessed by an almost

mystical belief in his aesthetic, he devoted his life entirely to making art. Few contemporary artists have been as successful in engaging the general public in such an uncompromised, joyful art experience.

SCOTT ROTHSTEIN

photo: Ted Degener



FAREWELLS



MAGGIE JONES MAIZELS (1944–2026)

Maggie Jones was born in 1944 in north-west England, in Birkenhead, known locally as the Welsh part of Liverpool. At the age of six or so, she moved with her parents and brother to a small village in Anglesey in Wales, where the family home – a quintessential Welsh cottage in a picturesque setting by the Menai Straits – would capture her heart and become the inspiration and motif for all of her creative work.

Growing up in such a quiet place, Maggie stood out, a little bit avant-garde with her artistic dress sense and her carefully curated scarves and tights. At 18, she left Anglesey to go to Liverpool Art School, later attending Chelsea School of Art and then the Royal College of Art. It was at Chelsea that she met John Maizels and the couple got married at Hampstead registry office in London. It was the swinging sixties and Maggie caught the eye of the Mary Quant fashion house and Vidal Sassoon hair salon, modelled for a while, wore voguish outfits and got geometric bob cuts for free. She and John travelled, driving in trucks across Turkey, Afghanistan and Iran, having hair-raising adventures and collecting unusual Islamic prints, with Maggie taking hundreds of photos along the way.

She had studied illustration at the Royal College and her first job was in publishing, producing beautiful illustrations for book covers and magazines. When she and John started a family, she was a wonderfully creative mother to their daughters, Jennie and Lucy. She returned to work lecturing in graphic design at several different art colleges in London and then took a role heading up a Foundation Graphics course at a college near the family's home just outside the capital.

Before founding *Raw Vision* in 1989, John and Maggie embarked on several voyages of discovery around Europe, visiting collections, artists

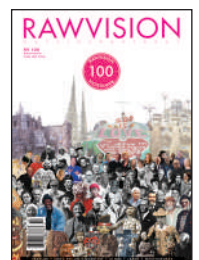
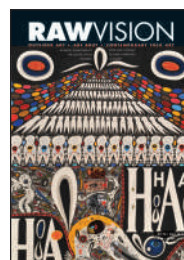
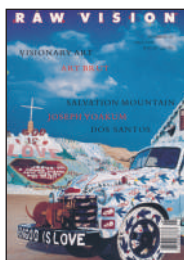
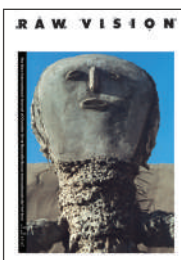
and environments. At that time, France and Switzerland were the countries where *art brut* and outsider art were most well known, while in the USA the field was still termed as "folk art," with even artists such as Adolf Wölfli included in that category. It was Maggie and her designer brother, David Jones, who were instrumental in getting *Raw Vision* off the ground. All the early issues were the result of skilled artwork in the days when copy and paste actually meant using gum. Soon Maggie became the main designer for the magazine, a role she filled for many years, updating her skills and learning to design on screen as technology moved forward.

Together, she and John championed outsider art, making connections and friends around the world. They were completely overwhelmed by their first visit to Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Chandigarh, India, in 1994 and became good friends with the artist's family, both in Chandigarh and in Leicester, UK, where his daughter lived.

Throughout her life, Maggie produced her own art. She painted scenes of the Anglesey of her childhood, on canvas as well as on carefully chosen slabs of Welsh slate. Whatever she made was beautifully composed and intricate, with her using a jewellers' eyepiece as well as her spectacles – often more than one pair at a time. She had gallery shows and sold a lot of her work but that wasn't what making art was about for her.

Maggie had great pride in her North Welsh heritage and a deeply rooted attachment to her home country. She leaves behind a lifetime of wonderful creativity and fond, happy memories for her family – especially John, their two daughters and four grandchildren – as well as her many friends and everyone else that she touched with her warmth, humour, inimitable sparkle and artistic talent.

ML



THE FIRST CHALINIST

Using a unique painting technique, Zambian artist Aubrey Chali expresses his thoughts on the value of tradition in the modern age

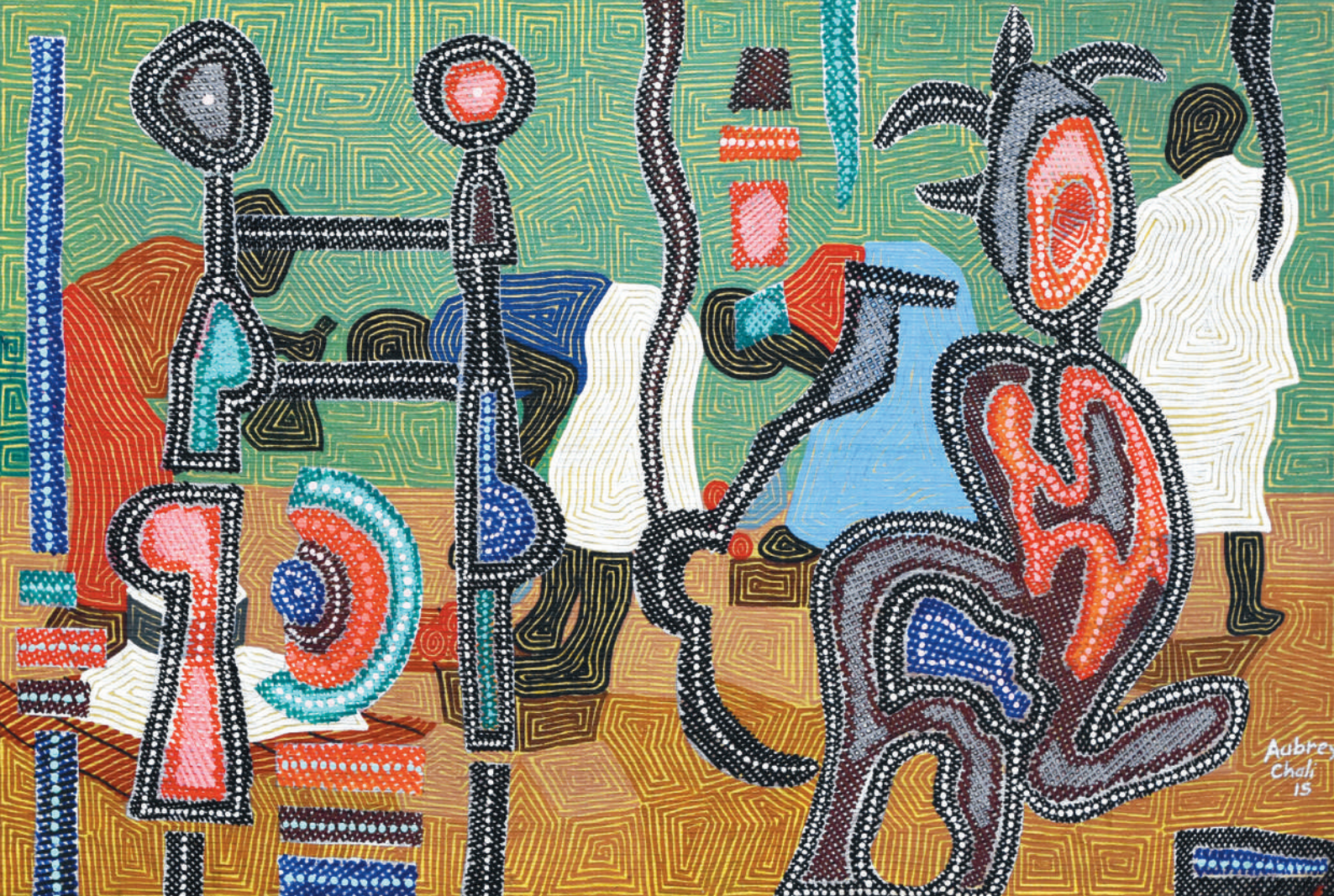
ISAYA HIGA

When people see Aubrey Chali's artwork for the first time they often wonder what medium they are looking at. Criss-crossing lines and dots of different shades, painstakingly applied by hand without using tools such as a ruler or maulstick, give an impression closer to that of needlework or mosaic than painting on canvas. The creator named this style "contour linear technique" and later "Chalinism", a portmanteau of his name and "line". He describes Chalinism as a painting style: "consisting of closely distributed weaved lines of various colours and/or carefully and often evenly placed angled spirals that

create an intentional, nesting motif, which on close inspection can resemble a maze but when viewed at a reasonable distance complete a storied picture"

Chali was born in 1977 in Chingola, a city in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia. Soon after, his family moved to Mufurila, Ndola, and then to Mansa, the capital of Luapula Province in the northern part of the country. Luapula is a rural division where the main industries are farming and fishing, and many of Chali's artworks depict scenes of agrarian villages and traditional activities such as people extracting salt from the earth or collecting water from the bottom of the





well during the dry season. In a statement for his first show “About Me and My Art” in 2014, he wrote that his works were a reflection on his traditional roots and a series of social subjects in his homeland. He explained that he painted people in their environments because he was curious about “where they have been, where they are and where they hope to go in life.”

Chali has been drawing since childhood. There was no art curriculum in the primary school he attended, but he drew at home, first with pencil, then with pen and ink. His parents wanted him to become a lawyer, but he pursued his vocation as an artist while studying for a certificate in Human Resources Management and Administration from the University of Zambia.

Becoming a professional artist is never easy, but perhaps even less so in a place where information on art is not readily available and clients are scarce. A turning point came in 2000 when Chali’s friend Victor Mwakalombe, an artist also based in Mansa, introduced him to the Zambia National Visual Arts Council (VAC), a nation-wide organisation founded by Zambian artists in 1989 to raise awareness for arts and to promote the interests of artists. Chali became a member, attending

regular meetings, and soon began using acrylic paint as his medium. That same year, he started a studio with Mwakalombe and another artist, Collins Kangwa. The trio worked during the day making signage for public facilities, farms and private homes, and then Chali would stay behind in the evening to focus on his art.

His early works were mainly figurative, but Chali soon started experimenting with abstraction. Many of the paintings he created around the early 2010s are scenes of rural life rendered in combination with spiralling patterns, or simplified figures, the contours of which are duplicated repeatedly, filling up the entire background. In his later works, Chali’s main subjects and backgrounds became compositions of crosshatched patterns and angular spirals reminiscent of labyrinthine meanders, a practice leading him to coin the phrase “Chalinism”. According to the artist, the new style came from a dream:

“In 2010, when I was still living in Mansa, I had a dream. I was visiting a gentleman in the studio. I had never seen him before; I only met him once in that dream. He said, ‘Why did you come here?’ and I said, ‘I want to learn how to paint’. Then the gentleman took



Appreciating Culture (Kachina figure from Hopi tribe), 2020, 17.5 x 30.5 in. / 45 x 78 cm



above: *Trusted Friend*, 2015, acrylic on canvas with *chitenge*, 16 x 25.5 in. / 40 x 65 cm

left: *Intertwined*, 2016, acrylic on canvas with *chitenge*, 21 x 27.5 in. / 53 x 69.5 cm

me in, showed me the canvas that was propped on an easel, and started to paint lines and dots, saying 'This is how you do it'. I always keep a sketchbook at my bedside to take notes of ideas I conceive while I'm in bed, so when I woke up, I ... drew the patterns which the gentleman showed me in the dream. After that I fell asleep again and have forgotten about the dream for days. Then one day I was flipping through the pages of my sketchbook, looking for ideas, and saw the picture I drew It suddenly brought back all the memory of the dream, and I started to paint the way the gentleman showed me."

Four years later, in 2014, Chali moved to Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, and started creating artworks at the shared studio of Art Academy Without Walls (AAWW) – a joint project between VAC and the National Academy of Fine Art in Oslo which had been founded to provide up-and-coming artists with workspaces and the chance to interact with other creators. In the same year, Chali exhibited his Chalinism paintings at his first solo show titled "Me and My Art" held at Henry Tayali Visual Arts Centre. An eminent Zambian art historian Andrew Mulenga wrote that viewers of Chali's scenes from pastoral life, inspired by the peri-urban setting

in Mansa, would "get a chance to marvel at the unique technique this artist has come up with".

Another breakthrough came in 2015 when Chali started incorporating pieces of *chitenge*, a traditional African fabric dyed through batik printing. His wife, Catherine Kafumbe Chali, designs and makes dresses using *chitenge* and when Chali saw the colourful leftover fabric scraps in her studio, he was inspired to apply them to his artworks. The introduction of *chitenge* has added an element of surprise to Chali's otherwise methodical, meticulous work, resulting in bolder, freer compositions. The new works were first revealed at his exhibition at Gianpielo's Hotel in Lusaka in 2015.

The following year, Chali was accepted by the Azule Art Residency programme in North Carolina, USA. He raised the funds for his travel but was not granted a visa to enter the US. Undaunted, he carried on, honing his technique and expanding his range of subject matter, moving on from his early focus of the daily routines of people's lives. In 2017, in an updated version of his 2014 statement "About Me and My Art", he wrote that his subject matter was "about spiritual traditional objects studies and a comment on cultures and human nature". He started incorporating motifs of

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**He was curious about “where they have been,
where they are and where they hope to go...”**



opposite: *Tribal Elder*, 2017, 28.5 x 43.5 in. / 72.5 x 110.5 cm

above: *Tribal Guardian Warrior*, 2017, 28.5 x 43.5 in. / 72.5 x 110.5 cm



May the Spirit Protect Us, 2016, acrylic on canvas with *chitenge*,
28.5 x 15 in. / 73 x 38 cm

traditional African objects such as ceremonial masks, garments, tools and utensils, not merely to express his identity as an African artist, but to express his thoughts about the value of tradition in the modern age. His *Tribal Guardian Warrior* (2017) is about initiation rites and how they shape the young men of the Luvale, Chokwe and Mbunda tribes, equipping them with the skills and moral strength to take up their role in society. *Tribal Elder* (2017) depicts an elderly woman with traditional wisdom who is alone, rejected by new generations who have discarded their culture

and responsibilities. The artist's interest in traditional cultures extends beyond Africa, as seen in *Appreciating Culture* (2020) that depicts a Kachina figure of the Native American Hopi tribe whose strong belief in cultural norms and values has influenced Chali.

In 2023, Chali produced "Pollinator Butterfly"; a series of paintings reflecting his concern for the loss of biodiversity. His recent works, which also deal with subjects including poverty, education and climate change, are often rendered in vivid colour. He maintains that "lines and colours have specific spiritual truth



which directly connects with an artist's spirit". He says it is about interaction between artist and medium:

"You have an idea to start with, but selecting colours and applying them on the canvas gives you new ideas and directions. It also has to do with imagination, because spirituality is linked with imagination. You think hard and you keep painting, and then you get an inspiration, something that was not there before."

Chali has established his own creative furrow and has found some commercial success but, hailing from a place that makes practising art a constant struggle,

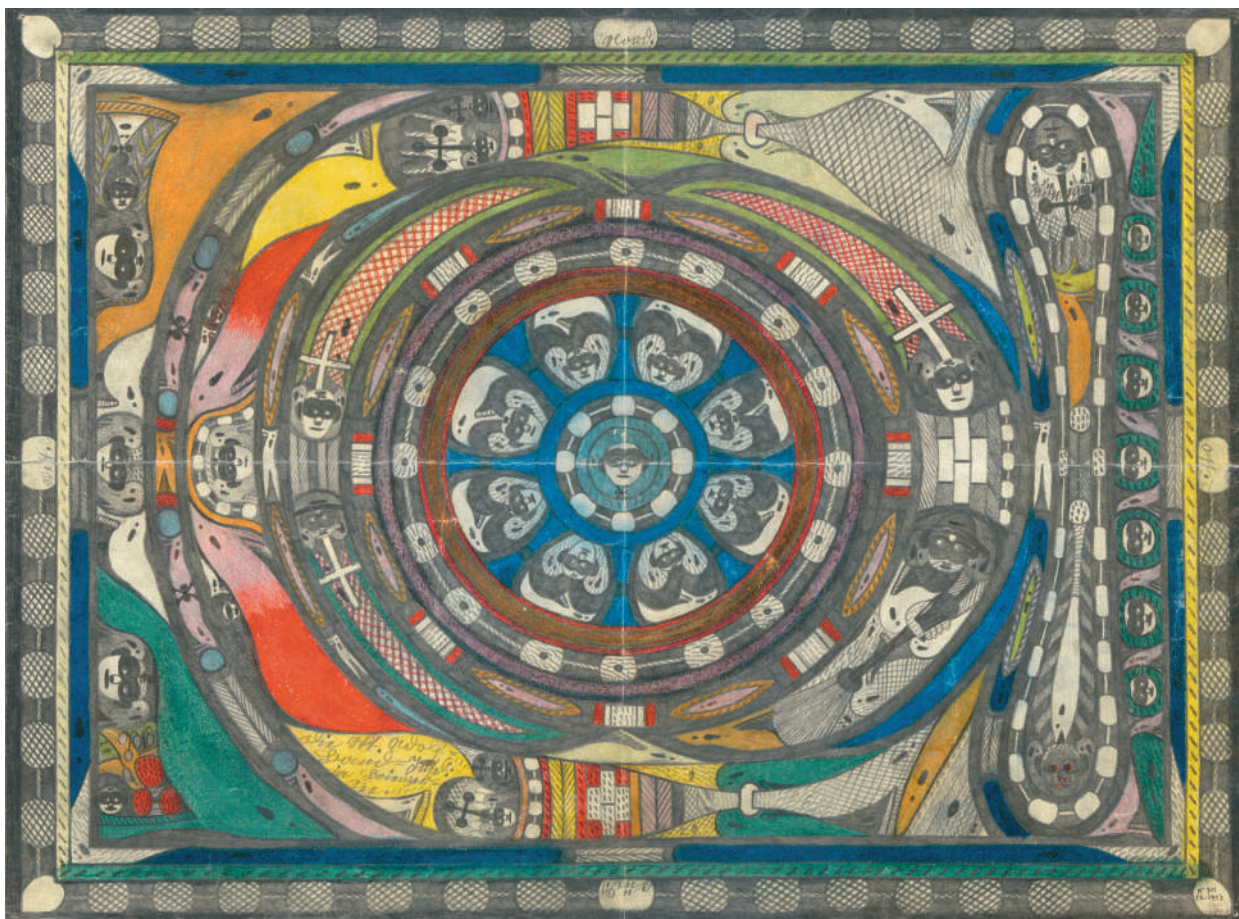
he is acutely aware of the challenges faced by aspiring artists in his country. He is using the proceeds from the sales of his paintings to build an art studio, a place where artists can secure their working spaces and interact with fellow artists. The venue is to be called "Chalinism Concepts Art Studio".

