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Exhibitions of Outsider Art Since 1947

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Exhibitions of Outsider Art Since 1947

by

Christina McCollum

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Exhibitions of Outsider Art Since 1947

by

Christina McCollum

Advisor: Romy Golan

The search for a “raw art,” untouched by the corrupting effects of culture, led Jean Dubuffet and others to collect, under the heading Art Brut [Outsider art], art made by the mentally ill and otherwise disenfranchised, poor, uneducated, elderly, and/or physically disabled. Since Dubuffet’s codification of Art Brut around 1945, the Outsider has been identified by cultural isolation, mental distance and a requisite discovery by some cultural insider, paternal or exploitative. This discoverer, whether doctor, artist or collector, becomes a translator of sorts, instructing audiences through exhibitions as to how they should receive this work by marginalized artists. Because there is no discourse among Outsider artists, the field does not conform to the standard paradigm of the artistic ‘movement,’ but coheres through a history of these exhibition and collecting practices. Collecting of Outsider work becomes a treasure hunt, where trophies from contact with the abnormal -- cast as capable of pure artistry -- are returned to normative realms. My dissertation charts that history through a series of exhibition case studies, from the mid-twentieth century to the present. I begin with Dubuffet’s Art Brut collection in Switzerland as background, and its dark presentation still invokes asylum. I move quickly to the United States, however. I study the history of the American Folk Art Museum and its erasures of difference among anonymous Folk artists, and then look at Southern Outsider environments such as those constructed by Howard Finster and Kenny Hill. The dissertation ends
with the contemporary scene: the Outsider Art fair, workshop/galleries for artists with developmental disabilities and Outsiders in the mainstream.
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For Gabriel and Cressida
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Introduction

Outsider art has been a difficult genre to define in the fifty years of its existence under the term, and arguably, in an entire century as a collectible category. Nonetheless, anxiety over the fundamental, shared identity features of this cohort of art and artists is the defining problem of the genre, and should signify a crisis at its core. Worse, and a timely issue, the artists whose work has been historically collected under the moniker have been exploited in many cases for their lack of business acumen, art world connections or educational sophistication, or because their lives are otherwise inflected or subsumed by some disability. Unlike Primitivism and Orientalism, Outsider art has somehow escaped scrutiny as a form of exoticism. Despite a few lines of scholarly text included in articles and presentations over the past twenty years or so, this is a fact that is not often openly acknowledged, and one that has not formally been studied or systematically problematized by art historians before now, but one that has driven this dissertation.

Outsider art, not as a material fact, but as a category of art that is collected, shown and sold, has been the result of the colonizing of the privacy of the poor, disabled and disenfranchised for the benefit of an art market hungry for expressions of purity. It has been wielded to the ideological (financial, egotistical, etc.) purposes of many stakeholders with varying interpretations of it, and varying claims to the veracity and righteousness of their interpretations. Those usually revolve around some marginal contact with Outsider artists, prompting my theorizing of the Outsider object through a discourse of the exotic, and specifically, as “souvenir.” This discourse of exoticism, and a pendant field of disability studies, working as mystifying and demystifying forces, respectively, and both as descendants of a larger
post-colonial discourse, have, surprisingly, never been used to frame the creation of the category of Outsider art.

This dissertation was organized to follow exhibitions of Outsider art in a loose chronology of overlapping timelines as a strategy to avoid what I argue is a history mired in inflated and transcendent language, siloed monographs, and sketchy justifications for canonicity around Outsider art. Exhibitions are tangible, if nodal, definitions, and in my resorting to those what has resulted here is a tacit institutional critique. That is, I suggest that to exhibit Outsider art as Outsider art is not only a betrayal of the artists thus named, but of the very ideal of an Outsider art or an Art Brut as essentially hidden, such as Dubuffet would formulate it, and as I will shortly describe it. In leveling this broad critique, I acknowledge that the curators and directors in the case studies I describe, are inheritors and truly stewards of difficult collections in a heated contemporary political climate. They are valiantly working through the challenges of social justice and identity politics that these collections elicit. In tracing a history of exhibitions, I began by hypothesizing that a certain kind of exhibition for Outsider art, one that emphasized darkness, confinement, crowding, and otherwise obscuring settings, would prove the most blatantly exploitative and sensationalizing. The research has shown to the contrary that bright, Modern exhibitions can be equally obscuring in their transfiguration of the messiness of diversity into a faux universality, and that more obscure stagings can sometimes best acknowledge the very anxiety of exposure at the core of Outsider art.

In 1997, Dr. N. F. Karlins, a New York art historian, assessed the difficulty of defining the genre of Outsider art in her review of a group of publications and exhibitions for *Art Journal*:

Because the field of Outsider art is expanding exponentially, it will not be easy to define any time soon, and devotees have given up trying to explain it precisely. Not long ago,
any exhibition catalogue or symposium dealing with Henry Darger\textsuperscript{1} and his ilk would have been obliged to include an essay with a title like “What is Outsider art?” While the line remains to be drawn between “self-taught,” “contemporary folk art,” and “Outsider art”... there is a new willingness just to go ahead and deal with this large mass of material.\textsuperscript{2}

Despite Karlins’ optimism at that time, the fundamental, ontological question about Outsider art remains unresolved in scant scholarly literature on the topic today, as well as in press, exhibitions, and conversation.\textsuperscript{3} Most definitions of Outsider art prove unsatisfying because the meaning of the term varies from source to source, often relies on comparisons to other contested or vaguely delimited genres, such as Art Brut, Folk art, or Visionary art, and because it further rests upon uncertain descriptors like “vernacular,” “self-taught” or “intuitive.”\textsuperscript{4} For example, 2013 \textit{Village Voice} article by Christian Viveros-Faune defined Outsider art as “today's ‘raw art’ craze [that] promotes unskilled stuff by Sunday painters, stitching septuagenarians, and religious

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Henry Darger (1893-1973), a Chicago janitor and reclusive artist, has become one of the most renowned Outsider artists, represented by his drawings in prestigious art institutions in the U.S. and abroad and most prominently at the Darger Center at the American Folk Art Museum.
\item This question of “What is it?” appears rhetorically in a range of publications, print and digital, from the 1980s until today. For just a few examples, see the following: Jane Livingston’s section of \textit{Black Folk Art in America}, the controversial catalog to a 1982 Corcoran Gallery exhibition including works by artists such as Bill Traylor, now considered under the Outsider umbrella, opened with the heading, “What is it?” (Jane Livingston, John Beardsley and Regina Pery, \textit{Black Folk Art in America: 1930-1980} [Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1982],13). The websites for both \textit{Raw Vision} magazine and the Outsider Art Fair host permanent articles titled, “What is Outsider Art?” The Philadelphia Museum, in an article on the recently acquired (2012) Bonovitz Collection of Outsider Art also available online at \url{http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/768.html}, asks in bold, “What is Outsider Art?” At the 2012 Outsider Art Fair, Flavorwire.com, a popular cultural tabloid sent a correspondent to ask ten experts, “What, exactly, is Outsider art?” (Paul Hiebert, “Seeking a definition of Outsider Art at the Outsider Art Fair,” \textit{Flavorwire}, 30 January 2012). In other media, a segment titled “What is Outsider Art?” aired on the program Today on \textit{BBC Radio 4} on 11 June 2013.
\item For the purposes of this Introduction “vernacular” will retain its linguistic connotation in being used to describe art featuring the shared, common or popular visual language of a middle or lower class of makers; “self-taught” will mean that an artist is without formal artistic education, apart from training or apprenticeship within a tradition of craftsmanship; and “intuitive art,” although avoided herein because of its dubious proximity to “primitive,” might be defined as art made by those people somehow possessing a more innate sensory ability than most, despite the absence of formal artistic training. It implies special access to a basic and universal creativity.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
cranks.” In that article, the critic not only leveled “Outsider art” and Art Brut as synonyms, but also offered confusing examples of Outsider artists who conjure Folk artistry (“Sunday painters and stitching septuagenarians”) as well as Visionary art (“religious cranks”).

As a preliminary definition for the purposes of this introduction: Because Outsider art is constituted from an array of artists working independently and without a unified artistic goal, there can be no intrinsic definition. Outsider art is rather what it is said to be, usually by collectors or curators, at any given moment. There are, however, certain assumptions, fabricated by insiders and attached to Outsider art and artists, that have been taken as defining features of the problematic genre. Some of these assumptions are of “pure” creative intent, social isolation, formal intensity, compulsion and lack of artistic or academic training. I would add to these commonly assigned attributes the more accurate qualifiers of class, disenfranchise, appropriation by insiders, and, most acutely, narratives of discovery as the most reliable signatures of Outsider art and artists. In this introduction, I first review the terms related to the Outsider genre in order to define and clarify them for use in the subsequent chapters, and because, to my knowledge, a lengthy review of the history of the terms Art Brut and “Folk art” together, as they contributed to the formation of what I define as “Outsider art,” has not yet been detailed in scholarly literature. They have been defined individually, but not in such a triad. Next, I rehearse the assumptions about Outsider art generally offered as defining features, debunking many of them as false parameters.

This dissertation engages with the Outsider art problem as a twentieth-century, Euro-
American phenomenon, and finds the seeds of Outsider art in the late 19th century asylum collections of Western Europe -- seeds that grew through Jean Dubuffet’s conception of anti-cultural “raw art,” which he dubbed Art Brut. Dubuffet (French, 1901-1985) was a well-connected artist by the time he began to formulate the concept of Art Brut and collect it.

Lucienne Peiry, Director Emeritus at the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne, made the connection between Art Brut and the category of Outsider art with her 2001 doctoral thesis, published as Art Brut: The Origins of Outsider Art (2006), although the connection was first made in the 1972 with the publication of Roger Cardinal’s, Outsider Art. As a direct curatorial descendent to Dubuffet at his Collection de l’Art Brut in Switzerland, Peiry wrote about the collector in sometimes hagiographic ways. She did acknowledge that Art Brut fulfilled a latent Primitivist impulse– a penchant in Dubuffet’s native France – when writing from Dubuffet’s point of view that, “An extreme form of otherness existed nearby, almost at home, rising up out of the creators’ belligerent energy, and this otherness was more striking than the otherness introduced by other cultures, no matter how distant.”

Art Brut is translated most commonly as “raw art,” and was Jean Dubuffet’s term for the art he collected, beginning in 1945, from artists on the margins of European society. Some of those artists were institutionalized with mental illness. Dubuffet was reluctant to define Art Brut upon first exhibiting it, by appointment only, in the basement of René Drouin gallery in 1947. He explained: “To formulate what is Art Brut, this is not my purpose. To define a thing – gold

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8 Cardinal Outsider Art.
9 Peiry Art Brut, 62.
10 Jean Dubuffet wrote in a letter to Rene Auberjonois, published in Prospectus aux amateurs de tout genre (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 145-6: “I preferred ‘l’Art Brut’ to ‘l’Art Obscur’ because the art of the professionals did not seem to me to be more clairvoyant, more lucid, but rather the opposite. It would lead to confusion and I would feel guilty about this.”
isolated – is to damage it greatly. It is nearly to destroy it.”

Dubuffet was prone to exaggerations, tautologies and contradictions, and thus more willing to offer an explanation as soon as 1949. With the title of his exhibition of that year, L’Art Brut préféré aux arts culturels (René Drouin Gallery) and in other writings, Dubuffet’s Art Brut was set principally in opposition to “cultural art.” Art Brut was primarily, according to the artist, free of any trace of influence. In the pamphlet for that exhibition, Dubuffet laid out a definition of Art Brut upon which he would elaborate for the next decade:

We mean by this the works executed by persons free of artistic culture, in which mimicry, contrary to that which occurs in the art of intellectuals, has played little or no part, of the artistry.

Dubuffet’s definition proved malleable, changing over his lifetime from a very rigorous requirement of extreme creative isolation on the part of the artists to more lax requirements that they be highly individualistic and untrained. Peiry asserts that Dubuffet revised his thinking, beginning in 1959: “For the first time, he abandoned his rigid Manichean distinction between Art Brut and ‘cultural art.’” Eventually, those among the artists collected by Dubuffet who evinced too much artistic ambition or those who made art world connections were annexed into the category of Neuve Invention [sic]. Neither the term nor the category has gained much traction beyond his own Collection de l’Art Brut. It can be argued that Dubuffet used Art Brut, in ways both concrete and conceptual, to forward his own career, aesthetic and ideology, by not only

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15 Peiry Art Brut, 65.
copying (an allegation which he denied) a rough, untrained style, but also by championing in Art Brut what he perceived to be a rejection of cultured art. The term Art Brut is currently used to refer to European works made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and collected specifically by Jean Dubuffet during his lifetime, although occasionally the term is given more latitude to include work made by artists on the margins of European society but not collected by Dubuffet himself. Even dispersed works made by the same artists whose work was collected by Dubuffet—now a kind of Art Brut inner circle—are termed Art Brut when they are exhibited and bought and sold in the United States and elsewhere. Dubuffet’s collection has developed into what Outsider art historian Colin Rhodes has called an “alternative orthodoxy” of Outsider art.

As another parent genre to Outsider art, I suggest Folk art, specifically as it was collected and displayed in the United States during the twentieth century. This is an unpopular position among some Outsider art scholars, who take a rather narrow, and historically inaccurate, view of Folk art as a genre and in its definition, thus excluding a link to Outsider art. A conservative view perpetuates an idealistic picture of Folk art that does not fully account for the real array of works that have been shown and sold under that heading. “Folk art” conjures up for these scholars and many others images of pastoral simplicity and pictorial quaintness, passed down

16 Macgregor “Art Brut chez Dubuffet,” 51. Macgregor presses Dubuffet in the 1976 interview on the point of direct visual relationships between his own art and some Art Brut, in particular that of Heinrich Müller. Dubuffet not only denies the influence several times, but makes a spontaneous drawing demonstrating his style against Müller’s. Macgregor recalls: “Dubuffet’s version was simpler, but the drawings were otherwise all but identical. It is one of the regrets of my life that I left that beautiful little comparative drawing on the table.”
17 Dubuffet felt his own artistic project to be anti-cultural, despite the obvious facts that he fetishized materials, persisted in traditional formats of painting, sculpture and printmaking, and generally engaged art history by rejecting it.
18 Rhodes Outsider Art, 14.
19 This view of “Folk art” as strictly describing communal, consistently craft-based traditions, and works demonstrating shared, vernacular visual languages was espoused by Roger Cardinal as well as by Charles Russell in their essays for Self-Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art, ed. Charles Russell (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 68-80 and 3-34.
through generations. The term “Folk art” historically has been associated with communal artistic traditions, or referred to the products of skilled techniques for producing utilitarian or craft objects that are often decorated. Thus, Folk art might include domestic furnishings produced within those traditions and called otherwise “antiques.” I capitalize the term herein, as I do the terms of “Outsider” and “Modern” art, to distinguish this category of art in its distinct incarnation in elite contexts the United States.

The Folk art category, at first, largely signified the activities of white males in the Northeast, with some few activities such as embroidery, quilting, and “Sunday” painting reserved as well for white females of the Northeast. Those textile arts were not considered Folk art worthy of public display until the twentieth century. “Folk art” also connotes social class in this historic formulation. In Europe it implied a lower, peasant class. In the United States, it invoked a laboring, largely Anglo-American, middle class until the mid-twentieth century when African-American artists and Black Folk music began to be appreciated in mainstream circles under the same heading.20 Besides decorated, utilitarian or craft objects (such as weathervanes, dolls, and signs), “Folk art” included from the start of its collectability in the late nineteenth century, amateur paintings by artists who taught themselves. These were primarily portraits by itinerant “limners,” amateur landscapes and still-lifes (often adapted from pattern books or stencils), German Fraktur paintings that stemmed from calligraphy, and more rarely, religious scenes. Because of the dominant Protestantism of the colonial Northeast, religious imagery was largely discouraged.

In the United States by the late 1920s, Folk art came to be measured by originality and idiosyncrasy rather than its apparent conformity to communal standards, by influential tastemakers in New York. Art dealer Edith Halpert and Modernist curator Holger Cahill (active at the Newark Museum and Museum of Modern Art) considered the pieces of Folk art they discovered in dusty antique shops and attics in the Northeast to be individual demonstrations of a collective American genius. That idiosyncrasy supposedly indicated the proto-Modern individualistic subjectivity of the American citizen. Lone objects by anonymous makers, as well as, by contrast, the oeuvres of a few named American Folk art “masters,” were seen to be in dialogue visually with the work of American Modernists like Charles Sheeler and Elie Nadelman. Cahill concluded in an article for *Parnassus* in 1932, “Folk art gives modern art an ancestry.”

Cahill’s Folk art, usually featuring a compositional clarity and simplicity of line, parallels the “naïve art” (*art naïf*) of Europe from the same time period. Henri Rousseau is the most well-known example of a European “naïve” artist, and he was included in the exhibition, “Masters of Popular Painting” (*Maitres populaires de la Réalité*, 1937), which travelled to MoMA from the Museum in Grenoble, via the Petit Palais in Paris. It consisted entirely of work by French *naïf* and American Outsider artists. By the Depression era in the Unites States, the meaning of “Folk art” had shifted again, if slightly. The “folk” in Folk art, in the 1930s referred not to artisanal or vernacular traditions, nor to an ancestry for American Modernism, but called to the spirit of the

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21 At the time these were all white male portrait and landscape painters from the Northeast like Joseph Pickett and Edward Hicks, and required the legitimating discovery by Halpert, Cahill or some other Modernist insider.
22 Holger Cahill, “Folk Art: Its Place in the American Tradition,” *Parnassus* 4, no. 3 (March 1932).
“common man.” Just as the art of the insane had for European Modernists, Folk art in America became an ideological vehicle, as would Outsider art.

There is not a satisfying line to be fixed in between contemporary Folk art and Outsider art made in the United States. We can draw a perforated line between those Folk artists without formal training who made singular, even idiosyncratic versions of images or objects from within traditional art and craft genres -- the unschooled artist carving a particularly abstract equine weathervane, the itinerant limner painting enigmatic portraits in the lineage of Ammi Philips, the amateur painting odd landscapes or bowls of fruit – and those Outsider artists developing a more personally distinct style and iconography. The Outsider is never truly outside of culture, but creates a formal language and iconography for herself and works consistently in that mode. The Outsider artist, working later than the traditional American Folk artist (in the industrialized 20th century as opposed to the pre-industrial Colonial and early Republican eras) and with imagery that is radically non-traditional, with a style assumed more original, often came from a psychically distressed or economically remote class of person, as had Art Brut artists. Race and geography were deciding factors as well in dividing the Folk from the Outsider. American Outsider art came to encompass, over the course of the later twentieth century, art made by African-American artists in the South (alternatively called “Black Folk art”) and “Visionary” artists from across the country, who made art to illustrate the religious visions and prophecies they received.

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Although thriving Outsider art scenes exist now in other places, such as Japan, they are not within the purview of this study. Focused on Outsider art as an Anglophone phenomenon with European (Art Brut) and American (Folk art) precursors, this study begins in Europe in 1947 but lingers after the first chapter in the United States through today. I argue that Outsider art is constantly redefined through exhibition, and importantly, exhibition as an extension of the paradigm of discovery. It is declining as a relevant category in the twenty-first century, as greater idiosyncrasy and less orthodoxy characterizes art making and artists in general. In order to lay this category to rest, my strategy has been to historicize it. To that end, parts of the dissertation read as straightforward reportage, because the facts of this history have not previously been taken down in any comprehensive way. Because I consider Outsider art as a twentieth-century phenomenon, I also bring to this history the theory of some of the century’s mid- and late-century philosophers: Bataille, Riegl, Foucault, Lefebvre, Pollock, Stewart, Derrida, Spivak, Latour, and others. I consider the application of these theories to be “against the grain” of their original intent, and therefore in line with my own feminist and post-colonial investments. This Outsider topic remains an odd one vis-à-vis the academy; and thus it has produced something of an odd dissertation. My tone varies among chapters, as I attempted to write in a style corresponding to the subject matter of each chapter’s case study, whether I deemed that more academic (in the case of the first and second chapters), more vernacular (in the third), or journalistic (in the last). Outsider art, as we shall see, forms a wide rubric for these case studies.

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24 See Outsider Art from Japan, ex.cat, English edition (Haarlem: Museum het Dolhuys, 2012); and Outsider Art, English edition (Kyoto: Shoin International, 1989). The exhibition Souzou: Outsider art from Japan brought 300 works of Japanese Outsider art to the Wellcome Collection in the UK from March 28- June 30, 2013. The word “souzou” translates very roughly from Japanese to “imagination.” All the artists in this show exhibit behavioral, mental or developmental disorders. In addition, they all attend daily or are residents of the special care institution, Aiseikai in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area.

25 A strategy validated to me by comments from AFAM curator Valerie Rousseau in our 2015 interview. Rousseau similarly argued therein for “historicizing” Outsider art, but to different ends. While my goal is to abolish the category going forward as an anachronism, hers is to bolster the category, thus elevating the work of Folk, Outsider and Art Brut artists.
“Outsider art” is still a useful term for works made by cultural outsiders from the early to mid-twentieth century, and works collected by certain cultural insiders in the United States and Europe, but its descriptive capacity for new art is bankrupt. The nomenclature has been the subject of impassioned “term warfare.” But this debate over naming—“self-taught,” “Outsider,” “Visionary,” and otherwise—amounts to a red herring, skirting real issues of canonicity, exploitation and agency. Outsider art publications frequently mention Roger Cardinal’s “coining” of the term “Outsider art,” “as a direct English translation of Jean Dubuffet’s Art Brut in 1972.” That that explanation has been taken as scripture is odd because Brut does not translate to “outside,” nor to “outsider,” but to “raw” or “rough.” Even Dubuffet, in 1976, in his characteristically contradictory way (although agreeing with Cardinal), wrote: “In America, both the untranslatable French term, ‘Art Brut,’ and the exactly synonymous English equivalent, ‘Outsider Art,’ introduced by Roger Cardinal in 1972, have caused even more massive problems, due to confusion…”

Cardinal himself remembers not coining, but selecting the name “Outsider”: Many terms have been used which allude to the creator’s social or mental status—isolate art, maverick art, outsider art, folk art, visionary art, inspired art, schizophrenic art. This seems unsatisfactory in as much as not every creator we want to recognize fits so readily into a social or psychological category. I feel strongly that to label works in a way that stresses the eccentricity or oddness of their maker tends to divert attention from aesthetic impact onto the biographies…. One could look at the factor of artistic independence as of central importance.

Cardinal sought an undeviating English expression of Dubuffet’s anti-cultural Art Brut. He therefore shied away from biographical qualifiers, however ultimately selecting the broad

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26 Jane Kallir writes in “Outsider Art at a Crossroads,” (Raw Vision 43, 2009) “‘Term warfare’ is the tongue in cheek phrase used to refer to the endless quibbling which afflicts the genre, not just with regard to terminology but, more seriously, regarding definitions.”

27 Jean Dubuffet, from his 1976 interview with John Macgregor, 51.

28 Letter to Seymour Rosen, reprinted in excerpt in Maurice Tuchmen’s Introduction to Parallel Visions: Modern Art and Outsider Artists, ex.cat. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1993), 11.
“Outsider,” naming the maker and not the artwork. The option “self-taught,” was, according to Cardinal, not “incisive” enough, and neither was “Art of the Artless.”29 The real, myriad and changing symbolic intentions of this label over the forty years since this apocryphal moment have not yet been traced.30 A few examples of contention are illuminating.

In 2002 a renewed debate was sparked by journalist and critic, Tessa DeCarlo’s advocacy in the New York Times for the sustained use of the term “Outsider.” It was not an exceptional argument. She continued to downplay the role of biography in canonizing Outsiders, and instead cited the recognizable power of the artwork itself. She argued in highly subjective terms that “Outsider” was the only term to describe this work. The article used language at once vague and transcendent, a problem endemic in Outsider studies. Subjective words peppered the very short text: “beautiful,” “moving,” “intellectually and spiritually nourishing.”31 Jennifer Borum responded to De Carlo, also in the New York Times, to argue her point that the continued use of the blanket term “Outsider” was “retrograde” and “primitivism revisited.”32

This infighting over nomenclature continues today with the collector, filmmaker, and entrepreneur James Brett of the nomadic Museum of Everything, for one example. That traveling exhibition of Outsider art is Brett’s collection, now a “registered British charity,” exhibited semi-annually at various locations such as London, Paris, Venice and Moscow since 2010. It has become a merchandising machine.33 Brett has argued persistently for the elimination of the term “Outsider,” which “irks” him, despite his collection comprising of the most canonical Outsider

29 Ibid.
32 Borum, “Labels that Mislead.”
33 At the Outsider Art Fair in 2012, the booth for the Museum of Everything displayed no artworks. Instead it offered for sale books, magnets and other trinkets with the institution’s branding as well as reproductions of Outsider art in the collection.
artists including Henry Darger, Justin McCarthy and Judith Scott. He prefers “non-traditional” to term this artwork. “Call it art brut, self taught, outsider art, what you will, these names mean very little and they rarely do justice to the astonishing range of private and personal imagery, made often by those in the most difficult circumstances. It is like stepping into another world,” observes Brett, reiterating the distance that spares him remuneration to “non-traditional” artists whose artworks he reproduces on countless trinkets for sale in his gift shops.

“Glimmers of Genius:” Qualifying Outsiders as Outsiders

One of the primary assumptions of Outsider artists is of “pure,” non-commercial intent. Who is to say if a mentally ill, autistic, socially isolated, uneducated or other person ever creates art with no desire for it to be seen or shown or shared? Henry Darger (1892-1973), Gayleen Aiken (1934-2005), and Stephen Palmer (1882-1965), all deceased American Outsider artists with work in current market circulation, all signed their works with evident authorial intent, sometimes including the words “designer” or even “artist.” By contrast, Judith Scott (American, 1943-2005), came closer to this non-intent to circulate in never expressing an interest in her success. Suffice it to say that professional ambition varies on an individual basis, but a dubious non-intent to sell and/or publicize does not support a basis for the category.

Another of the primary insider assumptions about Outsider art is that in order to develop a visual language considered “self-referential” or an “individualistic visual account of the world,” as Marcus Davies wrote in his Masters thesis “On Outsider Art and the Margins of the

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Mainstream” in 2007. Outsider artists must suffer lives of extreme isolation. Many did and do. Isolation was often, in the early decades of the twentieth century in Europe, to come through mental illness compounded by institutionalization. Many of the works of “asylum art” that were collected by psychiatrists in Europe and the United States were made by schizophrenics. Around the turn of the twentieth century, some asylum psychiatrists in Western Europe became interested in collecting and publishing the work of their patients. They emphasized formal and stylistic analysis over diagnostic potential, in a reversal of the nineteenth century model. Hans Prinzhorn, an Austrian psychiatrist, can be credited for popularizing asylum art or the “art of the insane” as a product of the zeitgeist. During the first two decades of the twentieth century in Europe, contemporaries of Prinzhorn practiced Spiritualism and Expressionism to supplant what Wassily Kandinsky called “the nightmare of materialism” that held the “awakening soul still in its grip.” It was the possibility of extracting truth through art, and the ferreting out of human impulse in its purest state that drove the Expressionists, as is well known, to imitate the art of the insane as well as children’s and Folk art. They initiated local primitivism imbued with the universalizing goals of Modernism. Prinzhorn summed it up well when he wrote with Expressionist urgency in 1922: “we speak of a tendency, a compulsion, a need for expression of

37 Schizophrenia or dementia praecox effects roughly one percent of the world population and is a clinical disorder diagnosed by a set of symptoms and behaviors. It was more commonly diagnosed in the early twentieth century, although less understood and less treatable than it is today. For an overview, see Assen Jablensky, M.D., ”The diagnostic concept of schizophrenia: its history, evolution and future prospects,” Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience 12, no. 3 (September 2010): 271-287.
38 The term is straightforward here, meaning the art made by patients in asylums.
39 See Georget’s De la folie of 1820 for an example of the nineteenth century drive to classification. His nosologies relied on physiognomic indicators like voice and facial features. Cesare Lombroso specifically addressed the “degeneration” he found in the art of the insane in his diagnostic study of 107 patients, not all of whom made art, in Genius and Madness (Milan, 1864), translated into English in 1891 and French in 1889.
40 Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art (London: Tate, 2006 [Munich: Piper Verlag, 1911]), 6.
the psyche, and thereby denote those compulsive vital processes which are not subordinated to any outside purpose but directed solely and self-sufficiently toward their own realization.”41

This is not to imply a simplistic nor monolithic relationship between Expressionism and the field of Outsider art, nor to imply an innate resemblance between the art of schizophrenics or children and Folk art. These all may share, in varying degrees, elements of abstraction, interiority, crude or brash imagery, and exist outside of mimetic traditions. Paul Klee responded to children’s art. Kandinsky liked the roughness of German folk woodcuts. The first volume of his Der Blaue Reiter (1912) illustrated children’s drawings with tribal, medieval and Expressionist reproductions and Bavarian folk art. But children’s art would be excluded from the Outsider realm beginning with Jean Dubuffet’s Art Brut in the 1940s. Kirchner looked to the compulsive energy of asylum artists before his own mental decline into morphine, alcohol and suicide. Expressionist work would be grouped again with the art of the insane and “Jewish” art, infamously, in the 1937 Nazi exhibition of “degenerate art,” Entartete Kunst. Sander Gilman, author of the seminal Seeing the Insane (1982) explains in “The Mad Man as Artist: Medicine, History and Degenerate Art,” that the Nazi answer “to the question of the creativity of the insane was to deny it, and thus to reduce the insane to a subhuman level, to deny them the status of a ‘cultural entity,” and eventually to murder them.”42

Besides the Expressionists, much has been written also about the Surrealists’ interest in madness and the art of the insane, from Breton’s dalliance with the mentally ill in his novella Nadja (1928) to Dali’s “paranoid critical” method that intentionally conjured paranoia’s

misrecognitions of real sensory input. 43 Freud and psychoanalysis were major influences for the Surrealists, and Breton himself had experience in counseling shell-shocked patients during World War I. His First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924) specified automatism as a primary technique for accessing the unconscious. Most importantly, then, the Surrealists emulated with automatic writing and drawing a state of abandon they admired in madness, with only a few associates--Antonin Artaud and Unica Zürn being of note—actually experiencing such trauma. Thus Surrealism framed madness as a tactic to reveal subconscious personal truth and universal creativity.

The Surrealists were aware of Dr. Hans Prinzhorn’s popular Bildnerei des Geisteskranken, some via Max Ernst, who could read the original German. Many of the Surrealists were in contact during the 1930s with psychologists such as Dr. Ferdiere at Rodez asylum, whose ward, the playwright and artist Artaud, was associated with the movement. Surrealists spent time visiting asylums as so-called “parasites” in France and Switzerland. They also collected art of the insane. Clifford Bowden, a biographer of Breton, reminds us, however, that after years of experimenting with states touching madness, even Breton is said to have acknowledged “the presence of conscious elements that defeated the purpose”44 of the Surrealist experiments with automatism. As Roger Cardinal explained: “clearly the Surrealist creator was

43 For an account of the later intersections of Surrealism and asylum art, see Sarah Wilson, “From the Asylum to the Museum: Marginal Art in Paris and New York, 1938-68,” in Parallel Visions: Modern Art and Outsider Artists, ex.cat. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1993), 120-149. In 1929 a large commercial exhibition of asylum art was held in Paris, titled Exposition des artistes malades. Paul Eluard and Andre Breton were both buyers at this show. In 2009 The Prinzhorn Museum in Heidelberg mounted an exhibition, Surrealism and Madness, which brought together the extant Prinzhorn Collection works of the thirty-six originally borrowed for the 1929 Paris exposition. From that catalog, see Ingrid von Beyme, “Asylum Art as the ‘True Avant-Garde?’ The Surrealist Reception of ‘Mad Art,’” in Surrealismus und Wahnsinn/Surrealism and Madness, ed. von Beyme and Thomas Röske, exh. cat., (Sammlung Prinzhorn, Heidelberg, 2009), 154-168 (bi-lingual catalogue).

44 Clifford Browder, André Breton: Arbiter of Surrealism, (Geneva: Librarie DROZ, 1967), 16. The full quote reads: “The practice of automatic writing was not, however, viewed by Breton without reservations. His own initial immoderate use of it had led to disturbing hallucinatory experiences. Furthermore, he detected at times the presence of conscious elements that defeated the purpose.”
expected not to flounder about as an object of delirium but to retain the poise of the stable subject.\textsuperscript{45}

Although touted by the Expressionists and Surrealists, the idea of unadulterated creativity arguably finds its roots in the Romantic collusion of genius and madness of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{46} Victor Hugo and John Martin are potent examples. The work of documenting these European roots was done by John Macgregor in his \textit{Discovery of the Art of the Insane} (1972),\textsuperscript{47} a book that has become a touchstone for Outsider studies. Therein Macgregor detailed the collecting and artistic activities of psychologists, Expressionists, Surrealists, Jean Dubuffet and others as they relate to asylum art through the mid-twentieth century. This dissertation receives and builds upon Macgregor’s work, but with emphasis shifted onto the importance of exhibitions to this history, and the United States, and with a more critical point of view.\textsuperscript{48}

As psychiatry, art therapy and antipsychotic pharmaceuticals developed over the course of the mid-twentieth century, to treat psychic ailments, artwork produced during psychic breaks diminished. Some insiders, like Michel Thevôz, director of Dubuffet’s Collection de l’Art Brut in Lausanne from 1976 until Lucienne Peiry became director in 2001, joined the international

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Roger Cardinal, “Surrealism and the Paradigm of the Creative Subject,” \textit{Parallel Visions} (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1996), 97.
\item Although Ellen Handler Spitz’s review of Macgregor (\textit{Art Bulletin} 74, no. 2 [June 1992]: 346-348) is entirely positive, some other scholars take issue with an intrinsic finality in MacGregor’s famous narrative: “If the art of the insane was positioned to enable a radical redefinition of the visual forms of progress, the story told about its discovery nevertheless replicates familiar and seductive narratives toward an enlightened appreciation. This teleology, in which authors such as Réja and Prinzhorn are precursors whose writings lead inevitably to surrealism’s valuing of the art of the insane in the 1920s and 1930s and finally to Dubuffet’s definition of art brut in the late 1940s, may very well constitute a further instance where madness is silenced.” From Allison Morehead, “The Musée de la folie: collecting and exhibiting chez les fous” \textit{Journal of the History of Collections} 23, no. 1 (2011): 102.
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anti-psychiatry movement. While many proponents of the anti-psychiatry movement cited concerns with psychiatry’s uneven power dynamic (between doctor and patient) and the inhumane tactics historically used for psychiatric treatment (imprisonment, electric shock therapy), Thévoz’s and Dubuffet’s point of critique had more to do with psychiatry’s interruption of the raw creative impulse through the imposition of what they perceived as mind-numbing pharmaceuticals. Other insiders, like John Macgregor, began to seek Outsider artists among a population with “isolating” developmental disorders and genetic, social or learning disabilities. One such artist whom he studied was Judith Scott, whose wrapped fiber, cocoon-like sculptures seemed to numerous onlookers to concretize isolation. Institutionalized with Down Syndrome for decades, her “muteness” was emphasized, despite the fact that she communicated through sounds and signs with her twin sister and caretakers. Today, with the rampant rise of diagnoses of autism, autistic artists such as twenty-five-year-old Justin Cahna and mathematical savant George Widener form a new generation of Outsiders who qualify as “isolated” because of neurological disorders that impair their social interactions. Roger Cardinal has written that, “Art has indeed proven to be the key to unlock the autistic citadel.” He adds that many autistic artists have “made their mark thanks to the expressive impetus of their drawings,” while concluding hyperbolically that, “To glimpse their alternative modes of outlook and understanding is to peer into the dark glass of Otherness and divine a wondrous, if sometimes tragic, coherence.”


50 See excerpts on the website for the still forthcoming book from Judith Scott’s twin, Joyce Scott, EnTWINed: Echoes from the Silent Life of Judith Scott available at http://judithandjoycescott.com; and John MacGregor, Metamorphosis: The Fiber Art of Judith Scott (Oakland: Creative Growth Center, 1999). To watch Scott creating her artworks as well as communicating with the camera and peers, see Betsy Bayha’s independently produced 2006 documentary film, Outsider: The Life and Art of Judith Scott. Bayha is a former PBS documentary producer with writing credits for the Discovery Channel. The Brooklyn opened a show of Scott’s sculptures titled Bound/Unbound in October 2014.

Canha and Widener both frustrate received assumptions of Outsider artists as extremely isolated and without professional intent. Appearing at gallery exhibitions and art fairs, they are both vocal advocates for their own talent and passion in making art. For these twenty-first century artists, we should relinquish the “Outsider” designation where it seems strained. With Widener and Canha, it may be the compulsive aspect of their work that interests insiders and links them for collectors to the obsessive and/or compulsive works by schizophrenics. Canha is constantly drawing and Widener compulsively makes strings of numbers into calendars. Compulsion, although common to schizophrenics, the developmentally disabled, and autistics, is a neurosis that afflicts many people who are otherwise relatively mentally sound.

If there exists an aesthetic of Outsider art, it has been related to an aesthetics of obsession and compulsion that features repeated lines, forms or figures, ranging from ordered to wildly expressive; hallucinatory forms with contour rivalry; naïve or childlike abstraction; grotesque depictions of the body; *bricolaged* material; shallow and unrealistic space; *horror vacui* and *glossolalia*. Roger Cardinal’s list in “Toward an Outsider Aesthetic” is longer:

- dense ornamentation, compulsively repeated patterns, metamorphic accumulations, an appearance of instinctive though wayward symmetry, configurations which occupy an equivocal ground *in between* the figurative and the decorative, other configurations which hesitate between representation and enigmatic calligraphy, or which seek the perfect blending of image and word.

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52 I met Justin Canha twice socially. The first time he was drawing quietly alone in an ante-room during the opening of a gallery exhibition of his work at Ricco/Maresca gallery *(Justin Canha: Carnivorous, and Other Exotic Plants, May 19-June 18, 2011)*, and the second time he was with his mother at the 2012 Outsider Art Fair, also at a table doodling. He expressed, at the gallery, that he preferred to be away from the crowd, but was eager to talk about drawing and his favorite cartoon characters. Canha contributes to his own website at [www.justincanhaart.com](http://www.justincanhaart.com), and takes speaking engagements, such as at an Arts and Wellness conference at Montclair State University in March 2013. I heard George Widener speak to a crowd about his art very clearly and seemingly comfortably at an opening for the exhibition of his work at Ricco/Maresca gallery in 2012. In a video produced by John Michael Kohler Arts Center (Wisconsin) for the exhibition *Hiding Places: Memory in the Arts* *(June 26 -- December 30, 2011)*, he describes himself as “high functioning calendar savant” with “some other problems.”

It is true that each entry in my or Cardinal’s list could likewise describe the work of certain Modern, avant-garde or Post-Modern artists such as: Klee’s enigmatic calligraphy, Masson’s metamorphic accumulations, Agnes Martin’s repeated patterns, Louise Bourgeois’ grotesque depictions of body parts, Mike Kelly’s *horror vacui*, or Edward Ruscha’s blending of image and word. For that matter, a compulsion to create plagues or drives many mainstream artists. These parallels or interconnections betray, in part, the formal and ideological, and assumedly one-sided dialogue that Modernism has had with Outsider art, but also a bevy of formal coincidences and parallel evolutions.54

On this point of formal similarity, Arthur Danto opined in *The Nation* in 1997 that “the history of Modernism is a history of appropriations,”55 and of Outsider art, that it fell prey to Modernists who mined its morphologies--which is to presuppose an Outsider aesthetic. He explained that even Dubuffet, with all of his bombast about anti-cultural art, “appropriated the outward look rather than the internal motivation--the ‘expressive plastic form’ in the art psychotics produce--which puts him, after all, among chameleons and parrots.”56 One wonders whether there is a critical mass of these traits that pushes a work into an Outsider aesthetic. No accumulation of these formal traits, however, could ever make a Louise Bourgeois sculpture or any Paul Klee painting a work of Outsider art. The formal criteria, then, just like the criteria of “pure” intent, isolation, and mental illness, ultimately fail to adequately characterize Outsider art.

Jennifer Borum presented a paper to the College Art Association’s annual conference in Dallas in 2008 on Outsider art (including *Art Brut* and American Folk art) that touched upon this subject. In a reversal of Danto’s argument, for Borum, Outsider art was desirable for Modern

54 While Modernism is generally understood to have evolved, Outsider art “evolves” only within the oeuvre of a single artist, or through the changing tastes of the market and institutional insiders.
56 Ibid.
artists who drew not only morphological, but convenient ideological comparisons between their own work and that of Outsider artists in order to advance their own ideologies. She reasoned that Outsider art, more broadly, became a testament to the visual and philosophical experimentation of Modernists in the United States as well. That assertion, by connecting European *Art Brut* and American Folk art through Modernist artists and curators who exploited its actual and supposed originality, would reinforce the connections between *Art Brut* and Folk art in the United States that I hope to draw out in this dissertation under the heading of Outsider art.

For her part, Borum discusses aspects of the above conflation under the heading “Self-taught.” The phrase embeds another of the usual assumptions about Outsider artists: that they should lack academic and artistic sophistication. Where the Outsider artist is not mentally ill, her lack of formal schooling or training may stand in as a form of qualification. Specifically for Southern African-American (*cum* Outsider) artists such as Bill Traylor, who was born into slavery (Alabama, 1854-1949) or William Hawkins, who had a third-grade education (Kentucky/Ohio, 1895-1990), this aspect has been defining of their Outsider status, when combined with their poverty, the advanced age at which they began making art, and rural living. The term “Self-taught” may not accurately capture, though, the extremes of intellectual deprivation that Outsider art collectors have tended to seek. “Self-taught” may very well conjure

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57 Borum said specifically: “European *Art Brut* and American Folk Art, twin histories of marginal art that together form the hybrid field known as ‘self-taught art,’ were both modernist inventions. European psychiatrists sympathetic to German Expressionism on the one hand, and American curators deeply committed to abstraction, specifically Cubism, on the other. They chose from artists on the margins who exemplified their beliefs and tastes, and marked them as masters.” From Jennifer Borum, “The Self-Taught Artists and Other Modernist Myths,” paper presented as part of the *Art History Open Session: Self-Taught and Outsider Art Today* at the Annual Meeting of the College Art Association in Dallas, 2008.

hours spent alone at a task with no master but the self, but auto-didacticism usually means that a person is learning in part from some established canon.

It is tempting to conclude that biographic profiles including some sensational, isolating, impoverished or pitiable circumstances serve to brand artists as Outsiders. An Outsider artist’s biography is indeed more important in the marketplace than a mainstream artist’s because it tends to actually justify rather than merely complementing the value of a work, although this is lately changing. Folklore scholar Gary Allen Fine put it simply when he wrote of Outsider art collectors: “Collectors buy stories that they share with visitors when they display their work.”

Fine has been most incisive in exploring the importance of biography to Outsider art, probing “personal legitimacy as part of the market for self-taught art as a means of valorizing aesthetic authenticity, sponsored by the cultural authority of elites.” Outsider art’s function as a foil to the “cultural authority of elites,” as Fine puts it, becomes its most defining feature. In his, “Crafting Authenticity: The Validation of Identity in Self-Taught Art,” Fine calls out this biographical tourism, and relies heavily on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social capital.

If an artist’s intent, isolation, mental health, and formal output cannot be relied upon to define Outsider art, then one might point to an “unacknowledged class issue,” as Lucy Lippard did, writing in 1994. This is rarely made explicit. A systematic evaluation of the social and economic class backgrounds of canonical Outsider artists has not been performed, to my knowledge, and is outside of the scope of this dissertation. Besides Lippard, others have alluded

60 Ibid. Even as Fine critically wields Pierre Bourdieu’s axiom from Rules of Art (Stanford University Press, 1996), about the need of a “creator of the creator,” he follows that line with a section called “Uncovering the Field.” Therein Fine oddly details his five years of “ethnographic” observations of self-taught artists, his scholarly residencies, and each art fair and event he attended, noting the number of times.
to such a class disparity, if obliquely. For example, Colin Rhodes wrote that “difference is not merely marked by exclusion from the mainstream of the professional (western) art world, but also by exclusion from, or marginalization in relation to, the very culture that supports the market for mainstream art.” It is true that artists from marginalized groups are often discovered (they are “discovered” only by insiders, being often “known” to their communities), and thus legitimized for the mainstream. However, it is the remarkable foregrounding of that discovery narrative to the point of superseding the voice of the artist that becomes a defining feature of Outsider art. As with any exercise of Primitivism, insiders cite the need for translation and insert themselves as interpreters-- and all the more forcefully so, since the Outsider is presumably geographically nearby, and not creating art in some exoticized subaltern state, as the maker of the formerly-held “Primitivist” object had been.

Beyond the Pale: Discovering the Outsider nearby

The Outsider market represents a second-tier niche of the broader art market, where the prices and the renown are downsized. Nowadays, collectors of Outsider art can purchase masterworks by, for instance, Bill Traylor, for twenty thousand dollars apiece, and the most coveted of all Outsider works by Martín Ramírez, his large mixed media pieces, sell for less than half a million dollars --no small price, but less than many mainstream masterpieces in oil. For example, Gerald Roy, in an interview promoting the 2014 exhibition of his eccentric quilt collection remembers prospecting in the 1960s with his late partner, Paul Pilgrim: “The first time we saw an Amish quilt hanging on a clothes line in Pennsylvania, we asked, ‘What is a Josef Albers doing hanging on a clothes line?’ We started thinking, we can’t afford Albers

63 Rhodes Outsider Art, 15. Emphasis mine.
64 One can argue whether quilts may be discussed as Outsider art, but the makers, in this case, are similarly anonymized and absent.
paintings as much as we’d like to, but we can afford to buy an Albers quilt.”65 Because of the traditional absence of the Outsider artist in the machinations of the market, collectors become the first to offer interpretations of unarticulated meaning within a work. For example, Gene Epstein, author and co-owner of the Epstein/Powell Gallery in New York, writing for the American Folk Art Museum about Justin McCarthy, an American Outsider artist, revealed that for him “many technical shortcomings [in McCarthy’s work]… have the further effect of arousing the viewer’s sense of creativity. Is, for instance, the painting not quite finished? I’ll finish it for him in my mind.”66

Because the primary qualifying characteristic of Outsider artists historically has been their cultural and/or mental isolation, the cultural insider who serves as “discoverer” typically plays a crucial, sometimes paternal and sometimes exploitative role. The rubric of Outsider art, then, relies on the absence of the artist from both the flow of the mainstream art marketplace and the constructed lineages of art history. Early on this meant the artists in question were probably asyled, but the category of Outsider art has come to include art made not only by the mentally ill and but also by the otherwise disenfranchised, poor, uneducated, elderly, and/or physically and genetically disabled. A narrative of discovery is the most important factor in legitimizing each Outsider artist’s passage into public visibility. Because there is no discourse among Outsiders themselves, with no manifestos and none of the debate typical of avant-garde artists, the field does not conform to the standard paradigm of the artistic ‘movement,’ but coheres instead through a history of exhibition and collecting practices: so I mean to argue. Collecting of

65 From an interview with Geoff Edgers, “Gerald Roy’s Quilt Collection Covers the Spectrum,” Boston Globe, 3 April 2014. Roy does not refer to an actual ‘Albers quilt,’ but to the visual affinities between modernist abstraction and quilt design that, importantly, preceded it. This formal resemblance formed the --somewhat troubling -- basis of the Boston MFA’s exhibition, Quilts and Color (April 6 – July 27, 2014), as it did the basis for earlier, and so criticized, quilt shows at the Whitney Museum in 1971 and 2002.
Outsider work becomes a treasure hunt, where souvenirs from contact with the abnormal—cast as capable of pure artistry—are returned to normative realms by cultural insiders.

Susan Stewart, a poet and literary critic who theorized the exotic in the 1990s, described the “souvenir” as an object whose meaning is completed by the possessor: “To have a souvenir of the exotic is to possess both a specimen and a trophy; on the one hand, the object must be marked as exterior and foreign, on the other it must be marked as arising out of the immediate experience of its possessor.” Although she refers to an exotic object from a far away destination, like a painted coconut or miniature monument, thinking of the Outsider object as a souvenir helps explain the stakes in construing it as illegible, in need of interpretation or stewardship. Stewart continues: “…the souvenir must remain impoverished and partial so that it can be supplemented by a narrative discourse… We cannot be proud of someone else’s souvenir.” For most of the twentieth century artists with physical and mental disabilities, developmental and genetic disorders, the elderly (although excluding the very young), the uneducated, the poor or somehow otherwise disenfranchised, did not have access to the flows of art history or the market. The troubling aspects of this persistent grouping of artists with vastly different maladies, abilities and biographies into this Outsider category are now more apparent. Outsider objects share narratives of discovery that characterize the appeal of the exotic. Historically those “sane” persons who venture willingly into conversation with the disturbed or the poor or their art in the interest of understanding become witnesses, spies and self-styled translators. By making the unknown known, bringing it into renown, they undertake to make masters out of the isolated.

68 Ibid.
Exhibitions of Outsider Art

A history of Outsider art exhibitions should afford a more empirically grounded and nuanced view of this genre than we have accomplished to date through abstract theorizing—a view that resists the tendency to define Outsider art monolithically, transcendentally, or negatively as “not-Modernist” and “not-popular culture.” Although empirically grounded in documents, images and oral descriptions of exhibitions, this study also draws from theories of exhibition and collecting, identity and post-colonial theory, and post-structuralism. All of these share an attention to power and signs, and the power of signs. What do Outsider objects mean once they are collected, exhibited, institutionalized and circulated? Sharon MacDonald, writing in an early volume of museum studies in the 1990s, was correct in lamenting: “The assumptions, rationales, compromises, and accidents that lead to a finished exhibition are generally hidden from public view: they are tidied away along with the cleaning equipment, the early drafts of text and the artefacts for which no place could be found.”69 Although we may be encouraged by the increased transparency of curatorial practices, her fundamental question remains essential to museums and to post-colonial studies alike, for she asks: “Who is empowered or disempowered by certain modes of display?”70 As Bruce Altshuler has outlined elsewhere, in two volumes on museum studies, *Salon to Biennial* (2008) and *Biennials and Beyond* (2013), exhibitions can be positioned within art history as well as within broader contemporary politics through analysis of exhibition documents and images.71 However, neither of Altshuler’s volumes, in their survey of exhibitions spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, touches upon the exhibitions treated here related to *Art Brut* and Outsider Art. He considers exclusively major international group

70 Ibid., 4.
shows of successive iterations of modernism. To delve into smaller and commercial exhibitions of *Art Brut* and Outsider art at length with this dissertation, brings nuance and lacking historical depth. I use comparative studies of mainstream exhibitions to illuminate those paradigmatic Outsider shows. My stakes in this project are to participate in the folding of contemporary Outsider art into contemporary art. Beyond that, I historicize the twentieth-century Outsider genre so that we might refer to it less ambiguously. The exhibitions selected range from major institutional presentations to backyard displays. They share a degree of official imprimatur, whether it is the relationship to a dealer, the discovery by a curator, or their curation by a national art preservation organization.

No scholarly work to date has focused solely on the history of the collection and presentation of Outsider art. Elizabeth Stillman’s recent *A Kind of Archaeology* (2011) reveals a record of folk art collecting. Roger Cardinal’s *Outsider Art* (1972), Michel Thévoz’s *Art Brut* (1976), and Colin Rhodes’ *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (2000) are geared to a wider public, and rehearse received explanations of the genre, complemented by illustrated surveys of work from the Outsider canon. Monographs on Outsider artists are popular, since being treated as isolated cases generally suits artists who can rarely be connected to one another, unless they share space in an institution or workshop. Limited work has been done toward documenting current controversies and developments occurring in the Outsider market, although David Macglagan’s *Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace* (2010) manages to draw upon both psychoanalysis and economics to that end.

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73 Michel Thévoz, *Art Brut* (New York: Rizzoli, 1976); Rhodes *Outsider Art*.
74 Macglagan *Margins to the Marketplace.*
Marcus Davies identified four existing paradigms in a section of his 2005 thesis,\(^75\) for the display of Outsider art, conceding the power of exhibition in outlining the slippery parameters of the genre. These paradigms will form a resource in my history of exhibitions, where they may be applied, combined, amended and supplemented. Recognizing “Biographical Emphasis,” as “the most prevalent tendency in the presentation of outsider art,”\(^76\) Davies cites early examples of Dubuffet’s *Art Brut* shows and Sidney Janis’ 1942 *They Taught Themselves* at MoMA. The producers of these exhibitions, and others of the ilk, foregrounded artists’ biographies like “laundry lists of tribulation,”\(^77\) in wall text, press and publication, often with good intentions of pointing out remarkable resilience. Many insiders have been wary, understandably, of this approach for its inherent sensationalism and uneven mining of the biographies of Outsiders.\(^78\)

Martín Ramírez’s biographers Kristin and Victor Espinosa point out a paradox in the biographical emphasis, writing, “Ramírez’s case clearly illustrates how in the outsider art field there is a contradictory relationship between the exploitation of biographical narratives on one hand and the lack of systematic research about the life of the artist on the other.”\(^79\) Little was known about Ramírez’s life beyond his institutionalization before their thorough efforts. It can be argued, on the other hand, that biographical information, where accurate and complete “may be employed as a powerful tool in reorienting public perception by recasting Outsider art as a

\(^75\) Davies Thesis.

\(^76\) Ibid., 11.

\(^77\) Ibid.


response to social disparities within the world art large.” In other words, the intensely personal can be political. Outsider art, according to Gary Allen Fine, is “identity art.”

Davies’ next category is “Formal Emphasis.” A formal approach to Outsider art can drive aesthetic appreciation of artworks on their own merit, but runs a double risk. First, it forcefully elides the contexts within which the Outsider objects were made, perhaps inadvertently deeming those contexts too low or messy--unfit for institutional reproduction. Anonymous Folk objects were displayed at the Newark Museum and at the Museum of Modern Art under Holger Cahill solely for their aesthetic merit and without any contextual information. A colonial equine weathervane may look striking against white walls, but it also relates to blacksmithing as a trade, to the barn it sat atop, the hay that barn stored, and the owners who shoveled it. In two exhibitions of quilts at the Whitney Museum, Abstract Design in American Quilts (1971) and The Quilts of Gee’s Bend (2002), American quilts were shown as feats of abstraction, at the expense of contextual and historical background.

Secondly, with a formal paradigm, exhibitors run the risk of positing a fictitious group aesthetic based on circumstantial affinities and empty formal comparisons. The critical backlash against MoMA’s 1984 ‘Primitivism’ in Twentieth Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern was instructive, highlighting the dangers of drawing visual similitude between Modern and ‘Primitive’ art without sufficient contextualization, or even understanding, of the latter.

80 Davies Thesis, 12.
81 Fine “Crafting Authenticity.”
83 Arthur Danto warned in “Defective Affinities” (The Nation, 1 December 1984: 149), of an inherent cultural imperialism in the show: “There is no other way to describe wrestling into contiguity a Miro and an Eskimo mask. Under formalist principles, all works are brothers and contemporaries, but at the cost of sacrificing whatever makes them interesting or vital or important.” For criticism of the exhibition based on its Modernist content see Hilton Kramer, “The Primitivism Conundrum,” New Criterion 3 (1984): 1. The museum produced a two-volume, nearly
The Corcoran Gallery’s landmark *Black Folk Art in America 1930-1980* (1982), although its purview was much smaller, was likewise criticized for its curators’ attempts to bring together disparate objects proving a ‘Black Folk style” and even an iconography related to African aesthetic survivals in diaspora. Snake imagery and sculptural abstraction were given as examples. Although some biographical information about the artists was provided, it inadvertently emphasized isolation and the distance between artists, instead of uniting them with a unified style, as was the goal. Mary Schmidt Campbell’s review of the exhibition for *Art Journal* posed, “But if we are to understand these artists as more than ephemeral examples of Black American exotica, we need to know the details of their cultural traditions.” 84 She suggests the tradition of storytelling as one organizing paradigm.

Although critical and curatorial opinion around the exhibition of Outsider art has been divided mostly along the biographical versus formal arguments, Davies suggests as well an “Appropriative Emphasis.” It describes exhibitions focusing on Modernist appropriations of Outsider art, in order to fit the Outsider body of work into a pre-existing Modernist genealogy. The approach is emblematized by the important show, *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art* (1992) held at the L.A. County Museum and, it would appear, by the upcoming exhibition being planned by Lynne Cooke for the National Gallery. As the name suggests, *Parallel Visions* posited various Modernist movements as supplemented by Outsider art. The exhibition catalog states “The focus of *Parallel Visions*, a research project of comparable scope [to their earlier *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (1986)], is on the modern artists drawn to, and influenced by, the art of “outsiders,” or, as we refer to them, compulsive

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visionaries.” Although Davies believes that “in exposing this propensity for appropriation, the exhibit succeeds in undermining the myth of high art’s impenetrable self-obsessions,” as Daniel Preziosi had believed as well in writing for the catalog that the exhibition “restores heterogeneity and multiplicity,” I see only a one-way flow of influence, reinforcing Modernism’s dominance and legitimizing power.