Isaya Higa is a contributor to the Japanese website of the Nek Chand Foundation. He is writing a book about Tengenenge, an artists' community in Zimbabwe.



BUILDING A LEGACY





Born from Jean Dubuffet's extraordinary donation of outsider creations, the Collection de l'Art Brut celebrates its 50th anniversary, looking back and forward

CHLOÉ FALCY

The elegant, understated building that houses the Collection de l'Art Brut sits in the urban landscape of the Swiss city of Lausanne. Originally a patrician residence dating from the eighteenth century, it has been the home of the Collection – which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year – since 1976.

To quote Jean Dubuffet, an artist himself and the first theorist and collector of *art brut*, "True art is always where you least expect it." Thanks to the establishment of the Collection de l'Art Brut, thousands of visitors have been able to find the huge body of art that he amassed. The Collection's renown and popularity have grown over the last half century and today the museum attracts more than 40,000 people a year from around the world.

On first entering the building, one is struck by the

black walls, the antithesis of the White Cube aesthetic of contemporary art scenography. This intimate atmosphere has remained unchanged since the museum opened and the 300 works in the 50th-anniversary exhibition stand out as vivid against the dark walls as they did in 1976.

"In this celebratory exhibition, I wished to show chief figures of outsider art, like Aloïse Corbaz, Adolf Wölfli and Heinrich Anton Müller, but also artworks never presented so far and newly discovered creators, such as Diego de Mauri and Pascal Vonlanthen, because they illustrate how the notion of *art brut* is still very relevant and alive today," says Sarah Lombardi, director of the Collection de l'Art Brut since 2013. The exhibition explores the story of *art brut*, old and new, and how its renown spread across the world, moving from the margins to become an integral

opposite, top: Slavko Kopač, Michel Thévoz and Jean Dubuffet preparing for the Collection de l'Art Brut opening in 1976; photo: Jean-Jacques Laeser
opposite, below: the museum's exterior in 2012; photo: Mario Trotta

above: Adolf Wölfli, Untitled (*Le Lac et les Îles*), 1917, graphite and coloured and pencil on paper, 27 x 20 in. / 68 x 51 cm
all images courtesy: Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne



above: Aloïse Corbaz, *Untitled (Couple Princier)*, c. 1947, graphite and coloured pencil and gouache on paper, 23.5 x 31 in. / 60 x 79 cm



above: work by Aloïse Corbaz in the museum; photo: Claudina Garcia, 2016
top: Aloïse Corbaz at the Rosière asylum in 1963; photo: Henriette Grindat

part of contemporary art, the makers leaving behind anonymity to be recognised as artists, inspiring others in different artistic fields.

In the 1975 film *Aloïse*, French actress Isabelle Huppert took on the role of the eponymous artist and visited the Collection de l'Art Brut several times, saying that it "raises so many questions about normality and folly". Indeed, when Aloïse Corbaz was 28 years old she was interned for life in a then-called mental asylum, going on to an existence, not only of seclusion, but also of intense creativity, producing a corpus of 3,000 pieces.

The work of Aloïse has been part of the Collection since its inception, the seed of which was sewn decades earlier with a journey made by Jean Dubuffet in 1945.

In the aftermath of World War II, Dubuffet was invited to Switzerland by a group of intellectuals, medical professionals and artists. During the trip, he visited prisons and asylums, where doctors showed him creations that would go on to constitute the nucleus

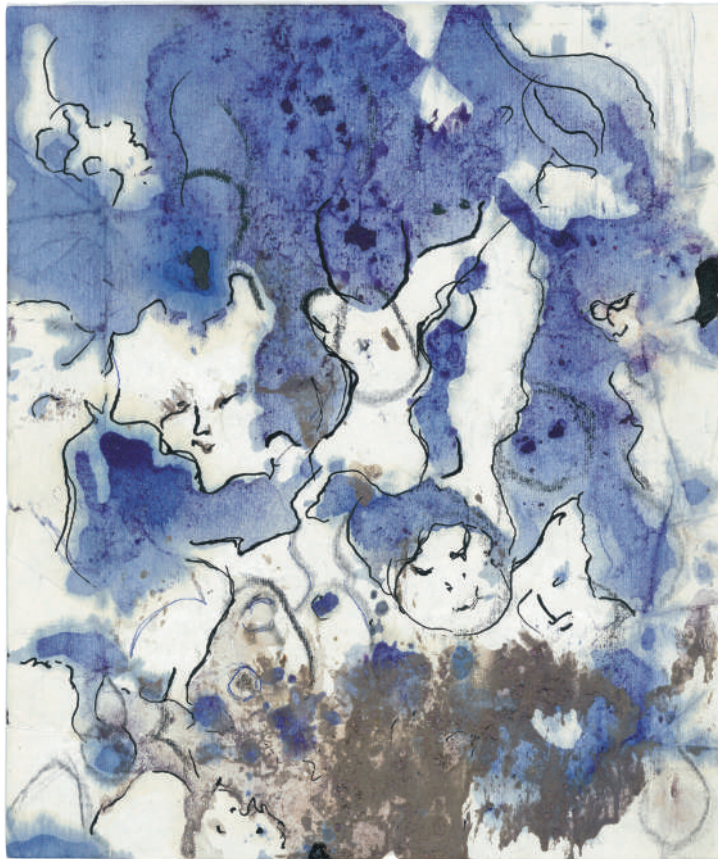
of what he would later theorise as *art brut*. In 1971, after decades of gathering artworks, he donated his collection of more than 5,000 pieces, by 133 creators, to the Swiss city of Lausanne. The Collection de l'Art Brut museum opened five years later with Michel Thévoz as its first director. Thévoz recalls, "At the time, we asked ourselves if the Collection was finished, if new creators were still to be discovered. We betted for the latter option". Five decades on, the Collection comprises 70,000 pieces, with about 1000 in the permanent exhibition.

Among the acquisitions with Thévoz at the helm were the works of Gaston Teuscher (1903–1986). Born in Switzerland to a farming family, he worked as a teacher and, after retirement, aged 71, he took to drawing compulsively on pieces of paper – cigarette wrappings, restaurant table mats, and so on – in graphite pencil or ballpoint pen, using coffee grounds, cigarette ash and wine to heighten the colours. Over the last twelve years of his life, he created thousands of drawings from which

"We asked ourselves if the Collection was finished, if new creators were still to be discovered."



Aloïse Corbaz, Untitled (*Abduction of a Bride from Gaul*), b/w 1946 and 1947, gouache and coloured pencil on sewn paper, 23.5 x 35 in. / 60 x 89.5 cm



all artworks: Gaston Teuscher, Untitled, b/w 1974 and 1986

above: ink, paint and organic elements on waste paper,
11 x 12.5 in. / 30 x 31.5 cm

right: ink, paint, coloured pencil and clay on cigarette
wrapping paper, 6 x 5 in. / 15.5 x 13 cm

below: Indian ink, paint and coloured pencil on cigarette
wrapping paper, 6 x 5 in. / 15.5 x 13 cm





Hans Krüsi, Untitled, 1982, gouache and acrylic paint, spray paint, felt pen and adhesive tape on paper, 40 x 27.5 in. / 100 x 70 cm

crowds of enigmatic faces and silhouettes emerged.

Another Swiss creator, Hans Krüsi (1920–1995), was taken from his parents as a child and put to work in a farm – a deplorable, although common practice that poor families in Switzerland were subjected to in the first half of the twentieth century. At the age of 55 or so, while selling flowers for a living, Krüsi began making postcard-size paintings on scraps of paper and cardboard, which he then sold on a busy Zurich street. Over time, he moved to bigger formats, always celebrating traditional Swiss symbols, such as chalets, fir trees and scenes of *pozas*, the old custom of cow-driving in alpine pastures. Like many outsider art creators, Krüsi ingeniously used the materials at hand, such as milk cartons which he sometimes assembled into bas-reliefs.

Protecting such *art brut* creations can present challenges, says conservation expert Lucile Ruynat:

“They are very delicate from a mechanical point of view because over time the synthetic glue used to hold the elements together can deteriorate. Likewise, scales of paint, which are very rigid, can detach from a supple body.”

Some works require particularly close monitoring due to the highly inventive techniques of their making, such as the sculptures of Joseph Giavarini. His story is almost mythical: born in Italy in 1877, he emigrated to Basel, Switzerland when he was 30 and established a small construction business; 20 years later, he was imprisoned

for murdering his lover. Using raw clay that his family brought to him in jail – as well as wax and chewed bread – he modelled intricate statuettes notable for their expressiveness as well as their maker’s technique.

“Giavarini shaped his sculptures before soaking them in plaster and painting them. This gave them their varnished aspect, as well as solidified and unified them,” says Ruynat. “They are mechanically very delicate, but also chemically, because organic matter can decay or be attacked by insects, especially if humidity rises.” Among the most fragile works in the Collection, they cannot be loaned.

“Giavarini is an artistic oddity,” says Ruynat. “In the case of Krüsi, we have some studies about how synthetic materials decay, especially those containing plastic – but we don’t know how Giavarini’s artwork will be affected over time. We are, so to speak, in *terra incognita*.”

While Giavarini was part of Dubuffet’s original collection, others are very recent acquisitions, like Diego de Mauri. Born in 1963 in Lausanne, he suffered a heart attack a few days after his birth, leaving him mentally disabled. Fascinated by Swiss chalets, he draws buildings made up of small geometrical modules, repeated across the entire façade, which seem to expand infinitely. Lombardi says of De Mauri:

“In his case, as in many others, it is a ‘watchman,’ as I like to call them, who reported him to us, like the psychiatrists of Dubuffet’s time. The neighbour of Diego,

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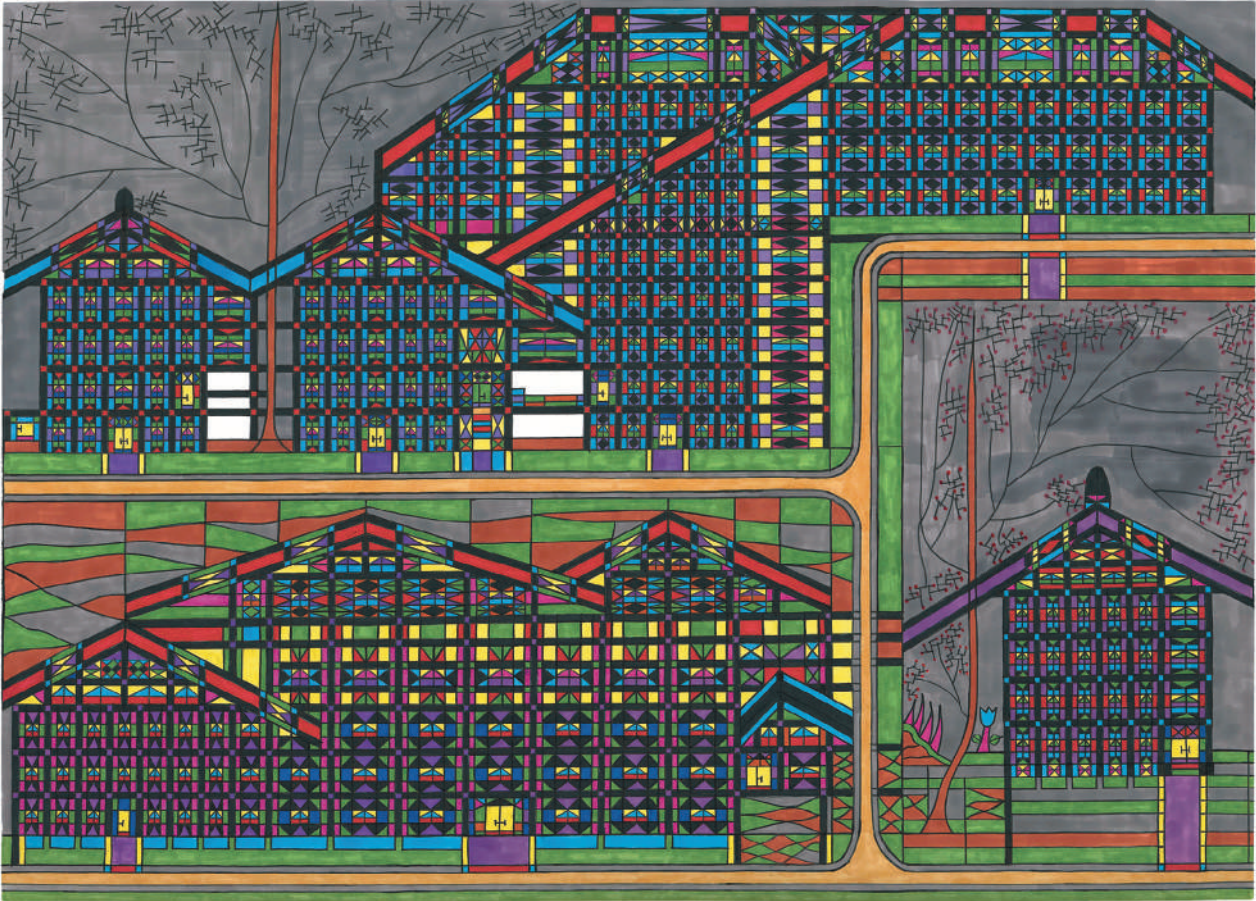
"This collection is like no other – we find here art in its full identity and creative strength."





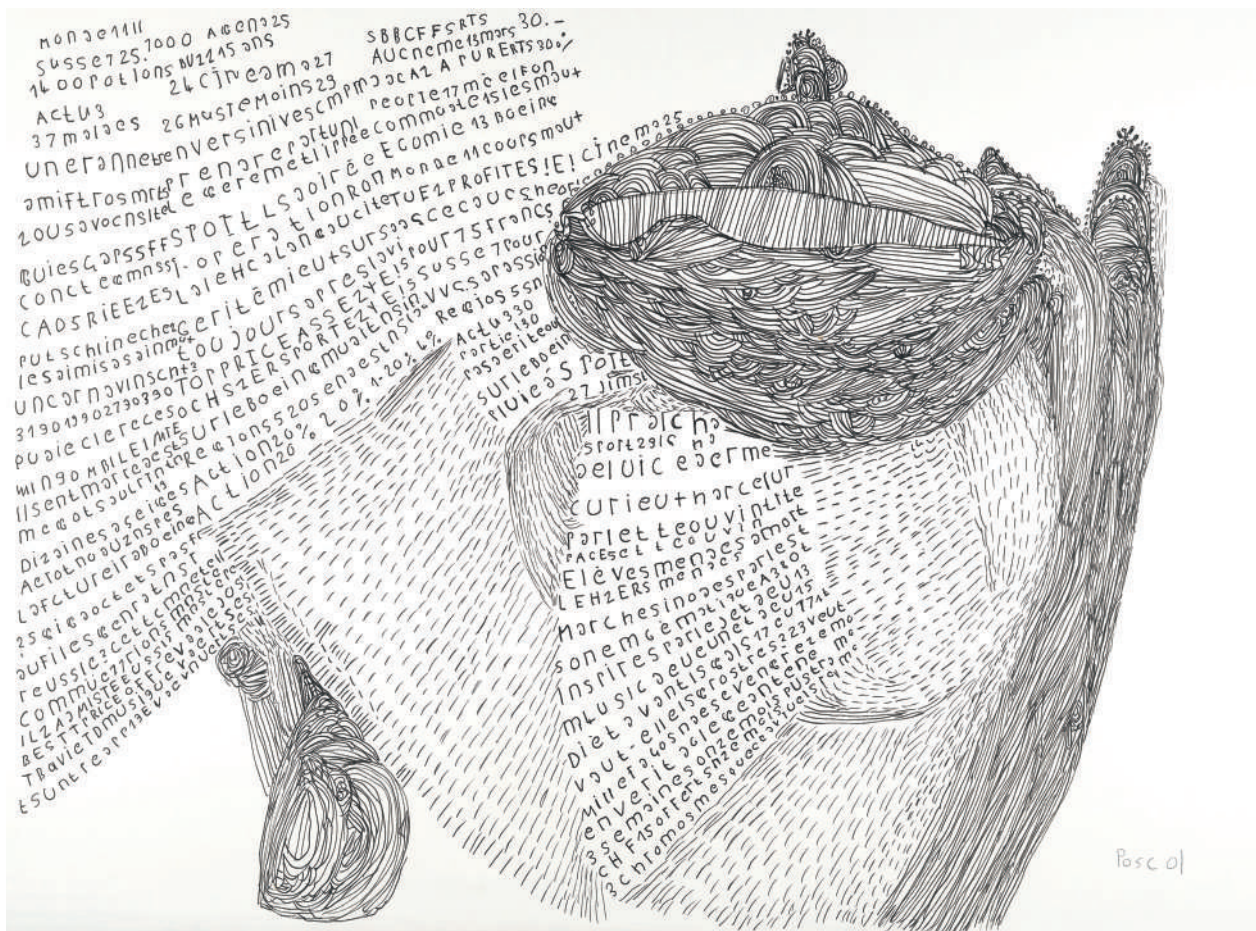
this page:
Heinrich Müller, Untitled (*Man with
Gout on his Nose*), b/w 1917 and 1922,
watercolour and chalk on wrapping
paper, 17.5 x 29.5 in. / 44.5 x 75.5 cm

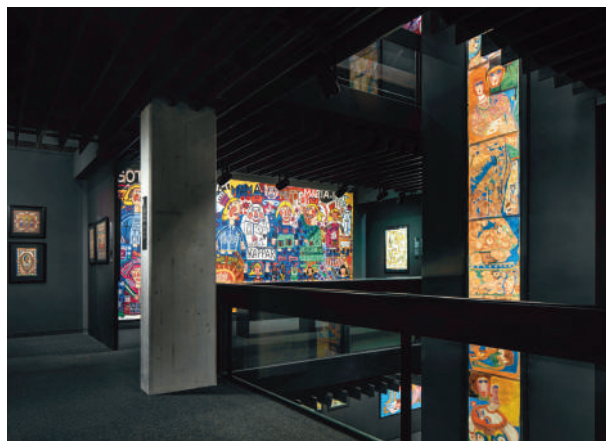
opposite page:
Joseph Giavarini, Untitled
(*Two Musicians*), b/w 1928 and 1934,
modelling clay, paint and wood,
15.5 x 18.5 x 7 in. / 39.5 x 47 x 18 cm



above: Diego De Mauri, *Untitled*, b/w 1981 and 2015, graphite pencil and felt pen on paper, 40 x 28.5 in./ 102 x 72.8 cm

below: Pascal Vonlanthen, Untitled, 2019, felt pen and Indian ink on paper, 27.5 x 19.5 in./ 70 x 50 cm





above: inside the museum in 2010; photo: Caroline Smyrliadis
top: the museum exterior in 1976; photo: Henri Germond

above: some of the Collection's exhibits in 2024; photo: Delphine Burtin
top: the Collection de l'Art Brut building today; photo: Corinne Sporrer

a filmmaker, thought his drawings could be of interest to us. We met Diego and his mother and they donated 20 works, which were first exhibited in the museum in 2018.”