A model related to Davies’ final, so-called “Paternalistic” approach was tried, a few years after Davies’ writing. This mode acknowledges a disparity in power between many Outsiders and cultural insiders, putting the onus of ethical display (and compensation, one assumes) onto curators and dealers. A truly paternalistic approach, one encouraging ongoing and respectful relationships between gallery and artist, is in practice at contemporary artists’ workshops like Contemporary Growth Center (Oakland) and Fountain Gallery (New York). An interdisciplinary study, little-known outside of Australia, was conducted in 2010 by the University of Melbourne in conjunction with the Cunningham Dax Collection. Funded by the Australian Research Council, _Framing Marginalised Art: Developing an ethical multidimensional framework for exhibiting the creative works by people who experienced mental illness and/or psychological trauma_, has important promise for the ethical treatment of artists with mental illness and those scholars and curators involved in making their work public. A team comprised of an art historian, a philosopher, a museum professional and a psychiatrist assembled to construct a theoretical ethical model for the exhibition of the art of the mentally ill.

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88 The following multi-author study, published as Karen Jones, et al., _Framing Marginalised Art: Developing an ethical multidimensional framework for exhibiting the creative works by people who experienced mental illness and/or psychological trauma_ (University of Melbourne Custom Book Centre, 2010) cited Davies.
That model was then implemented as the exhibition *The Art of Making Sense*, at the Cunningham Dax Collection, itself situated on the campus of a mental health facility. Viewed as historical artifact, medical record and artwork, art produced in an institution must be multivalent. Their report stressed that no single perspective can classify objects made under circumstances of mental illness, thus necessitating their multidisciplinary approach toward an ethics of display. The Melbourne/ Cunningham Dax group developed the following evaluative topics for their post-exhibition review: “Overall perceptions of the exhibition;” “Perceptions of the venue layout and curation;” “Key messages conveyed through the exhibition;” “Changes in perception toward [Outsider art];” “Level of disturbing content and its impact;” and “Ethical considerations.” They will be taken as loose guidelines for the evaluation of exhibitions within this dissertation, along with “Audience profile and response,” “Marketing and Communications,” and “Critical response.”

Each chapter in my dissertation focuses on a particular instance that will stand as a case study within a typology of institutions, while engaging comparative sites. To prepare these diverse chapters, I consulted a notably broad range of resources and archives, from clippings stuffed in manila envelopes to sophisticated, climate-controlled collections, and located in places as diverse as Appalachia, New York City and Switzerland. More specifically, for Chapter One, I worked in the archive of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne, and spent time analyzing the installation, and interviewing the curator and director at the museum there over several visits. I interviewed as well, Dubuffet’s professional heir, the distinguished curator Michel Thévoz. My work for Chapter Two centered in New York City, in the text and image archives of the American Folk Art Museum, which were graciously opened to me at my convenience, and in the archive of the Museum of Modern Art. This research in particular was supported by a
Knickerbocker archival research grant and also included work in the digital collection of the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of American Art. Field research for Chapter Three took me to Outsider art environments in the American South, where I worked through and organized an informal archive of documents in boxes at Paradise Garden in northern Georgia, and interviewed caretakers at Kenny Hill’s sculpture Garden in southern Louisiana. I worked in the archive of Sanford Smith, the founder of the Outsider Art Fair for Chapter Four, and interviewed several of that art fair’s creators. I also made two site visits to the Creative Growth Center in Oakland, and interviewed two of its curators over several years. Living in Boston for much of this writing, I made use of the Harvard Art Library as a visiting researcher, as well as the Fine Art non-circulating collection of the Boston Public Library. I was supported remotely by archivists in image archives at LACMA and at the Walker Art Center, who graciously provided exhibition images and scanned documents for me to analyze. The chapters of the dissertation can be summarized as follows:

Jean Dubuffet’s exhibition of L’art brut préféré aux arts culturels with the Compagnie de L’Art Brut at Galerie René Drouin in 1949, and smaller shows at the same venue in 1947-8, initiated the genre. For Dubuffet, insanity represented a mode of revolt against culture, and his motivations for collecting Art Brut seem to have been part careerist and part sincere. For all his talk of the liberating possibilities of Art Brut, and for all his refusal of Art Brut as equivalent to insane art, Dubuffet’s exhibitions re-inscribed the conditions of asylum, alternately closing and opening unto the public. They did this through tactics of darkness, accumulation and inaccessibility. Chapter One draws connections to and departures from Swiss asylum exhibitions of the early 1900s mounted by doctors as precursors of Dubuffet’s Art Brut exhibitions. When in 1976 Dubuffet found a permanent Swiss home for his collection in the Château de Beaulieu,
Lausanne, he conveyed his beliefs about *Art Brut* through its installation, which I also treat in Chapter One. Dubuffet brought *Art Brut* back to its place of birth, tucked near quiet Lake Geneva and away from the influence of Parisian art circles, preferring to install his celebratory Fondation Dubuffet in Paris. Lausanne effectively placed a bell jar over Dubuffet’s view of *Art Brut*. This is true because the collection did not circulate, per his stipulation, for decades, and the installation changed very little. He personally approved the arrangement of the galleries -- with their black walls and crowded displays -- and his legacy was strictly maintained by curator Michel Thévôz. The museum’s galleries look remarkably similar today, despite the efforts of the current curators to insinuate more contemporary exhibition practices within Dubuffet’s parameters. So, although the wall labels next to each work still display an image of each artist (looking troublingly like nineteenth-century physiognomic studies of the insane), the labels have been revised to give greater breadth of context beyond biography, including working method. Although crowded vitrine displays still conjure anxiety, new video documentaries now help to dignify the artists and clarify.

The dissertation’s narrative (Chapter Two) moves to the United States in the 1970s, where American folk art collectors financed a growing interest in European Outsider art as the twentieth century progressed. The marriage of Folk and Outsider art that resulted would become most apparent at the American Folk Art Museum (AFAM) in New York City, an institution that still works through struggles of its identity precipitated by its bifurcated collection. It filed bankruptcy in 2011 but exists now in a kernel at a satellite gallery at Lincoln Center and in a new, Collections and Education Center in Queens. AFAM’s modern exhibition style bears the legacy of Holger Cahill’s earliest Folk art shows at the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s. AFAM’s collection reflects as well Cahill’s particular approach to finding and collecting
individualistic pieces of self-taught art, as opposed to demonstrations of communal handicraft knowledge.

The Outsider environment is the subject of Chapter Three, namely those of Kenny Hill in Chauvin, Louisiana and Howard Finster in Georgia. The phenomenon of the domestic or backyard environment, teeming with sculpture, painting, and accumulated artworks, is an international one going back before even the Surrealists’ championing of *Le Palais idéal* of the Postman Cheval. Relevant to this study are those sites that have been somehow institutionalized or museified. Kenny Hill’s land, where he squatted from 1988 until 2000, has been appropriated and restored (after Hurricanes Katrina and Irene) by the Kohler Foundation, a Wisconsin-based organization dedicated to the preservation of renowned American Outsider environments. Hill’s personal effects are now enshrined in glass cases in a small building built for the purpose, and the site is today a point of civic pride. The citizens of the town of Chauvin, even before the Kohler Foundation, in assembling and displaying his objects, such as eyeglasses, clothing, and handwritten letters, also metonymically collected Kenny Hill.

Chapter Four focuses on the Outsider market, studying the case of the Outsider Art Fair, entering its third decade of existence. This chapter broadly frames the viewpoint of those New York galleries that have built up the Outsider market and stocked the booths at the fair for twenty-two years. As non-profits such as the Creative Growth Center and the Fountain Gallery of New York, encroach into their market, a degree of friction has lately become palpable at the OAF, though dealers do very often collaborate with non-profit organizations concerned with Outsider artists to raise funds. The year 2012 saw an exodus of some of the founding galleries from the Outsider Art Fair. Those founding galleries returned to the fair in 2013 when it emerged
under new ownership, and moved to the sleek, contemporary, vertiginous Chelsea space formerly occupied by DIA.

As a point of comparison to the early French shows, and to the current program of the Collection de l’Art Brut, the Creative Growth Center (CGC) is a non-profit arts initiative in Oakland, California, which takes a radically different approach to the Outsider artist. CGC provides space, encouragement, and materials for artists with developmental disorders. The popular Center even maintains a gallery in Paris to cater to European collectors. CGC exhibitions mimic the bright white presentation of contemporary galleries, and so position their artists as more mainstream. Yet social factors, such as the need to moderate income for those receiving disability assistance, necessarily factor into CGC’s advocacy. Some of CGC’s artists have lately been included in major mainstream art venues. For instance, Judith Scott’s work was at the New Museum in late 2012, included in the Rosemarie Trockel show, and recently had a solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 2015. Outsider work was also visible at the 2013 Venice Biennale and the 2012 Whitney Biennial.

Taboo: Blurring the boundaries between Outsider and Contemporary

Surrealist, pornographer and philosopher George Bataille wrote about taboo:

We must know, we can know that prohibitions are not imposed from without. This is clear to us in the moment we are violating the taboo, especially at that moment when our feelings hang in the balance, when the taboo still holds good and yet we are yielding to the impulsion it forbids...but in the act of violating it we feel the anguish of mind without which the taboo could not exist...89

Will we soon be able to break the taboo, saying without qualification: “The contemporary Outsider artist is a contemporary artist,” based on the social gains we have made? Building from

the multiplicity of viable subject positions and the continued explosion of notions of normativity accomplished by identity politics, disability studies has explained physical and mental health along a continuum. Individuals may require special considerations, for example, in conditions of art production and sale: how/where they make things and earn money. Artists’ workshops and non-profits like the Creative Growth Center in Oakland, California are creating dignified responses to those needs. That extent (and the extent to which the category of Outsider Art becomes obsolete) will be defined by the willingness of institutions and citizens to accommodate the disabled in infrastructure and in interactions, and to incorporate to the point of employment, dialogue and patronage those among them/us who are artists. In this sense, the contemporary use of “Outsider” maintains an active, if negative function. It holds a mirror to a limit, a critical mass beyond which a liberal—even a radical—definition of normal will not extend. Under an increasingly rare set of fluctuating and extreme conditions, then, beyond the pale, may exist the artist still isolated enough to garner the name “Outsider.”

90 For a broad and accessible overview see Raghava Reddy, “From Impairment to Disability: Critical Explorations in Disability Studies,” *Sociological Bulletin* 60, no. 2 (May-August 2011): 287-306; and Lennard Davis, ed. *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997). “Disability” in the present dissertation, refers to a socially constructed model and not an individual medical paradigm. In this view, a person is not disabled by the malfunctioning of her body, but by the exclusion of the society that deems a lack in that body.

91 The idiom “beyond the pale,” meaning “outside the standards of decency” or “unacceptable” derives from reference to the wooden stakes or “pales” that comprised fences around domestic property in areas of Ireland and Scotland controlled by England, and thus deemed safe for English inhabitants. As early as the seventeenth century it came to signify more generally a space outside of (but, importantly, nearby) that space considered home and safe. Others have used this term casually to refer to Outsider Art, including David Macglagan in his *Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010). Although, as the title implies, some of Macglagan’s subject matter overlaps with that of this dissertation, as an art therapist, his approach is heavily psychoanalytic.
Chapter One: The Collection de l’Art Brut at Lausanne

“The misfortune of the mad, the interminable misfortune of their silence, is that their best spokesmen are those who betray them best.” – Jacques Derrida

The story of Jean Dubuffet’s first encounter with what he would term Art Brut is by now well-documented. Along with Jean Paulhan and Le Corbusier, he travelled to Switzerland from France on a mission of research in July of 1945. There he met with psychiatrists, including Dr. Walter Morgenthaler and Dr. Charles Ladame, who would familiarize him with their personal “asylum art” collections and roster of patient-artists. Within two years, Dubuffet showed “Art Brut préféré aux arts culturels (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), and Lucienne Peiry, Art Brut: The Origins of Outsider Art (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 35-50. Although Dubuffet points to this date as the seminal moment, he had encountered Art Brut previously, during his military service in 1923. Assigned to meteorological service at the Eiffel Tower, he came across a notebook of cloud drawings with commentary by Clémentine Ripoche, a woman with dementia with whom he corresponded for over a year. On his exchanges with Ripoche, see Jean Dubuffet, “Biographie au pas de course,” in Prospectus et tous écrits suivants, vol.4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 468-9. Ripoche’s work was included in the 2012 show, “Collectors of Skies,” at Andrew Edlin gallery in New York (September 13-November 3, 2012).
"Brut" in Paris, consisting of pieces borrowed from those Swiss asylum collections and from collectors in his personal networks in France. By 1948, he had cobbled together a group of interested European artists and intellectuals to form the short-lived, first incarnation of the Compagnie de l’Art Brut. He simultaneously began to build his own Art Brut collection. In 1951, the year when his own career achieved an international pitch, and upon the dissolution of the Compagnie, Dubuffet sent his collection of Art Brut into effective exile on New York’s Long Island, to the private estate of friend and socially-connected collector, Alphonse Ossorio. Apart from two gallery exhibitions in 1962, one in Vence and one in New York, the collection was not on view again until its quiet return to France and subsequent, triumphant exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1967. After a decade-long stay in Paris, Dubuffet gave the collection to the city of Lausanne, Switzerland in 1971 with no location yet designated for its display. The collection was installed at the redesigned eighteenth-century Château de Beaulieu, and opened as a public museum in 1976 [Figure 1].

In entering that museum, officially titled by Dubuffet, the “Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne,” the visitor is immediately struck by the affect of the place, created by darkness, many frenetic artworks packed closely together, and the strangeness of the architectural space. It is all the more striking within the setting of an eighteenth-century Swiss estate, with the other buildings on the compound maintaining their traditional décor. According to my research Dubuffet had little to do with the design of the final installation, which he did however approve. Further, the darkness – although it does function as a metaphorical re-internment of these artists in the asylum—likely has much to do as well with Dubuffet’s and then Thevoz’s latent anxiety about showing the work. I argue that the installation thus alludes to the artwork without fully showing it. It shifts emphasis to presence over vision so that the visitor experiences the work as
one does a relic. A premise of *Art Brut*, after all, is its being hidden, but rumored. I also put forth that the museum’s contemporary directors have been left to steward a collection, but also the installation itself as an oddity/artwork.

Before discussing the Collection’s installation at Lausanne, I review Dubuffet’s early exhibitions of *Art Brut* here, to stress his ambivalence about showing the collected works, which others such as Peiry have proven before me. The review will also stress Dubuffet’s foregrounding of his own role as arbiter of *Art Brut*, which has not been emphasized at this length. I have tried to contribute to that historiography of exhibitions with original, and more thorough descriptions of the physical exhibitions whenever possible. I likewise contribute new analysis of related ephemera, with a view to positing that the artworks were exploited to a greater or lesser degree as a form of exoticism. Dubuffet’s rendering of the private artworks of poor and unschooled people into *Art Brut* was his bid to stage this art, through dramatic recontextualization, as tangible evidence of what began as little more than an elite abstraction about the nature of creativity. It was also the crucial step in necessitating himself as *Art Brut*’s sole translator, in the tradition of Western primitivists.

Translation might be a source of clarity and potential in many cases, but it can also frustrate meaning. The distancing of works called *Art Brut* from intelligibility through the filter of an invented category makes them less comprehensible in their own right, more exotic, and suddenly in need of decipherment. The discourse of exoticism, then, becomes appropriate in discussing the Outsider, particularly given Dubuffet’s implications of this art as, foremost, an alternative to “cultural art,” and representative of an ill-defined Other. As the nineteenth-century diarist Peter Segalen famously wrote in his collected, lifelong musings on exoticism: “I conceive
otherwise, and immediately the vision is enticing. All of Exoticism lies herein.”93 Peter Mason likewise speaks to the distancing inherent in translation, such that it construes a thing as exotic rather than familiarizing it, in his *Elementary Structure of the Exotic*: “…the act of translation here creates obscurity rather than dispelling it. At a more abstract level, this might be seen as the essence of translation, an act which throws up a barrier of opaqueness, thereby thwarting the act of communication itself.”94

To bring a contemporary comparison of an artist grappling with questions of exposure and opacity: one may think of the conceptual works of Alfredo Jaar, who made artwork of his own refusal to show his self-authored images of, for example, Rwandan genocide. This is not to equate the lives of disenfranchised Europeans to the atrocities experienced by citizens of Rwanda. Jaar exhibited labeled archival boxes of photographs, which may very well have been empty. Jaar spared us the horror, denied us the perverse pleasure, and undermined the certainty that the photographs ever existed. Whether Jaar maintained a moral high ground through this gesture is still debatable and his motives for revealing or concealing were certainly different than Dubuffet’s. After all, Dubuffet must have known this: that exposing *Art Brut* ran contrary to the spirit of *Art Brut*, and with that dis-ease kept it clandestine for many years. Ultimately it did not keep him from capitalizing on its sensational currency.

I do not presume, with this chapter, to undertake the work of tracing Dubuffet’s intentions and definitions from 1945-1976, what might be viewed as the classical period of his *Art Brut*, through analysis of his writings and communication in the French language. This meticulous work was done by the former director of the collection, Lucienne Peiry. In her 1996

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dissertation, “De la clandestinité à la consécration: histoire de la Collection de l'Art Brut, 1945-1996,” published as *Art Brut: The Origins of Outsider Art* in English in 2006, Peiry traced Dubuffet’s decades-long engagement with *Art Brut* from his founding venture through the donation at Lausanne. Primarily using personal correspondence archived at the Collection de l’Art Brut and at the Fondation Dubuffet in Paris, as well as Dubuffet’s published writing on *Art Brut* and anti-culture, her study focused on Dubuffet and, to a lesser extent, his successor Michel Thévoz. She followed their stated intentions for the definition and legacy of *Art Brut*. Given Peiry’s proximity to the institution and her position as inherit or of the director’s mantle, her perspective on the collection suggests a likely bias. This chapter benefits from a critical distance in offering a renewed assessment of the installation of the collection in Lausanne from 1976 until the present, with a preliminary look at earlier *Art Brut* exhibitions in Europe. I hope to arrive at an appraisal of the implicit statements that the collection’s installation makes about what *Art Brut* was and now is from a point of view that highlights the inherent power dynamics of *Art Brut*’s very collection and exhibition, by moving away from Dubuffet’s statements. I resort to exhibition ephemera, critical responses, press articles and personal interviews as source material, as well as analysis of the original and contemporary installation at Lausanne. Apart from Dubuffet’s writing, which can be, even in private correspondence, elliptical, bombastic and contradictory, his ideas about this construct were also communicated through exhibition, although sometimes passively in his inaction or in letting others control exhibitions in his absence.

While Peiry’s meticulous account of Dubuffet’s defining of *Art Brut* is historical—even commemorative --others have been more critical in their approaches. Most have focused on defining the category, or on calling it out as false, rather than on its exhibition. Hal Foster’s
“Blinded Insights: On the Modernist Reception of the Art of the Mentally Ill,” argues that successive generations of Modernists misperceived the art of the mentally ill when activating it toward their own philosophical ends.95 Dubuffet’s particular error, Foster writes, was in claiming *Art Brut* as created *against* a “cultured” visual order rather than made in the desperation of its rupture—during a psychotic break, for instance [Figure 2]. Foster looks past Dubuffet’s protestations against the equation of *Art Brut* with the art of the insane, it should be noted. He sees Dubuffet’s defining of *Art Brut* as an anti-cultural transgression that reinstates the cultural: “Nevertheless,” Foster writes, “like other primitivists before him, Dubuffet targets academic art first and last; in this regard his outsider logic is finally an insider move, a gambit designed to win a place within avant-gardist lineages.”96 Recognizing Dubuffet’s concerted interest in *Art Brut* as an extended “gambit,” Foster perhaps invokes Griselda Pollock’s formulation in *Avant-Garde Gambits* (1992).97 Dubuffet’s “calculated displacement,”98 as Pollock described those artistic gambits, broadly, attempted to dislodge no less than the entirety of Western culture—but so did every other avant-garde movement in the twentieth century. In examining, as we will do here, Dubuffet’s choices in the alternating display and removal of his collection from public view, as well as his choices within exhibitions of *Art Brut*, many of Dubuffet’s decisions reveal themselves as moves within this larger game. On the way to a thesis about the “insights” that the misapprehensions of Dubuffet afford us regarding the art of the insane (such as into visual world-making in the schizophrenic “breach”), Foster identifies Dubuffet’s assumptions of alterity on the part of those artists as a founding premise for *Art Brut*. In exhibitions of *Art Brut*, and particularly in Lausanne, this contrarian positioning became an overriding principle,

96 Ibid., 15.
98 Ibid.
dictating its eventual display in the “anti-museum” of Lausanne, particularly when the collection was taken up by Michel Thévoz—a true believer in *Art Brut* as protest.

Another art historian to address *Art Brut* theoretically has been Kent Minturn, whose broader work has been dedicated to understanding Dubuffet, his relationship to his contemporaries and chroniclers (expressly Hubert Damisch), and in exploring an *écriture brut* within Dubuffet’s œuvre. In his early essay, “Dubuffet, Lévi-Strauss, and the Idea of Art Brut,” Minturn situates *Art Brut* within postwar intellectual circles of ethnography and Structuralism in Europe and among European émigrés to the U.S. 99 Through the discussion of a constellation of exchanges, run-ins, coincidences and connections between Dubuffet, the most renowned contemporary ethnographers (namely Lévi-Strauss) and their theories, Minturn argues that Dubuffet’s *Art Brut* was run through with Structuralist themes of diacritics and synchronic time and notes the leveling of categories within Dubuffet’s archive. Minturn exonerates Dubuffet for his uneven and at times superficial research into the lives of *Art Brut* artists whom he claimed to chronicle, on the grounds that biographies of those artists had to be “imaginatively pieced together” because the artists were “homeless, institutionalized, or amnesic.” 100 He proposes that Dubuffet’s project was to “write [*Art Brut*] makers back into history.” 101 I would argue that the phrase, “writing back into history,” might be reserved for more sincere and hard won emancipatory efforts than Dubuffet’s. If being an ethnographer in the first half of the twentieth century meant immersion and time and depth—sometimes “going native”-- those were not features of Dubuffet’s research or practice. He famously skirted the line between depth and surface in his paintings and etchings, and this *Art Brut* collection seems to have been another


100 Ibid., 254.

101 Ibid., 253.
exercise of his intentional disturbing of the surface of a deep pool. Dubuffet did not spend time with *Art Brut* artists to any profound degree, apart from those few who worked with or for him, such as Slavco Kopak. The creation of an exhaustive archive would seemingly run counter, as Minturn acknowledges, to Dubuffet’s own anti-historical project, and it was a curious enterprise for him to take up at any scope. It was likely an issue of Dubuffet’s posterity more than that of the artists’, as language in the official memorandum for his donation to Lausanne suggests. Dubuffet had specific aspirations for the destiny of that archive, which was to be housed in an imagined “Institut de l’Art Brut,” and explicitly subsumed under no other organization.\(^{102}\)

More applicable here are Minturn’s conclusions about the “inaccessible and impenetrable,” qualities of *Art Brut*, at least, “as far as Dubuffet is concerned,” specifically at the writing of *Savage Values* (1950). These are key to understanding the installation at Lausanne, which enshrines those qualities. Minturn aligns that indecipherability with Levi-Strauss’s concept of the empty signifier, *mana*, “a sign signifying nothing.”\(^{103}\) This level of signification, analogous to a “writing degree zero,”\(^{104}\) as Minturn points out, diagnoses an opacity sometimes ascribed to Outsider art. Minturn’s point is well taken. *Art Brut* does become in the hands of insiders a manipulable signifier, emptied of semantic content and refilled with the meaning of alterity or elsewhere purity. It becomes an ideological vehicle. To build on that, I would add that *Art Brut* at its inception, before being collected, does mean something rather than nothing to its maker, and with full sincerity. However limited *Art Brut* might be in its scope of communication, it should not be confused with disorganized information, “open” works or floating signifiers. Dubuffet, himself, even acknowledged *Art Brut* as a kind of “closed circuit,” which is to say,

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\(^{103}\) Minturn “The Idea of Art Brut,” 258.

flowing with meaning within a single channel. In that case we might reimagine now it as a very specific kind of sign: Mason describes such a sign as the *hapax legomenon*—an ancient Greek term for a sign written only once, and presumed untranslatable.\(^\text{105}\) *Hapax legomena* are written signs, unlike utterances in their material and temporal fixity, that can be translated through the context of a larger story, passage or prose. They are experienced by a reader through an eternal veil of mystery, however, the full nuance of their meaning remaining always out of reach in the absence of an author.

In addition to its connections to ethnography, Primitivism, Expressionism and Surrealism, Dubuffet’s collecting of *Art Brut* is directly related to collecting of the art of the insane and the asyled. He inherited his positioning as translator from the European doctor-collectors who pioneered the collections of art of the insane that would transform in Dubuffet’s hands to become *Art Brut*, and further expand to become Outsider art. Their history is worth summarizing here, again, with the basic argument that these doctors emphasized their points of view over the artwork. The following summary lays the historical groundwork for the appraisal of Dubuffet’s exhibitions of *Art Brut*.

**Toward an *Art Brut***

The first recorded collection of asylum art belonged to Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813),\(^\text{106}\) and throughout the nineteenth century reports indicated small collections of patient art

\(^{105}\) Rush was of a first generation of psychiatrists who believed insanity to be a medical issue rather than a moral or criminal deficiency. See Rush’s *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia 1812), Sander Gilman, “Madness and Representation: Han Prinzhorn’s “Study of Madness and Art in its Historical Context,” in *The Prinzhorn Collection*, ex.cat. (Urbana, IL: Krannert Museum, 1984), 8, and John Macgregor *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 29-32. Philippe Pinel, although he did much to lobby for reform and the humane treatment of the “madmen” in his care at the Salpêtrière, seems only to have been interested in the artwork of patients who were professional artists before their asylum. On Pinel, see Macgregor *Discovery*, 26-28.
within other European asylums. In 1900, Bethlem Royal Hospital in London mounted the first exhibition of asylum art,\textsuperscript{107} and five years later, to far greater fanfare, Dr. Auguste Marie (1865-1934) exposed his \textit{Musée de la folie} at the Villejuif asylum—or so it has been assumed. Allison Morehead argues that aspects of Marie’s exhibition have been overdetermined by a teleological narrative of the discovery of \textit{Art Brut} that traditionally sweeps from Villejuif through psychiatrists Vinchon and Marcel Réja,\textsuperscript{108} to members of the avant-garde such as Apollinaire and Breton (who later purchased two so-called “schizophrenic boxes” from Marie’s collection), and eventually to Dubuffet.\textsuperscript{109} She calls into question the very existence of the \textit{Musée de la folie} as it was publicized in 1905, by pointing out inaccuracies in several press articles of that year, historically used to legitimize the collection as an important public museum celebrating the art of the asyled. One article, using the title, “Musée de la folie,”—a designation, however, never used by Marie when interviewed therein—appeared in the “Curiosité” section of the French publication \textit{Je sais tout}, announcing this as a museum and not just a collection.\textsuperscript{110} Further confounding readers then and now, was the image illustrating that article [Figure 3]. It showed Marie standing in front of asylum artwork collected by the psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso in Turin,\textsuperscript{111} and not, in fact, installed at Villejuif. The diversionary image was underscored, as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{107} John Haslam (1764-1844), apothecary at Bethlam asylum, published \textit{Illustrations of Madness} (London, 1810). Macgregor writes of Haslam’s volume: “Careful reading... leaves one with the impression that Haslam was a man of little insight much impressed with himself...” (Macgregor \textit{Discovery}, 33). In 1900, an exhibition of 600 works of patient art from the personal collections of Drs. Hyslop and Savage, was opened to the public. Little else is known about the exposition and the collection has been lost (Macgregor \textit{Discovery}, 163-4).
\item \textsuperscript{108} See Marcel Reja (Paul Meunier), \textit{L’Art chez les fous: le dessin, la prose, la poésie} (Paris: Société du ”Mercure de France”, 1907).
\item \textsuperscript{110} \textit{Je sais tout} 1:9 (15 October, 1905): 353-60.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Lombroso was another of the important psychiatrists in collecting patient art, although not addressed at length here.
\end{itemize}
Morehead argues, by a caption that misled readers to believe Marie posed with artwork made by his own patients.\footnote{This sleight was recognized much earlier by Macgregor in a footnote to his 1989 text, as Morehead acknowledges (Morehead Musée de la folie, 105).} Items collected at Villejuif were a limited number of patient works, at first hung in a meeting hall, and later, by 1909, came to include cruel objects relating to the history of psychiatry such as leg irons and gagging devices. It was a collection largely aimed at molding public notions of modern psychiatry and still prizing patient artwork for its diagnostic potential. As Morehead writes:

> The willingness among historians to accept the Musée de la folie as a real place ‘thrown open to the public’ highlights its discursive usefulness as a point forming part of a boundary between an older and a newer fascination with the art of the insane, a boundary supposedly separating diagnostic value and popular derision from aesthetic appreciation, delineating positivist usage from avant-garde concerns for creative inspiration and cultural critique.\footnote{Morehead Musée de la folie, 106.}

The Lehrmittelsammlung, or, “teaching collection,” at the psychiatric clinic in Heidelberg, was begun in the 1890s, probably by Emil Kraepelin, and famously expanded by Hans Prinzhorn between 1919 and 1921. Prinzhorn came to the clinic as an assistant, under the condition that he oversee the collection of 4,000 items collected from patients in European psychiatric institutions.\footnote{See Bettina Brand-Claussen’s history of the collection, “The Collection of Works of Art in the Psychiatric Clinic, Heidelberg— from the Beginnings until 1945,” in Beyond Reason: art and psychosis, works from the Prinzhorn Collection (London: Hayward Gallery, 1996), 7-23.} Although Prinzhorn and his colleague Karl Wilmanns had ambitions to create a proper museum for that collection within the clinic, the setting and funds never materialized. The works were, rather, labeled with anonymizing numbers and aliases, crudely mounted, and brought out upon request for interested parties. Bettina Brand-Claussen, in her essay for the catalogue of the 1996 Hayward Gallery exhibition of a portion of the Prinzhorn Collection, clarifies that Prinzhorn’s favorite artist-patients did not necessarily create spontaneously, but were often prodded to create and rewarded in producing artworks, if not...
aggressively interviewed by the doctor for his book, *Bildnerei des Geisteskranken* (1922).\(^{115}\) The production and marketing of that book eventually overwhelmed Prinzhorn’s energy, and when he left Heidelberg, attention to the collection diminished. Prinzhorn’s idealization of art made in asylums was certainly flawed and self-serving—he used and manipulated patients to further his own ideological program about “pure” human creativity—but his work brought about a change in its treatment. Brand-Claussen writes:

> It is true that he [Prinzhorn] erected autonomous, natural expression into an absolute, ignored social factors, disregarded all reactive, processual or interactive mechanisms, and, by adopting empathetic “essential insight” as an epistemological method, laid the way wide open to projections of every kind. And yet it was his achievement to rescue previously despised works from the psychopathological and diagnostic clutches of his colleagues and...to place them on equal footing with ‘professional’ art.\(^{116}\)

Several exhibitions in Europe during the interwar period, of which Dubuffet became aware later in the 1940s without seeing them, indirectly paved the way for his exhibition of *Art Brut*. There was a 1929 solo show of Hélène Smith’s mediumistic works at the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire in Geneva, and a large show of asylum art at the same institution the following year that incorporated pieces from the Prinzhorn collection and from the collection of Dr. Charles Ladame at Bel-Air. Smith (1861-1929) was not properly an Outsider, but a member of one of many Spiritualist movements that gained credence around the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, the séances she performed, in which she spoke in tongues including “Hindu” and “Martian” (demonstrating *glossolalia*), were attended by a circle of academics.\(^{117}\) There were exhibitions

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\(^{115}\) Ibid., 9-11.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 13-14.

\(^{117}\) Included among them was her primary biographer, Théodore Flournoy, who acted as a sort of assistant during séances. Smith was renowned as a medium, and channeled a complex corpus of mythology about her past lives and via her spirit guides, convincing many. Her linguistic gymnastics were even observed by the great semiotician, Ferdinand de Saussure. The publication associated with the Smith exhibition in 1929 is Waldemar Deonna, *De la planète mars en terre sainte: Art et subconscient, Un médium peintre: Hélène Smith* (Paris: De Boccard, 1932), but the earliest and most popular text on Smith, that was also translated to English, is Théodore Flournoy, *From India to the Planet Mars: A Study of a Case of Somnambulism with Glossolalia*, trans. Daniel B. Vermilye (New York:
of the art of the mentally ill that took place at the Gewerbemuseum in Basel in 1929 and at the Gewerbemuseum in Winterthur in 1930. Dubuffet did not see these exhibitions, however aware of them he may have become, and likely would not have seen installation photos that might influence his later exhibition style. Dubuffet was also aware of—without attending—the Entartete Kunst exhibition, first mounted by the Nazis in Munich in 1937. The Berlin incarnation of that exhibition included asylum art by patients such as Pohl (Bühler) and Brendel (Karl Genzel), who would later enter Dubuffet’s collection, as comparative evidence of an aesthetic of degeneracy, alongside Expressionist and Dada works. Ongoing museum installations that Dubuffet did see in person in Switzerland included the collection of the Geneva ethnographic museum overseen by Eugène Pittard and the “little museums” of Dr. Walter Morgenthaler (1882-1965) at Waldau Asylum in Bern and Dr. Charles Ladame (1971-1949) at Bel-air Asylum also in Geneva. The former Pittard permanent installation was housed in an impressive, marble building in the Neo-Classical style, with ethnographic objects inside encased on architectural pedestals behind glass. It is an interesting irony, but unrelated, that the contemporary permanent installation (executed 2015) at that museum is bathed in darkness, and affects some of the same mystery as the Art Brut installation in Lausanne, conceived in the years between 1972 and 1976. Although in short time he was collecting more broadly in Europe, particularly in France and

Harper & Bros., 1900). Waldemar Deonna also organized the 1930 exhibition of asylum art called “L’Art et les maladies mentales. Desseins, peintures, sculptures, broderies” (January 16-February 16, 1930).

118 A twelve-page pamphlet, now only available in a few archives in Switzerland, was published to correspond with the exhibition Zeichnung und Malerei des Geisteskranken at the Gewerbemuseum Basel (October 13-November 3, 1929). The catalog for the 1930 Winterthur show is also obscure: Sonderausstellung Zeichnungen eines Geisteskranken, Ausstellungskatalog, (Gewerbemuseum Winterthur, 1930). That catalog included a short essay by Walter Morgenthaler on Adolf Wölfli, who was included in the exhibition.

Germany, Dubuffet must have taken cues from the installations he saw in Switzerland when mounting his first *Art Brut* exhibitions in Paris. Spaces for the display of inmate art, such as those mounted by Ladame and Morgenthaler, were invariably annexed within larger institutions. Morgenthaler, in particular, displayed the works of his most famous patient, Adolf Wölfl, about whom he wrote the volume *Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler* (1921), in an annexed attic space at the asylum now remembered only anecdotally. Morgenthaler invited Wölfl to decorate furniture as well, which has been preserved. Wolfli’s work was shown as one exhibit within a larger collection on the history of psychological institutions.

Dubuffet left Switzerland for France in September 1945, still on his mission of research into asylum art networks. Sarah Wilson’s essay, “From the Asylum to the Museum: Marginal Art in Paris and New York, 1938-68,”¹²⁰ written for the 1992 *Parallel Visions* catalog,¹²¹ is most helpful in drawing connections between psychiatrists—most prominently Dr. Gaston Ferdière (1907-1990)—and avant-garde artists (many, Surrealists) in France just before Dubuffet’s arrival on that scene. As Wilson details, artists, among them such figures as Duchamp, Breton and Giacometti, attended the Sainte-Anne asylum as visitors or so-called “parasites,” and, reciprocally, Ferdière lent his collection of patient-made dolls and fetishes to the International Surrealist exhibition of 1938. Ferdière cultivated a triad of interests with his knowledge of art and psychiatry plus a curiosity for ethnology, and attended lectures given by Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, and Roger Caillois. He eventually supervised the artist and playwright Antonin Artaud at Rodez asylum at Robert Desnos’ request.¹²² In 1945, during his time at Rodez (and coinciding with Dubuffet’s seminal adventure, as it would turn out), Ferdière mounted an

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¹²⁰ Sarah Wilson, “From the Asylum to the Museum: Marginal Art in Paris and New York, 1938-68,” (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1992), 120-149. Wilson’s essay was, unfortunately, not illustrated.
¹²¹ See Chapter Four.
¹²² Wilson “Asylum to Museum,” 121.
exhibition of fifty works from his personal collection at the Musée Denys Peuch, a small museum traditionally showing academic painting. Although Wilson gives the museum “the accolade for this historic occasion,” as the “first exhibition of psychotic art to be held in a museum,” she does not specify that this was the first exhibition of its kind, but only within France. In 1946, Sainte-Anne held an exhibition of asylum art created by its own patients and gathered from other institutions, in part through Ferdière’s connections. Another, much larger, follow-up exhibition at Sainte-Anne in 1950, *The International Exhibition of Psychopathological Art (L'exposition internationale d'art psychopathologique)*, dwarfed Dubuffet’s recent *Art Brut* efforts of 1947-49, in scale, popularity and attendance, although such acclaim was apparently not Dubuffet’s goal.

Dubuffet’s epiphany closely coincided, then, with a swell in the popularity and instances of exhibitions of “asylum art,” “art of the insane,” or “psychiatric art” in France in the mid-1940s, such as those described above. In the succeeding decades, he would explain away a resemblance between *Art Brut* and the “art of the insane,” recently come into popular consciousness. That postwar exposure may account, in some small or substantial part, for his wholesale denial of the category of the art of the insane, and insanity in general: “There is no art of the insane, any more than there is an art of dyspeptics or an art of people with knee complaints.” It became a disavowal. Such was Dubuffet’s desire for *Art Brut* to stand apart that he addressed “psychiatric art” in discreet sections both within the text of his original 1948 *Notice sur la Compagnie de l’Art Brut* and in the sixteen-page notice issued upon the company’s

123 Ibid., 123.
124 Ibid., 124-126. Karel Appel, the artist associated with CoBrA, attended the 1950 exhibition and détourned the catalog to create his *Psychopathological Notebook*, that was later published in facsimile with essays by Donald Kuspit and Rudi Fuchs (Bern : Gachnang & Springer, 1997).
125 This statement from Dubuffet has become so ubiquitous that its original context is rarely attributed. Jean Dubuffet, “L’Art Brut préféré aux arts culturels,” exhibition pamphlet, 1949. Archives of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne.
second incarnation in 1963. The former, entitled “Appeal to psychiatrists,” explained the profusion of artworks produced in asylum: “It is natural that people deprived of work and of pleasure are shown to be more inclined than others toward artistic activity,” requesting the assistance of psychiatrists in “alerting us to the work of persons under their supervision when their works appear of a nature to enter into the frame of our research.” The section in the 1963 document, “Psychopathological art,” argued a more Foucauldian idea of normalcy: “that mania and delirium are not absent from the normal psyche,” and may even flourish there.

Art Brut On View/ Under Cover: The First and Second Foyers

When, in November of 1947, Dubuffet established his Foyer de l’Art Brut in two sublevel rooms of the Galerie René Drouin at Place Vendôme lent to him by the gallerist, he intended the space as a semi-private research center for his own circle of initiates. Peiry writes of this first venue: “the word foyer suggest[s] the idea of a safe haven, a sort of club or community center, where one could join with others to drink, talk, and warm up.” Despite the fact that its first poster advertised the space as “open to all visitors” the Foyer, and subsequent spaces set up by Dubuffet for similar purposes later in the 1940s and through the 1960s, were, according to first-hand accounts, quite cloistered. Peiry corresponded with Drouin’s son, Jean-Claude, in 1989, about his memories of the Foyer, and his response was evocative:

You would enter the basement of the gallery through a hallway entrance which opened up on Place Véndome…The set-up in the basement was rather precarious and very somber. The walls were draped in burlap…The idea amused a lot of intellectuals, but aside from Jean Dubuffet, the whole thing wasn’t considered very important. I can name Jean Paulhan, Georges Limbour, Michel Tapié, André Breton (though I never saw him on the

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127 Dubuffet La Compagnie de l’Art Brut.
128 Peiry Art Brut, 68.
Art Brut premises)…The few exhibitions that took place had a limited number of visitors and, as I recall, some initiates.”

The annex, as a side space, foyer, hallway, or simply a space beneath, above, beyond, or away, serves as a paradigm for Dubuffet’s relationship to Art Brut and his exhibition of it in the early years. An ancillary project for the artist, the collection could be shifted aside when necessary because Dubuffet controlled access to the work, conjuring it periodically, himself like a medium or shaman. One writer for the publication, Le Livre, described the Foyer in a February 1948 review as a mysterious cave of wonders: “‘Art Brut’ at Drouin’s, place Vendôme, is a cave of forty thieves, a fortune of Ali-Baba where lies pell-mell a heap of treasures of… Art Brut, there is no other word.”

There are only a few known photographs of the Foyer [Figures 4 and 5]. From those we glean that the room for the exhibit of Art Brut had a low ceiling with unfinished wooden floors and textured plaster walls covered over with burlap in places. The whole space conjured the appearance of the provisional or an outpost. Mid-way up one wall, wooden shelves were mounted on posts, supporting sculptures lined closely together. Works on paper were tacked directly to the wall underneath the shelving in even rows, or adhered in groupings to board for support. No identifying information was given for each work, but a handwritten sign might indicate, “Travaux des alienés,” as one did during the February 1948 show of works borrowed from the collection of Dr. Ladame. Many of the sculptures were self-sustaining, such as those exhibited at the 1948 Jan Krizek show, but a few required mounted supports to keep them upright for exhibition. They would likely have been mounted by lenders, and sometimes clumsily. Those supports made sculptures of what were otherwise fetish-like objects that may

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131 “L’Art Brut,” Le Livre, February 1948. Archive of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne. This article was also quoted in Peiry Art Brut, and Minturn “The Idea of Art Brut.”
have held for their makers restorative or even magical power. Often originally intended to be
manipulated, rather than simply viewed, these mounts kept the objects semi-permanently vertical
and thus shifted the viewer’s primary engagement with them to the contemplative. It was a
phenomenon eventually paralleled by Dubuffet’s own application of base materials such as mud
to the vertical plane of the canvas. Already at the Foyer, the practice was established—and it is
unclear whether by Dubuffet or Tapié, his curator—of showing multiple works by a single artist
in close proximity, even in group exhibitions. Crowded installations communicated a desired
aesthetic of compulsion. These objects were vetted, it implied, neither by the artist nor the
exhibitor. Once an artist was identified as a maker of Art Brut his entire oeuvre was coopted into
it wholesale, as well as his biography where details were known. A collection of at least ten of
Robert Gie’s “schizophrenic drawings” of “influencing machines” is visible in a photograph of
the 1948 Ladame show, for example.

The first Foyer poster announced Tapié’s supervision of the space, without mentioning
Dubuffet, as was the case in other of the French press coverage of the Foyer generated during
1948. Dubuffet was, in fact, absent during a portion of the opening months of the space, away
on one of three trips to El Golea in Algeria that he took between 1947 and 1949. This indicates
an early, and perhaps surprising, willingness on his part to leave the supervision of Art Brut
exhibitions, and eventually, his own collection, to others. Dubuffet seems to have preferred to
tend to the theorizing of Art Brut through his publication of texts such as “L’art brut préféré aux
arts culturels” (1949) and “Honneur aux valeurs sauvages” (1951), as well as biographical texts
on individual Art Brut artists, as Minturn has similarly noted. He also prospected and collected.
Tapié was busy himself during this period, with his theorizing of “L’art Informel,” to be

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132 Poster 1947.
published as *Un Art Autre* in 1952. From late 1947 through 1948, Tapié borrowed from friends of the *Foyer*, works requested by Dubuffet. He also sourced some of his own choosing, thus incorporated as *Art Brut* by default. The exhibited pieces were then offered for sale. Such was the case with those works lent by Joseph-Oscar Müller and Charles Ratton for the gallery’s first exhibition of sculpture by “Le Barbus Müller.” Drouin helped with the publication of short, biographical pamphlets to accompany the shows.

By late 1948, Dubuffet sought to regain control over his *Art Brut* venture, in part by breaking ties with the Galerie Drouin and Tapié. Dubuffet laid the blame for what he saw as the misshaping of *Art Brut* during its year at the *Foyer* with Tapié. Peiry points to Tapié’s shortcomings as well, although it is possible that Dubuffet reacted abruptly because he felt the control of his *Art Brut* enterprise slipping from his grasp. She writes: “The fact that total control of the *Foyer* had been handed over to Michel Tapié—who had a tendency to choose eclectic things, to lack organization, and to care too much about sales—pushed Dubuffet into a corner.” As a result of his frustrations, whatever their reasons, Dubuffet pulled *Art Brut* from Place Vendôme. The publisher Gaston Gallimard, who would later renege on a deal to publish a series of short monographic *cahiers* entitled *L’Art Brut*, written by Dubuffet plus invited contributors, offered space in a garden pavilion at his Éditions Gallimard building on rue de l’Université. Dubuffet’s relaunched *Compagnie de l’Art Brut* was a non-commercial venture, which, although it would mount exhibitions, was intended primarily for study by subscribing “Active Members” and “Adherents” of the Company [Figure 6]. At least from its exterior, the

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134 See Peiry *Art Brut*, 69-72.
135 Peiry *Art Brut*, 72.
136 “Nous désirons nous abstenir de toutes operations présentant un caractère commercial, et les frais entraînés par l’entretien de Foyer de l’Art Brut et par nos recherches et activités diverses auront pour seule contrepartie les cotisations des membres de notre Compagnie.” Announcement of the *Compagnie de l’Art Brut*, 1948, Archive of the
Gallimard building offered an appearance, not cave-like, but restricted in another way. On the garden side, a Neoclassical façade at the street level gave way to a garden level covered in vine. The building’s air of elitism and privilege that must have crossed oddly with the works of Art Brut therein, apparently hung one atop another and sometimes intentionally scattered about the place in the fashion of a “study of curiosities.”

In an issue of Le Figaro Littéraire published in September 1948, the month of the Gallimard location opening, Dubuffet quipped sarcastically: “The most harrowing part of this exhibition was, all alone in the corner of a room, a Louis-Phillipe chair.” By calling upon the image of a Louis-Phillipe chaise, Dubuffet summoned an implicit critique of middle-brow, bourgeois taste in mass production as more disturbing than any of his Art Brut.

A pamphlet--typed, hand-printed and stapled, complete with typos and listing the address of the new Foyer, perhaps appropriately through a side entrance to Éditions Gallimard at 5 Rue Sébastien-Bottin--served as the catalogue of objects for the first opening at the new Foyer de l’Art Brut. In addition to works from Dubuffet’s original canon of asylum artists including Wölfli, Krizek and Alöise that had been shown at the old Foyer, the new exhibition featured works by other common folks that Dubuffet had collected. He included introductory biographical statements about those amateur artists, so matter-of-fact as to recall his own discourse on the “common man” from the early 1940s. For instance, in the case of the artist known as Marygali, he wrote only of her profession: “Marygali runs a salon for women in Paris.” Further down the list, Dubuffet summarily related the background of the artist Somuk: “Somuk is an indigenous

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Collection de l’Art Brut. Active members and adherents paid 1,000 francs per year in dues, with members also paying a one-time fee of 10,000 francs.

137 Slavko Kopak, Interview with Lucienne Peiry, June 22, 1988, reproduced in Peiry Art Brut, 78-9.
138 Jean Dubuffet, quoted in Le Figaro Littéraire, 2 September 1948.
140 Ibid.
Polynesian of the Isle de Bougainville, aged thirty-one years.” Several of the artists are listed as “our friend”—Gaston Chaissac, Aristide Caillaud, and Giordano Falzoni enjoyed that designation. Slavko Kopac, a self-taught Croatian artist, who would soon oversee the collection at the Gallimard pavilion as curator, was also listed among the exhibited artists. Kopac, as a foreigner and an outsider to the Parisian art world, necessarily posed less threat of usurping Dubuffet’s authority than had the well-connected French critic Tapié. Despite indications of a broader purview for Art Brut at the new Foyer, exhibitions mounted there by Kopac with Dubuffet still focused on those artists that he had shown previously downstairs at Drouin. Part philosophical statement and part commercial enterprise, the exhibition Art Brut preferred over the cultural arts (L’Art Brut préféré aux arts culturels), staged upstairs at René Drouin in 1949 lifted the veil that Dubuffet had drawn over Art Brut during the preceding year. The exhibition was impressive at two hundred pieces and became the venue through which Dubuffet first formally articulated his theory of Art Brut through a treatise of the same title.\footnote{See the Introduction of this dissertation for definitions formed using that text.} Throughout the period of these exhibitions, Dubuffet’s construct of Art Brut was not particularly studied by anyone but himself despite his articulations in print, and fell short of causing a sensation. His own ambivalence at this point about what Art Brut should be and do was apparent, at least, in exhibitions that remained largely cloistered and philosophically framed with a heavy hand by Dubuffet.

\textit{Art Brut} in Exile

Until recently, little work had been done toward the study of Art Brut during the decade of the 1950s--the period when Dubuffet sent his collection to the Long Island, New York estate
of artist and collector, Alphonse Ossorio. The two men were acquainted professionally through a network of artists and writers including Jackson Pollock, and grew close in the late 1940s before Dubuffet somewhat imposed his collection upon Ossorio—a narrative which unfolds in collected letters held in the Archives of American Art and in Ossorio’s papers at the Harvard Art Museums Archives. A 2015 exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum’s Lincoln Center galleries in New York, entitled “Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet” (October 2015-January 2016), finally focused in on that period of Art Brut’s initial American residency, from 1951 until 1962 [Figures 7 and 8]. Inevitably, an exhibition of Art Brut becomes, almost by default, an exhibition about Jean Dubuffet. It was no different at the AFAM exhibition, where the history of the Art Brut collection was offered in layers. To the casual observer, the exhibition foregrounded works of Art Brut lent entirely, and for the first time in such numbers, from the Collection de l’Art Brut in Lausanne. Some observers must have also gleaned the specific historical context as well, with the presence of archival documents related to the collection’s transfer to Ossorio on display in an introductory section and with black and white installation photographs from “The Creeks,” as Ossorio called his estate, projected onto the wall. Meanwhile, for those most deeply engaged, commentary formed by wall texts, a catalogue publication and a day-long conference, centered squarely on Dubuffet. Dubuffet’s full intentions with that particular gambit—the extended loan to Ossorio in the U.S.—are somewhat relegated to murkiness because of his tendency for manipulation in communication, although he did offer an official explanation, addressed below. Suffice to say here that despite plentiful documentation, a look at contemporary scholarly treatment of Art Brut’s American engagement

142 See Klaus Ottman and Dorothy Kosinski, Angels, Demons and Savages: Pollock Ossorio, Dubuffet (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with the Parrish Art Museum, 2013) for some background.
may be more fruitful and telling as to what Dubuffet ultimately communicated to posterity in sending the collection away for a decade.

The very title of that recent exhibition, “The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet,” bespeaks a linkage between Art Brut and the language of criminality as well as the crossing of borders. Dubuffet was bringing in to elite spaces artwork from “beyond the pale” but in a controlled way. Up until this move in the early 1950s, and indeed until the present day, Dubuffet has succeeded in both spatially and ideologically incarcerating Art Brut within the parameters of specific exhibitions. An “incursion” might imply a tactical maneuver, thus linking Dubuffet’s move, through militaristic language, with the concept of the artistic avant-garde. As a “hostile invasion,” Dubuffet’s incursion might also liken him to a self-styled burglar in the night. Along with “incursion,” there is frequent use in discussion of Outsider art, of “clandestine”—a word found in the title of Peiry’s dissertation in French, but removed from the title when it was later published in English. (The English title refocused the narrative of Art Brut as an origins story of Outsider Art). “Clandestine” is a word that has shed some of its illicit connotation in the English language in favor of a meaning closer to “secretive.” The use of this word along with “incursion” at AFAM, cements Art Brut’s anti-social, rather than asocial, reputation for a new generation of viewers. An “incursion,” in its less aggressive definition, a “brief entrance,” is arguably not so threatening as the “sudden attack” it might also be. Either way, by this title’s implication and according to the leading narrative, Dubuffet the theorist was unexpected and his ideas about anti-culture perhaps unwanted in the U.S. in the 1950s. But he was in fact no


145 This narrative is questioned in Jill Shaw’s contribution to the exhibition’s catalogue, “Chicago Matters: Jean Dubuffet and the Second City,” in AFAM Art Brut in America, 52-65, which suggests that Dubuffet was received in Chicago by an art community, including the Imagists, readied for his ideas.
outsider. Dubuffet was represented by Pierre Matisse in the United States from 1946-1960 at the same time that the gallerist was exhibiting such luminaries as Matisse and Miro.\footnote{See the exhibition catalog for \textit{Pierre Matisse and His Artists} (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 2002).}

There is slippage, then, between Dubuffet’s “incursion” and that of \textit{Art Brut}. This would further imply that \textit{Art Brut}, like Dubuffet, entered America from abroad—hostile or otherwise—and was thus not something that might be found here. In fact, as the exhibition’s curator, Valérie Rousseau, reveals in her interview for the exhibition catalogue with director of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Sarah Lombardi, only four pieces of anonymous “American \textit{Art Brut}” ever entered the collection under Dubuffet’s tenure.\footnote{Valerie Rousseau, “Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet,” in \textit{AFAM Art Brut in America}, 8-37.} Although Ossorio had collected, in a “parallel venture,” his own trove of \textit{Art Brut} from within the United States, those works never folded into Dubuffet’s official collection. Dubuffet’s projected aims, then, to “find interesting artworks” and “organize prospecting networks” in the United States were never accomplished.\footnote{Dubuffet \textit{Prospectus} v.1, 497. Full quote translated and reproduced in Rousseau “Art Brut in America,” 12.}

Ossorio, for his part, brought many art world celebrities through the collection, including Jackson Pollock, Clement Greenberg, Barnett Newman and Alfred Barr, the latter of whom responded positively. Barr had been an early proponent of expanding the field of museum-worthy art. According to Rousseau, artists received it in varying degrees of delight and dismissal.\footnote{Ibid., 16.} At the Creeks, the collection was doubly annexed, hidden both within the grounds of a private estate well outside of New York City and in upper rooms dedicated to the separate display of \textit{Art Brut}. \textit{Art Brut} at the Creeks was hung neatly and \textit{en masse}, apart from Ossorio’s remarkable abstract art collection, as contemporary photographs by Hans Namuth attest. Although no identifying information accompanied the display, Dubuffet was apparently diligent in sending archival files to accompany the collection, in case any insider researchers might
express interest. Dubuffet courted an affectionate relationship with Ossorio regarding the collection, referring to it in communication as a shared collection between the two men.\textsuperscript{150} That relationship turned somewhat tense, however, as the decade waned and Dubuffet decided he preferred to once again oversee the collection in Europe. Ossorio’s years as steward earned him some aggressive letters about a speedy handover and a few token Art Brut pieces granted him by Dubuffet which remained at The Creeks. Despite Ossorio’s considerable connections in New York, Dubuffet had always tended to subjugate the artist both personally and professionally. He had the official-- and, effectively, the final-- word on Ossorio’s art in penning the celebratory monograph, \textit{Peintures Initiatiques d’Alfonso Ossorio} (1952) and then in subsuming Ossorio’s work paternalistically into the annex of the \textit{Art Brut} collection.\textsuperscript{151} Despite Ossorio’s connections and sophistication, Dubuffet believed that his self-taught style, combined with a Catholic fervor, spoke to some authentic element close to, if not fully \textit{Art Brut}. Dubuffet’s denial of Ossorio’s reasonable claim to the \textit{Art Brut} collection mirrored his earlier bout with Tapié at the first \textit{Foyer} in Paris, although Ossorio and Dubuffet never severed ties.

Finally, some of the scholarly work around the 2015 AFAM exhibition hinted that Dubuffet’s mercurial attitude toward his \textit{Art Brut} collection was indeed driven by his own careerism. Shaw noted, in her talk at the “Jean Dubuffet and Beyond: A Certain Idea of Art,” conference in November 2015 that Dubuffet never cited \textit{Art Brut} by name in his famous lecture on “Anti-Culture” at the Arts Club in 1951 in Chicago, despite referring to it obliquely through a broader category of “anti-cultural art.” It was perhaps a calculated elision meant to move the focus onto his own oeuvre on view in Chicago institutions at the time. Minturn reminds the reader in his essay for the AFAM catalog that Dubuffet did not visit the collection when he was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[Ibid., 25.]
\end{footnotes}
in the U.S. in 1952 for a period of six months, with the explanation that The Creeks was under renovation at the time. It is noteworthy that Dubuffet did not look in on his treasured collection despite this ostensible barrier. Further, Rousseau suggests in her essay that Dubuffet may have finally exposed the *Art Brut* collection at New York’s Cordier gallery only to accompany his simultaneous 1962 MoMA retrospective.\(^{152}\) *Art Brut* was not included in that MoMA exhibition, nor is it mentioned in the catalog by Peter Selz. The full value of his *Art Brut* collection was finally capitalizing, early in this decade of the 1960s, and Dubuffet would make use of it beyond illustrative and inspirational purposes.