In the Galerie du Marché, in Lausanne’s city centre, De Mauri’s artworks are displayed alongside those of Aloïse. His work now grants him financial and artistic recognition, as other outsider creators before him have experienced. This is a paradox that has arisen since the Collection de l’Art Brut opened. As the director says:

“By labelling creations as *art brut* – with the subjectivity that it entails – by offering them the recognition of being part of the Collection, we lead the way to a potential recognition by the art market. Some of the most famous creators can be found at [contemporary and modern art fair] Art Basel. The Collection can act as a springboard. It is a paradox. But, at the same time, we don’t want to limit the recognition of works that we admire to our institution only, which we want to make known to the largest audience”

On the Collection de l’Art Brut’s 50th anniversary, Lombardi is looking ahead. She plans to continue international collaborations, showcasing outsider creators worldwide (Shanghai’s first exhibition of outsider art was held last year at the Power Station of Art), while keeping the museum as a centre of expertise, focusing on both old and new creators, continuing the museum’s mission of conservation, study and exhibition, and highlighting

Dubuffet’s legacy. To this end, the city of Lausanne recently launched an architecture competition to expand the museum. Lombardi says, “What has been essential, since the beginning, are the *art brut* works. That is what is important to me – presenting pieces that are artistically stimulating, because they are simply worth it.”

Dubuffet’s claim – “True art is always where you least expect it” – raises the question of whether there is a form of art that is untrue. In a bygone context, where art made by self-taught – let alone mentally ill or disabled – artists was unthinkable, this strict categorisation between outsider and traditional was relevant. Now that outsider art is recognised, it can be seen as a spectrum.

The programme of activities for the Collection de l’Art Brut’s 50th anniversary demonstrates how *art brut* has indelibly touched generations of artists, inside and outside the margins – writers, musicians, filmmakers, performers – and the wider public alike. In 1979, Thévoz wrote about the reaction of many first-time visitors to the Collection: “This collection is like no other, we find here art in its full identity and creative strength.” The legacy of these women and men, whose voices were silenced, continues. Against all odds, their artwork still speaks today, loud and clear.

Chloé Falcy is a Swiss writer. Her novel *The Mechanics of the Wings* (Hélice Hélas éditeur, 2025) is inspired by outsider artist Eugène Gabritschewsky.

BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP MISSISSIPPI

Gravedigger and blues musician James "Son Ford" Thomas moulded clay skulls and coffins that reflect his thoughts on death and the afterlife

ALLISON C MEIER



The joys of life and the grim shadow of death were never far apart for James "Son Ford" Thomas. One of the many nicknames the Mississippi Delta blues musician picked up was "Cairo" for his evocative take on *Cairo Blues*, recorded by Melvin "Lil Son" Jackson

in 1949. The song reflects on the catastrophic Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, in which a levee failed near Cairo, Illinois, but the way Thomas sang it made it sound like the inevitability of your world being obliterated: "You know I would go to Cairo / But the water too high

all artworks: courtesy: Souls Grown Deep;
photos: Stephen Pitkin/Pitkin Studio; unless otherwise stated

above: James "Son Ford" Thomas in 1980; photo: Judy Peiser

Skull, 1987, unfired clay and human teeth, 6 x 8 x 7.5 in. /
15.5 x 20.5 x 19 cm; courtesy: High Museum of Art





Untitled, 1987, unfired clay, artificial hair, cigarette, glass marbles and metal coin, 7 x 9 x 7.5 in. / 18 x 23 x 19 cm



Untitled, 1987, unfired clay, artificial hair, wire and paint, 5.5 x 8.5 x 6 in. / 14 x 21.5 x 15.5 cm

for me.The girl I love, she got washed-away /
You know that woman got drowned / Swimming
along after me."

Although better known for those plaintive blues, Thomas instilled the same awareness of the frailty of life in a hard world in his small-scale sculptures. From rough unfired clay, he formed faces, skulls and animals native to the Mississippi Delta, like deer, rabbits and fish. The local clay he used – known as "gumbo" for the way it soaks up moisture into a sticky mass – wasn't just an accessible material; it was a reminder of the mortal fate everyone shares. In the 1969 documentary *Sonny Ford, Delta Artist*, recorded on 16mm by folklorist William R Ferris, he said:

"If everybody was friendly to one another, it would be a whole lot different. Because I don't care who it is, white or Black, they got to go where I'm going. That's down in that clay, and that ain't going to be too long."

If you look closely at Thomas's clay skulls, their hollow sockets gleaming with a lining of aluminum foil, you may notice they grin back at you with real human teeth.

"Mr Thomas was an artist whose stories, music, and sculpture intersected in important ways," Ferris said. "During the day he worked as a gravedigger, and his

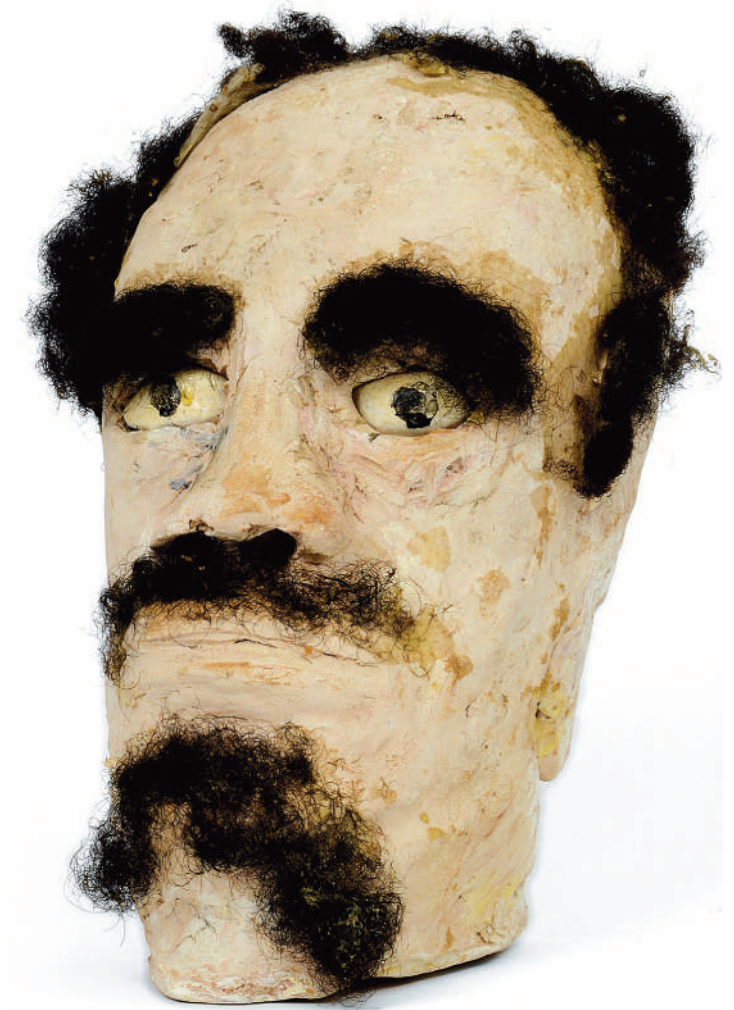
thoughts about death and the afterlife shaped all his artistic work. He moulded clay skulls with teeth that a local dentist gave him and gave them to friends as a reminder of what one day they would become."

Both his music and art drew on the precariousness of being a Black man in an impoverished corner of the rural American South, where the Jim Crow-era laws of segregation upheld a system of racial apartheid long after the end of slavery. The cotton fields where once enslaved people had toiled were still worked by Black people in the exploitative system of sharecropping – something Thomas experienced firsthand as a boy working alongside his grandparents, who raised him in Eden, Mississippi.

Born James Henry Thomas in 1926 in Yazoo County on the Mississippi Delta's edge, he spent his entire life in the state. He later moved to Leland, Mississippi, where he and his wife, Christine, raised their children, always scraping by with whatever he could make from music, art, and odd jobs, from painting houses to digging graves for the local funeral home. He learned to play guitar as a teenager, taught by his uncle, Delta blues guitarist Joe Cooper and – saving what he could from his work



Untitled (Head), n.d., fibre, paint and glass on concrete, 5 x 9.5 x 7 in. / 13 x 23.5 x 18 cm; American Folk Art Museum



Untitled, 1985, unfired clay, human hair and paint, 6.5 x 11 x 8.5 in. / 16.5 x 28 x 21.5 cm

as a cotton sharecropper – bought his first guitar, a Gene Autry acoustic from Sears, Roebuck & Co.

Cooper also introduced him to the clay that could be excavated from the nearby hills. Some of the earliest sculptures a young Thomas made were Ford tractors that he would roll over the floor, leading his family to call him “Ford”. Most people, though, called him “Son” or “Sonny”. He kept experimenting over the years and eventually sold clay sculptures of animals to earn the money he needed to buy his school supplies.

“A lot of days I’d walk two or three miles to get me some clay,” he recalled in an interview with Ferris. “I’d come back home and sit up by the fireplace at night and make things until I got sleepy. I got where I could make mules and rabbits and squirrels and things like that. From that, I went to making birds.”

Specifically, one of the birds he depicted was the quail, which, he noted, Black people were banned from hunting. “You could kill blackbirds,” he said. “But if you killed a quail, it was just like you done shot somebody.”

Thomas kept sculpting and perfecting his guitar skills in relative obscurity except to locals until the late 1960s. That is when Ferris sought him out as part of his

documentation of the contemporary scene of the Delta blues, a genre widely believed to be fading away. Several tracks performed by Thomas were included on the 1970 album *The Blues Are Alive and Well* based on Ferris’s field recordings. From the early 1970s into the 1980s, Thomas performed around the USA and Europe, and frequently stopped at colleges, including at Jackson State University, Yale University, and the University of Mississippi where Ferris taught. In a radio interview conducted alongside a performance in New Haven, Connecticut, Thomas discussed the breadth of what he sang about:

“When you broke and you ain’t got no money, you ain’t got nothin’ but the blues. If you get hungry you got the blues. If your wife quit you, you still got the blues. So there’s more than one way you can have the blues.”

Despite this close attachment, he regularly ruminated in interviews that he thought the kind of music he played wasn’t aligned with God (“The blues is nothing but the Devil”), but he needed to perform to survive.

Thomas released his first solo album in 1981. Most recordings are just him crooning over his spare playing; sometimes, the sound of his foot can be heard tapping the beat. The smoothness of his music contrasts with





the textural rawness of his sculptures but the artist approached both from his view of existence as being at the crossroads of life and death, good and evil, where there was always something to celebrate and something to mourn.

He explained that his skull sculptures started first as faces: "I shape it up like a regular man's head. Then I cut it down to a skeleton head. A skull has got to be ugly because it's nothing but bones and teeth." He also sculpted open-top miniature coffins revealing tiny figures dressed in funerary attire. In 1989, he was photographed by Rex Miller for his *All the Blues Gone* project on Mississippi blues culture. The lanky Thomas is sitting on his porch with his guitar, while next to him a full-size casket – taking up much of the frame – holds a human-size clay corpse, its head sunken into the fabric lining.

"He told stories about the ghosts of dead people who return to haunt the living," Ferris said. "Inspiration

for his art came to him in dreams. When he woke up, he would recreate his dream images in his sculpture, blues and stories."

Even his busts of faces have a sense of impermanence to them, as if the clay might crumble off to reveal a skull underneath. The boxy character of his pieces came from his technique of starting with a lump of clay, which he shaped with a basic tool, such as a whisky bottle, and then used his hands to softly sculpt details of mouths and eyelids. Skin tones were added with paint; artificial hair, glass marbles for eyes, corn kernels for teeth (if not the real thing), and accessories such as sunglasses and earrings gave each its own personality. Some were portraits of neighbours or imagined people, others were famed American figures like Abraham Lincoln or George Washington, whose white wig made of cotton reminds the viewer of his link to slavery and the cotton industry it fuelled. Some of the skulls and heads were made to

opposite: Untitled, 1987, unfired clay, artificial hair, sunglasses and glass marbles, 7 x 9 x 7 in. / 18 x 23 x 18 cm

above and top: Untitled, 1980s, unfired clay and paint, 7.5 x 2 x 3.5 in. / 19 x 5 x 9 cm; photos: Marie Catalano



Untitled, 1988, unfired clay, human teeth, rocks and aluminum foil, 4.5 x 7 x 7 in. / 11.5 x 17.5 x 17.5 cm



Untitled, 1980s, unfired clay, paint, cotton and glass marbles, 7.5 x 7.5 x 7 in. / 19 x 19 x 18 cm

be functional, for example, as ashtrays or pencil holders.

A breakthrough in bringing national attention to Thomas's art was its inclusion in the landmark exhibition "Black Folk Art in America, 1930–1980," which opened in 1982 at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. A photograph in the catalogue taken by Ferris is itself a sort of *memento mori*, capturing Thomas staring into the camera lens, a large sculpted skull in one hand. He is quoted underneath the image: "This is all done by head, not by no book or no picture. I have never went to no school to do this. No teacher has ever taught me nothing about it."

When Thomas died in 1993 after a stretch of bad health, *The New York Times* ran an obituary describing how he had gone from performing in small juke joints where "he would get an artful guitar rhythm going and sing out in his robust baritone about women, floods and other down-home subjects" to recording in the Netherlands and France. His sculpting was considered a footnote to his music career. Yet posthumously, appreciation for his creative way of turning humble clay into work so expressive of the American South through its themes and materials has grown over the years.

His art is now in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and Studio Museum in Harlem. In 2015, a major retrospective was held at New York University's

80WSE Gallery in Manhattan. The Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi, holds one of his well-used electric guitars as well as examples of his sculptures. "Both his music and his artworks convey powerful messages that some may dismiss as simple... They tell an amazing story by connecting us to history, life and death," said Shelley Ritter, the museum's executive director.

However, James "Son Ford" Thomas – who often stated "we all end up in the clay" – didn't have much confidence in being remembered. In a conversation with Ferris recorded in a cemetery, released on the 2018 *Voices of Mississippi: Artists and Musicians Documented by William Ferris*, he said, "You got to have money to get a monument ... a marker on my grave, my name on it lasts about three weeks, and it's gone." In 1996, a headstone was erected at his final resting place in Leland through funding from the Mississippi-based Mt. Zion Memorial Fund, which supports monuments for unmarked graves of blues musicians, and from John Fogerty of Creedence Clearwater Revival. One side of the granite is carved with some of those words Thomas sang about savouring the good things while you can get them: "Give me beefsteak when I'm hungry / Whiskey when I'm dry / Pretty Women when I'm living / Heaven when I die."

Allison C Meier is an art and culture writer for several publications, and editor of *Fine Books & Collections* magazine.

**The local clay he used ... was a
reminder of the mortal fate
everyone shares.**



Untitled, 1988, unfired clay,
wire, aluminum foil, artificial hair,
glass marbles, plastic bead and paint,
5 x 10 x 6.5 in. / 12.5 x 25.5 x 16.5 cm



THE HERMIT OF THE FOREST





French artist Chomo scraped away all formal teaching to conjure up the Village d'Art Préludien, a unique place of creation, preservation and refuge

AYMERIC ROUILLAC

On Thursday, September 10, 2009, the Halle Saint-Pierre was alive with the buzz of a major opening night. The work of "Chomo" was being shown by art critic Laurent Danchin and the museum's director Martine Lusardy in the exhibition "Le Débarquement Spirituel" (The Spiritual Landing).

Chomo – also known as "the hermit of the Forest of Fontainebleau" – had not exhibited in Paris since 1960 at the Jean Camion gallery on Rue des Beaux-Arts. The show, "Expressions Noires de Chomo" (Black Expressions of Chomo), was an artistic success but a commercial failure. *Le Monde* reported:

"On the day of the opening, 3,500 people were present, the Rue des Beaux-Arts completely blocked. André Breton spent hours there. Dalí swooned. Picasso came as well. So did Cocteau, who was insulted by Chomo, and Henri Michaux, who was told that he 'smelled of a corpse'. A collector negotiates the purchase of a sculpture. A discount is about to be offered when Chomo overhears the conversation: 'For God's sake,

Camion, are you selling cheese? Get out of here, sir!'"

From that point on, Chomo withdrew completely into the Forest of Fontainebleau – 60 km to the southeast of Paris – at the heart of which he built the Village d'Art Préludien on a hectare of sandy woodland. He became reclusive and would remain so for almost three decades.