*Art Brut* was repatriated to Europe in 1962 with its return to Paris and installation at the building on the Rue de Sèvres in the posh sixth arrondissement that would later become the Fondation Dubuffet [Figure 9]. At the headquarters of the newly reinstated *Compagnie de l’Art Brut*, the installation was slicker and more thoughtful than it had been in the collection’s previous Parisian incarnations, if installation photographs from the time are evidence [Figure 10]. Drawings and paintings were framed, in some cases matted, and professionally hung, and custom, freestanding platform vitrines protected vulnerable wooden sculptures. Space was limited, however, and multiple works still jostled together within the rooms. Despite improvements in the preparation and conservation of the artworks, the installation had the look—and the function-- of an archive rather than a museum display, with file cabinets and surplus artworks lining the walls and floors. The 1967 exhibition of *Art Brut* at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs followed thirty years of semi-private showings. In the west wing of the Louvre, in space designated for the separate display of decorative arts, *Art Brut* found its most grand and startling setting [Figures 11 and 12]. One of the exhibition’s organizers and director of the Musée

\(^{152}\) Ibid.
des Arts Décoratifs at the time, François Mathey, noted the poignancy of this shift toward publicity for the collection:

Today--and it is a challenge--*Art Brut* enters the museum: which is to say that it loses its virginity and becomes, paradoxically, by this fact, cultural. But, in truth, in constituting the collection of *Art Brut*, Jean Dubuffet had never imagined it preserved from all view… Handed over to the public, *Art Brut* ceases to be, becomes the object of contemplation, of speculation, fits into a spiritual context, social, to be honest, cultural--which it had hitherto escaped.”

Mathey’s half-hearted lament—half-hearted because he was himself a prime agent in the plunder of *Art Brut*’s supposed innocence at this venue—was indicative of the response to the exhibition in contemporary press. Whether praised or panned, Dubuffet’s *Art Brut* went in fact largely unchallenged as a category. Some, like Mathey, acknowledged the irony of the appearance of such sincere artwork in the preeminent French institution for contrived decorative arts, even taking the implications of such an incursion to their dramatic conclusion--the implosion of academy and museum: “Perhaps even museums will no longer be necessary.”

But Mathey’s fantasy, much like Dubuffet’s own remonstrances against the cultural, proved rhetorical. It is for this reason that Dubuffet’s project with *Art Brut* was always a farce, and never truly radical, because it was disengaged from action. Collecting the artwork of the dispossessed only to introduce it into elite settings served to draw a bright line between inside and outsider, and to expose the latter to scrutiny. The jeopardy of this temporary spotlight for *Art Brut* did not go unregistered, however. A young Michel Thévoz, the Swiss curator who would eventually take over the direction of the collection a few years later at Lausanne, visited the Paris

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154 My time in the archive in Lausanne was focused on the installation at the Chateau Beaulieu and I was thus unable to make more than a cursory review of press surrounding this exhibition. I hope to expand my research to include the planning and execution of this exhibition in a future article. Daniel Sherman surveyed several hundred articles in the archive of the Collection de l’Art Brut and briefly summarized reviews of the 1967 exhibition in his French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire: 1945-75 (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 124-128.
155 Mathey “L’Art Brut.”
exhibition, setting out on a path to create for *Art Brut* what he considered a more suitable milieu: an “anti-museum.”

Lausanne: *Art Brut* Comes Home

It is perhaps a credit to the Swiss tradition of banking that much was made in the local press of Lausanne of the funding and financing of the city’s acquisition of Dubuffet’s collection of *Art Brut*. On August 17, 1972, the Municipality of Lausanne passed an agreement with Jean Dubuffet to acquire his collection, and on October 24th of that year, the city council approved a motion to transfer the collection from Paris, endowing the project with 2,152,000 Swiss francs. It would ultimately cost 2,991,000 chf to complete the transfer and final installation at the Château de Beaulieu, the venue selected for its exhibition.\(^{156}\) The additional funding was provided through state and federal subsidies, won because the Château is an historical monument and its restoration was involved in the transfer.\(^{157}\) [Figure 13]. The city council was responsible for the selection of the Château as the permanent exhibition venue and administrative seat for the collection, but the decision was not unanimous. A Mlle Dufour of the council objected that the eighteenth-century site—consisting of a mansion in the Rococo style, a granary and a barn—was a setting unsuited to the tenor of *Art Brut*, first of all. Further, she argued, and to the horror of Thévoz, no doubt, Dubuffet’s collection was of interest to only a limited number of psychiatric

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\(^{156}\) *Collection de l’art brut, Restauration partielle du Château de Beaulieu, Préavis no 177, Lausanne 14 July 1972.* Archives de la Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne.

\(^{157}\) The chateau was constructed in 1757 and belonged to the Mingard family. It was decorated in the prevailing Rococo style with wall decorations in the grand salon after Watteau. See “Beaulieu: Un Chateau à l’ombre d’un palais,” *Lausanne Soir*, 19 February 1976, Archives of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne.
professionals. She thus suggested that a more broadly appealing collection of historic engravings, for example, might be installed there instead.\footnote{“En Novembre, Le Musée de l’Art Brut sera ouvert dans le Chateau de Beaulieu rénové,” 24 Heures. 5 April 1975, Archives of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne.}

Far from Dubuffet’s ambitions for \textit{Art Brut} as a broad “pole” of artmaking, Dufour’s reduction of the collection to “psychiatric art,” added to similar assumptions by others, prompted renewed protestations against the conflation of categories, this time from the curator of the collection, Michel Thévoz. Thévoz had been the curator of Lausanne’s Musée Cantonal de Beaux Arts, and his master’s thesis focused on Louis Soutter, a self-taught artist and cousin of Le Corbusier collected by Jean Dubuffet early on in the artist’s \textit{Art Brut} prospecting.\footnote{Personal communication with Michel Thévoz, 17 June 2015. See Le Corbusier, “Louis Soutter, l’inconnu de la soixantaine,” \textit{Minotaure} 3:9 (1936).} According to Thévoz, his interest in \textit{Art Brut} was initially driven by his “leftist and oppositional political sensibilities.”\footnote{Ibid.}

He first found the opportunity to meet Dubuffet during a visit to the collection in Paris in the late 1960s, and it is clear he approached the elder artist as a fan. At that time, Dubuffet, sensing a willing acolyte, suggested to Thévoz that he devote his next book to \textit{Art Brut}. To that end, he figuratively and literally gave Thévoz the keys to the collection in the four story, fourteen-room building on the rue de Sevre. Thévoz recalls that he “soaked up the ambiance of this magical place.”\footnote{Ibid.}

When he arranged for Dubuffet’s collection to be presented at the Château de Beaulieu nearly a decade later, he similarly aimed to produce an “\textit{ambiance de rêve}”\footnote{“L’Art Brut au Chateau de Beaulieu,” 24 Heures. 26 February 1976, Archives of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne.} [Figure 14]. Thévoz was remarkably only tangentially aware of the study center downstairs at Drouin’s gallery and had not yet seen photographs of the exhibitions there from
1947-49 when he planned the permanent installation at Lausanne.\textsuperscript{163} Dubuffet--although he tacitly and then officially approved the final Lausanne installation--had only expected some modest arrangement in an unused location in Lausanne. He suggested something like an “old school in some out of the way place,” remembers Thévoz, who seems to regard this position as a mark of modesty on the part of Dubuffet.\textsuperscript{164}

On October 6, 1975, six thousand and twenty-six works of Art Brut arrived to Lausanne from Paris without any sustained damage. It had already been decided that only a portion of the collection would remain on permanent display, with the remainder to rotate through exhibition. The city of Lausanne contracted local architect Bernard Vouga, whose signature is on the architectural plans, but Thévoz attests that Vouga’s associate, Jean de Martini, did more to prepare the Château building for the collection’s installation [Figure 15]. The barn, rather than the residence, was chosen as the site for the permanent display, and the mansion would be reserved for administration. That barn had been in use since the eighteenth century for livestock, even housing a pair of camels at some point, as contemporary journalism in the collection’s archives reveals. The fact no doubt amused Dubuffet, who had traveled to El Golea to return with scrawled drawings of camels in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{165}

The “Anti-Museum”

Jean Dubuffet had little hand in the design of the installation at Lausanne. He was, in fact, far less strict in his stipulations for the donation than might be expected. He was clear on a few points, however. He wanted the museum to be public, and he further preferred that the

\textsuperscript{163} Thévoz Personal.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid. Translated by the author.
\textsuperscript{165} L’Art Brut au Chateau de Beaulieu,” 24 Heures.
institution should hold the official title of “Collection de l’Art Brut,” rather than “Musée,” as it is nonetheless often called in press and even in official tourist guides for the city of Lausanne.\textsuperscript{166} Peiry attributes the preference to Dubuffet’s aversion to the traditional concept of the museum as a culturally validated and validating institution, and she minimizes the semantic weight of his alternative choice of “collection,” implying that he sought only to invoke “a simple gathering of objects.”\textsuperscript{167} Current director, Sarah Lombardi, interprets Dubuffet’s choice in the language of the title as a reminder of the cohesiveness of the material as a single collection.\textsuperscript{168} The interpretations are not mutually exclusive.

The fact of Dubuffet’s collecting and donation as the founding premise of the institution, has, until now, been less than foregrounded to visitors at the Collection de l’Art Brut, apart from through that oblique notion of the title. A poster-sized signboard hangs on the wall partially obscured by an open door, inside the reception area at the entrance to the museum’s galleries, relating in a few paragraphs the story of Dubuffet’s collecting of \textit{Art Brut} and his donation to Lausanne [Figure 16]. A recent initiative at the collection installed a small but permanent historical display, informally dubbed the “Dubuffet room,” to include a 1971 inventory of the collection, a detailed timeline, scanned archival documents relating to the collection and biographical information about Dubuffet. It should redress a lack of information on site regarding the collection’s genesis. Located on a second floor, on the way to special exhibitions galleries, the position of the historical gallery will maneuver most visitors past the material, but only after their viewing of several galleries of the permanent collection on the first floor. As part of the same campaign to emphasize the specificity of the collection—its special claim to authenticity as the original and complete collection of Dubuffet—Lombardi continues a series of

\textsuperscript{166} Préavis.
\textsuperscript{167} Peiry \textit{Art Brut}, 174.
\textsuperscript{168} Personal communication with Sarah Lombardi, 8 May 2015.
semi-annual monographic exhibitions to feature core artists in Dubuffet’s historical collection.

When serving as interim Director in 2012 she oversaw the production of Alöise: the Solar Ricochet (June 2 – October 28, 2012), curated by Pascale Marini. The sizeable drawings of Alöise, as she was known to Dubuffet and publicly, have been on permanent display since the opening of the collection, spanning vertical space up through several levels. They were acquired very early on by Dubuffet from Dr. Hans Steck at the University Psychiatric Hospital near Lausanne. The exhibition Jean Dubuffet’s Art Brut, Origins of the Collection (L’Art Brut de Jean Dubuffet, Aux origins de la collection) took up the subject of the collection’s historiography in 2016 at the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Lausanne installation by re-exhibiting one-hundred-and-fifty works that Dubuffet had selected for his 1949 Rene Drouin show of Art Brut. Some of those had not been shown since then.

Careful not to lodge the collection in the past, in the minds of fans and potential visitors, Lombardi’s strategy embraces a counterpoint to her emphasis on the collection’s roots. Besides her commitment to “sticking to the classics,” she believes that “it is important to have a second foot in the present.” So, with an eye to contemporary Art Brut, as well as international trends in exhibition, Lombardi will mount a regular Biennale de l’Art Brut on a theme of her choosing. The first, Vehicles (November 8 2013- April 27, 2014) drew together two hundred and fifty artworks from forty-two lesser-known artists in the permanent collection, and the second (November 13, 2015 – April 17, 2016) focused on architecture. Besides the goal of contemporary relevance, the biennials, temporarily commandeering the entire first floor space usually designated for the most canonical works, plus two special exhibitions galleries, allow the

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169 Dubuffet was introduced to the work of Alöise by Dr. Jacqueline Forel, before encountering Steck’s collection. He visited Aloise in Gimel with Forel and Auberjonois. In the lengthy introduction to a 1965 text, published the next year by the newly reconstituted Compagnie de l’Art Brut, devoted entirely to Alöise, and including an essay by Forel, See Jean Dubuffet, “Introduction,” in Alöise (Paris: Compagnie de l’Art Brut, 1966), 7-21.

170 Lombardi Personal.
collection to expose a wider array of artists around a theme. Those themes, however—the first two aforementioned, and a third planned as “the body”—tend (if we can call three themes a tendency) to the vague, or worse, juvenile. Understanding that the themes are chosen with a goal of encompassing the greatest amount of work, the topics yet seem to unwittingly encourage the assessment of *Art Brut* as childish, or, at least, less than mature. We might compare these to contemporary thematic exhibitions at the Creative Growth Center in California, admittedly much less ambitious in size, that engage with such topics as “limitation” and “habits”—charged issues for artists with disabilities, many of whom incline toward obsessive creation. With sixty thousand artworks at its disposal, the Collection de l’Art Brut might grapple with some of the most arresting controversies of *Art Brut*: fear and anxiety, self-awareness and identity construction, isolation, poverty, ingenuity and resourcefulness, joy and exuberance, or collecting and source material. That is just to name a few, and to exclude possible formal themes. No matter the topic, the biennial offers the collection the opportunity to inventory, photograph and conserve objects in a healthier rotation than the routine program allows, with three-to-five exhibitions per year, some comprising of borrowed work.\(^\text{171}\)

Although the collection occasionally borrows work, the interpretation of its lending practices has come under some scrutiny. Among Dubuffet’s stipulations was a demand that the collection be “inalienable.” His core collection of just over 5,000 objects, and any objects collected beyond those, must remain in the permanent collection of the institution. No artworks may be sold or traded to acquire new works, or for any other reason. Although that rule is still respected, it was formerly interpreted—and primarily by the conservative Michel Thévoz—to mean that no works should be lent to other institutions.\(^\text{172}\) That changed under Lucienne Peiry’s

\(^{171}\) Ibid.
\(^{172}\) He did lend works from the *Neuve Invention* collection, but not from the *Art Brut* collection.
directorship. She interpreted the rule to mean that, although no works may be sold, they may be lent to worthy institutions in efforts to promote the genre. Lombardi continues in that vein, often lending works of the permanent collection to well-intentioned exhibitions in the public interest, given proper arrangements for the safety of the objects during transportation and installation. Artists from Dubuffet’s historical inner circle garner the most requests, but newly collected artists find their place in diverse shows too when relevant. German *Art Brut* artist Theo’s (1918-1998) portraits of Hitler were on loan to a Swiss exhibition on Nazism in 2015, and AFAM’s “Incursion” exhibition was populated entirely with works borrowed from Lausanne.

One stipulation that Dubuffet did not make was that the collection be closed at his donation in 1971, or after the museum’s opening in 1976. In fact, his personal 5,000-piece horde has swelled to sixty thousand, a number that has prompted Lombardi to all but halt collecting. The continuation of an acquisitions program for the collection after Dubuffet’s passing of the control of the collection to Thévoz, and beyond, registered a final ambivalence. After decades of exerting control over what entered his collection, this policy left only Dubuffet’s theory of *Art Brut* as interpreted and administered by others to arbitrate any entries in lieu of himself. Except in rare circumstances where the strength of a work compels it, or the popularity of a new Outsider artist overwhelms the moratorium, Lombardi currently refrains from new acquisitions. She does continue to search for works to enrich the collection’s holdings of a previously collected artist’s oeuvre in order to cultivate depth and not only breadth in the inventory. The accumulative power of *Art Brut* is still stressed by Lombardi. She reaffirms Thévoz’s decision to exhibit, not only many works, but many works from each artist. Lombardi attests:

I want to say that the quantity to me is very interesting… When you see one work—all the works are very strong—but when you give the public the opportunity to see different

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173 She recently refused a request for image rights to the owners of the Outsider Art Fair, because she did not find it ethical to lend work, even in reproduction, to a commercial interest. Lombardi Personal.
works [by a single artist] you really understand the kind of mechanics behind it… If you see one painting you can be impressed by the work, but these artists are not known. It’s not like if you show a Soulage or a Warhol, where you can show one nice piece… because the public comes to see Warhol, but when they come they know who Warhol is and can relate this work to the rest of his production, which is really not the case here. You have to imagine that the people who get interested know more about some artists, but the majority of people don’t know those artists at all. If you just show one piece, they can be sensitive about the work, but they can’t relate to the rest of the production. It’s the role of our institution to show a body of work and to try to explain what makes this artist, this technique.\textsuperscript{174}

Lombardi has, however, reduced the number of works on permanent display, if slightly. Not highly noticeable, the space does feel, subjectively, less frantic, since her revisions to the hang in recent years. This does little to allay the presiding feeling of excitement that greets the visitor the Collection de l’Art Brut, engineered by Thévoz with the architects in the 1970s.

For Vouga (and de Martini), the project was a unique one, although Vouga did have experience refitting and remodeling historic buildings in Lausanne. A local journalist registered the oddity of the project: “An unusual job for an architect, for whom the principle task is generally to organize the volumes in a given space. Here, it was to the contrary: the volumes existed, it [the task] was to organize the space.”\textsuperscript{175} By uniting and integrating the four floors of the intimately-scaled building into a single unit, with multiple stairwells and interpenetrating views down and up through levels, the architects reinforced the unity of the space, and by extension, the unity of the collection. That unity would need be reinforced by this design in the absence of Dubuffet’s legitimating presence. He had been both referee and filter and had himself adhered the collection in previous decades. In this uniformly bizarre setting, artwork could be hung on all surfaces, including the ceiling where it slopes down into the headspace of the fourth floor. The floorplan further avoided, as Thévoz explained at the time, the labyrinth of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{175} “En Novembre,” 24 Heures.
\end{itemize}
individuated galleries that one navigates in traditional museums. But by far the most remarkable aspect of the Collection de l’Art Brut’s installation at Lausanne remains its uncanny, dark interior [Figures 17 and 18]. Thévoz, with the architects, chose to paint all of the interior walls and the ceiling in a matte black, creating an atmosphere where light is absorbed. Thus, they aimed to create an atmosphere that “dissolves into itself,” and frustrates the viewer’s apprehension of both objects and explanatory texts. As he described it at the time, “We wanted to create an ambiance of dreaming in realizing an environment which dissolves into itself, sort of. The volume disappears into color (the materials are black and matte) and the climate is neutral and consistent.”

Natural lighting was and is completely restricted in the galleries, and electrical lighting is dim or absent, leaving some works to hang in shadow. Exploring the space, one essentially encounters strange objects while roaming in the dark. The experience is, in turn, disorienting, unnerving, dreamlike and exciting [Figure 19]. Thévoz and the architects aspired to erase the frame of the homogenizing museum, leaving the space with “la connotation zero.” That erasure extended to the artwork as well, which, following on that principle, should be perceived without being fully seen. The artwork becomes auratic in this context, once again fetishistic. Writing in 1976, Thévoz compared Art Brut to the mythological Eurydice, who vanished when looked upon by her beloved. He further decried the dangers of its assimilation into the “insatiable maw” of the traditional museum, writing as he was in an atmosphere of institutional critique. His strategy, thus, was to allude to objects in their very presence to avoid that assimilation.

176 “L’Art Brut au Chateau de Beaulieu,” 24 Heures.
177 “En Novembre,” 24 Heures.
178 “L’Art Brut au Chateau de Beaulieu,” 24 Heures.
179 Thévoz Personal.
through their being properly apprehended – as Dubuffet had avoided their apprehension through being thoroughly understood when creating his superficial archive.

Lombardi also defends the black walls. Noting the practicality of black walls to the exhibition of delicate artworks, she upholds the function of the dark setting in acclimating one’s eyes to darkness, thus reducing requirements for bright lighting that may damage the artworks over time. Further, she appreciates the oddity of the place, and the curious installation that was all the more radical in the 1970s, as a kind of institutional heritage. In that respect, the Collection has become a museum of itself. In some cases, the low lighting does a disservice to the works on display, although curators, past directors, and now Lombardi do their best to showcase the works while respecting the founding spirit of the place. For instance, two multi-colored mosaicked figures by Nek Chand (Indian, 1924-2015), made for sunny garden display and come all the way from India to Lausanne, sit underneath a second floor stairwell with no lighting [Figure 20]. A large Madge Gil drawing, nearly six feet high and characteristically dense with skeins of black ink swirling off into patterns and congealing here and there into figures, is bathed in darkness on one wall. Distracting reflections on its protective glass discourage sustained viewing.

In its undermining of the sense of sight, and through its appeal to emotions of anxiety, curiosity, and discovery, the collection’s installation seems to have anticipated a twenty-first century “affective turn.” It is possible that the evocation of anxiety and frustration in the viewer in Lausanne communicates something of the conditions of the production of Art Brut, fictional or accurate as that may be. The architects openly emphasized feeling over seeing, creating a hyperbolic chamber of experience that should communicate something about the collection itself

181 Lombardi Personal.
As a contemporary journalist described it: “One cannot describe with words the magic and the mystery that emanates from all of the exhibited works. You have to go to see and to penetrate to the heart of all these fantasies, of these dreams, of these nightmares.” Of course, this is the circular fantasy that is often attached to Outsider art. One can neither see (for reasons detailed above) nor penetrate to the heart of (for lack of information, however improved) the artworks at Lausanne -- hence the eminence of mystery.

Conclusions

The first artworks that Dubuffet identified as Art Brut represented the art of the mentally ill: Wölfli was institutionalized as an alleged sex offender and likely schizophrenic; Alöise had delusions of grandeur; Chaissac would be the first, and in many ways, the most challenging exception. Dubuffet’s exhibition of such – it has been proven by others—derived loosely from asylum collection examples. Further, the only consistent parameters Dubuffet listed for this supposedly anti-cultural, anti-communicative artwork (Art Brut) waver near hallmarks of a classical definition of madness as anti-reason and silence. In order for Dubuffet to maintain control over the taxonomy, and to name it himself as separate from the art of the insane, he would necessarily have to disavow any comparison of Art Brut to the art of the insane. In most cases, Dubuffet refused outright to parse the categories. That refusal was grounds for Breton’s vaunted dissent from the original Compagnie de l’Art Brut and formed a fundamental characteristic of Dubuffet’s philosophy. Duplicity, after all, was core to Dubuffet’s oeuvre. As Thévoz writes in his book, Art Brut: “Dubuffet came to realize that, stemming from his own culture, his work was addressed to cultured people, and that all of his discoveries were in the

182 “L’Art Brut au Chateau de Beaulieu,” 24 Heures.
nature of a sacrilege, whether he wanted them to be or not. So he accepted them as such and came to terms with his sacrilege, making it an ally in his work of subversion, in his reversals and paradoxes.”

Dubuffet conscripted objects (in some cases, collected in good faith from the artists themselves or family members believing that they would be exhibited; in others, under the assumption that the artist had no concern over their fate) and recontextualized them into a large-scale demonstration of his theoretical anti-culture. Even if we accept Thévoz’s apology for Dubuffet’s inconstancy and anti-logical practice, the fact of his pirating—and controversially, his copying--of artworks of the disenfranchised should not remain beyond reproach. Wouldn’t the more potent protest against an art establishment and culture itself have been, in the spirit of Dubuffet’s imagined *Art Brut*, to not show it at all, not collect it, and not create a chimerical institution for its allusive display?

Thévoz, for his part, spoke of the installation at Lausanne in explicitly psychological terms, having less responsibility, as a steward, to define it than Dubuffet did, and coming to *Art Brut* as he did just after its legitimization in Paris in 1967. In his *Art Brut* book Thévoz wrote of the experience and the feeling of the installation, and that of the cumulative collection on the visitor’s psyche. This may not be the art of the insane, but as it is presented at Lausanne, this is *art chez les fous*. It occupies the space of negativity with madness and the primitive. Thévoz described a visit to the collection as such:

Our first reaction may well be a horrified refusal to follow him on the darkening paths of psychopathological exploration. And even if we are able to go all the way, we soon find that the company we keep here does not produce that atmosphere of tender emotion and *bonhomie* that surrounds child and naïve art. A visit to the Art Brut collection in Lausanne is a trying experience; one cannot expect to come away unscathed. It arouses that gnawing uneasiness which a man always feels when carried beyond his bounds.

183 Thévoz *Art Brut*, 38.
184 Thévoz *Art Brut*, 50.
As he portrays it, then, Thévoz offered each visitor, with this installation, her own opportunity to brave the discovery of *Art Brut* through dangerous exploration, and to carry on to tell the tale.

Chapter Two: The American Folk Art Museum and Outsider Art

There is a whole range of objects – including unique, baroque, folkloric, exotic and antique objects... They appear to run counter to the requirements of functional calculation, and answer to other kinds of demands such as witness, memory, nostalgia or escapism. It is tempting to treat them as survivals from the original, symbolic order. Yet for all their distinctiveness, these objects do play a part in modernity, and that is what gives them a double meaning. – Jean Baudrillard\(^{185}\)

Although Holger Cahill was not a member of the original Board of the Museum of Early American Folk art—he had died in 1960, one year before the museum’s founding in 1961--his legacy is palpable in some of the language used by the institution in public and behind the scenes, and in its lack of a clear political positioning. At a planning meeting for its first exhibition held on January 23, 1962, the aims and purposes of the museum were read aloud, as follows:

A visitor from Europe, China, Africa or rural America may walk into a building and see in concrete terms something of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—the formative years when the image of America was taking shape, when the traditional concepts brought over from Europe were changing under the impact of this American earth and developing with consummate skill into a fresh, creative expression, based on individual liberty, freedom of enterprise, happiness and dignity under the democratic principles of a self-governing community.\(^{186}\)

In its foregrounding of the unified distinctiveness of U.S. culture, and in its insistence on the chronological parameters of pre-industrial Folk art as well as values of individualism and dignity

\(^{186}\) Memorandum of Discussion at the Meeting of the Committee for An Initial Loan Exhibition, 23 January 1962, Exhibition Files, Archives of the American Folk Art Museum.
that should be associated with Folk art, the statement echoes Cahill’s own sentiments, expressed thirty years earlier. It was decided at that 1962 meeting, however, that a formal definition of “early American Folk art” would be put off indefinitely, to be determined by a “group of experts” at some later date. 187 Aforementioned associates of Cahill’s, including Alfred Barr and Mary Childs Black, who were not in attendance at the 1962 meeting, and Edith Halpert, who was, interestingly, present at the initial exhibition planning meeting, as my archival research has revealed, were all members of the founding Board. The assembled group established that the museum would draw from many small, mostly private, collections around the country to create a central, national repository, using an “iceberg method.” That is, they would collect anything offered to the museum, exposing only the highest quality works, while lesser quality objects would be annexed into a category “euphemistically known as a study collection.” 188 This strategy differed from Dubuffet’s own—we know that he created an Annex collection of Art Brut, also known as Neuve Invention—as it was at AFAM the result of a financial issue, rather than a philosophical one.

The Museum of Early American Folk Art’s Initial Loan Exhibition, assembled, as its title suggests, entirely from loans, aimed to demonstrate to the public and to potential donors the types of objects the institution intended for its nascent permanent collection: carved eagles, flags, weathervanes, “Folk paintings,” and wooden Indians, and included one “wrought iron sculpture by a Negro slave.” 189 Board member, art collector and coffee mogul Joseph B. Martinson arranged for the exhibition to be hosted in the Time Life Building and Mary Allis curated. 190

187 Ibid.
188 Ibid.
189 Initial Loan Exhibition pamphlet, in the Exhibition Files, Archives of the American Folk Art Museum.
190 Mary Allis was a prominent Folk art dealer and interior designer based in Connecticut, associated with the Museum of Early American Folk Art in this curatorial capacity for only a short time. See Scudder Smith, “Mary Allis 1899-1987,” Clarion 12 (Fall 1987), 77.
Folk art at AFAM was thus immediately linked to a moneyed class in Manhattan, to a nostalgic version of Americana, and away from the avant-garde uses of popular culture being prosecuted by Pop artists in the concurrent decade. The exhibition’s pamphlet reinforced language from the above statement of aims and, generally, from Cahill, assuring that the artists represented would be “neither academically trained nor influenced by mass produced techniques which the Industrial Revolution introduced,” and that the artwork would demonstrate “an imaginative and aesthetic insight into the aspirations and individuality of the people who created our nation.”¹⁹¹ That individuality would be tastefully limited at this early stage in the museum’s aesthetic identity formation, it should be noted.