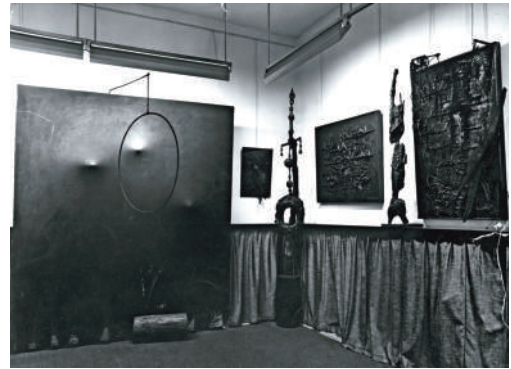
Born Roger Chomeaux in 1907, the artist came from a family of small shopkeepers in Berlaimont, northern France, far from Paris and the art world. His talent for modelling in clay was noticed by a teacher who sent him to the art school Académies de Valenciennes, from where he graduated in 1925. Moving to Paris, he attended the École des Beaux-Arts until 1928. He went on to marry, had four children with his wife Germaine, and worked as a decorator while also spending time making art.

Mobilised in 1940, Chomeaux was taken prisoner by the Germans and interned for a year and a half in a stalag in Poland. Feigning deafness, he was released on medical grounds and returned to civilian life but was unable to confine himself within any norm – familial, social or



left: the opening of the "Expressions Noires de Chomo", 1960, photo: Jean Camion

below: inside "Expressions Noires", 1960; photo: J Camion



above: The Refuge, c. 1978; photo: Patrick Dantec

below: inside The Church of the Poor in 1984; photo: L Danchin



above: Chomo "crucified" on the door of The Sanctuary of Burnt Woods, c. 1970; photo: P Dantec





The Door of the Burnt Woods, c. 1960, burnt wood, 47 x 56.5 x 17 in. / 120 x 143 x 43 cm; photo: P Rouillac



The Centaur, c. 1970, wire mesh and painted plaster, 17.5 x 47.5 x 34 in. / 45 x 121 x 86 cm; photo: P Rouillac

artistic. This is when he broke decisively with the academic art world and began to spend time in the Forest of Fontainebleau experimenting artistically – using only found materials, working in close harmony with the natural environment – while also making a living doing odd jobs as a dock porter at Paris's Les Halles.

Around this time he became interested in the Lettrist avant-garde of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Founded in Paris in 1945 to 1946 by poet Isidore Isou, Lettrism focussed on the letter, sound and visual sign as the core elements of artistic expression. With a poet friend, Chomeaux invented a new simplified language, both meta-poetic and phonetic. Thus "Chomeaux" became "Chomo".

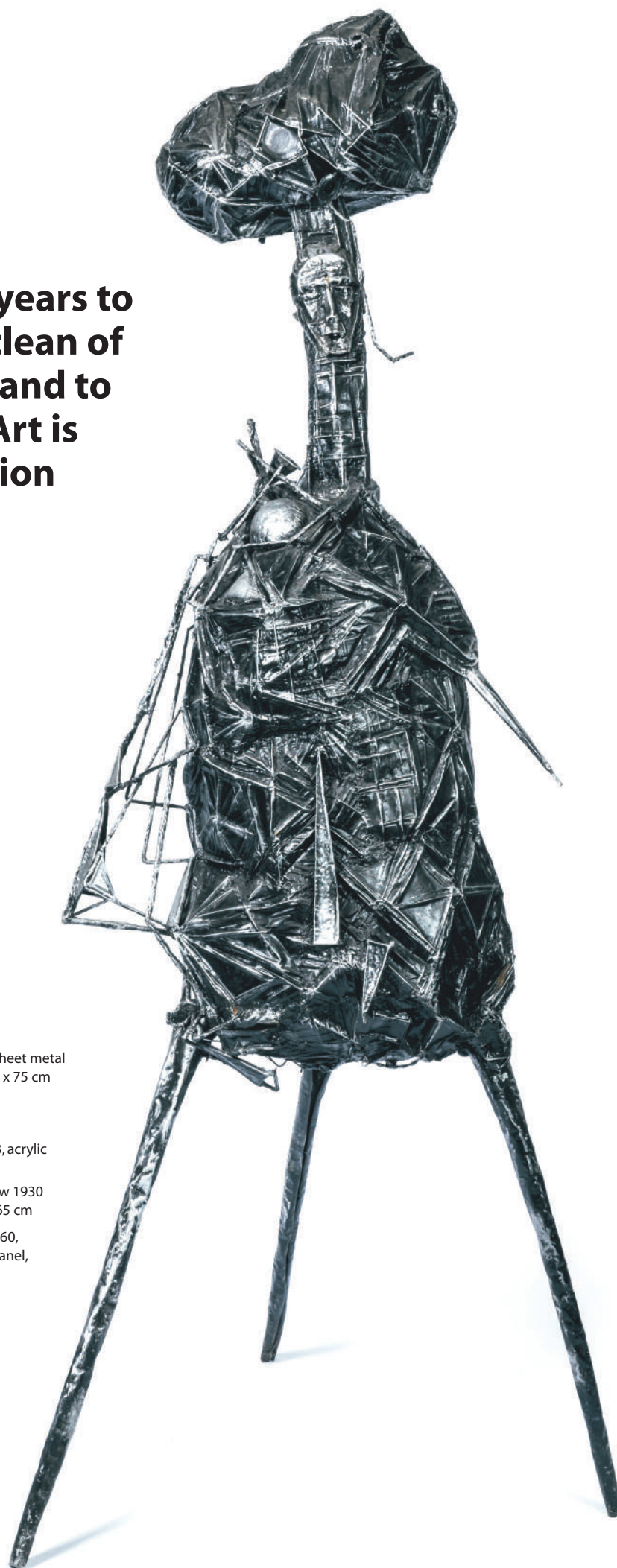
From 1947 onward, Chomo practised all the arts, ceaselessly. He made bas-reliefs from broken glass; monumental sculptures welded from tin cans; small ceramic "germs" (seed-like forms that he regarded as the generative units of life and creation); aerated concrete figures patinated to resemble bronze or stone; and, most notably, a series of burnt woods which he said were "imprints brought back from another planet".

Also a painter, he produced powerful series such as

"The Mutants" and "The Paths of Silence", combining cellular geometry, drippings and hyper-realistic drawings. He collaborated with other artists in a variety of creative fields, exploring vibratory or cellular motifs on sheets of paper, recording musical works and publishing poems. He delved into filmmaking, shooting at night and in winter to make *Le Débarquement Spirituel* (The Spiritual Landing) in which striking images staged the arrival of extraterrestrials on Earth. Confronted with wars and the ruin of our planet, the pure-hearted beings decide to return to space.

When his first show took place in 1960 at the Camion gallery in Paris, the failure plunged Chomo into a deep depression, driving him to disappear once and for all into the forest and what was to become his Village d'Art Préludien. A meeting with a young construction engineer, Claude Clavel, restored the artist's appetite for life and art. With Clavel's help, he made great headway with the Village. Three major buildings with mystical names rose from the ground between 1961 and 1968: The Sanctuary of Burnt Woods, The Church of the Poor, and The Refuge (also known as The Refrigerated Tugboat), all

**"It took me 40 years to
scrape myself clean of
the academies and to
understand ... Art is
the concretisation
of dreams."**



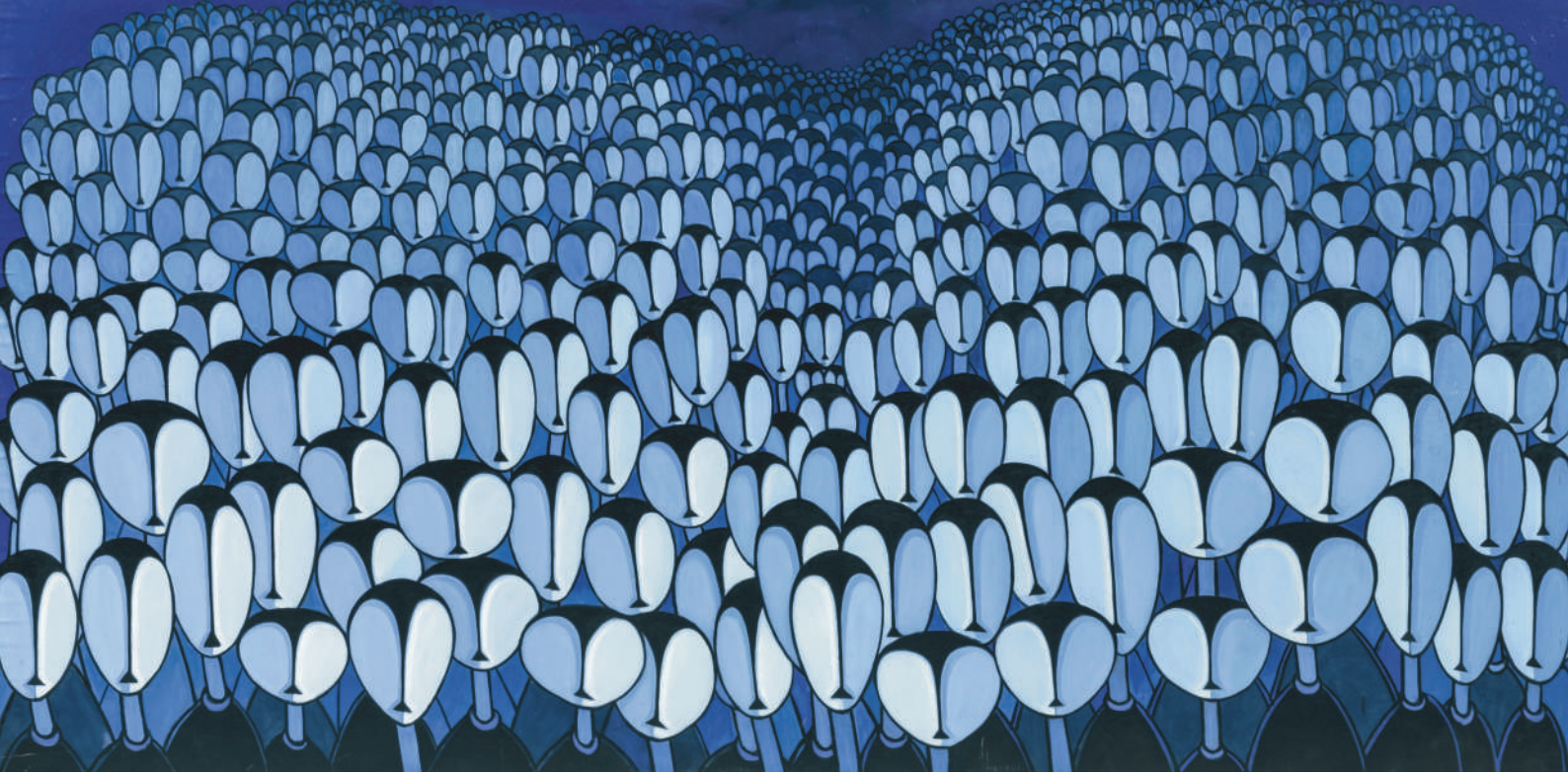
this page: *The Big Mutant*, c. 1960, painted sheet metal
and tin cans, 36.5 x 88.5 x 29.5 in. / 93 x 225 x 75 cm

opposite page :

top: *The Choir of Silence*, b/w 1981 and 1983, acrylic
on wood, 96 x 47 in. / 244 x 120 cm

middle: *The Serpent Rug* (detail of a bee), b/w 1930
and 1950, woven wool, 61 x 65 in. / 155 x 165 cm

bottom: *Panel of Masks – The Cemetery*, c. 1960,
cut and painted sheet metal on plywood panel,
98.5 x 48 in. / 250 x 122 cm





still standing today. Based on an architecture of tree trunks driven into the ground, chicken wire was staffed (coated with plaster) and then incrustated with molten, coloured plastic and luminous fragments of broken ceramics, forming a geometric universe of rosettes, angels, fantastical animals and anthropomorphic figures. As would be written in an article in *Le Monde* years later in 2009: "Let a ray of sunlight strike them, and our conviction is complete: with meager means, Chomo was a master of the art of stained glass."

Over five decades, Chomo made use of whatever materials were at hand, abandoning traditional media in favour of what he salvaged from scrapyards and dumps, or received freely. Families of mutants emerged, while bas-reliefs evoked the end of the world. Visiting him in the forest in 1970, art critic Michel Thévoz wrote: "Chomo wipes the slate clean of what might have been a career as a contemporary artist and, as a radical secessionist, commits himself to what can be considered a 'non-contemporaneity'."

Chomo himself said, "It took me 40 years to scrape myself clean of the academies and to understand what art is: not the depiction of what is, but of what could be. Art is the concretisation of dreams."

Throughout these years, Chomo still refused to exhibit publicly. Jean-Hubert Martin, former heritage curator and



above: *The Big Gold Mutant*, 1992, acrylic on card, 45 x 51 in. / 114 x 130 cm

left: *The Kiss*, c. 1985, patinated aerated concrete, 15.5 x 24.5 x 12 in. / 39 x 62 x 30 cm

opposite page, right: *The Hand of Chakras*, c. 1980, wire mesh, melted plastic and incrustations, 23 x 27.5 x 3.5 in. / 58 x 70 x 9 cm

opposite page, left: *The Couple*, c. 1977, wire mesh, melted plastic and ceramic incrustations, 11 x 40 x 10.5 in. / 27.5 x 102 x 27 cm

director of France's National Museum of Modern Art, recalls the impossibility of persuading the artist to take part in a landmark exhibition "Les Magiciens de la Terre" (Magicians of the Earth) in 1989: "He replied immediately: 'The Centre Pompidou – either a solo exhibition, or nothing at all!'" The matter ended there.

Then, two years later, in 1991, the artist agreed to lend 288 works from the Village d'Art Préludien for a major retrospective held in Milly-la-Forêt, a town in the Forest of Fontainebleau. Entitled "Chomo à Milly, Chomo Partout" (Chomo in Milly, Chomo Everywhere). It was the second and final time his work was shown during his lifetime, and it succeeded in giving him some recognition. That same year, a nurse came to live with him, going on to marry him and caring for him until his death in 1999.

Chomo's Village d'Art Préludien was not merely a place of creation and preservation. It was also conceived as a refuge for creators, where the artist welcomed young artists; and, open to the public, it was place to which visitors came on pilgrimage on Sundays. However, the site was not received with universal positivity, and its survival was under threat as early as the 1960s. Chomo's constructions bothered the locals, who repeatedly called for their destruction. It took the intervention of the Minister of the Interior and then the Minister of Culture for a demolition order to be suspended. Then, after the

artist's death, classification of the Village as a Historic Monument was refused by public authorities due to the absence of commercial valuation and inventory. When, in September 2009, some of Chomo's work emerged from the woods to be shown in the major retrospective at the Halle Saint-Pierre, it was in a bid to help save the site which was by then under threat by property developers.

It was not until 2024 – after three auction sales, two museum exhibitions, the reissue of Chomo's interviews, the publication of a monograph, and the donation to a friends' association of the shares in the Village d'Art Préludien owned by his children – that cultural authorities decided to rethink. The Village d'Art Préludien is now maintained by an association of friends, artists, associations, curators, collectors and auctioneers, and remains a unique site in France, dedicated to preserving and transmitting the spirit, soul and work of this extraordinary creator. As Chomo wrote on the lintel of his fireplace as an epitaph to his work: "What mark will you have left on Earth so that your God may be satisfied?"

Aymeric Rouillac, a French auctioneer and art expert, was appointed by Chomo's children to manage and sell his works. He has curated several exhibitions and published the first monograph on Chomo's work.



all artworks: Untitled, b/w 2010 and 2021, graphite pencil and mixed media (coloured pencil, gouache, nail polish, eyeliner) on paper or cardboard, 8 x 11.5 in./ 21 x 30 cm to 9.5 x 12.5 in./ 24 x 32 cm



BENEATH HER GAZE

Six decades into a life shaped by hardship and resilience, Hélène N. began to draw women's faces, and did not stop for a decade

LAURE FERNANDEZ

From a small, wheeled shopping trolley, a smiling septuagenarian pulls out sheets of paper, nearly a hundred tightly framed portraits of women. A small crowd begins to gather as she lays her drawings out on the ground. The largest are roughly A4 in size; others defy measurement, their edges irregular, cut and re-cut. In the anonymity of a town square alive

with constant movement, the woman offers her works for a few symbolic euros.

Hélène N. – she does not divulge her real name – was born to Sicilian-French parents in 1947 in Algeria, when it was a French colony, in Philippeville, a city whose name changed with history. By the time she was 13, the political context had led her parents to move her and her four

above: Hélène N. in 2023; photo: Estelle Hanania



“ ...Each face its own technical treatment, the unfathomable endlessly renewed.”

siblings to France, to Massy-Palaiseau, a suburb south-west of Paris.

For much of her life, Hélène has suffered a mental illness which, for many years, remained undiagnosed. A complex person, with a resilient life force, a vivid imagination and a passion for the arts, she roamed the museums and cinemas of Paris, and immersed herself in the world of music. She married young and had two daughters, and it was not until many years later – when she was in her sixties – that a crisis in her mental health led to an extended period of hospitalisation. It was then that Hélène began to draw, to see women's faces “come under [her] hand”, as she describes it.

“First I drew a Chinese woman, then a man with a cigarette and a cap – like Corto Maltese, you know,” she says, referring to the seafaring protagonist in an Italian comic book series dating back to the 1960s.

“A blue-black room. The orange of that time. A gallery owner had photographed the apartment. Then I kept entering the world of certain painters. You know, I saw strange things – painters from the Italian schools – Tintoretto, Titian, Veronese, all those artists you can admire in the Louvre, in the gallery behind the *Mona Lisa* – I'd go into my room, and there'd be an orange light with a curtain in front of it, and behind the curtain, an old man from another era, asleep. ...

“...I found myself in the world of certain painters. It was a bit frightening” Hélène continues, “because I was in my own room, and I saw old people lying there. I told myself, don't be afraid, you're in the bedroom of someone who lived a very, very long time ago.”

She draws with graphite pencil on different types of paper and card. Although mostly black and white, the works are sometimes punctuated by colour – a mouth, a flush of cheek, an accessory: scarf, beret, a fold of fabric – added with coloured pencil, gouache, eyeliner or nail varnish. Long, straight hair falls to the chest, framing faces that are at once tender and intense, their resemblance to one another only superficial. Sometimes, the subject's gaze is deep black, the eyes burned or scratched away. The paper is nearly worn through in places; the gesture remains visible – cutting, exposed collage, emphatic pencil strokes, and those stains of coffee, of living, of time passing. On the versos, ghostly figures appear – benevolent spectres recalling the mystical visions the artist sometimes had. Something like obsession runs

through the series of drawings – tranquillity and eruption simultaneously; despite the ongoing repetition of the theme over an extended period of time, there is urgency.