Allis, with help from Director, Mary Childs Black, sidestepped highly idiosyncratic or troubling examples of art by self-taught artists, that might today be regarded as Outsider art, as can be deduced from a few, extant installation views of the exhibition, and from the comments of one reviewer, who concluded: “Mrs. Black avoided the painful works by folk artists that are not successful, such as those late 19th century efforts to capture action that resulted in badly distorted figures. She concentrated her attention on the artists who have realized their limitations and managed to capture the essence of their subject by simplification” [Figures 32 and 33]. The exhibition was neat and vaguely domestic, like a shop window design from the 1950s or a collaged advertisement. Objects fit together in almost planar arrangements against a high-corporate backdrop of marbled and shining surfaces that belied the humble origins of the Folk objects. Two iconic objects that later passed into the museum’s permanent collection, demonstrating that sought-after balance of experimentation and simplification, were included in

¹⁹¹ Initial Loan Exhibition pamphlet. It should be noted that the chronological parameters had been softened, already, by the time of the initial exhibition. Rather than strictly art made in a “pre-industrial era,” there were also some early twentieth-century artworks that met the murky criterion of not being “influenced by mass produced techniques.”

the “Initial Loan Exhibition.” The Angel Gabriel and St. Tammany weathervanes, both made by unidentified nineteenth-century artists, became emblematic, not only of the institution, but of a grace of contour, a modern-looking economy of form, and a tasteful originality—a standard deviation from the utilitarian norm, not too strange—that the museum cultivated in its collection during its first decade of existence [Figure 34].

The selection and formal presentation of Folk art, absented from historical context by the museum in the Initial Loan Exhibition, might be read as apolitical at best, or even politically conservative. By the 1960s Folk art shed its populist, even socialist baggage—associations with the “common man” it had acquired during the New Deal era. Those associations were replaced with stylish ones, appropriate to the Manhattan address at 49 West Fifty-Third Street that the museum would secure shortly after that first exhibition in 1962. That address was geographically and metaphorically “far” from the humble, often rural locales from whence these objects of Folk art had come. They were as spiritually out of place there as the tribal objects included in the Primitivism exhibition of 1983 had been, when relocated to “West Fifty-Third Street.” James Clifford repeatedly referred to MoMA’s Midtown address as such, rather than using the museum’s name, in his highly critical review of that exhibition, “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern.”

One color photo-spread published in 1962 by that most mainstream of American venues, Life Magazine, showed models attired in Dior and Bill Blass, posed with unidentified objects from the museum’s burgeoning collection [Figure 35]. For a photo showing a stylish “Mod” woman wearing an American flag-inspired textile tailored into a Pop cocktail gown, the caption read blandly, “As they come in their new spring styles, the leading American designers.

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193See James Clifford, “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern,” in The Predicament of Culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 189-215. This was pointed out to me by Romy Golan in her review of this chapter.
are full of patriotism.”\textsuperscript{194} While Folk music was appropriated in the 1960s by youth counterculture, hippies and activists for radical political purposes, Folk art did not share that fate.\textsuperscript{195} Particularly at the Museum of Early American Folk Art, a purely aesthetic presentation of the material throughout the 1960s left the objects in the realm of the politically neutral. Eugene Metcalf Jr. addressed the passively conservative function of Folk art at the museum in his 1987 essay for the \textit{Clarion}, titled, “From the Mundane to the Miraculous: The Meaning of Folk Art Collecting in America”:

Folk art owes much of its popularity to the fact that it affords an escape from the pressures of our modern world. Rather than encouraging us to confront and understand the meaning of contemporary society, folk art helps us avoid it by presenting us with an imaginary time, or place, when (we would like to believe) life was simpler, less complicated, and more genuine.\textsuperscript{196}

Folk art was neither mass culture nor fine art, and thus fell outside the realm of mid-twentieth-century culture debates, such as that famously argued by Clement Greenberg as “Avant Garde and Kitsch.” As Greenberg put it: “[Kitsch] borrows from [fine art] devices tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, themes, converts them into systems and discards the rest.”\textsuperscript{197} Folk art may draw from aspects of fine art, but its techniques are neither systemized nor intended for mass appeal as are those of kitsch. This argument is not meant to disparage kitsch as Greenberg would do.

The explicit and tacit parameters of the museum’s collection as laid out at the \textit{Initial Loan Exhibition} were soon trespassed by the actual objects coming into the collection. Namely, Outsider art, by this dissertation’s definition, was introduced to the museum’s exhibition

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schedule in a very limited way, nearly from the outset in the 1960s. It has to this day never been addressed by that term by the museum. In 1966 the museum changed its name to the “Museum of American Folk Art,” dropping the “Early” in order to “broaden potential programming.” The museum’s collection was eventually bifurcated into one part anonymous, utilitarian Folk objects (like the weathervanes cited above) and paintings, and another part, comprised of the painting and sculpture of contemporary, self-taught artists. This split, as well as the broader temporal purview and related name change, was hinted at by the occurrence of two exhibitions in 1965. That year, two exhibitions ran concurrently at the museum: “Rubbings from New England Gravestones,” featuring pounced ink rubbings on paper taken by the professional artist Avon Neal from 17th and 18th century gravestones in New England, and “Signs of a Living Folk Art,” comprised of photographs of twentieth-century roadside signs taken in the American South by photographer Nina Howell Starr. Starr also photographed a number of evangelical churches decorated with visionary images, but those photographs are regrettably unavailable for study today. Both “Rubbings” and “Signs” relied on indexical records of contact with material culture, rendered aesthetic in its secondhand transportation to New York City. The enduring New England gravestones, decorated with dancing skeletons, were rooted physically and metaphorically in the history of the United States. By contrast, the ephemeral Southern road signs, most of them painted with watermelons and other overripe fruit, and the visionary religious paintings photographed by Starr, represented a newer and untried aesthetic to museum patrons. In the archives of the museum, a 1965 draft of broadside copy for the double show explains: “This double exhibition demonstrates the comparisons and contrasts inherent in

199 The Museum has never officially used the term “ Outsider art,” but instead, a range of other terms, some descriptive and some euphemistic. Those include “naive” and “self-taught,” but most often “twentieth-century Folk art” and “contemporary Folk art.” I use the latter two terms in this chapter, basically interchangeably with “Outsider art,” in order to mirror the Museum’s parlance, with an acknowledgment of shades of difference in their meanings.
American folk art’s oldest and latest expressions. The heyday of the American folk artists is past; in our society contemporary examples of his talent are seen infrequently, most often in rural areas isolated from the city and modern technology. Roadside trade signs are one of the few modern survivors.”

The double exhibition opened in January 1965, but loan requests in the archive indicate that by February, Black was seeking to amend the double exhibition. From March 1st, until the close of the exhibition shortly thereafter on April 4th, she added seven stone sculptures, two from the museum’s collection and five borrowed from around the country, all made by William Edmondson, an African-American, Nashville gravestone carver who began to sculpt religious and secular objects after a visionary experience. Called by countless sources over the years, and by Black herself, a “modern primitive,” Edmondson had flourished in the 1930s before his death in 1951. The harried addition of these sculptures to an already thematically stretched exhibition remains provocative. Black later explained, in a letter of appreciation to one lender from the New York State Historical Association: “We think that these modern folk sculptures will be an effective tie between one of the earliest and one of the latest folk expressions,” and elsewhere: “Edmondson’s archaic figures, created in the 20th century, were a fitting and beautiful addition to the designs and symbols from 17th and 18th century gravestones.” Edmondson, then, was meant to bridge the gap, chronologically and perhaps even geographically, between New England gravestone decorations and Southern Folk signs. It is unclear whether Black’s anxiety about smoothing over the differences between the exhibited objects was self-generated, or the result of pressure from an audience or Board. It is clear that Black’s choice of Edmondson was

201 Letter from Mary Black to Louis Jones, New York State Historical Association, 8 February 1965, Archives of the American Folk Art Museum.
intentional, however. He had been legitimized to an extent through a small exhibition of ten of his sculptures mounted at the museum of Modern Art in 1937. At the same time, photographs of Edmondson, taken by his discoverer, Harper’s Bazaar photographer Louise Dahl-Wolfe were published alongside quotes in dialect in venues including *Time* and *Life* magazines. And so, William Edmondson, the gravestone cutter and Outsider artist, was a perfect choice for Black, to bridge the space, as she would say, between the oldest and the latest Folk expression.

As a 2001 follow-up to the essay, “The Museum at Twenty,” written in 1981, Gerard Wertkin, then *Director Emeritus* at the American Folk Art Museum, contributed “The Museum at Forty: Four Decades of Achievement,” to *Folk Art* magazine. In that survey, Wertkin remembered the institution’s debt to modernism, beginning: “The very idea that folk art could be studied and appreciated as art rather than as material culture or historical or ethnographic artifact, was a by-product of the growth of modernism as a movement in the history of American culture.” Indeed, the great universalizing machine of modernism, by decontextualizing utilitarian and amateur objects in favor of a formal assessment of them as “art,” made some so-called “Folk art” palatable and then desirable for institutionalization, art museum display and collecting in the twentieth century. Wertkin continued, connecting AFAM’s founding goals directly to those of earlier twentieth-century modernist displays of American Folk art, importantly at the Newark Museum and the Museum of Modern Art, and specifically under MoMA director and curator (1932-33) Holger Cahill. What AFAM avoided at first, Wertkin

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204 Wertkin “The Museum at Forty,” 32.
confirmed, is an historical or ethnographic presentation of Folk art. Modernist ideas about the right display of Folk art, rather, structured the first, and many subsequent exhibits mounted by AFAM. In general, modernist exhibitions reduce historical context and visual noise that might distract from aesthetic appreciation of individual objects. Such sparse presentations were invented to counter the cluttered and confining space of the salon with evenly-spaced paintings hung at eye level, isolated sculptures on pedestals, and gallery layouts that encouraged movement.

This chapter broadly studies the marriage of Folk and Outsider art within the collection of the American Folk Art Museum, formerly the Museum of American Folk Art, and founded as the Museum of Early American Folk Art in 1961 in New York City. I aim to point out the practices for exhibiting Folk art at the museum that also became standards for the exhibition of Outsider art there, as well as to note places where those standards differed between the two genres and changed, thus helping to demarcate Outsider art as a distinct genre. The first part of this chapter surveys attitudes toward the collecting of Folk art in the United States from the colonial revivals at the end of the nineteenth century through the post-War decades. It traces the changing symbolic uses to which Folk art was put, from nationalistic trophy to modernist prototype. Although these symbolic uses have been traced into the early decades of the twentieth century by others before me, I pay close attention to the ways those attitudes manifested and


207 The first and most important work to describe this history through exhibitions was Beatrix Rumford, “Uncommon art of the common people: a review of trends in the collecting and exhibiting of American folk art,” in Perspectives on American Folk Art, eds. Ian M.G. Quimby and Scott T. Swank (New York: Norton in conjunction with the Winterthur Museum, 1980). Objections to this dominant history of Folk art as “rediscovered” by modernists in the United States have been raised, most recently at the Southeast Conference of Art Colleges (SECAC) conference in Pittsburgh, 23 October 2015. Shirley Reese-Hughes of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art proposed that American modernists—many of whom were immigrants, such as Elie Nadelman and Yasuo Kuniyoshi—responded
asserted themselves through exhibitions here, in particular. I delineate these attitudes with a goal to compare them to the later, symbolic uses of Outsider art objects, as souvenirs of contact with the marginal for their possessors. The next section of the chapter clarifies the direct connections of Cahill and his modernist exhibition mode to the American Folk Art Museum in New York. After establishing Cahill’s formalism as the founding and still predominant mode at the museum, the third section complicates that notion--of a monolithic, modernist exhibition style at AFAM—by including more recent, contextual presentations since the 1990s and idiosyncratic exhibitions presented under curator Herbert Hemphill during the 1970s. Further, the stimulus of domestic design has been all but excluded from the analysis of AFAM’s exhibitions, and I touch upon it here. Fourth, and most importantly, the chapter pinpoints as acutely as possible, the entry of Outsider art into the museum’s exhibition program, and posits that modes of exhibition already in place at the museum for Folk art were applied to integrate and naturalize an increasingly significant Outsider collection there.

Collecting the Colonial: Antiques, Americana and Folk art

By the 1880s, American antiques and amateur art, considered together under the heading “Folk art” in the United States, were valued by collectors for their “historicalness.” Folk art, as it was collected from the latter nineteenth century on, emblematized the austere and idealized moral fortitude of the colonial American people, set against the trappings of the nouveau riche and distinctive furnishings of incoming immigrant cultures. Although Folk art in the United States held these particular associations, in Europe at this time as well, “the valorization of folk
to Folk art, not for its abstract formal qualities, but for its insinuations of community. That paper, however interesting, failed to provide specific proof for this alternate reading and relied on the conceit that immigrants are naturally searching for community in their new homelands.
culture underpinned the search for the roots of national identity and tradition.”

The European interest in Folk production was, however, more closely linked to ethnological interests, the production of discrete national identities within larger Europe, and a peasant class and costume. Ethnic particularities would necessarily tend to be squelched in American constructions of Folk art in favor of an imagined unity of American spirit and aesthetics, as I will review. From this historical moment in the U.S., the collecting of antiques [cum Folk art] was associated with escapism and a celebration of the “hunt.” Elizabeth Stillinger, historian of Folk art collecting writes: “For colonial revivalists, collecting furnishings similar to those they encountered in old houses during their summer vacations provided an alluring alternative to the modern environment. They enjoyed the exhilaration of the chase and capture, and the satisfaction of acquiring hand made furnishings.”

Judith Barter tells the story in For Kith and Kin: the folk art collection at the Art Institute of Chicago, of colonial revival collector Emma Hodges. Hodges associated colonial revival antiques with morality, Republicanism and patriotism, according to Barter. One quilt that she donated to the Art Institute of Chicago was accompanied with a backstory that had its original owner as a horseback preacher converting troops on the Civil War front. As Barter points out, this despite of no record of that type of evangelism as a common activity in the 1860s, no record of the original owner at all, nor of how Hodges had acquired the quilt. Moral associations,

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209 Ibid. Rampley writes: “The discovery of Folk art was, of course, a Europe-wide phenomenon, linked to the emergence of ethnology as a field of scholarly endeavor as well as to the growth of attention to primitive art. All three were, in turn, a reflection of processes of modernization, in which urbanization fundamentally altered earlier customs and social practices, and the colonial experience, which provided Europeans extensive contact with radically different cultures.”

manufactured or not, were Hodges’ claim in the propagation of the object’s meaning. She apparently loved to rescue antiques from the obscurity of recent history, reporting that, “warm spring weather increased her ‘fever’ for travel and the passion of the hunt.”

Tinged with xenophobia, Folk art was sometimes used as tool for assimilation. Only a few curators, one of whom was folklorist, Allen Eaton, countered the narrow view of Folk art forwarded by revivalists like Hodges. Simon Bronner, in “Folk Art on Display: America’s Conflict of Traditions,” draws Eaton’s position through analysis of that curator’s “Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts of the Homelands,” held at the Albright Gallery in Buffalo and the New York State Educational Building in Albany (1919), in the Rochester Memorial Gallery (1920), and at other sites until 1932. Bronner praises Eaton, writing: “His culturally diverse view drew metaphors from the new physics of relativity and the ethnology of culture for the dynamics of America’s cultural plurality.” Bronner sets Eaton’s exhibitions of immigrant Folk arts against Holger Cahill’s later modernist exhibitions of Folk art in the 1930s. He argues that these two poles of presentation – ethnographic and aesthetic, respectively--are still representative of disparate modes of exhibition in the contemporary Folk art field.

How did a visitor experience the “Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts of the Homelands”? It was sprawling in most venues, particularly in the Albright-Knox Gallery’s atrium and in the New York State Educational Building. Passing through a small, introductory section that proposed the collaborative nature of the effort by mixing cultural objects from the twenty-two represented

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213 Allen Eaton was field secretary of the American Federation of Arts, founded 1919 in order to bring arts appreciation to the widest possible American audience.
215 Plural, Eaton’s language.
countries, visitors were then led by costumed interpreters through booths designed to cordon off each ethnic display, while performances and crafts demonstrations took place in common areas. Eaton wrote in his summary 1932 volume, *Immigrant Gifts to American Life*, “These events were public acknowledgments of the gifts which the immigrant brings to his adopted country, and encouragements to him to prize and conserve for America his finest native heritages.”

Installation photos from the various incarnations of *Homelands* show tables laid with ethnic textiles and small-scale furnishings, religious objects, and crafts, some encased, but many arrayed casually. These were all borrowed from immigrant lenders to the show. Some objects, like chairs, toys and tools—the same order of objects treated aesthetically by Cahill and his cohorts, and later by AFAM—litter the floor, and clothing, laces and textiles adorn the walls. At the Albright-Knox Gallery in 1919, the displays hugged walls and corners, allowing the architecture of the gallery’s six large rooms to create “natural” domestic vignettes without partitions. By 1920, at the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, the overt compartmentalization into ethnic booths was more complete [Figure 22]. A large map of each represented nation hung at the front of every booth. Objects were once again arrayed to mimic a livable, if overstuffed, parlor. Although fine examples were sought, the aesthetic strength of each object was not of primary consideration. Wooden stables apportioned adjacent displays with partitions awkwardly separating the viewing spaces for each vignette. Thus one could not simply walk along a wooden railing taking in culture after culture in succession, but had the choreographed experience of leaving and entering the viewing space of each ethnic vignette. The stables and partitions restricted a viewer’s access to the “immigrant” space while containing those cultures spatially.

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217 Some installation photos are reproduced in Greenwold “The Great Palace.” Those were sourced from the archives at the Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo and the University of Rochester. Others are available in Eaton *Immigrant Gifts* and in the archives of individual institutions which hosted the show.
and metaphorically.\textsuperscript{218} This coincided with the historical moment of the first installations of museum period rooms, similarly restricted spaces, such as those in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum in 1924.\textsuperscript{219} Although Bronner finds Eaton’s pluralism morally superior to Cahill’s later championing of the anonymous “common man,” Diana Greenwold argues that Eaton’s version of immigrant life was itself a fantasy conglomeration-- a reframing of ethnic immigrant culture within the huge, yet still confining spaces of elite U.S. cultural institutions.\textsuperscript{220}

“The Quality of Poetry:” American Modernists Appropriate Folk Art

Folk art collecting in the United States saw a sharp upturn in the 1920s that lasted until the 1940s. The cataclysm of WWI had thrust the nation into a wave of patriotism; many expatriates had come home; wealthy Americans cast off European styles; and artists and critics once again searched for a homegrown American style, in part through regionalism and realism. Abstraction, with its anti-realist, anti-figurative program would eventually succeed after WWII with many in charge of major museum shows in the Northeast, because of a range of factors including the nearness of realist styles to those fascist and socialist styles. The formal simplicity—perceived as naïveté or brilliance--of some American Folk painting and sculpture resonated with both those proponents of hearty American realism \textit{and} with those who favored the abstract turn. In a famous exchange, Cahill reportedly presented a Folk watercolor that he had purchased for $3.50 in New Haven to modernist painter Charles Sheeler with the question,

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218 Greenwold argues that the opening rooms of the installation, which brought together objects by newer immigrant groups (such as the Polish) and works by older American immigrants (such as the French) counteracted this compartmentalization by effectively erasing “hierarchies prevalent in exhibitions such as the world’s fair ethnographic displays.” Greenwold “The Great Palace,” 7.

219 The Essex Museum in Massachusetts, now the Peabody-Essex, is credited as the first to install North American period rooms showing everyday settings in 1907. The Metropolitan museum had previously installed European aristocratic rooms. See Pilgrim “Inherited From the Past,” and Amelia Peck and James Parker, \textit{Period Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art} (New York: Abrams, 1996).

220 See Bronner “Folk Art on Display,” and Greenwold “The Great Palace.”
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“How would you like to have done this?” Sheeler replied, aghast, “My God I wish I could. There is a severity there, a sparseness. It’s something like the quality of poetry.”

In the 1920s, Folk art collecting in the United States was stimulated by the interest of modernist artists, many of them around the Ogunquit School of art in Maine, founded by Hamilton Easter Field in 1913. Those artists, in turn, had been influenced by the various primitivist artists they had observed, many first-hand, before the War in Europe. Folk art, still in plentiful supply in the Teens and Twenties, in the antiques shops of the Eastern seaboard, presented itself as an American formal analog to Picasso’s African masks and Gauguin’s Tahitian idols. Accounts credit the Ogunquit artist Robert Laurent with the introduction of both art dealer, Halpert, and her friend Cahill, to Folk art in Maine around the summer of 1926. Laurent was indeed around the scene and collecting Folk art, but the artist Elie Nadelman was probably the first advocate to Halpert, along with Field at Ogunquit. Within the year, Halpert was informally showing Folk art at her Downtown Gallery in Manhattan – a gallery she founded.

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224 Judith A. Barter states the connection outright (Barter and Obniski *For Kith and Kin*, 19). Laurent did rent a summer home to the Halpers in Maine, and Cahill did visit them to look at art, both Modern and Folk. Elizabeth Stillinger cautions that this epiphany is overstated, and that Cahill would have been aware of the Whitney Studio Club’s *Early American Art* exhibit of 1924 (Stiingle, *A Kind of Archaeology*). Halpert credits Elie Nadelman and Charles Sheeler, among other artists, with the introduction. For a brief overview of Nadelman and Sheeler’s collections and the Whitney Studio Show of 1924, see Stillinger *A Kind of Archaeology*. See also Rumford “Uncommon Art.” A 2015 exhibition, “Folk Art and American Modernism,” shown at AFAM (July 18-September 27) but organized by the Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York drew out these connections with examples of Folk and modernist painting.
with money saved from years of work and investing as an executive, while supporting her husband, Sam Halpert, a mid-level abstract painter.\textsuperscript{225}

Halpert’s display of American Folk art at the Downtown Gallery in the 1920s was in part circumstantial and, in part, deliberate. In an extensive interview recorded for the Archives of American Art by Harlan Phillips in 1962-3 and not yet adequately treated by scholars, Halpert divulged that she set up pieces of Folk art as background décor for the gallery at first. She originally began collecting Folk furniture [Halpert’s term] for her own home because antiques stores were more “thrifty” than department stores.\textsuperscript{226} Folk art and furniture gave the gallery a domestic look and affected the chic homes of many of her gallery artists, like Sheeler and Nadelman. Diane Tepfer’s 1989 dissertation on the Downtown Gallery confirms: “The opening installation would call to mind a gracious den or living room in an upper-middle class home of art collectors rather than a fine art gallery were it not for the labels...”\textsuperscript{227} The announcement for that opening installation promised modern art and, “In addition there will be a fine display of antiques and an comprehensive assortment of books.”\textsuperscript{228}

A photograph from 1926 of the original, downstairs space of the Downtown Gallery on 13\textsuperscript{th} Street in Greenwich Village shows one corner of a fireplace mantle around which bookshelves and a seating area have been politely arranged [Figure 23]. A Nadelman sculpture of a female figure rests casually atop an antique wooden chest. Neither is labeled, and neither

\textsuperscript{225} For more on Edith Halpert, her gallery and Modern art, see the biography by Lindsay Pollock, \textit{The Girl with A Gallery: Edith Gregor Halpert and the Making of the Modern Art Market} (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2006).
\textsuperscript{226} Halpert remembered: “I mean, I bought it because it was the cheapest stuff you could get, and the whole house was furnished with early American furniture, and this was way before 1924, before Nadelman and so on, you know, the kind of thing that you just did automatically because you'd get a chest of drawers for three dollars. You'd go to Bloomingdale's or Macy's, and you had to pay at least thirty-five dollars, so you put brown soap on the drawers so that they would slide out, and you'd paint the things.” Phillips \textit{Interview}.
\textsuperscript{228} Announcement for the Opening of the Downtown Gallery, 6 November 1926. Downtown Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
incites anachronism. The organic, fernlike surface decoration on the chest is echoed by wire forms in Nadelman’s sculpture. In fact, Halpert did not formally show any Folk art for at least the first three years of the Downtown Gallery’s operation. Her exhibition style at this juncture was probably not as haphazard or thrifty as the cosmopolitan gallerist would make it seem in her retrospective interview. Halpert did openly agree that some of the formal language of American Folk art sympathized with the hard-edged, simplified abstractions of American modernists that she showed, such as George Ault. Her American Ancestors show of 1931, which paired Folk and Modern art in an artistic lineage, is strong evidence. But she downplayed that intention in her later interview, reasserting that she originally installed the Folk art at the Downtown Gallery as somewhat of a pretense: “I didn't -- you know, the folk art was just a ‘puller inner’ with the idea of making them like modern art. I was getting bored.” Once she realized the draw, Halpert wisely exploited her Folk art collection to lure in conservative collectors who may not yet have been convinced of the strength of Modern art. She recalled an episode when Edsel Ford came in to buy Folk art at the Downtown Gallery. Halpert slipped a Sheeler into a grouping of six Folk paintings. When Ford selected the Sheeler as one of his favorites, she demurred and refused the sale, admitting she had done a “naughty” thing.

Halpert certainly took cues from modern, high-end, domestic interior design that was in turn supplied with fine, hand-made objects through a knee-jerk resurgence of hand-craftsmanship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, itself prompted by the mass production of household furnishings and department store retail, both in the U.S. and Europe. Halpert’s biographer, Lindsay Pollock, notes in The Girl with the Gallery, that Halpert had been moved by her visit to the International Exposition of Decorative Arts and Modern Industries (Exposition

\footnote{229 Phillips Interview.}

\footnote{230 Ibid.}
Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes) in Paris one year prior to the gallery opening. That exhibition featured “ensembles” of industrial products, luxury goods and exotic objects, that privileged the subjectivity of the new consumer who acted as ensemblier in her own home. Simon Dell explains in “The Consumer and the Making of Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes 1907-25”: “In the logic of this system of readjustment, the coordination of the ensemble is defined as an expressive act. The disposition of objects was made a sign of the disposition of the consumer.” This fact did not escape Halpert, as the arrangement of her Downtown Gallery, fusing colonial and modern, might attest. She played on the moral currency of Folk art in her choice of display.

When Halpert expanded her Gallery in 1929, an upstairs floor of the same building was dedicated to the display of Folk art. It would officially become the American Folk Art Gallery, with Cahill as partner, in October 1931. It was open, like Dubuffet’s Foyer under René Drouin would be, only by appointment, until 1932. A light-filled upstairs room, however, it was a reversal of Dubuffet’s Foyer. Neither dangerous nor mad, Folk artists were implicitly morally superior forebears of the modernists downstairs. Of course, to Dubuffet’s mind, Art Brut was similarly superior to modern art—morals aside. While Folk art in Halpert’s incarnation was pure in its simplicity, and thus exhibited with all the clarity and light befitting such humble production, Art Brut’s power was its very baseness. It was shown in a poorly lit, subterranean space in Paris, settings fit to conjure cave art, graffiti and the asylum.

Halpert’s space upstairs at first preserved the same domestic tone as the downstairs gallery, although it exclusively featured Folk art. An undated photo, probably from 1930, shows a wallpapered room with low bookshelves [Figure 24]. Folk paintings are arrayed symmetrically.

231 Pollock Girl With the Gallery, 60.
with sculptures below creating an ordered scene. Bird decoys rest near a naïve family portrait. Later photos from the American Folk Art Gallery show a changed approach to its design: a stark room with white, uninterrupted, plastered walls and silhouetted Folk objects [Figures 25 and 26]. Weathervanes and whirligigs are arranged on stakes and pedestals, and seem to float at rhythmic intervals throughout the room. Although Halpert was ambiguous about the date of the change, she did refer to the broader shift in her exhibition aesthetic:

I had all the other things tucked away and having been very much interested in Sullivan's architecture, the idea of wasted space seemed very wicked. I no longer had shelves there. I had nothing to put on the shelves.  

By the early 1930s, Halpert and her intimate friend, “Eddie” Cahill, as she called him, had been on countless prospecting missions in Northeastern antiques shops from Maine to Pennsylvania to New York, and his style of exhibition had no doubt affected her own, just as her connections had benefitted him. They even travelled to the Southern United States in search of a new frontier of collecting. Halpert, like so many other Folk and Outsider collectors liked the “hunt,” but perhaps not so much as Cahill. Halpert had ulterior motives as a friend and art dealer to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, who was acquainted to her through her own voracious collecting of Modern art in the Twenties, much to her husband, John D. Rockefeller’s chagrin. 