Hélène has not drawn for several years now – she stopped when treatment for her mental health issues reduced the compulsion. Many of her portraits have been discarded, lost or sold – yet sheets of them still crowd her small room on the upper floor of a residence for the elderly, a few RER stops from the Jardin du Luxembourg through which she once loved to wander.

Shaped by the spirit of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Hélène has always been marked by beauty: the beauty of women; of ancient sculptures to which she returns again and again through cherished art books; of the Old Masters she visited tirelessly in the Italian rooms of the Louvre; of the music that accompanied her married life with a devoted collector of jazz and rock records.

Often born in moments of personal crisis, her artworks hold both the promise of appeasement and a relentless search for elsewhere – for alterity. To escape the grey of daily life, to move closer to the sublime: Hélène dreams of Mediterranean light, of the landscapes that shaped her childhood. Yet it is not through geography that she travels. She travels through the force of a gaze, the softness of a curve, the sharp angle of a shoulder. Although she does not present them as such, these portraits also carry something of self-portraiture so closely do these faces echo her own:

“I draw them from my memory, these women who come under my hand. Sometimes it takes me an hour. The face is round, cherubic. Look how beautiful the flowers are. The flowers are beautiful. Look at Aphrodite's body. I'm talking about Hellenism. The goddess of goddesses, Hera – she can't be bought, no-one could ever buy her, she's so beautiful. Just look at her name – the one who wears a diadem...”

“...Over time, the faces changed. This one, for example, doesn't belong to our era. Look at the profile. The eyes have been enlarged. Sometimes I draw in the morning. The people I see – they aren't like me. They're different. She's beautiful, with green eyes. She must be Italian – because of the green gaze.”

Hélène's portraits create an unsettling face-to-face encounter, merging the viewer into the flow of this river-like work. As *art brut* curator, writer and curator Michel Thévoz notes upon first seeing her work: “One moves



from surprise to surprise; from paper to paper, a new encounter; each face its own technical treatment, the unfathomable endlessly renewed.”

Over the past four years, the artist has grown less mobile. The world around her has narrowed. In her room, the radio crackles; the tea is brewed too strong. Her gaze, however, remains playful: the almond-shaped eyes framed by eyebrows still enhanced with a pencil line that has now grown hesitant. She recounts her life by evoking warm scents, the taste of biscuits and of spiced dishes that her mother once simmered, the image of a young neighbour twisting her hair into a bun, the slanting light over the harbour. She doesn’t usually speak directly of her work, preferring detours: the title of a film, the refrain of a song, a detail from a reproduction of a Renaissance

painting, the memory of men encountered on Parisian benches. Sometimes she brushes against a painful memory, only to sweep it away with a warm smile.

While looking at Hélène N.’s drawings, one may think one recognises, here and there, an echo of Veronese or Tintoretto, or a trait of an actress from 1970s Italian cinema. Yet the faces that come under her hand – shown to the public in her first solo exhibition at Paris’s Librairie Sans Titre in early 2026 – are not illustrative. Their intense gazes hint at something concealed. Decontextualised, without background, existing both individually and in dialogue with one another, they weave a dense network. Each contains a world; each is transformed in relation to the others, reminding us that countless paths have been travelled and countless remain unexplored.

Laure Fernandez is an arts researcher and the author of the central essay in the book *Elles Viennent sous ma Main* (Myriorama, 2025) on the life and work of Hélène N. All the artist’s quotes in this feature are from the essay.

Translation by Ela Kotkowska.



above: 77 of Hélène N.'s drawings on show at Librairie Sans Titre in Paris, 2026; photo: Estelle Hanania

below, left: the artist's work spread out on the dining table in her flat, and (right) on her coffee table; photos: Estelle Hanania





THE EMERGING FACES OF MEDUNA

Austrian Johann Meduna carved wood obsessively – almost to its destruction – in an ongoing dialogue with the material, himself and possibly the viewer

CHARLOTTE HRIBERNIG

Ever since the construction of Vienna's Narrenturm (Fool's Tower) – Europe's first purpose-built psychiatric institution – in 1784, during the reign of Emperor Joseph II, science has undertaken research into the difference between so-called sick and healthy people, especially in relation to the brain. Another matter of exploration has long been where and under what conditions patients with mental health issues and disabilities should be accommodated. Closed institutions were used initially, the first state-organised attempt to separate people with cognitive impairments from "normal" society. When these were shut down – including the prison-like Narrenturm asylum in 1869 – they were replaced with open facilities. Ever since, society has worked towards developing empathy, awareness and the desire to treat mentally impaired people with the respect they deserve.

By the time Johann Meduna was born in Vienna in 1951, the social welfare organisation Diakonie de la Tour was well established, its origins dating back to the end of the nineteenth century in southern Austria. Diakonie de la Tour went on to set up an atelier in the 1980s to support patients who had an uncontrollable urge to express themselves

left: *Loudmouthed Charlatan*, 2013, cherry wood, height 24 in. / 61.5 cm

opposite page: *The Mighty Shapes of Venus* (recto and verso), 2013, cherry wood, height 33.5 in. / 85 cm

all artworks shown, courtesy: Evangelische Stiftung de la Tour





Johann Meduna at the Atelier de la Tour in 2010;
photo: Gerhard Maurer



Lionel Ritchie, 2003, lime wood,
height 34.5 in. / 87 cm

Pictures of the Queen, 2009, birch wood, height
30 in. / 76.5 cm

through art. Nestled among mountains and forests, surrounded by nature, Atelier de la Tour became a creative hub.

Cognitively impaired, Meduna was a member of the Diakonie de la Tour for most of his life, and his job as a bricklayer was set up and supported by the organisation. He began attending the atelier from the age of 40 or so and, a prolific artist, created constantly, almost 24 hours a day. In the words of Christian Rudolf, his long-time assistant, mentor and companion at the atelier, Meduna was "honest, direct, very emotional, and gifted with tons of imagination". Art was an outlet for him. "He needed it," says Rudolf. "It made his life easier; it allowed him to process the issues that preoccupied him".

Wood was not always Meduna's only material of choice – he also worked with stone and painted, and would draw as a form of relaxation – but wood was his passion. He made his sculptures using a hammer, chisel and the raw material provided by the atelier – Swiss stone pine, acacia, lime, beech, apple, cherry, birch, plum, poplar. He would be completely absorbed in what he was doing. He did not simply work with the wood; he entered into a dialogue with it, making the object his counterpart, something he needed as much as the air he breathed to reassure himself that he still existed. It was a symbiosis:

without Meduna, there would be no piece of wood; without the wood, there would be no Meduna.

"He worked like a machine," says Rudolf. "Only when he had finished his sculpture and started rasping the surface did he become more relaxed." Rudolf adds that occasionally he had to prevent the artist from minimising an artwork to the size of a toothpick. With his "primordial energy and the hundred thoughts he had in his head – had he not been stopped – he would have completely destroyed" the wood.

Meduna was addicted to art. (Not only art – on more than one occasion, he tried to trade everything he had for a packet of cigarettes). Uncompromising, the artist "did not allow himself to be influenced by anyone and consistently translated his own thoughts into his works," says Karl Danninger, another assistant at the atelier.

There is no doubt that Meduna had his own way of understanding the world in which he lived and of drawing inspiration from people in it. Rudolf remembers the artist's imagination being like a volcano that seemed to rage in his mind and then erupt with unpredictable consequences. The identities of the figures who had inspired him or captured his curiosity were not revealed until the very end of his process. From Margaret Thatcher and Lionel Richie, to King Herod, the Loch Ness Monster

**...He had to prevent
the artist from
minimising an
artwork to the size
of a toothpick.**



left: *The Loch Ness Monster*, 2012,
lime wood, height 60.5 in. / 153.5 cm



far left: *Mrs Ursus*, 2010,
lime wood, height 41 in. / 104 cm



right: *The Charming Girls*, 2010, beech wood, height 45.5 in. / 115.5 cm

above, left and right: *The Charming Girls* (details)



and real-life monsters such as Idi Amin and Saddam Hussein, the characters constantly changed their identity so that someone else emerged from the wood than the one the artist had originally started with.

To make things even more complicated, Meduna did not simply start with one face and then replace it with another, but would add a second face to one that was already half way through being created. And some of his sculptures only reveal how many faces actually exist in the wood after very close examination. At times, it is almost as though he was playing tricks on the viewer. For example, is his open-mouthed *Screaming Charlatan*, singing us a song or deceiving us with a smug smile?

Carina Kofler works for the Diakonie de la Tour and says that Meduna was obsessed with the desire to bring the images in his head to life: "He wanted to make the simultaneity of things visible through his art."

Jean Dubuffet wrote in his *Compagnie de l'Art Brut* "The *art brut* artist creates their art for themselves, not for others. Perhaps there is an 'imaginary addressee', perhaps none at all, perhaps they are just messages

right: *The Crowds of People*, 2009, birch wood,
height 38.5 in. / 97.5 cm

to themselves...and we realise that there is a complete lack of communicative intention..."

Are Meduna's artworks merely the capricious whims of an eccentric? Or was it that the creative process held more value for him than the end result? Alternatively, could the abrupt departure from one face to another be the artist's judgement – conscious or unconscious – of the person behind the original face? According to Rudolf, Meduna was extremely interested in world politics. Did his carved portrayal of Margaret Thatcher with two faces reflect his views on political events of the 1980s?

On the one hand, Meduna's sculptures fulfil the criteria of a style unbound and unaffected by any conventional school; on the other hand, it is easy to view them simply as expressions of the artist's "social isolation" or his "primary loss of reality". But there is also the possibility that they are criticism Meduna-style: uncompromising, excessive, impulsive, even to the point of destroying his own creation.

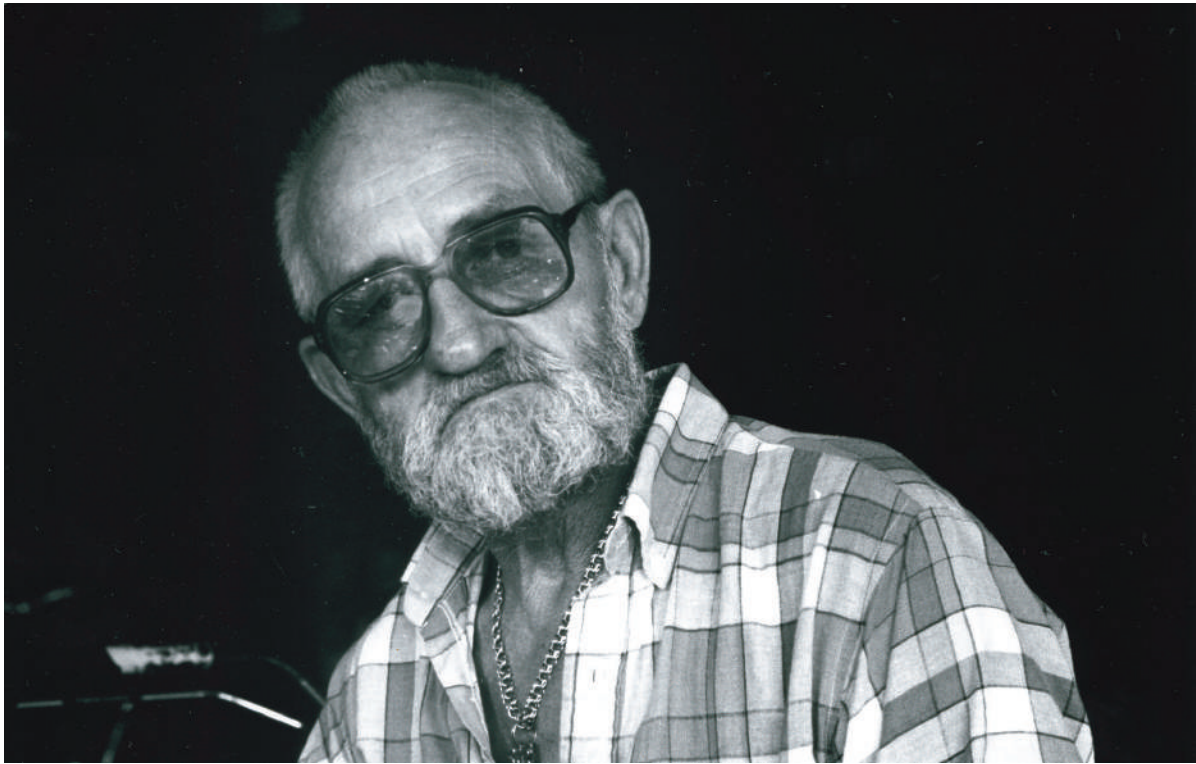
In the early days of the uninformed, unenlightened and cruel treatment of the mentally ill and disabled, Meduna would have been hidden away, erased. But it seems that Meduna wanted to be seen, to be heard, to be recognised. His own destruction of his wooden figures, from Saddam Hussein to Richard Nixon, would have marked the climax of the artist's critique of the outside world.

During his lifetime, working as a member of the Atelier de la Tour and creating in his own inimitable way, Meduna was part of various exhibitions, within the studio context, at the Galerie de la Tour in Klagenfurt (the exhibition venue of the Diakonie de la Tour since 2003), and at external events, including an international sculpture symposium in 2013. Since his death in 2015, his work has been included in several shows.

The artist's mentor Rudolf often had to remind him that, at a certain point, it would be better to leave a sculpture as it was rather than to continue whittling and end up with nothing. As a result, some of Meduna's unique creations survived and – with the growing recognition of progressive studios and the art created in them – they have helped the Atelier de la Tour play an important role in the Austrian cultural landscape. However, according to Rudolf, Johann Meduna left behind one legacy above all others from his prolific creative period: food for thought.

Charlotte Hribernik ran her own gallery from 2017 to 2019 and now works as a curator and arts manager for Diakonie de la Tour.





STANDARDS OF STEEL

WILLIAM SWISLOW

With metal scraps and the eye of a perfectionist, Polish born creator Stanley Szwarc crafted thousands of intricately embellished objects, no two ever alike

Stanley Szwarc created boxes, vases, crosses and other objects from cast-off stainless steel, decorating each with geometric accents of spot-welded quarter-inch dots, circles of bigger diameters, cylinders and squares, perforated strips, and a variety of other shapes. The intricate, layered ornamentation, born of his imagination, lends the items a sculptural quality and elevates them beyond their functional purpose.

Szwarc was prolific. From the late 1980s until his death in 2011 at the age of 82, he made thousands of pieces. He sold as much of them as the market would bear, never affiliating exclusively with a dealer, a practice that kept his

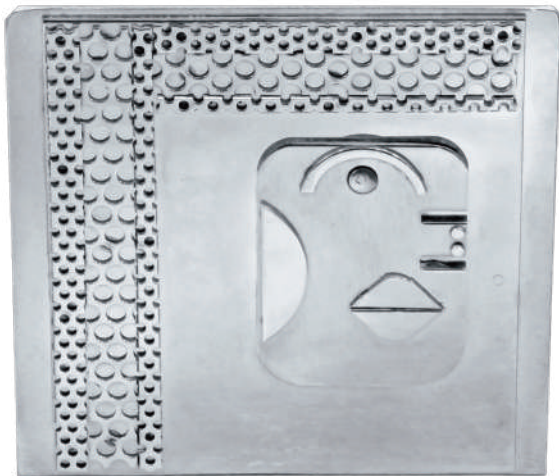
art-world profile and his prices lower than they should have been. Affordable and beautiful, abundant and yet unique, his works can be found in homes all over Chicago.

During his lifetime, Szwarc did get a modicum of recognition in art circles, for example when the Folk Art Society of America awarded him its annual Award of Distinction in 2005. His artwork was occasionally featured in group shows, while in 2007 he was in a two-person show at the Brickton Art Center in Park Ridge, Illinois, and in 2016 he was given a small solo show at Chicago's Intuit Art Center (now Museum).