Persuading Mrs. Rockefeller of the urgency in hoarding increasingly sought-after, and ultimately limited, works of Folk art from New England, Halpert, with Cahill, became skilled at seeking out Folk art and convincing its owners to sell. It was A. A. Rockefeller, in Stillinger’s account, who first showed Folk art within sleek, modern rooms, in a reversal of the Downtown Gallery’s early

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233 Ibid. Halpert refers to the Downtown Gallery space in this passage, but based on extant images reproduced here it is applicable to the American Folk Art Gallery as well.


235 Halpert later recalled: “She [A. A. Rockefeller] never bought anything through anybody else until later when the Modern Museum [Museum of Modern Art, NY] was established -- you know, paying a director, and that's how I lost all the Rockefellers by handing them over [to Cahill], but I got others.” Phillips Interview.
décor that had, rather, placed modern art among antique furnishings: “Her [Rockefeller’s] beautiful suite of rooms on the seventh floor of the Rockefeller mansion at 10 54th Street in Manhattan, designed by Duncan Candler and Donald Deskey and completed in 1930, held changing exhibitions of modern art, and, a little later, Folk art.”\textsuperscript{236} When Rockefeller decided to loan much of her collection of Folk art to the restored 1755 Ludwell-Paradise house at Colonial Williamsburg, a pet project of her husband’s, in 1935, Cahill took charge of the transfer. The Rockefellers’ collection was installed there as period décor for the historic home. In 1957, the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, including the Ludwell-Paradise loan plus Folk objects of Rockefeller’s returned from MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum, opened in a permanent move to Colonial Williamsburg.\textsuperscript{237} The installation of the Folk art there combined aesthetic presentations with domestic vignettes and period rooms, for a range of visitor experiences, under the guidance of curator and then director, Mary Childs Black, from 1958 until she left that position to steer the Museum of Early American Folk Art in 1963. Rockefeller’s collection that, under the influence of Halpert and Cahill, had defined Folk art rather narrowly at first, has come to admit many objects of contemporary self-taught art and Southern Folk art today.

Prefiguring the Modern: Holger Cahill and American Folk Art in the 1930s

Holger Cahill’s formulation of the “common man” preceded Dubuffet’s defining of \textit{l’homme commun} by ten years, at least in print.\textsuperscript{238} Like Dubuffet, Cahill prided himself by his

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\textsuperscript{236} Stillinger \textit{A Kind of Archaeology}, 44.
\textsuperscript{238} See Jean Dubuffet, \textit{L’Homme du commun à l’ouvrage} (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), and Chapter One.
\end{flushright}
ability to access both high and low cultural zones. His ennobling of the “common man” in the United States became the legitimating paradigm for his display of Folk art in high cultural institutions. What no doubt reflected in a configuration that so glorified the colonial Republican spirit, was Cahill’s own biography. He was born in Iceland, moving with his family to Canada and then North Dakota in his youth only to become a farm hand and itinerant after being abandoned by his parents. An autodidact, largely, he fought his way out of destitution and reluctantly accepted kindness from strangers, even as a child. Eventually moving to the bohemian Greenwich Village of the Teens, he was a friend to modernist painters (John Sloan), a conceptual artist (creating a Dada movement called Inje-Inje, named for an Andean tribe), and something of a primitivist. His curatorial philosophy was forged by the intersection in his experience of a triumvirate of progressive American thinkers: John Dewey, Thorstein Veblen and John Cotton Dana--the last, a personal mentor to Cahill. He was hired by John Cotton Dana in 1921 to work at the Newark Museum, specifically on his Deutsche Werkbund exhibition. In her recent dissertation, Jillian Russo noted that Cahill’s “attraction to the Newark job spoke to his proclivity for positioning himself on the margins, where he could be an insider and an outsider, and assume the role of cultural translator”—again, much like Dubuffet.

Cahill’s biographer, Wendy Jeffers, argues that Dana’s populist beliefs about museums as vehicles for education, and his push to display craft and industrial objects at the Newark Museum, influenced Cahill’s mature ideas about appropriate subject matter for museum exhibition. The first display of modern industrial design in the U.S. was Dana’s 1912 exhibition of items from the Exhibition of German Applied Arts at the Newark Museum—the

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239 Cahill Reminiscences, 158.
subject repeated with the 1921 *Werkbund* show. Throughout the 1920s, Dana continued to show utilitarian objects for the value of their design, even those that were mass-produced, such as with *Inexpensive Items of Good Design* (Newark Museum, 1928). But Dana’s exhibitions of “industrial arts” celebrated what might more properly be called “craft,” “tools,” and “design,” and Cahill often disagreed with Dana’s aesthetics.\(^{242}\) He evaluated Dana’s aesthetic sense as such: “I think that the business of cheap things in the department store, that sort of thing, was related to industrial uses of art. Dana had a very good sense of that. For pictures, paintings, he always used to write ‘Art’ with a capital ‘A,’ which has a little bit of contempt behind it.”\(^{243}\)

With Dana’s passing, Cahill would eventually set the pace for the aesthetic appraisal of American Folk art in museums with exhibitions at the Newark Museum in 1930 (*American Primitive Paintings*) and 1931 (*American Folk Sculpture*). As Cahill wrote in his introduction to *American Folk Sculpture* in 1931: “In selecting exhibits the museum has stressed the esthetic quality rather than technical proficiency. It has tried to find objects which illustrated not only excellence of craftsmanship – and there has always been a good deal of excellent craftsmanship in America – but particularly those which have value as sculpture.”\(^{244}\) That standard, in an extension of the modernist paradigm of autonomy plus originality, sought singular, even odd, objects over those exhibiting mastery of a shared skill or shared Folk aesthetic. For example, *American Folk Sculpture* opened with a twelve-foot tall figurehead of President Andrew Jackson by an anonymous sculptor—an ironic bit of handicraft given Jackson’s push for American industrialization, but perhaps a nod to the museum’s legacy of championing the industrial arts.


\(^{243}\) Cahill *Reminiscences*, 166.

\(^{244}\) Holger Cahill, Introduction to *American Folk Sculpture*, ex.cat., (Newark Museum of Art, 1931), 13.
and to Dana himself [Figure 27]. Discussed in the exhibition catalog with regard to its curious provenance (Was this indeed the very figurehead installed on the USS Constitution in 1834 and later decapitated?), it was also subject to an eloquent formal analysis: “Remarkable portraiture. Fine, deep-set eyes, drawn lines around mouth and haughty carriage all bespeak a man of the people…Bristling hair treated in a manner which sets off ragged countenance. Slight sweeping motion in folds of great cape…”

The anonymity of the artists in the Newark exhibition was not a symptom of a communal production ideal, but of a combination of the real circumstances of piecemeal antiques buying plus a forceful absenting of the artist in favor of cultivating imminence for the object, rendered legible only through its form and scant explanations by experts. Cahill invoked the now-classic Folk art “hunt” in asserting that the objects had been “gathered from Atlantic seaboard from Maine to Virginia during the past summer,” by himself and Halpert. Cahill’s personal tastes in Folk art favored a narrow picture of the American Folk artist as “common man,” descended from colonials in the Northeast, and it appears that he began to use that term at the time of the 1931 Newark show. Interestingly, research for this dissertation revealed that an essay, “American Folk Art,” which he wrote earlier that year for the journal American Mercury, did not contain the term, as nearly all of his subsequent publications on the subject dependably would.

The giant sculpture of Jackson described above may be a clue to Cahill’s shift in terminology,

245 Cahill American Folk Sculpture, 30.
246 Ibid. He did not reveal in this text that many of those objects had been collected by Halpert and himself expressly for the collection of Mrs. Rockefeller. She was the lender for many of the objects in the 1930 and 1931 Newark exhibitions and all, save one, of the objects in the 1932 MoMA exhibition.
247 Cahill laid out geographical and chronological parameters for Folk art expressly: “The greater part of it comes from New England and Pennsylvania, which were centers of craftsmanship in the Colonial and early American periods. Most of the material is of the 19th century, though a number of the exhibits, such as the cast iron stove plats of Pennsylvania, and a few of the weathervanes and figureheads, date as early as the middle of the 18th century” (ibid.).
drawing as Cahill likely did on Jackson’s legacy of populism to address the working-class audience in Newark. Jackson’s era, perceived as an age of the common man, hinged on a conservative enchantment with Jackson as a figurehead among the masses of eastern workers and western farmers – the very creators of Cahill’s brand of Folk art—rather than any proto-socialist politics that the term might invoke in the twentieth century. Thus the term for Cahill certainly held implications of class without linguistically constituting a proletariat. Cahill wrote in his introductory essay to the 1931 catalog that Folk art was instinctive artistry layered atop craft tradition, “an expression of the common people and not an expression of a small cultured class.”

Russo notes, without at all giving the notion the full weight of explaining the shift in terminology, that this was the historical moment when Cahill was assuming his role as curator, with the death of Dana.

Cahill stripped the domesticity seen in restrained, quaint groupings of furniture, Folk painting and sculpture favored by Halpert in the 1920s and later by Mary Childs Black, curator at the Ludwell-Paradise House, from his exhibitions of Folk art by displaying evenly spaced, isolated artworks as Dana had his industrial objects [Figures 28a and 28b]. Dana’s style, although importantly new in exhibiting and isolating utilitarian objects in a museum, was not particularly revolutionary along a spectrum culminating in Cahill’s mature exhibition style at MoMA. Cahill can be linked to figures of European international style modernism through the Newark Museum. For instance, the German Applied Arts exhibition that travelled to the Newark Museum in 1922, where Cahill was working as a publicist at the time, was designed by Lily Reich, who also designed textiles for the Deutsche Werkbund and collaborated with Mies van der Rohe. Van der Rohe is credited as codifying European modernist design through exhibitions

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249 Cahill American Folk Sculpture, 13.
such as the German Pavilion for the International Exhibition at Barcelona in 1929. In the United States, Alfred Stieglitz pioneered a modernist presentation of artwork at his 291 Gallery in Manhattan that also clearly made an impression on Cahill. Cahill reminisced of Stieglitz, a personal friend, “He had a mania for cleanliness, that’s one thing. His gallery was white. The walls were absolutely white. Everything was spotless. One spot on the wall and he’d repaint the whole wall. He was very active about it, very eager.”

Cahill continued his decade-long essay on American Folk art through exhibition, taking over the Directorship of the Museum of Modern Art temporarily during a period of Alfred Barr’s infirmity. In 1932 he mounted an exhibition of eighteenth and nineteenth-century American Folk painting and objects, Art of the Common Man in America, 1750-1900, that formed a counterpoint to a concurrent exhibition of professional art, American Painting and Sculpture, 1862-1932. Although the two exhibitions both likely already adhered to what was becoming MoMA’s institutional curatorial style, it is unfortunately not possible to compare those installations because MoMA’s archives only contain images of the latter show of painting and sculpture [Figure 29]. With chronological parameters in the titles, he reinforced the end of American Folk art with the turn of the twentieth century, but hinted at the possibility for another kind of self-taught expression, an amateurism: “By the close of the [nineteenth] century the era of handicrafts supported by apprenticeship was definitely at an end, and American folk art was dead, except for the work of the amateur.”

Cahill wrote at length of Folk art that year in an article for Parnassus:

The folk artist cannot be accused of mechanically repeating hollow instruction. One reason is that they had little or no instruction to repeat. A better reason is that many of

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251 Cahill Reminiscences. Cahill, in that interview, reported that he knew Stieglitz well. He remembered evenings at Stieglitz’s house when he attended the elder gallerist in conversation while he lay in bed with a failing heart.

them were true artists and so everything they had to say in the plastic mediums has an individuality, a forthright intensity, and a sincere and direct attempt to penetrate the subject which is seldom met with in the work of secondary professional artists. 253

That idiosyncrasy supposedly indicated the proto-modern individualistic subjectivity of the American citizen. Lone objects by anonymous makers, as well as, by contrast, the oeuvres of a few named American Folk art “masters,” 254 were seen by Cahill to dialogue visually with the work of American modernists. In her essay, “Picturing a ‘Usable Past’” of 2002, Virginia Tuttle Clayton, curator of prints at the National Gallery, Washington, elaborated on Cahill’s position as based on the earlier philosophy of Van Wyck Brooks. Brooks was a literary critic and Pulitzer Prize winning historian. In writing his touchstone essay, “Creating a Usable Past,” Brooks “believed our self-styled cultural history should commemorate the genuinely American creative impulse he had encountered among some forgotten, eccentric geniuses who inhabited our past.” 255

“Eccentric” would be a strong word to term the artwork shown at MoMA in 1932, as most of it existed within already established genres of Folk art, as what Cahill called “overflow from craft.” 256 Some of it was unconventional, but not quite strange. One version of Edward Hicks’ now famous A Peaceable Kingdom, for example, was included in the Common Man show, indicative of a naïve style favored by Cahill. It shows an edenic garden filled with varieties of beasts and prey relaxing together in harmony, all painted in a wooden, simplified style with flat areas of color and an isometric perspective. A few truly eccentric pieces were included, however. One such painting reproduced in the exhibition’s catalog without

254 At the time these were all white, male, portrait and landscape painters from the Northeast like Joseph Pickett and Edward Hicks.
256 Cahill Art of the Common Man, 4.
commentary, and titled *True Cross* (1790), had all of the oddness, experimentation and personal character of Outsider art, *avant la lettre*. Using oil paint on *bricolaged* bed ticking, the artist created a dramatic Crucifixion scene, depicted from multiple angles and using an intuitive foreshortening. Notable for its stagey Christian imagery, usually far subtler if not totally avoided in the Protestant Northeast, the painting suggests a passing awareness on the part of the artist, of early Renaissance paintings. Clouds blackened out by a biblical eclipse are painted with an energetic stroke and an attempt at movement that grates against the linear permanence and plastic form of a Hicks or Pickett painting. With an apparent lack of information as to the identity of the artist or the painting’s provenance, the catalog gives the painting new birth by substituting, not the word “anonymous,” but instead, the site of its discovery (“found in New Hope, Pennsylvania”) for the name of the artist.  

The *Common Man* catalog presented space for Cahill to include biographical information on the known artists, offered unevenly, depending on what was readily available, or upon the work he happened to have completed. Cahill had begun to research the biographies of a few of his “master” artists for an unarticulated Folk art canon, such as those of Edward Hicks and Jo Pickett, the former of whom had self-mythologized with a lengthy auto-biography. There was no sustained attempt at an extensive study of the influences and development of the known artists, little effort to discover the identities of the unknowns, and in a few cases, Cahill declared a dearth of information on an individual without much actual inquiry [Figure 30]. For example, a 1933 letter to Cahill from Ralph Warren Burnham of Ipswich, Massachusetts, an interested attendee of the *Common Man* show, offers a corrective to such an assertion by Cahill with regard to a Timothy Dexter. The catalog stated of Dexter: “All physical trace of Dexter, his estate, his

257 Cahill *Art of the Common Man*, see Plate 23.
statues, his commercial enterprises has disappeared. All that is left is his legend…” Burnham’s letter cited that passage, and countered with the very information on Dexter that Cahill had declared lost:

Enclosed please find a postal card showing Lord Timothy Dexter’s mansion. It can be seen at any time at 197 High Street, Newburyport. Also the house in which he previously lived still stands on State Street in Newburyport…At the Newburyport Historical Society may be seen a portion of one of the figures that was formerly set up in front of his mansion.

The letter continued in a respectful but slightly sardonic tone to list off the inscriptions on Dexter’s tombstones, and those of his wife and son, and even to take issue with a point Cahill had made about the superficial eccentricity of Dexter’s published work, *A Pickle for the Knowing Ones*.

Works by a group of so-called “naïve” artists were assembled for MoMA’s 1938 exhibition, *Masters of Popular Painting*, that travelled to New York from the Museum of Grenoble, France. Among the more famous of the naïves were painters Camille Bombois, Louis Vivin, and Henri Rousseau, the last of whom was brought to public renown through the efforts of playwright Alfred Jarry, poet Guillaume Apollinaire and Pablo Picasso himself. Unlike *Art Brut* and Outsider artists, expected to be mentally or socially isolated, many of these naïves had attempted to assert their work into professional venues such as the *Salon des Artistes Indépendents*. It is their eventual championing by insiders—even if that be perverse, as in the case of Rousseau—that links these naïve painters to later Outsider artists. By 1938, Cahill had

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258 Ibid., 20.
259 Letter from Ralph Warren Burnham to Holger Cahill dated 17 January 1933, in the Holger Cahill Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
260 Ibid.
been conscripted into the service of the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), but he advised the exhibition on the U.S. end. Assistant curator, Dorothy Canning Miller, who married Cahill that year, arranged an American contingent of “modern primitives,” including Edward Hicks and Horace Pippen, to be added to those coming from the French incarnation of the exhibition that had been likewise titled, *Les maîtres populaires de la réalité*. The exhibition itself was straightforwardly modernist in MoMA’s large, white galleries. The easel paintings were surprisingly uniform in size, framed similarly and lit evenly. Their subject matter was invariably narrative and figural, with landscape forming an important backdrop to each. They shared a flat style, gently abstracted, with planar application of color and some attempts at shading for volume [Figure 31].

Most of the untrained artists—whose work exhibited a unity of style, not through collaboration but through curatorial selection—held jobs and painted in spare time or after retirement, according to the brief biographies given by the catalog. None were exceptional, nor truly marginal, figures in society, if their middle-class lifestyles are taken as measure. The popular “masters” were, however, spoken of in the exhibition’s catalog, and particularly by the French writers, with poetic language bordering the surrealistic, and evocative of artistic dream worlds. They were “sincere” and “pure” at the very least. Maximilien Gauthier wrote in one transcendent passage: “The Universe is only a reflection. True reality exists within the soul. And the reality which exists in certain simple and miraculous souls is poetry. That is the whole secret.”

Cahill’s theoretical contribution to the exhibition was, on the other hand, more grounded in reality and in identifying non-mimetic systems of “realism” in the work of these painters. He wrote: “Surface realism means nothing to these artists. With them realism becomes

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passion and not mere technique. They have set down what they saw, but, much more, they have set down what they knew and what they felt.” That statement rang of Picasso’s famous formulation (“I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them”) and tied these naïves less to Surrealism, as had the French art historical contextualization, and more so to experiments with modernist abstraction. Cahill, in this, still found space to champion his idealized “common man,” thus linking these “masters of popular painting” with anonymous Folk art in addition to modernism. Cahill’s attitude toward this group of artists, however, and despite his terminology, would never approach the political intentions of the exhibition’s original French organizer, Andry-Farcy. Whereas Cahill’s tendency was to romanticize his Folk masters, his French counterparts were socialist sympathizers for whom nostalgia was anathema. Romy Golan explained it in her book, Modernity and Nostalgia (1995):

> In the midst of the vicissitudes of the 1930s, such artists as Rousseau, Utrillo, Bombois, Bauchant, Vivin, and Rimbert were no longer hailed as charming anachronisms, but as key antidotes to the spirit of anxiety of modernism, central protagonists in the struggle against the mechanization of the spirit and the retrieval of that lost entity called Man.\(^\text{264}\)

“From the Mundane to the Miraculous”: Sublimating Folk and Outsider Art

All of the objects exhibited in the two “light and bright” second-story rooms of the first museum space on Fifty-Third Street during the 1960s were displayed against burlap walls on an “unobtrusive background.” Paneling, cabinets and floorboards were stained a driftwood gray and bases and stands were painted with a rough “sand paint” to create “an appropriate foil” for


Folk art, according to Black’s article for the journal *Curator* in 1966.¹⁶⁶ A leveling, through a similar style of exhibition, then, allowed for the cohabitation of two orders of objects, Folk and Outsider, under the auspices of the Museum of American Folk Art. Outsider art historian, Charles Russell, has written of the relationship of the categories of Folk and Outsider art, broadly:

While folk art revealed a nostalgia for a pastoral, traditionalist society, the outsider paradigm displayed a romantic glorification of the artist’s radical innocence seemingly untainted by cultural norms. Initially in America, the “artist outsider” sustained the popular, indeed traditional myth of American individualistic spirit, while expressing an anti-establishment rebelliousness emerging from the 1960s social restlessness.²⁶⁷

Abstractly, both genres allow for the second-hand completion of meaning by a possessor, who might, for example, render a weathervane into a symbol of hearty but vague American values, or inscribe Outsider sculpture with mythic artistic genius. Looking at the conflation of Folk and Outsider art through the discourse of exoticism, and casting both genres as souvenirs of the temporally or culturally distant, we might come to an understanding of how these objects were linked in the minds of those who exhibited them at the Museum of American Folk Art.

Collecting of both genres of artwork involves a “hunt” for authentic objects, or, at least, objects that stand in for authenticity. Compare the Folk art adventures of Cahill and Halpert on the New England coast, from Baltimore to Maine, to photographer Louise Dahl-Wolfe’s discovery of Edmondson down in Nashville. All returned to New York City—and particularly MoMA, as the legitimizing modern art institution par excellence—with souvenirs of their experiences in the forms of Folk and Outsider art.²⁶⁸

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¹⁶⁶ Ibid.
²⁶⁸ Images of these exhibitions are, unfortunately, not available in the archives of MoMA, nor at AFAM, so I’ve relied here on short textual descriptions.
A souvenir gains its mystique from a narrative of distance, and may belong to one of several orders of the exotic, including the temporally distant (antique) and geographically distant (foreign), as famously laid out by Victor Segalen in his seminal *Essay On Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity* of 1904-18.\(^{269}\) The souvenir is returned by its owner from some braved encounter and remains an escapist vehicle for both she and other viewers. Susan Stewart’s theory of the “souvenir,” as presented in her *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir and the Collection* (1984), is helpful in articulating the place of Folk and Outsider art for the collector. Stewart explains: “Through narrative the souvenir substitutes a context of perpetual consumption for its context of origin. It represents not the lived experience of its maker but the ‘secondhand’ experience of its possessor/owner. Like the collection, it always displays the romance of contraband, for its scandal is its removal from its ‘natural’ location.”\(^{270}\)

For the museum’s first group exhibition of contemporary painting and sculpture by self-taught artists, *Twentieth-Century Folk Art*, held in 1970, some emphasis was indeed placed on legitimizing narratives of discovery. A press release listed not only the featured artists, but also the discoverers who had collected these souvenirs of their experiences with Outsiders. Grandma Moses, for instance, was “championed by the indefatigable Dr. Otto Kallir,” and she stood “as an Old Master” among these self-taught artists.\(^{271}\) Sidney Janis was credited with the championing, if not the discovery, of Morris Hirschfield and Lawrence Lebduska, both of whom were


\(^{270}\) Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir and the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 133.

illustrated in Janis’ 1942 manual of naïve American painting, *They Taught Themselves*.272

Herbert Hemphill, who had served as a Trustee since the museum’s founding, curated *Twentieth Century Folk Art*, and his recourse to grounding this artwork in the efforts of art world insiders was as intentional as Black’s choice of Edmondson for the 1965 exhibition had been. Hemphill had struggled to convince even the museum’s Board of the exhibition’s relevance. Alice Hoffman reported in her abbreviated history of the museum, 1961-1988, published in the *Clarion*, that the “Trustees were split over the validity of the show,” and that Hemphill became a driving force behind the acceptance of twentieth-century Folk art at the museum because he was convinced of its aesthetic strength.273

Hemphill was, himself, first an artist, and then a collector, only becoming a curator at the museum at the behest of Black in 1964, and he must have sympathized with the efforts of those collectors of twentieth-century Folk art whom he praised. However, Hemphill restricted his “hunts” mainly to Manhattan antiques shops on Second and Third Avenues. It was not until later in his life, through important Outsider art collectors, Julie and Michael Hall, that Hemphill became acquainted with an artist whom he collected, namely Edgar Tolson. Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, now Deputy Director of the Peabody-Essex Museum, wrote in her monograph on Hemphill: “As Hemphill and the Halls drove down from Campton’s mountains, Hemphill said that meeting Tolson was the equivalent of meeting the artists, all dead and often nameless, who had made the works in his collection. Hemphill had never encountered a living artist and, unbelievably, had not contemplated the possibility.”274


Telling Not Showing: The Museum Explains Contemporary Folk Art

After a formative decade of the 1960s, when the museum had set itself and its collection as the inheritor of Cahill’s mantle (although through a series of conservative exhibitions that hearkened more to the repressed 1950s than the freer 1960s), the 1970s would prove a more experimental decade for the museum. That experimentation, and a broader interest in objects and Folk customs from outside of Cahill’s purview did not usher in an era of twentieth-century Folk art exhibitions, as one might expect, however. Apart from three unrelated exhibitions, the museum did not exhibit twentieth-century Folk art during a full decade of the 1970s. One of those exhibitions was the aforementioned 1970 group exhibition, and another was an exhibition of Louisiana Folk paintings brought to New York by William Fagaly via the New Orleans Museum of Art in 1973. The third was a small show of the “primitive watercolors” of Herman Arthur Haskins curated by his daughter, Mary Williams Haskins. Hemphill, if he was not successful in bringing a turnabout to include contemporary Folk art more fully in the museum’s schedule, did change the exhibition style and the tenor of the museum’s exhibition program during the early years of the decade. As Hartigan wrote, “Hemphill emerged essentially as an individual. He was quite separate from, and in many respects unconcerned with, the rhetoric and issues attached to earlier collecting efforts.”

His exhibitions played with a different kind of domestic influence in presenting Folk art. Rather than the restrained domestic vignettes arranged by Halpert at the Downtown Gallery, or Black, at Williamsburg, and in some earlier instances at the museum, Hemphill’s installations were crowded. In that respect, Hemphill’s exhibition

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rather in the collection of the National Museum of American Art, where Hartigan was senior curator. This volume was published on that occasion.

275 Ibid., 22.
aesthetic matched the sensibility brought to the museum a little while later by Andy Warhol in his 1977 *Folk and Funk*, a show comprised of his personal collection of Folk art.²⁷⁶

Hemphill “distilled the baroque sensibility at work in his apartment,”²⁷⁷ in particular, for a series of “Grassroots” exhibitions planned around the U.S. bicentennial and sponsored by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. For *Fabric of the State* (1972), he filled to the brim the museum’s two rooms of gallery space with American textiles, clothing, hooked rugs, quilts, embroidery, and even included looms, machines and tools used in their manufacture. A comparison of Hemphill’s exhibition to an earlier, 1967 textile show of *American Needlework*, installed in the museum’s more characteristic, minimal exhibition style, is illuminating [Figures 36 and 37]. With *Fabric of the State*, Hemphill pioneered the inclusion of live demonstrations within the galleries, in a turn toward some limited, practical explanation of the exhibited objects. For his 1972 *Occult* show in the same space, Hemphill invited a coven of eleven practicing witches to consecrate the exhibition at the opening. They blessed goblets of wine and raised daggers in a darkened gallery while a palmist gave readings. The *Occult* exhibition of one hundred and fifteen “spiritualist” objects proved so popular that its dates were extended, but some within the museum organization and among the critical press questioned Hemphill’s tactics. One reviewer questioned Hemphill’s curatorial rigor: “The fact that phrenology, the system of analyzing character by the study of and bumps on the skull, is also included, indicates that the show at times seems more a hodgepodge than a serious study of hocus-pocus.”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ With characteristic flippancy, Warhol downplayed his collecting of antiques, saying that he adored “awkward,” “loser” objects, and that, “I am always looking for that five dollar object that’s really worth a million.” See Elissa Cullman’s essay for *Folk and Funk*, ex.cat., (New York: Museum of American Folk Art, 1977), and Rita Reif’s review in the *New York Times*, 22 September 1977. Although there is not space here, I hope to develop an article focusing on this exhibition and Warhol’s Folk art collection.


²⁷⁸ Ibid.
Hemphill’s personal eccentricity, and a growing acceptance of a Pop sensibility among more conservative circles brought this type of exhibition to the AFAM, but perhaps a decade late.

Although contemporary Folk art was rarely represented in the museum’s exhibitions during that period, by the later 1970s the museum’s publication, the Clarion, began to allot space for articles on the subject. In 1977, under the leadership of a new museum director, the Clarion--which had metamorphosed since its inception in 1971 from an internal newsletter into a full-color magazine with advertisers and national aspirations--published a monographic article on contemporary Folk sculptor, Felipe Archuleta, in an issue otherwise dedicated to articles on waterfowl decoys, tinsel paintings and ships’ portraits. In an illustrated summary of the permanent collection from 1978, a section on painting included several works by contemporary, named Folk artists. An illustration of Brown Dog (1970) by Nellie Mae Rowe, now considered a canonical Outsider artist, was captioned: “even though Miss Rowe’s sketches are crude, they possess a vital strength.” Most of the contemporary Folk works illustrated in that article were listed as gifts or promised gifts of the Halls or the Rosenaks, the collections of whom would eventually form a core of Outsider work in the museum’s collection. Instead of expelling from consideration all work created after a vaguely defined period of Euro-American industrialization, as had the museum’s first definition of Folk art, AFAM’s developing position accommodated twentieth-century work on a continuum that stretched from Folk to naïve artist.