For Szwarc though, his art-making was never about

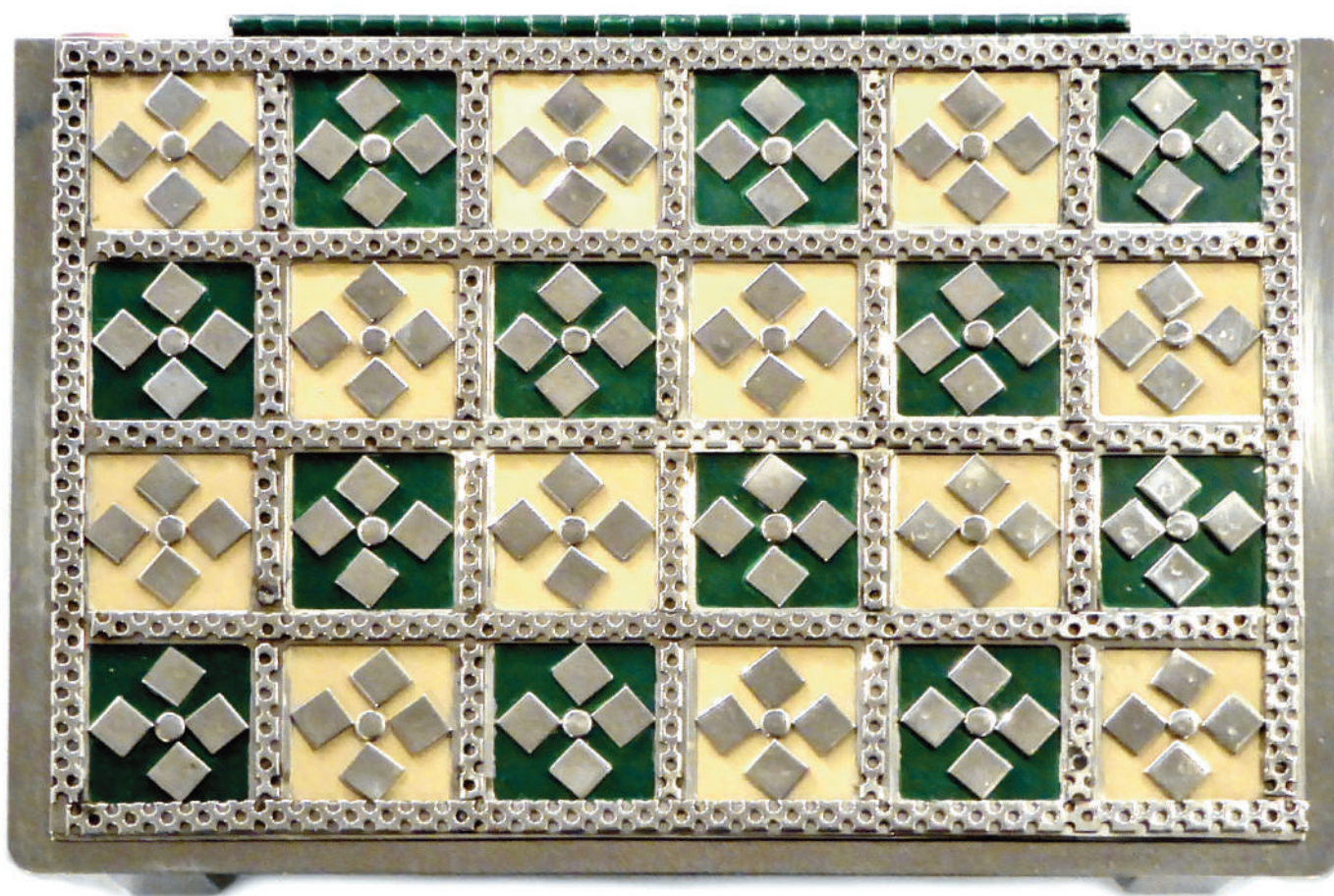
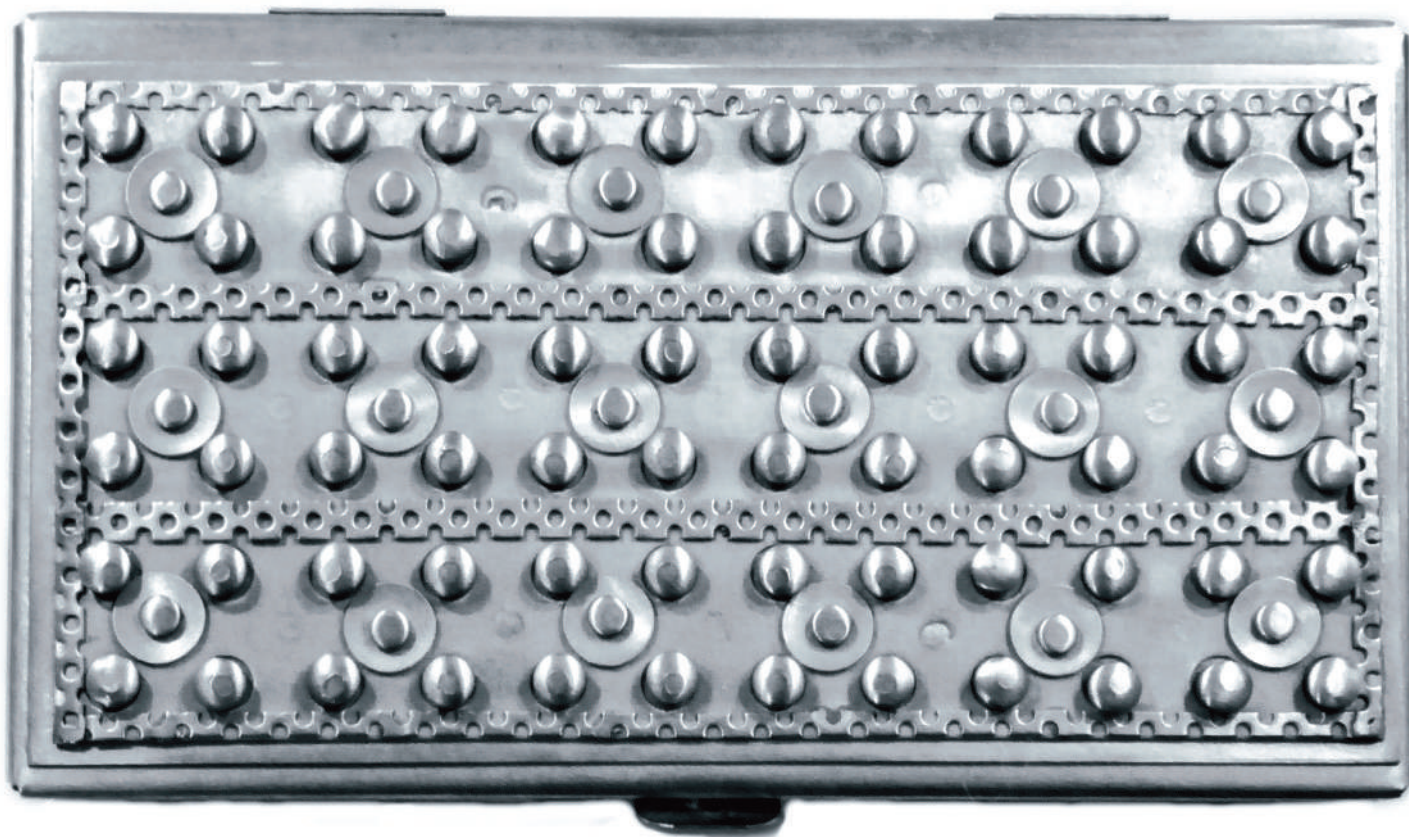
all artworks shown: Untitled, stainless steel, unless otherwise stated;
courtesy: William Swislow

above: Stanley Szwarc in 2002; photo: Ken Burkhart



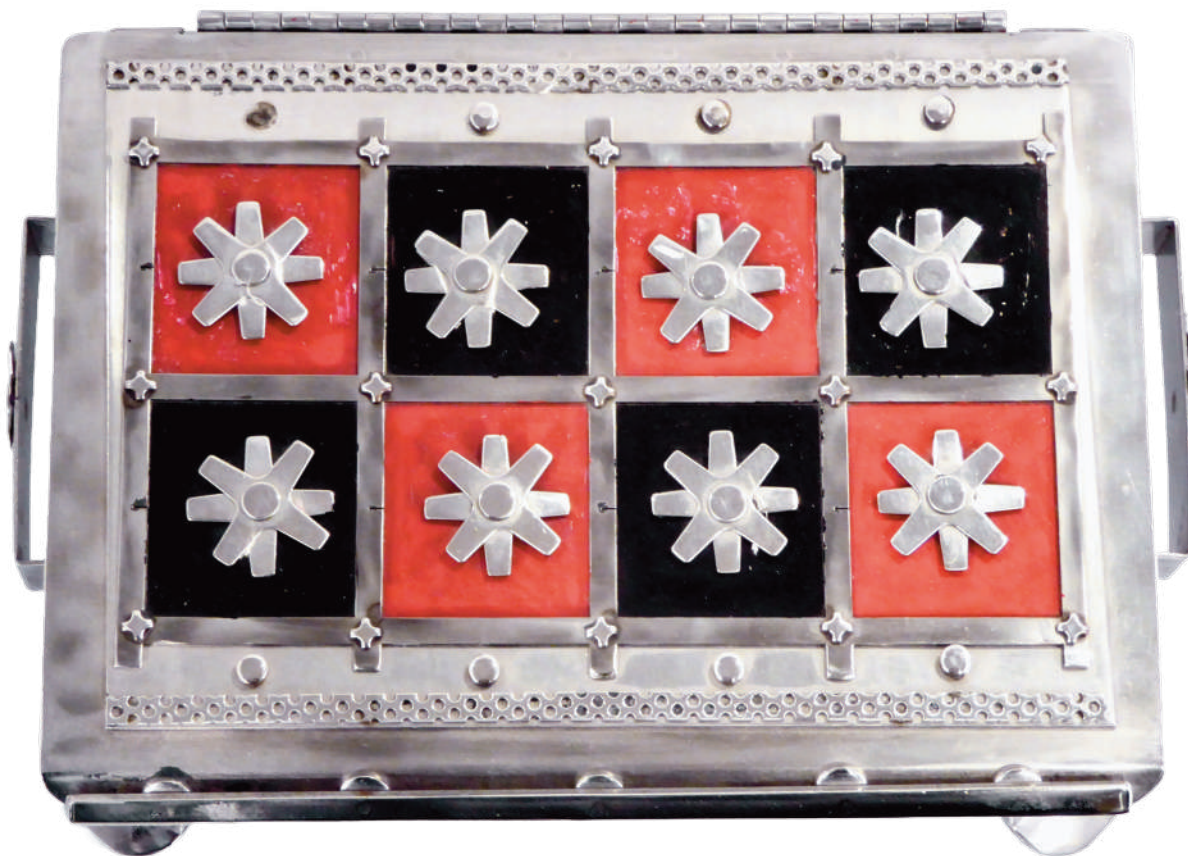
above: box, c. 1992, stainless and plated steel, 10 x 9 x 3.5 in. / 25.5 x 23 x 9 cm
middle: bookend, 1999, 5.5 x 5.5 x 5 in. / 13.5 x 13.5 x 12.5 cm
top: box, 1989, 8.5 x 5 x 2.5 in. / 21.5 x 12.5 x 6.5 cm

above: box, 1998, 10.5 x 8.365 x 3 in. / 26.7 x 21.2 x 7.6 cm
middle: box, 1998, stainless steel and enamel paint, 5 x 4.5 x 2 in. / 12.5 x 11 x 4.5 cm



above: box, 1997, stainless steel and enamel paint,
10 x 7 x 5 in./ 25.5 x 17 x 12 cm

top: box, 1988, 8 x 4.5 x 2 in./ 20.5 x 11.5 x 5 cm



above: box, 2002, stainless steel and enamel paint,
11 x 7.5 x 4 in. / 27.5 x 18.5 x 9.5 cm

accolades – even if he was touched when he received them – it was more a matter of personal compulsion to create, and to create to his own high standards. When he saw three of his works in the 1996 show, “Outsider Art: A Survey of Chicago Collections” – held at the Chicago Cultural Center and sponsored by Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art – his reaction was not entirely favourable. One of the items, a jewellery box decorated with a human face, needed cleaning. Worse, the other two pieces – a small cross and a vase, both covered with the geometric patterns characteristic of Szwarc’s work, were early efforts that in his view were not up to his later standards. The artist was embarrassed by the two older works and wanted to give their lenders replacements that better reflected his current abilities. And he did.

The episode was typical of Szwarc. He was modest about his talent, despite the work’s enormous importance to him. “I have never considered myself an artist,” he said. “I’m just a clever handyman.” Collectors of his work would disagree. His creations – with their extravagances of ornamentation through which his imagination took flight – demonstrate exactly why he was an artist.

As Szwarc layered smooth panels of metal with bits and pieces of spot-welded stainless steel, sculptural forms emerged. The geometric, intricate combinations can be evocative despite their formal abstraction. In some instances, the patterns are figurative: faces, plant and animal forms, airplanes and buildings. The scale of the

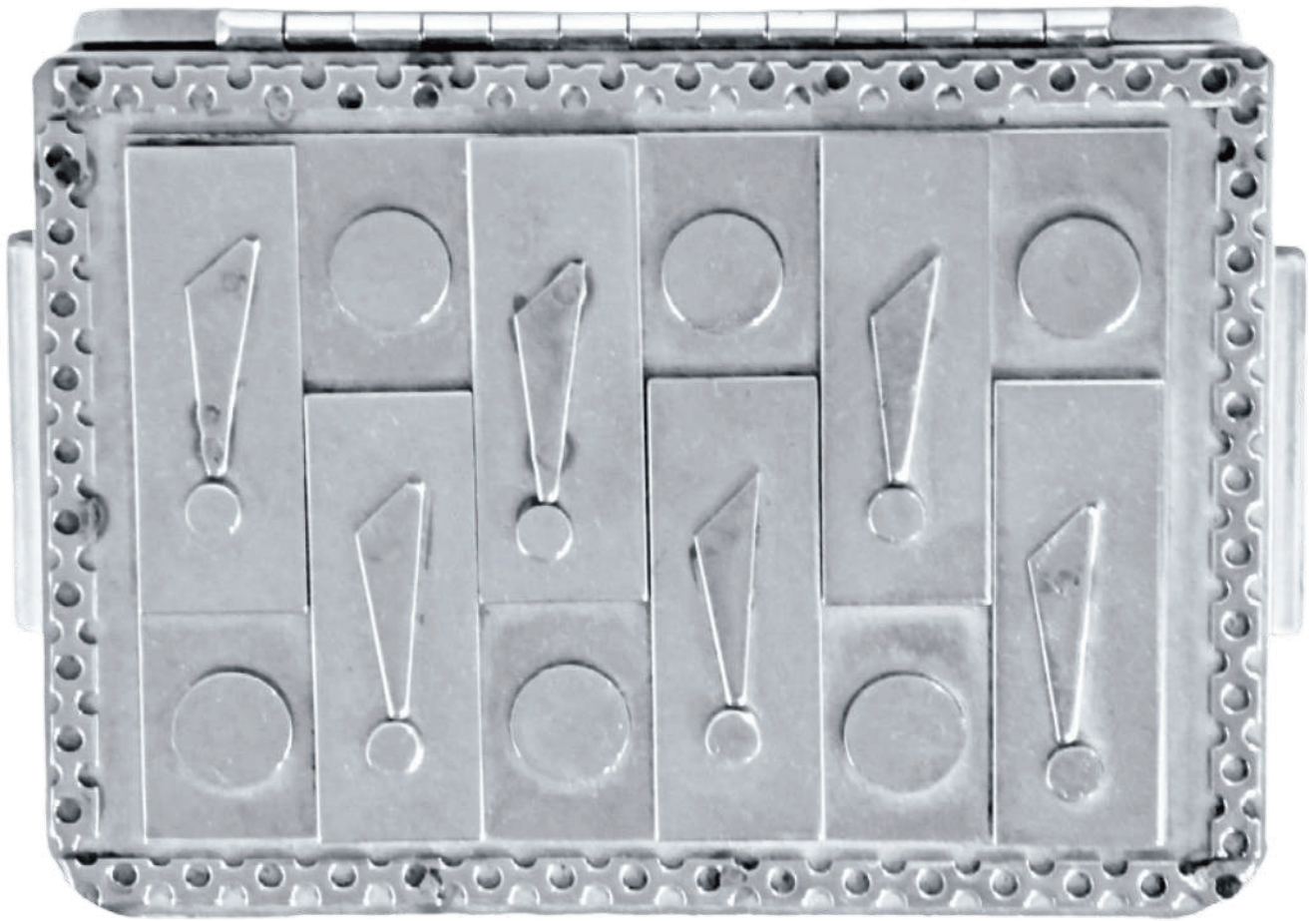
work ranges from earring-sized crosses to floor-standing vases. Along with the large vessels, tiny trinkets and fancy jewellery boxes, Szwarc created more utilitarian objects such as key fobs and mailboxes. He buffed most of his creations to a high sheen, and painted some with enamels after welding them together.

His materials were mainly recycled, brought home from the metal shop where he worked through his semi-retirement and where there was, he said, plenty of scrap: “I’m still collecting. Every day I bring home something. There’s so much, I can’t use everything.” A look at his garage workshop confirmed this. Adjacent to his power tools and spot welder were dozens of tubs filled with tiny circles and squares, a trunk full of box elements, and metal strips hanging on the walls.

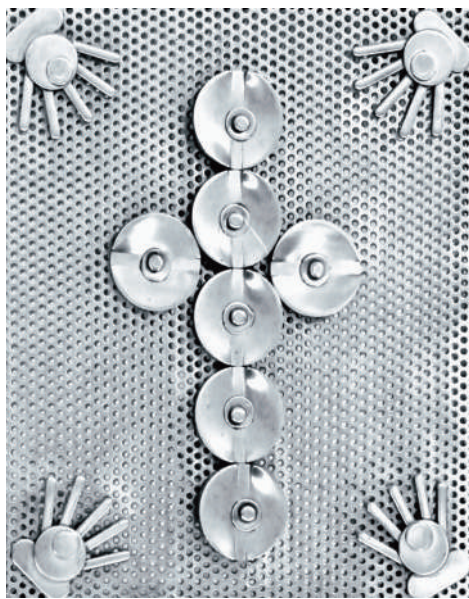
Born in 1928 in Poland, Szwarc came to the USA in 1977, becoming a welder and metal worker in 1980. His career as an artist began in 1986, when a slowdown at his workplace, a manufacturer of dental equipment, allowed him to experiment with his highly original techniques of steel fabrication and ornamentation.

Later on, those early pieces did not look good to him and he discarded many of them. “Whatever you do, first time for sure you won’t be no good. Experience counts,” he said. “How many I throw in the garbage...” This habit has made his early works, with their roughly painted surfaces and carpet-scrap linings, all the more desirable.

Back in Poland, Szwarc had been a bookkeeper and, in

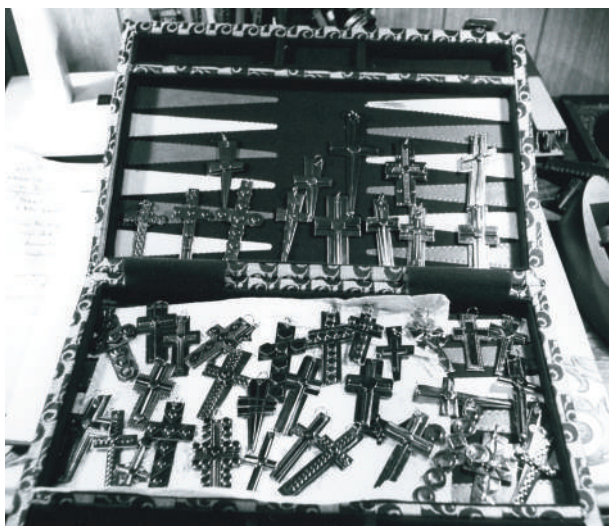


The ideas in his art were “like in music. It’s the bass melody and you do some improvisation.”



above: cross, 1988, 4.5 x 8 x 0.5 in. / 11.5 x 20.5 x 1.5 cm
above, middle: plaque, 1988, 7 x 8.5 x 1 in. / 18 x 21 x 2 cm

above, right: cross, 2001, 4 x 8.5 x 0.5 in. / 10 x 21.5 x 1.5 cm
top: box, 1998, 5 x 3.5 x 1 in. / 12.5 x 8.5 x 2.5 cm



above: Szwarc had dozens of tubs filled with tiny circles and squares in his garage; photo: K Burkhart, 2002
left: he kept his decorated crosses in carrying cases; photo: K Burkhart, 2002

his free-time, a musician like his father. He played trumpet in a professional Dixieland band. (Jazz was a prime source of self-expression for citizens of Communist Poland.) The cassette tapes that Szwarc kept in his basement in a briefcase revealed skilled players, and his photo albums showed an ensemble of Eastern Bloc hipsters in sharp suits, narrow ties and tinted glasses. "The best I did in my life was playing music," said Szwarc. "I was lousy husband. I was terrible lover. But I was good musician."

In the US, he played accordion for eleven years at a German restaurant and other Chicago venues. He later sold his accordion, saying, "When you are old, you have to give up some things." He claimed that, although music was a very important part of his life, he did not miss it.

Years later, long after he had died, his son Jacek told researcher Dana Boutin that Szwarc was unhappy at one point, his life in disarray. "The only refuge he found was his workshop [making art], in the same way he did with music before." Szwarc himself had once explained that the ideas in his art were "like in music." He said:

"It's the bass melody and you do some improvisation. It's hard to explain. Creative mind or something. When I start, I don't know what it's going to look like. It doesn't take me long to make the design. Sometimes I don't even know where I get the idea, [but] I've got to admit my ideas have never betrayed me... I see this in my mind how it should be. It doesn't work always but mostly." The result, he would often say, was "no two alike".

Szwarc had four children from two marriages, and 13 grandchildren in the US and Europe. He lived in suburban Chicago with his second wife and one grandchild, whom he raised as a son. The basement of the family's modest bungalow was filled with photos, clocks, souvenirs and scrapbooks, as well as toolboxes that Szwarc had made himself. He had his decorated jewellery boxes in drawers and cabinets and on shelves in every corner, and cases full of crosses and trinkets. There was also a work area where he sometimes painted his creations. The assembly was done in the garage however, which made the winter

months tough (in earlier years he would wear three pairs of trousers). Nevertheless, his production was ceaseless, the artist saying that he couldn't not work.

According to Szwarc, it was William Miller, a writer and photographer who, on coming across his elaborately decorated boxes at a Cicero flea market in 1988, urged him to have ambitions higher than the tube socks, second-hand tools, and adult videos on sale around him.

"We go to flea markets all over and don't ever see anything like that," Miller said. "It's really out of place at a flea market. I was trying to tell him, 'Stanley, you can't sell these things for \$5.'" With Miller's assistance, Szwarc placed his work in more appropriate settings.

In the same way that Miller encouraged Szwarc to take his imagination beyond the flea market, collector Rich Bowen convinced him to start signing and dating his work, which the artist did from 1997 onwards. Despite this, his earnings from his creations remained modest:

"If I see somebody who likes my work, it's given me a lot more satisfaction than the money," he says. "If I count my time, it's no profit.... It sounds crazy but it's true. If someone likes my work, I say take it. I'm very good for work but lousy for business."

Szwarc's recognition as an artist was almost as modest as his prices. Maybe this is, in part, because the work falls into a kind of artistic void. It displays too wild a decorative imagination to sit comfortably on the shelves of arts and crafts shops. Yet it can appear too funky to pass for high-art craft and too crafty to rate as sculpture with fine art dealers. Moreover, while the self-taught Szwarc was clearly outside the mainstream art world, his work does not fit into the genres of folk or outsider art. His creativity marks him as an artist of intense personal vision, yet his pieces are decorative, often utilitarian, objects. None of that bothered Szwarc, however, who simply made what he had to make until he could make no more.

William Swislow is a writer and runs the website interestingideas.com. He is on the boards of Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, and the Society for Commercial Archeology.

WILLIAM EDMONDSON

Angel (with Cape Surround)

Emily B Schilling contemplates a creation by the visionary American sculptor, noting the divine details that separate it from the flock

When he was in his late fifties, William Edmondson (c. 1874–1951) experienced what he believed to be visions of God commanding him to carve tombstones. Using a railroad spike, hammer and rasp, he obeyed, working with slabs of discarded limestone. He also began sculpting minimalist, thickset people and animals – “miracles” as he called them, also crediting their making to God – and sold them as garden ornaments.

The son of formerly enslaved parents, Edmondson grew up working the land in rural Tennessee. At 16, he moved to Nashville, where he found a job in a railroad company, then a hospital and, briefly, for a stonemason. Over the years, Edmondson earned enough to buy a house – a considerable accomplishment during America’s Jim Crow era – and displayed his sculptures in his front yard. A local college professor and playwright, seeing the work as he walked by, brought it to the attention of well-known photographer Louise Dahl-Wolfe. With her influence, New York’s Museum of Modern Art gave Edmondson a small solo show (its first for a Black artist) in 1937, which led to some recognition for the sculptor and his inclusion in a few other shows.

It is estimated that 300 of the works that Edmondson created between about 1931 and 1949 survive. Devoutly religious, he often made sculptures with biblical significance, including numerous crucifixions and angels. This resplendent *Angel (with Cape Surround)* is a particularly beautiful example – demure yet potent,

with a distinguished provenance, her soft features conveying compassion. As with many of Edmondson’s female figures, her textured hair covers her ears and adds bulk behind her head. Also typical of his angels is the way in which her bow-tie wings are flat at the back – but, unusually, they curve gracefully at the sides and front, and are adorned with gently swooping, feathery furrows that lead the eye. With arms loosely crossed, right hand over her heart, *Angel* carries extra roundness beneath her arms, creating a harmonious shape. Her cape crowns her head, floats over her shoulders, and flares downwards to meet the heptagonal support, while her feet are hidden beneath her skirt.

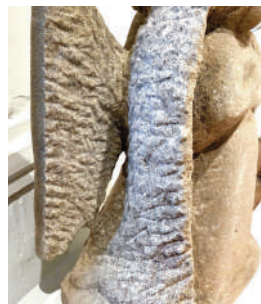
Another unusual, possibly unique, feature among Edmondson’s angels are the exquisite negative spaces between this figure’s robe and wings on both sides. The sculptor took a great risk in chiselling these out, as doing so could easily have broken the stone.

Dahl-Wolfe bought the sculpture from Edmondson in 1937, giving it to friends whose grandchildren auctioned it in 2011. By then, *Angel*’s light had dimmed, as she had likely been kept outdoors for decades. Although, after cleaning, some darkening of the porous stone remains between her robe and cape, the figure has been restored to her former state with her overall colour turning cool or warm, depending on the light. Every so often, the viewer’s gaze catches a single gleam from the surface – a salutatory flash, a blessing.

Emily B Schilling is a writer, artist and director of James E Brewton Foundation.

Angel (with Cape Surround), n.d., carved limestone, 15 x 19.5 x 9.5 in. / 38 x 49.5 x 23.5 cm; courtesy: Fleisher/Ollman Gallery

Detail photos: Emily B Schilling





left: LV Hull in her art environment in 2000; photo: Bruce West

all artworks shown: Untitled, n.d.



LV HULL: LOVE IS A SENSATION

Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson
March 20 – June 14, 2026

Upon entering “Love is a Sensation” at the Mississippi Museum of Art, visitors are met with a life-size photograph of LV Hull standing in front of her home, its surface alive with painted interventions. The image makes clear that Hull’s work extends beyond discrete objects: she painted shoes, bottles and cast-off materials, folding everyday life into a larger, immersive environment shaped by colour, text and repetition.

What follows is necessarily a translation. While removed from the immersive intensity of Hull’s home, the museum setting creates a distance that allows individual works to come into sharper focus. A painted bottle tree appears early on, its surface marked by dabs of colour, while nearby objects – hubcaps, fan blades, toys and televisions – demonstrate her instinct to transform the discarded into something charged and expressive. A grouping of painted

TVs, including one playing footage of her home, underscores the extent to which Hull collapsed the boundary between living space and artwork.

The exhibition is thoughtfully organised into sections such as “Methods and Materials” and “Pretty Things,” emphasising both the artist’s resourcefulness and her visual language. Sourcing paint from everyday retailers and objects from garage sales, Hull built a practice grounded in accessibility and persistence. Her repeated phrases – references to God and to Jesus, and aphorisms such as “mind your business” – function as declarations rather than ornament, conveying a world view shaped by faith, observation and lived experience. Archival photographs tracing her home’s transformation over the years, along with audio recordings of Hull herself, reinforce the iterative nature of her work and the importance of voice, visiting and exchange.

Rather than diminishing the work, the museum setting ultimately clarifies Hull’s achievement. Beginning in the 1970s and sustained through decades of steady labour – often from a single chair and small table – her work reflects sincerity and a profound creative ethic. “Love is a Sensation” reveals an artist who created not out of obligation but from a persistent desire to make beauty from whatever was at hand, collapsing the divide between art and life in the process.

CHANDLER GRIFFIN



MUSEUM GUGGING.! 20 YEARS ART

Museum Gugging, Maria Gugging
March 15, 2026 – January 17, 2027

There always hung “only the pictures, not the stories,” says Johann Feilacher, referring to Gugging, the art house in Lower Austria of which he was director and where he practised psychiatry. For years, the site housed a psychiatric hospital; now, the former children’s pavilion within the former hospital is a museum, art centre, gallery, studio, and workplace for patients, some of whom – the “Gugging artists” – have made extraordinary outsider art.

When the museum opened in 2006, the poster for the inaugural exhibition bore the word “Blug” (plough), borrowed from the work of Gugging artist Franz Kernbeis, as well as two curious eyes from the work of his fellow artist, Rudolf Horacek. Two decades on, the art of both Horacek and Kernbeis appears in “museum gugging.! 20 years art,” the anniversary show curated by the institution’s artistic and scientific director Nina Ansperger.

Visitors are greeted by 20 Gugging artists smiling out from photo portraits, and are then led to the Garber salon where 470

or so objects depict the bright world of Johann “Hansi” Garber. In another room, Leonhard Fink faces Philipp Schöpke, while Oswald Tschirtner’s figures – consisting of just heads and long legs – march nearby. Further on, Arnold “Andi” Schmidt’s *People* dance with Franz Kamlander’s *Cows*, and Karl Vondal’s *Sexbompes* flirt with Erich Tressler’s never-before-shown dragon creatures. Meanwhile, Günther Schützenhöfer’s *Ant* looks for shelter under Heinrich Reisenbauer’s *Apples* and *Cloud* (unusual subject matter for both artists).

Two Gugging stars get rooms of their own – Johann Hauser (who would have been 100 this year) and August Walla (who would have turned 90) – the spaces filled with some well-known works as well as a few seldom seen pieces, such as Walla’s *Crown* (2000) and Hauser’s 1969 *Lion*. The latter also roars from the cover of the newly published anniversary book covering the two decades of Gugging art.

Comprising over 480 artworks – lent by numerous institutions, such as Lausanne’s Collection de l’Art Brut and Vienna’s Albertina, as well as private collections including that of Feilacher – this is a bright, wild, at times unexpected, and overall extraordinary celebration of 20 years of Museum Gugging.

MICHAELA FLECK-REGENFELDER



August Walla, *Crown*, 2000



Rudolf Horacek, *In Mannswörth*, 1984



Johann Hauser, *Lion*, 1969

AUSSI LOIN QU'ICI

Art et Marges Musée, Brussels
November 13, 2025 – March 29, 2026

“Aussi Loin Qu’Ici” brings together works that reflect on the notion of territory. Among them, two major pieces stand out: one by Gérard van Lankveld, the other by Michael Golz. The first is an installation taken from an extensive creation. A brightly coloured pavilion – beneath which the visitor can walk – houses the archives of the artist’s colossal undertaking: the Monera Empire. Van Lankveld has proclaimed this empire in and around his own home; a kind of state within a state, complete with its own rules, aesthetic, coat of arms, invented language, symbols of power – in short, its own culture. The intricacy, systematic rigour and subtlety of this proposition compel us to take it very seriously. Moreover, the museum’s scenography leads the viewer to step under Van Lankveld’s pavilion, to enter his state and acknowledge its existence. The modesty of the empire’s models, coupled with their infinite precision, introduces the possibility of rethinking the concept of “nation” through a subversive lens.

Of Golz’s work, too, only a fragment is shown – a portion of his vast opus *Athosland*, an immense map, composed of more than 1,200 sheets, delineating the parcels of a cadastre of which the artist is the engineer. Unframed, the work is presented in a deliberately overflowing manner. As such, it does not function as an image but rather as a real landscape before which the visitor behaves as when faced with a panoramic view. A bench has even been placed in front of the map – not a museum bench but something closer to a promenade bench, on which one sits to contemplate a landscape.

As the museum does not exhibit Golz’s work in its entirety, the viewer is invited to imagine what response the totality of the map would elicit. It brings to mind the enigma of the map and the territory as presented by Jorge Luis Borges’s 1946 *On Exactitude in Science*: what would be the meaning of a map that is the same size as the territory it represents? Together, the territories constructed by Van Lankveld and Golz carry us to this point and beyond.

CLARISSE MICHAUX

below: Van Lankveld, *Monera Empire* (1967–2014) installation



below: Michael Golz, *Athosland*, 1977–present



NO SEASONING: ARTWORKS BY SEVEN AFRO-DESCENDANT CUBAN OUTSIDER ARTISTS

CopperBridge Foundation, Miami
February 27 – May 23, 2026

Stepping into “No Seasoning” at the CopperBridge Foundation Headquarters in Miami, one is immediately confronted with the weight of the title: an existence without cultural conditioning, without the spices of institutional approval. Curated by Elvia Rosa Castro, this group exhibition brings together seven Afro-descendant Cuban outsider artists in what marks the first presentation of its kind in the city. The works span collage, drawing, sculpture and photography, and together form a portrait of creative life flourishing at the outermost margins of visibility.

The curator frames the show through the metaphor of a “Ten-Minute Stop” – a brief, unscheduled pause offering something rare: unfiltered honesty. Nothing here has been smoothed over for comfort, and the works carry authenticity with undeniable force.

Martha Iris Pérez Santana’s photographs, her black-and-white shadow series and painterly colour abstractions titled “I Can’t Paint,” dissolve figuration into velvet and light, sitting somewhere between abstraction and Expressionist drama. Misleidys Castillo’s large-format watercolour figures of hyper-muscular men, cut out and adhered to her walls like personal frescoes, land as an unselfconscious yet pointed intervention in the discourse around gender representation and the art-historical absence of the male nude. Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara assembles sculptures from street debris and coloured cloth into an unlikely convergence of Arte Povera and pop iconography with Mickey Mouse and the Eiffel Tower constructed from refuse. That he is currently imprisoned in Cuba adds an urgency no curatorial statement could manufacture.

Isaac Crespo’s densely rendered, carnivalesque drawings channel James Ensor’s grotesque social critique through his own biography, two decades away from painting due to addiction, and a return to the canvas as recovery. Gloria de la Caridad’s collages, dense with faces, masks, chains and letters, feel simultaneously festive and desperate, assembled from materials gathered in a home that floods when it rains. Pedro Pablo Bacallao’s compositions, his own writings overpainted with heavy, near-childlike strokes, map a world where epilepsy, isolation and neighbourhood violence converge into something raw and irreducible. And Daldo Marte cuts figures from old tire tubes with scissors of miraculous precision, then walks his neighbourhood in handmade superhero armour: the insistence on inhabiting one’s own fantasy, publicly, without apology.

“No Seasoning” is a necessary exhibition, and overdue in Miami.

CLAUDIA TABOADA



Gloria de la Caridad, *Glamour*, 2020



Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, *Elephant*, 2015

SELBY WARREN: BUSH POET

Dutton, New York
February 19 – March 29, 2026

H G Stoker, 1969



Selby Warren (1887–1979) created his art with a restless energy, as if the memories he depicted in the vivid scenes were at risk of slipping away. Against the white walls of Dutton gallery on New York’s Lower East Side, the paintings and works on paper vibrantly conjure another world, one where rabbit hunters and bushrangers roamed the rugged expanses of rural Australia. In his landscapes, where foreground and background are flattened into a single expanse, kangaroos and bright birds emerge from the heavy, quick brushstrokes. Each piece has a sense of a story being told, with Warren’s scrawled annotations hinting at some scrap of his past or a ballad or poem he heard on his journeys.

Warren spent most of his life around Trunkey Creek, a gold mining village in New South Wales. Despite claiming that he had had a lifelong interest in painting, he was in his seventies when he began his brief yet prolific practice. Before that, he cycled through the itinerant jobs available in that remote corner of the country: sheep shearing, rabbit trapping, mining, cutting railroad ties and gold panning. Retirement finally gave him the time to transmit those experiences into images, using any materials he could get

INVENTING ABSTRACTION: NONREPRESENTATIONAL SELF-TAUGHT ART

SHRINE, New York

February 13 – March 22, 2026

Whether the blind artist Hawkins Bolden working by touch to assemble discarded metal and fabric from his Memphis neighbourhood, or the English visionary Madge Gill guided by spirits to create sweeping fields of colour, the pathways that have brought self-taught artists to abstract expression are myriad. "Inventing Abstraction" at SHRINE features 16 of these artists in an illuminating examination of non-representational work. Curated by veteran gallerist Jay Gorney, the show highlights how these artists came to abstraction not by rebelling against or deviating from artistic traditions, but by "inventing" it, as the exhibition text puts it, as their "primary visual language".

Although there are short biographies of the artists available to peruse at the gallery desk, the walls are left blank of explanatory labels. This allows the viewer to make their own connections. The intricate layering of painted cloth scraps on a large piece by Thornton Dial resonates with the thick swirls of oil paint coating a work by Abraham Lincoln Walker. A bundle of purple tape and cellophane by Nnena Kalu – who in 2025 became the first artist with a learning disability to win the Turner prize – echoes in its cocoon of materials a totem of wrapped yarn by Judith Scott. The kaleidoscopic colours of a painted piece by Emery Blagdon – one of the numerous elements incorporated into his "healing machine" – have a similar exuberance for colour as the rippling lines in dense ink, marker and pencil on Joseph Lambert's works on paper.

Even if Melvin Edward Nelson arrived at his ethereal landscapes of mineral pigments by excavating samples from what he perceived as UFO landing sites in Oregon, and JB Murray at his vibrant geometric patterns by attempting to take down the ineffable word of God in rural Georgia, removing them from these personal stories encourages a purely aesthetic exploration of their work. Especially with several of the artists having been widely exhibited – in particular, creators like Dial, Scott, Martín Ramírez and Minnie Evans – this is a fresh way to consider their art. Often, the reason a self-taught artist made their work, and the narrative they put into it, is the focus of an exhibition. Showing that the simple use of colour and shape is shared across creators despite their motivations reveals the humanity in this universal impulse. It also broadens the usual view of abstraction in art history. Whereas abstraction is generally presented as something made in reaction to the figurative traditions of art, in this show it is highlighted as art's most elemental form.

ALLISON C MEIER*Landscape Scene, 1971*Hawkins Bolden, *Untitled (Scarecrow)*, 1980Thornton Dial, *Lady from Across the Street*, 2012

his hands on, even making paintbrushes from his own hair.

The works in "Bush Poet" at Dutton demonstrate how Warren captured very specific details in the spare works, like the galloping speed of a man on horseback, or a pod of what appears to be dolphins swimming along a coastline. These pieces also have traces of the artist's resourcefulness, such as creating his own frames from an old car window or bits of salvaged wood, and using cut towels on fibrewood to give his paintings a textural quality. A date book exhibited in a case reveals how he also did sketches alongside daily notes on the weather, with its open pages showing a portrait of Winston Churchill based on a postage stamp next to a January 2, 1966 observation: "Clouds forming but fine. Could become a storm."

After a university professor on a fishing trip came upon his work in a local pub, Warren received attention in some major Australian galleries before his death, but then fell back into obscurity. He has returned to some prominence in recent years in his home country, including a 2014 retrospective, but remains little exhibited in the US. Dutton previously presented his work at the Independent Art Fair in New York in 2024, but "Bush Poet" is the first solo show of Warren's art in the city. It is a rare look at the breadth of his work, where he expresses through the murky lens of memory the wildlife, people and places of the bush from a life lived hard on its land.

ALLISON C MEIER



left: *Anonymous Building*, 1987

below left: *Niagara Falls*, 1986

below left: National Museum of African Art



WILLIAM L HAWKINS: PAINTED PLACES

Maison d'Art, Los Angeles
February 21 – May 30, 2026

A self-taught, African-American artist, William L Hawkins is best known for his vivid, expressionistic paintings of animals, historic landmarks, religious scenes and popular cultural figures. Despite creating art privately for many years while working various odd jobs, including managing a brothel, Hawkins only gained public recognition at the age of 87, eight years before his death in 1990.

His first solo show in Los Angeles, "Painted Places," features eleven paintings made between 1983 and 1989 that, focussing on architecture and landscapes, marked the artist's rise to fame. Held at Maison d'Art – a gallery owned by collector Theo Niarchos (of the Niarchos shipping family) and better known for showcasing modern and contemporary artists like Man Ray, Claes Oldenburg and Cady Noland – Hawkins' exhibition is spread across two floors of a former bank, strikingly renovated by Johnston Marklee, a Los Angeles architecture firm widely recognised for its cultural spaces.

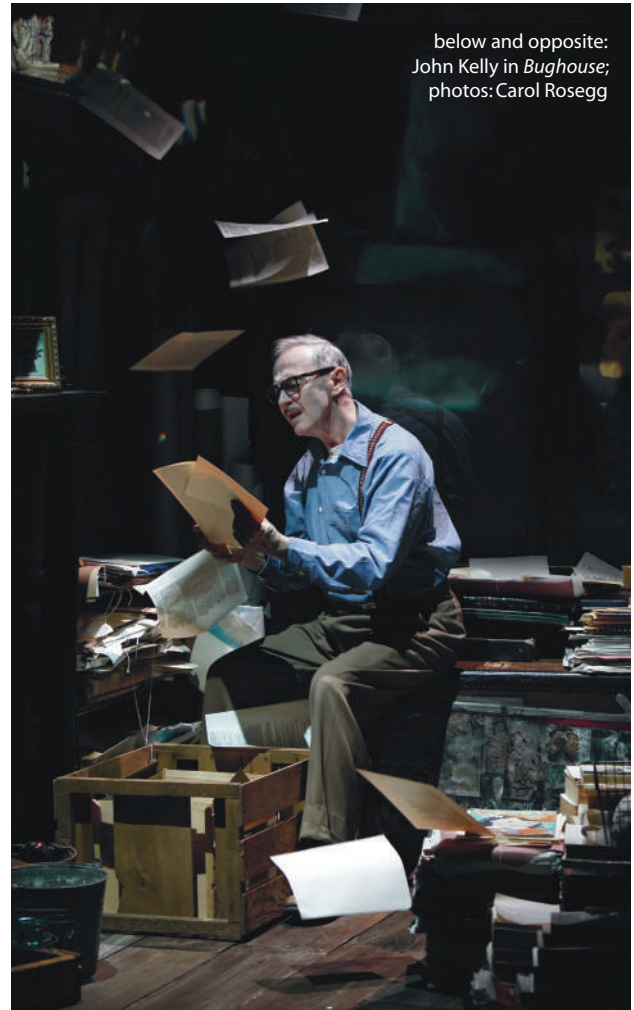
Featuring landscapes with parks and waterfalls, as well as cityscapes with main-street homes, storefronts, factories and government buildings, the paintings were created using industrial enamel paint on fibreboard panels. Reportedly, the Columbus Ohio-

based artist painted from source images he kept in a suitcase, using a single brush which he would wipe with a rag before applying each new colour. He used two or three complementary primary colours, along with black-and-white shades, boldly signing each piece "William L Hawkins Born KY July 27 1895", and usually finishing with a decorative framing motif, as with most of the works in this show. In many of his paintings, Hawkins puffed out the enamel with cornmeal or sawdust to add texture to the surface, as seen in the 1987 painting *Anonymous Building*, which depicts a tall, wide structure with rows of gable windows, rendered in various shades of red, white and blue.

This same artwork is shown being held by the artist in one of the intriguing archive photos on display in a notebook, part of research by curator / writer Piper Marshall for a soon-to-be-published catalogue. In another shot, Hawkins is outdoors, applying paint to a panel on sawhorses, on a tabletop similar to one his grandmother used for making quilts; a nod to the inspiring woman who raised him.

Hawkins' straightforward, expressive use of colour and form has equally influenced contemporary artists, in particular Josh Smith, a collector of his work. Smith's paintings of old city buildings from his 2020 exhibitions at David Zwirner in London and New York would have fit seamlessly alongside Hawkins' paintings in this show.

PAUL LASTER



below and opposite:
John Kelly in *Bughouse*;
photos: Carol Rosegg

BUGHOUSE

Vineyard Theatre, New York
February 18 – April 5, 2026

Bughouse – MacArthur Award-winning director/choreographer Martha Clarke's multidisciplinary monodrama based upon the life and work of Chicago visionary artist/writer Henry Darger – was performed at New York's off-Broadway Vineyard Theatre. Having previously worked on productions centred around Hieronymus Bosch, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Lewis Carroll and St Francis of Assisi, Clarke has been consistently drawn to artists, writers and mystics. In Darger, she found all three; yet, shaping the monumentally voluminous material surrounding him into a cogent presentation, and casting the right actor to play him, took some eight years.

In 2018, Clarke first approached me – as the author of a book on Darger to join her creative team as an art history consultant. I provided her with salient quotes from Darger's memoir, *The History of My Life* (1966–1972) which supplemented with excerpts from his diary and weather journals. Although the core script was built around these autobiographical texts, I pushed early on for the inclusion of passages from his three unpublished fictional works: *In the Realms of the Unreal*; *Further Adventures in Chicago*; and the extensive portion of his *History* about an imaginary tornado dubbed "Sweetie Pie." The artist/writer spent as much time in those fantasy realms as he did in the so-called real world and they blended within him significantly.

When Pulitzer-Prize-winning scriptwriter Beth Henley (*Crimes of the Heart*, 1979) came on board with the project, she brought in further selections from both Darger's nonfiction and fiction writings. She then took some creative licence in introducing brief monologues of her own design to fill in the areas that she felt

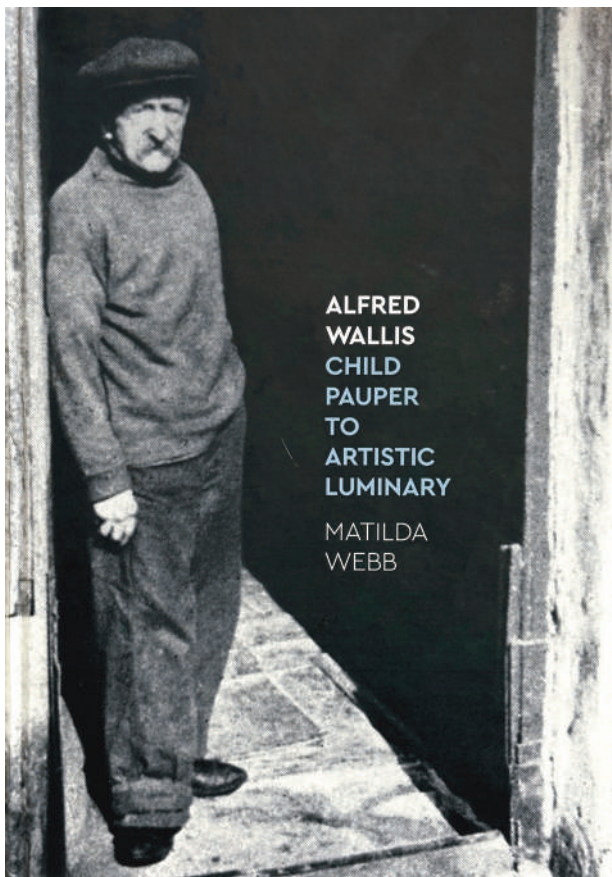
would benefit from clarification or context.

Staging-wise, Faye Armon-Troncoso's meticulous one-room apartment recreation was enriched by Ruth Lingford's delightful animations and John Narun's clever projections. In fact, the set was a "character" in its own right. Windows screened vintage documentary film footage, cartoon clouds, and falling snow. A magic mirror embodied Darger's martyred child-slave leader, Annie Aronburg, speaking via a recorded voice. There were freewheeling displays of the intrepid Vivian Girls, flying "Blengiglomenean" serpents, and real-life personalities William Schloeder (Darger's "special friend") and murdered, child victim Elsie Paroubek, as well as blooming flowers and chirping birds. While the production did not exploit the more controversial elements in Darger's art, such as his intersex children or graphic depictions of violence, neither did it shy away from them.

As both a performing and visual artist himself, actor John Kelly brought his own insights to the role of Darger. And, as a gay man, he found author Jim Elledge's persuasive fictional biography of Darger portrayed as a homosexual (*Henry Darger, Throwaway Boy*, 2013) to be particularly useful in motivating him, although such lifestyle references were not overtly displayed in Kelly's sensitive and often moving interpretation.

Bughouse enjoyed sold-out performances throughout its extended run but received mixed reviews from critics, in part because they felt it didn't give audiences deeper insights into Darger's enigmatic persona. Having spent nearly half-a-century probing his work, I must admit that deeper insights into Darger continue to elude me as well. Still, Clarke gave it her all and, from my partisan point of view, it was a magnificent effort. Heroic, in fact. Or, as Darger might have put it, herculean.

MICHAEL BONESTEEL



Shipwreck 1: The Wreck of the Alba, c. 1938



Trees and Cottages, c. 1936

Penzance Harbour, n.d.



ALFRED WALLIS: CHILD PAUPER TO ARTISTIC LUMINARY

by Matilda Webb
Seadrift Press, 2025
ISBN: 978-1838414207

It is impossible to open a book about art in the small fishing port of St Ives, Cornwall, without encountering the work of Alfred Wallis (1855–1942). St Ives has been a magnet to artists visiting from London and other cities since at least the late nineteenth century, when an artist colony was established there. Wallis, though, was a homegrown talent, resident in the town from 1882 until his death. Yet, he didn't begin to make art until his 70th year, after the death of his wife and shortly after receiving his first State Pension money, when – as Matilda Webb tells us in her scrupulously researched, thoroughly readable and richly illustrated biography of Wallis – he said to a friend, “I think I’ll do a bit’a paintin’” to help pass the time. The rest is history, so to speak.

Within a couple of years of starting to paint, Wallis came to the attention of British cosmopolitan Modernist artists, critics and curators – notably Ben and Winifred Nicholson and Christopher Wood – who eagerly acquired his work, thinking they had “discovered” an English Henri Rousseau. Whilst they were genuinely interested in his paintings, the fact that Wallis was self-taught as an

artist and working class was enough for these upper middle-class individuals and their circle to imagine that he was neither interested in nor needed much money, and they paid accordingly paltry amounts for his work. A mythology of Wallis's earlier biography was also quickly established, which emphasised a supposed primitiveness and tendency to fantasise stories of adventures at sea. Webb ably corrects this, bringing Wallis to life as a real person, demonstrating the reality of his sea travels as a young man and charting his subsequent working and family life, notably the more than 30 years he spent as a marine stores dealer in St Ives – a long way from the “rag-and-bone man” of myth.

It is instructive that Wallis's life ended as it began, in penury, and Webb sensitively navigates the sad circumstances of his last year as a resident in an institution that was effectively a workhouse, when the cultural distance between him and his putative art-world friends became starkly clear.

COLIN RHODES



Boats Under Saltash Bridge, n.d.

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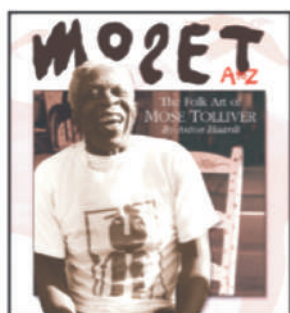
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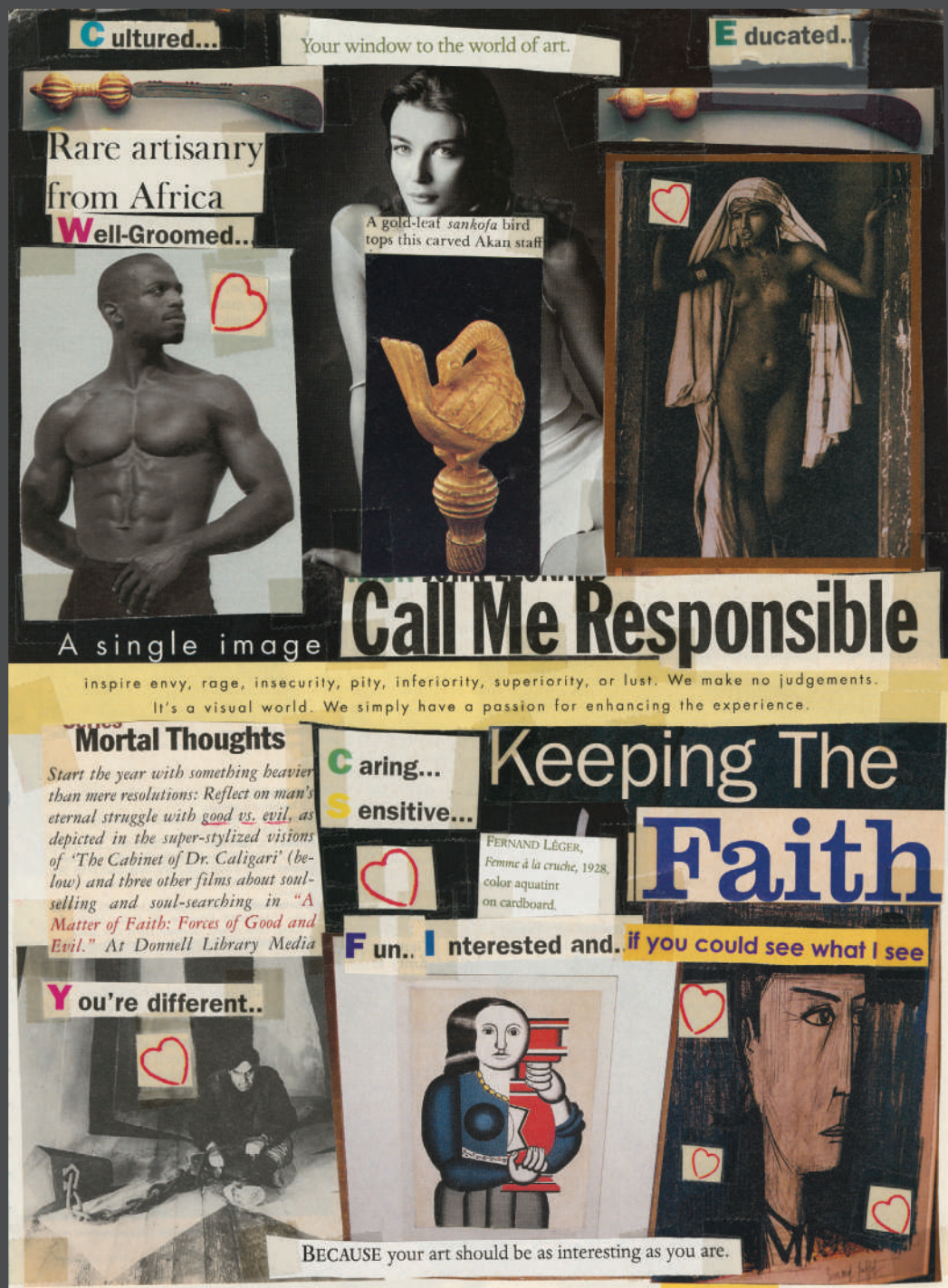


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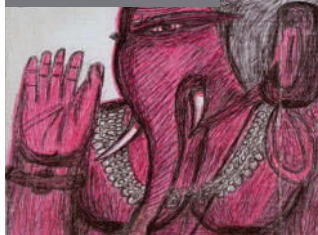
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