As recently as 2006, long-time museum curator Stacy Hollander explained disparate strains within the museum’s collection, writing of Folk art in the American Anthem catalog: “Until the middle of the nineteenth century, it was an effective and adaptive means of syncretizing disparate forces into a normative culture, a familiar environment and a regional

279 See the Clarion 7 (Summer 1977).
identity. Individual artistry was rewarded by patronage, but usually within the parameters defined by a milieu…”

Industrialization, technology and shifting demographics toward urbanism, she continued, led to patterns of isolated art production. The result, as Hollander mythologized it: “Rather than reinforcing the norm, Folk art became expressive of individual voices raised in support of the human touch and the credo of beauty in everyday objects.” By the norm, I suspect Hollander meant mass produced objects. Hollander’s implication in this retrospective redefinition, is that would-be Folk artists became Outsider artists because a will to create was no longer met with utilitarian necessity. The museum’s function in formalizing this imagined shift through its collection and exhibitions was not addressed. One curatorial strategy to that end is palpable in the inflationary and transcendent language—the type often found in discussions of naïve art, Outsider art and Art Brut-- to address Folk art in the collection. For instance, a 2005 article about the permanent collection by Hollander with Brooke Davis Anderson, who became the Director of Contemporary Center at the museum in 1999, explained that, although Folk art was originally utilitarian, its superfluous decoration was nevertheless an “expression of the creative desires of [its] makers, and elevated a mundane object into a work of art.” Professional furniture painters using guild-promoted techniques, in this estimation, “glorified even the humblest pieces of furniture” into museum-quality pieces of art.

A Controversial Decade: Contemporary Self-Taught Art in the 1980s

282 Ibid.
Robert Bishop’s Directorship of the museum, beginning in 1977, brought an expanded view of Folk art, and expanded exposure for the institution. Membership tripled under his tenure. The museum purchased several adjacent townhouses to the one it had been leasing on Fifty-Third Street with an eye to building a permanent museum structure using funds raised in Bishop’s image reproduction program. Those funds were combined with donations achieved through his connections. Although throughout the 1980s, exhibitions of traditional Folk art in the museum far outpaced those focused on contemporary Folk artists, Bishop was engaged, both privately and professionally, in collecting a broad range of objects that included textiles, art from the Southern United States, and contemporary Folk art. He opened the Lincoln Square branch in 1988, an admission-free satellite gallery leased rent-free by the museum as part of a zoning deal with developers, with ambitions to make it a center for twentieth-century Folk art once the museum building was complete. That ambition did not come to pass during his lifetime. However, the trajectory of exhibitions during Bishop’s directorship did evince a palpable change regarding the scope of Folk art at the museum.

Bishop was experienced in traditional Folk art collecting, and he had been a successful dealer and museum professional before taking office at the museum. He was well aware of the strategic import of affiliating the museum with the Howard and Jean Lipman Collection of American Folk Art. The Lipmans’ connections in the New York art world ran deep, with Jean Lipman serving as editor of *Art in America* for a number of years and Howard Lipman an early

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285 Bishop died prematurely in 1991 from complications of the AIDS virus, but was active in the Museum until the end of his life, publishing the *Encyclopedia of American Folk Art* the year before his death with the Rosenaks, and facilitating a 1990 exhibition of works from the Rosenak collection of contemporary Folk art. See his thorough obituary by Rita Reif, “Robert Bishop, a Folk Art Expert and Museum Director, Dies at 53,” *New York Times*, 23 September 1991.
Chairman at the Whitney museum. 286 Both were Trustees of the Museum of American Folk Art. They began Folk art collecting like many others, in Edith Halpert’s gallery in the 1930s, attracted to the formal crispness of Folk painting. 287 The Lipmans organized the landmark 1974 exhibition, *The Flowering of American Folk Art 1776-1876*, at the Whitney Museum to anticipate the nation’s bicentennial. 288 In 1981, Bishop secured for the museum the purchase of the entire Lipman collection for one million dollars. Thirty-three key works of Folk art were acquired and the remaining four hundred and twenty objects were auctioned at Sotheby’s for an amount totaling several million dollars. 289 The museum’s President at the time, Ralph Esmerian, declared to the press: “This has finally put us into the major leagues.” 290 The objects reinforced the museum’s version of Folk art and the roots of its appreciation in modernism. An announcement of the acquisition avoided any reference to “craft” or the “decorative”:

> The selections range from watercolor portraits, landscapes and elaborately patterned furniture to an anthropomorphic woolwinder. Each object is remarkable for its individuality, whimsy or humor. Many of the pieces vividly illustrate the range of work of the itinerant artist as well as the nineteenth-century fascination with pure design, pattern, and color. Together they reveal what is special about folk art, and what the Lipmans have valued the most in their collecting: originality, imagination and heart. 291

By the early 1980s a conservative, nostalgic version of Folk art was no longer sufficient to account for the range of self-taught expression being produced, studied and collected in the

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286 During periods of financial hardship in the 1960s and again in the 1970s, the Museum had actually declined offers of affiliation with and/or absorption into several other museums, including the Whitney, the Metropolitan Museum and the Cooper-Hewitt.


289 The acquisition purchase was made through the Eva and Morris Feld Folk Art Acquisition Fund. This was the second Lipman collection accessioned into a museum. Their original collection was donated to the New York Historical Association in Cooperstown in the 1950s. See the catalog for “Lipman Collection of American Art and Furniture Sale 4730Y” (New York: Sotheby’s, 1981).


United States. The museum had succeeded, to a degree, in expanding the chronological parameters of Folk art to include contemporary artists, and began to motion toward expanded ethnic and regional demographics of artists. Elsewhere, scholars and arts institutions responded to Civil Rights and Feminist movements as they had trickled up to popular culture and institutions over the course of two decades, through a redress of Folk art that was far more politically charged. The most striking example of this redress was the rise and hasty decline of the category of “Black Folk Art in America” around an eponymous exhibition of 1982 planned by the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., and traveling to the Brooklyn Museum and five other locations across the country. The proposal of a Southern, African-American, vernacular aesthetic by that exhibition’s authors, Jane Livingston and John Beardsley, impelled a formidable backlash, discussed below. But what is remarkable with regard to this study is the museum’s lack of official comment vis-à-vis this controversy—a near disavowal at the time of the problems precipitated by “Black Folk Art” around the definition of the genre. Instead, the museum continued to view Southern Folk art mainly through the experiences of collectors and insiders for another full decade.

The Black Folk Art exhibition did not emerge from a conceptual vacuum, but followed exhibitions of the 1970s examining African-American art, including Two Centuries of Black American Art (1976, Los Angeles County Museum of Art) and The Afro-American Tradition in the Decorative Arts (1978, Cleveland Museum of Art). Through four-hundred works of art made by African-American, mostly Southern, self-taught artists, the exhibition posited not only a

Black Folk aesthetic based on “intentional crudeness” or “compassionate ugliness,” but also shared motifs, subject matter and spirit based on a Black experience in the United States in the early twentieth century. Organizers Beardsley and Livingston (both white) boldly entered into a polemical debate with their premise that, “It is an aesthetic that is paradoxically based in a deeply communal culture, while springing from the hands of relatively few, physically isolated individuals.” The paradox that “Black Folk Art” premised was rather a dialectic where individualism and communalism collapse into one artistic manifestation. This phenomenon is definitive of contemporary Folk art more generally, as Eugene Metcalf articulated in 1983, writing that Folk art is, “an art in which individual expression exists within, and is enabled by communal forms and traditions.” He continued to say, however, that when the tension between social and individual is no longer sufficient, the artist becomes, in effect, an Outsider: “Once individuation and novelty overshadow tradition, as Livingston suggests they may in this exhibition, the art is no longer significantly Folk.” In those cases, if Metcalf was correct, African aesthetic retentions and shared responses to oppressive social conditions proposed by “Black Folk Art’s” curators, were submerged under an individual artist’s overpowering personal aesthetic and message.

At the exhibition’s first incarnation at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., four hundred works represented only twenty artists. This meant that each artist’s oeuvre was explored in some depth. The catalog supplied biographies for each artist with some analysis of working method, style and development—and Beardsley and Livingston need be credited with a level of attention that dignified each artist’s life experiences to an unprecedented degree.

294 Ibid., 11.
296 Ibid.
Generally, there was little discussion of influence. Instead, the suggested shared aesthetic sensibility among the artists was meant to have sprung up somewhat preternaturally. Metcalf ultimately argued that the planners of *Black Folk Art* substituted a false context—aesthetic rather than the more appropriately historical context—for the genre by mapping onto Black Folk art strategies of estrangement established in the 1920s and 1930s by Cahill et al. In other words, *Black Folk Art* substituted hermetic life histories for the anonymity of the “common man” and drew the same kind of formal connections Cahill had, rather than illuminating cultural connections that might easily have been made. Metcalf criticized, for example, the inclusion of only Edmondson’s “gratuitous” or “autonomous,” non-utilitarian sculptures in the exhibition, despite his ongoing activity as a traditional gravestone carver. The installation at the Corcoran Gallery supported the ideological work of the catalog in its service to the illumination of life histories and in its disservice to useful cultural connections, by staging a distinct narrative setting for each artist. Mary Schmidt Campbell’s review for *Art Journal* evocatively laid the scene:

James Hampton’s throne, a fragile assemblage of old furniture and found objects, covered with gold and silver foil and purple craft paper, was set in space resembling the humble, red-brick garage where it was conceived and developed over a period of perhaps fifteen years. The dramatic lighting of William Edmondson’s stone carvings highlighted the Brancusi-like simplicity of forms of this Tennessee artist, who carved outdoors in natural light. Sister Gertrude Morgan’s painted revelations were hung in a stark white room reminiscent of the pure white walls of her religiously fervent Everlasting Gospel Revelation in New Orleans. In the most successful of the installations, the private territories, the personal spiritual and physical geographies that gave birth to these artifacts, were subtly evoked, and the cultural traditions of the communities that sustained these highly individual expressions were thus at least vaguely suggested, if not clearly defined.297

For its installation at the Brooklyn Museum, *Black Folk Art* was trimmed in scope and presented in a more unified fashion, emphasizing a dynamic aesthetic [Figure 38]. Multiple objects and large placards with biographical text and photographic portraits once again

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represented each artist, and further information was available on laminated cards available in the
galleries. Once again, Edmondsdon’s works were silhouetted from above against a darkly painted
wall. But so were works by other artists. Presented at various heights and distances from the
viewer, some *en vitrine* and some in cordoned tableaux, the whole exhibition cultivated a sense
of vitality and playfulness. Partial and perforated walls allowed for interpenetrating views and
visual conversations between the work of a few artists, implicitly prompting the viewer to make
aesthetic comparisons [Figure 39].

Metcalf chose to publish his perceptive critique of *Black Folk Art*, discussed above, in the
more academically oriented *Winterthur Portfolio*, although he would publish in the AFAM’s
magazine on a related topic only a few years later. For their part, the AFAM’s influential voices
were effectively silent on the *Black Folk Art* exhibition, deferring by default to a short article
published in the *Clarion* by a masters student in the museum’s Folk art graduate degree program,
begun in conjunction with New York University in 1981. 298 That essay unofficially reinforced
an apolitical position for the museum at a moment when it had the opportunity to act as an
institutional mouthpiece for a national debate. The museum’s digestion of the curatorial
strategies seen in the Corcoran version of the exhibition would take ten years. This kind of
dismissal of the messy realities of life for the poor and marginalized squared with larger
conservative trends in the 1980s under President Reagan that would, for example, deny the
devastation of the AIDS virus among a generation of gay men and assume that structural
economic benefits for the rich would somehow “trickle down” to the poor.

298 Ellen Smith’s very short essay traced African aesthetic influences and techniques, such as basket weaving and
bronze casting, as they were transmitted to African-American crafts—an art historical strategy in line with
anthropologist Regenia Perry’s in her article for the “Black Folk Art” catalog. Compare Ellen Smith, “Black Folk
Art: A Unique Blending of Cultures,” *Clarion* (Spring-Summer 1983), 32-35 to Regenia Perry, “Black American
Folk Art: Origins and Early Manifestations,” in Livingston and Beardsley *Black Folk Art*, 24-37.
The Spring/Summer 1987 issue of the *Clarion* was the first to be devoted entirely to “twentieth-century Folk art.” Didi Barrett, the museum’s new Director, focused her introduction on Hemphill’s recent gift of several hundred works from his collection to the Smithsonian via curator Lynda Roscoe Hartigan. Barrett warned that the market for contemporary Folk art would be driven up by the fact that, “The ‘Hemphill aesthetic,’ which tends to appreciate the outrageous, unusual or eccentric in American folk art—as opposed to the pretty or decorative—was publicly validated by the Smithsonian accession.”

Barrett also warned against a “term warfare” that challenged the term “Folk” with other terms, such as “Outsider.”

*The Cutting Edge: Contemporary American Folk Art* of 1990, an exhibition of works from the Rosenak family collection organized largely by Bob Bishop before his death that year, formed a pendant to Bishop’s early Lipman Folk art acquisition. It came at the end of his career, and with a near reversal of parameters: the artists in this last exhibition were all named, contemporary personalities rather than anonymous nineteenth-century Folk artists. Billed as “diverse as America itself,” the show drew eighty-six works from the Rosenak collection of ethnically diverse, twentieth-century, self-taught artists from across the U.S. Two of those artists, Gregorio Marzan and Malcah Zeldis, were present at the opening to interact with guests. Both elderly artists lived and worked in New York City, and had been represented by works in the 1988 exhibition, *City Folk: Ethnic traditions in the Metropolitan Area*, mounted by museum curator Gerard Wertkin at the Paine Webber Art Gallery. Located at the ground floor of a brokerage and banking building, the exhibition tacitly positioned Folk art as a commodity, and it was an increasingly valuable investment: Christie’s first sale of Americana had taken place in

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300 Ibid., 37.

1979, for example. Although *City Folk* undeniably moved the boundaries of the museum’s purview, the show did not focus on ethnic folkways in America in the tradition of Allen Eaton’s “Immigrant Gifts,” but rather on the artworks of individual, immigrant and first-generation American Outsider artists deploying subject matter derived from their ethnic traditions. Artist Ralph Fasanella, for example, painted naïve scenes of bustling crowds among the booths and decorations at the Italian San Gennaro festival.

When queried about the *Cutting Edge* exhibition, the Rosenaks did not shy away from an opportunity to claim their stake in the creation of this contemporary Folk genre, explaining the title of the exhibition to the *L.A. Times*: “We thought that we really had discovered the cutting edge of American art.” In an oral history interview with Liza Kirwin for the Archives of American Art, the Rosenaks related the history of their collecting activities back to a genesis moment of 1973 and their “discovery” of Edgar Tolson. Oddly, that origin story was set, not on an Appalachian highway, but in New York City. Tolson’s painting was exhibited in the Whitney Biennial that year. Appreciation of the artwork, perhaps a purchase, would not be sufficient for the Rosenaks, who wanted to know more about the artist, and they “determined to find Edgar Tolson,” and to have an encounter with him in person. In that, they continued their practice of meeting with contemporary, formerly modernist, artists, in order to buy art directly. Michael Hall, with his wife Julie, formed the *other* great patron couple--gatekeepers of contemporary Folk art at the time—and, as it turned out, Hall had brought the Tolson work to the Whitney

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303 The Rosenaks, quoted in Liza Kirwin, Oral history interview with Chuck and Jan Rosenak, 1998 December 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The Rosenaks were also familiar, from their time living in Milwaukee, with the Chicago Imagist school of painting, members of which took influence from Mid-Western Outsider artists such as Dwight Yoakum being shown by the Outsider dealer Phyllis Kind. Although there is not space here to describe it at length, that Chicago-based episode forms an important part of the history of Outsider art in the United States. The topic will be addressed at a symposium, *Jean Dubuffet and Beyond: A Certain Idea of Art*, 9 November 2015, in two papers: “Chicago Matters: Jean Dubuffet and the Second City,” by Jill Shaw and “Dubuffet’s Other Incursion: Chicago/The Midwest” by Lisa Stone.
Biennial, wherein Hall was shown that year as well. In the Rosenak narrative, Hall provided the perfect setup for the couple’s braved encounter with the Outsider artist. He warned that, “to visit Edgar Tolson was extremely dangerous because they made boot-leg whiskey in Campton, Kentucky, where he lived and someone might shoot at us.”

Disclosing the whereabouts of a newly discovered Outsider artist as Hall grudgingly had, meant jeopardizing a monopoly on that artist’s output, and some dealers declined to do so. Hall, dealer Jeff Camp and Hemphill even dubbed themselves the “Folk art mafia,” presumably with a note of humor about their clandestine collecting activities. According to the Rosenaks, “They were always very secretive. We would see the work, but they often would not disclose the location of the artists.” Bishop, the final member of the “Folk art mafia,” held a more transparent philosophy as a dealer, “…entirely the opposite…He would always disclose the location of artists.” The Rosenaks were not, themselves, proponents of strict isolation for the artists they collected, assuming what they believed to be a liberal position on the matter in encouraging Outsider artists to participate in their own artistic careers. Acknowledging that public life must necessarily change an artist’s work, and usually not for the better, they nevertheless refused the methods of “folklorists who believe you should build a fence around artists and study them as if they were caged animals.”

By the time of the 1990 exhibition of the Rosenak collection at the museum, an alternative approach to Folk art, begun around Black Folk Art and with scholars of African-American history, had arisen more broadly among folklore scholars, who saw Folk art as

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304 Kirwin Interview.
305 Ibid.
306 Ibid.
material insight into social worlds. John Michael Vlach reductively described the two “camps,”
of folklorists and museum professionals: “folk life specialists, with their orientation toward the
field, have an overarching concern for context, while museums and historic preservationists tend
to be ‘artifact focused,’”\textsuperscript{308} and elsewhere: “Collectors employ the methods of connoisseurship in
the pursuit of masterpiece-quality works while folklorists and social scientists look for the
representative pieces of art that permit the accurate description of a genre, a period or a
career.”\textsuperscript{309} Installed in the museum’s Lincoln Center gallery, the Rosenak exhibition courted the
connoisseur’s position, with only a few concessions to the folklorist’s perspective. Overall, it
looked spare and neat against white walls, with hearty wood sculptures on low, white platforms
[Figure 40]. It resembled, to an extent, exhibitions of American Folk art mounted in the
museum’s default institutional style back in the 1960s, with the sizeable exception of increased
biographical text on walls and placards where there had formerly been none [Figure 41]. To the
casual onlooker, the artworks must have appeared crude, and outside of the larger context of
each artist’s oeuvre, they appeared to be singular works, at best quirky or quaint. No different
than Modern art in its requirement that viewers be familiar with particular artists and their
signature styles, the knowing viewer could speak to the grace amidst ostensibly clunky artworks.
The 1980s had been a positive decade for contemporary Folk art collecting, particularly at the
museum under Bishop. AFAM’s exhibition style had not changed remarkably since its opening
shows, however, to reflect deeper knowledge about the artists being shown. The pluralism and
identity politics of the 1990s would force the museum to come to terms – even if through a
downplaying of their connection to broader culture—of the lived histories of contemporary Folk
artists.

To Each His Own: Outsider Artists Headline the American Folk Art Museum

Throughout the 1990s, the frequency of exhibitions devoted to contemporary Folk art increased dramatically. Among those, the single-artist exhibition dominated. Contemporary self-taught artists were presented within closed aesthetic systems, one by one. During that decade, Howard Finster (1990), Thornton Dial (1994), Minnie Evans (1995), Henry Darger (1997), William Hawkins (1997), A.G. Rizzoli (1998), Nellie Mae Rowe (1999) and William Edmondson (2000), were all given monographic shows. All were held at the Lincoln Center gallery, save Finster’s at Paine Webber. In the 1980s, Malcah Zeldis had been the one artist to receive a solo exhibition at the museum, and only directly on the heels of the related City Folk. The museum’s predominantly aesthetic presentations generally opened with a quote transcribed in dialect, applied directly to the wall, and included photographs and biography on the artist. The style of installation tended to follow the museum’s larger curatorial trends—Minnie Evans’ exhibition, for instance, came at a moment when the museum had installed multiple, semi-permanent vitrines, rather inexplicably, into the Lincoln Center space. All the exhibited artwork from that period, both traditional and contemporary Folk art, was unwittingly rendered artifact. Various curators introduced painted “accent” walls that complemented a featured artist’s palette and hanging solutions that accommodated non-traditional media, but scenography was far from custom.

The William Edmondson exhibition of 2000, however, offered a model for more rounded research into individual Outsider artists, and its spectacular installation and public programming moved toward increased contextualization. The exhibition, was not, however, planned at the museum, but travelled there from the Cheekwood Museum of Art in Edmondson’s native
Nashville. Rather than choosing one treatment for Edmondson’s work from the two previously available frames of connoisseurship or folklife studies, the show drew on the pluralism of the 1990s, particularly in its acknowledgment of faceted identity construction. The catalog essays indeed began with some individual formal analysis, with Robert Farris Thompson’s article, “Edmondson’s Art,” but swiftly zoomed out to Rusty Freeman’s study of local “Community Heroes in the Sculpture of William Edmondson,” and wider still with Bobby Lovett’s historical analysis of collective Southern Black experiences, “From Plantation to the City: William Edmondson and the African-American community.” Edmondson’s discovery story—more accurately, Dahl-Wolfe’s story of her “discovery” of Edmondson, along with photographer Edward Weston’s similar story—formed the subject of a further essay, and Lowery Stokes Sims even grappled with the “vanguardist dilemma” of self-taught art as a category.310

At the Museum of American Folk Art, Edmondson’s light grey sculptures looked ghostly and elegiac against dark walls in the main Lincoln Center gallery, much as they had eighteen years earlier at “Black Folk Art.” A veritable graveyard of plinths with sculptures atop filled the center of the room. A large, funereal black slab with two paragraphs of biographical text leaned against one wall of the central gallery, and further down that same wall hung four of Dahl-Wolfe’s crisply mounted and framed photographs of Edmondson at work. There were more in a subsidiary gallery [Figures 42 and 43]. The exhibition’s drama came where the abstract representation of Edmondson’s yard met a photographic representation—a full-scale, black-and-white mural at the back wall of the gallery. The mural showed Edmondson’s workshop in the background: a wooden shack, the porch of which was lined with his figural sculptures, and from the rafters hung a sign advertising: “Tombstones for sale. Garden ornaments. Stonework.”

middle ground of the photograph stepped down from the porch to reveal Edmondson’s yard filled with carved tombstones arranged with intention, regularly among the tall grass. In front of the mural in the three-dimensional gallery space, a low, broad pedestal supporting eight figural sculptures provided a third step, bridging the space between the photograph and gallery. In another room, a shack, scaled-down and built out in three dimensions from the wall, replicated the one in the mural and provided a miniature setting for several more of Edmondson’s sculptures. A contemporary sculptor gave public demonstrations of Edmondson’s carving technique—the extent of its accuracy is difficult to ascertain from images---from behind protective Plexiglas in the gallery’s entryway on a few scheduled occasions. In further monographic exhibitions of contemporary Folk artists, the museum took cues from the Edmondson exhibition, but its future conjuring of place and context tended to be less simulacra and more evocation, and for the best. For a 2010 exhibition of the work of Wisconsin-based Outsider artist, Eugene Von Bruenchenhein (1910-1983), for example, wallpaper in the galleries mimicked the kitsch, floral backdrops that Von Bruenchenhein used in his amateur pinup photographs of his wife, Marie [Figure 44]. There entered here an element of immersion, familiar from the installation art of the 1990s, engaging and evocative of the circumstances of production.

Henry Darger, a Chicago janitor and recluse, became the most studied and exhibited artist at the museum after its accession in 2000 of a Henry Darger archive, and the subsequent opening of a Henry Darger study center. The Darger Center functioned and continues to function, albeit presently in transit, under the museum’s Contemporary Center, founded in 1998 to focus on the acquisition and exhibition of twentieth-century, self-taught [Outsider] art. The bulk of the Darger material includes three manuscripts, comprised of a shocking 30,000 total pages, and over 3,000
pieces of ephemera and source material. With the exhibition, *Henry Darger: The Unreality of Being*, prepared by art historian Stephen Prokopoff for the museum in 1997, a stylistic evolution had been previously suggested for Darger’s large, double-sided, narrative works on paper, that developed from earlier military portrait drawings and tracings he made. Continuing Prokopoff’s work on Darger, more than one hundred studies and sketches for individual figures were displayed in a 2001 show, *The Henry Darger Collection at the American Folk Art Museum*, that exploited the depth and size of the museum’s new Darger holdings. Curator Brooke Davis Anderson, who often worked with outside curatorial consultants in planning exhibitions, brought in Ralph Appelbaum and Associates to create a “unique” installation. It included a specially constructed metal armature that displayed fourteen of twenty-six of Darger’s large, double-sided works in the show. The cruciform structure was intended to evoke Darger’s Catholicism, besides offering a solution for displaying both sides of each painting. Anderson’s goal for the exhibition was ambitious—nothing short of the creation of an “alternative world” within the gallery, “operating for the audience much like the creative process did for the artist.” With ethereal lighting that made the artwork to look like it was floating in its immersive installation, and an actor reading from Darger’s *The Relams of the Unreal* in the gallery, the whole spectacle was meant to conjure Darger’s fantasy world of the Vivian Girls and the Glandolinians, rather than his real, hermetic life in Chicago. Anderson saw herself as a facilitator, curating an exhibition, in her words, “developed in the manner of a contemporary artist’s installation, enabl[ing] the visitor to fully enter Darger’s astounding imaginary world and fully experience his fictional tale.”

The exhibition *Dargerism: Contemporary Artists and Henry Darger*, followed nearly a decade later in 2008, and exhibited the work of eleven contemporary, professional artists.

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312 Ibid.
“responding not only to the aesthetic beauty of Darger’s mythic work…but to his unblinking work ethic and all-consuming devotion to art-making.” Many of those artists testified to the influence of the 1997 show upon their work. Dargerism repeated the format of earlier exhibitions, such as LACMA’s 1992 Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art, in pairing professional and Outsider work. But unlike in that and other “affinity” exhibitions, Modern artists were not foregrounded, leaving Outsider work as mere support. That is, Dargerism was not a show about the effective plunder of Outsider art by contemporary artists. By proposing a single Outsider artist, Darger, affecting many contemporary artists in nuanced ways, the exhibition elevated Darger to the level of instructor, making him the center of an artistic cosmology. Yet another exhibition at the museum, The Private Collection of Henry Darger (2010) deepened public knowledge of Darger’s private life and influences. As curator Brooke Davis Anderson summed it, “Henry Darger had an art collection…Henry Darger had an art collection?” In 2010, the museum displayed paper and found object collages he made from newspaper clippings and coloring books and advertisements as a fully-formed exhibition. The reliance of Outsider artists on visual sources from popular culture was the underlying, and important, thesis of the show, countering the prevalent perception of the Outsider artist’s idiom as springing fully formed from his psyche.

Conclusions

The objects exhibited at AFAM cannot reliably be assumed to be “American,” or, made in the United States, any longer, although perhaps for the better. The museum’s original usage of

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the term “American” was problematic as attitudes to language changed. It was formerly used intra-institutionally as a gloss for “of the United States,” and generally not accounting for wider understandings of the term to include the larger Americas. With the inauguration of a new building in 2001, the museum’s name changed to the “American Folk Art Museum,” to signify its place as an American institution showing Folk art, which could now be international. A harbinger of the change, a final show at the Lincoln Center branch (which continued to operate as a satellite gallery after the move) before the opening of the Tsien building at the site of the original museum, next to MoMA on Fifty-Third street, exhibited works of Art Brut from Bruno Decharme’s European collection, ABCD (Art Brut Connaissance & Diffusion). French-Canadian curator, Valérie Rousseau, AFAM’s first “Curator of Self-Taught Art and Art Brut,” a title she designed herself with intention, continues to assert Art Brut into the museum’s schedule and collection since her appointment in 2014.\(^{315}\)

Rousseau’s efforts have certainly broadened the purview of the museum’s programming in a short time, but AFAM’s collection had already been shifting over the decades to become more inclusive, both in an aesthetic sense and in the demographics of its artists. Its exhibitions grew to be more contextualizing as museum best practices, post-colonial thinking and even identity and disability studies must have exerted pressure-- to the point of AFAM’s frequent mounting of immersive installations to invoke the sites of the artwork’s production, by the late 1990s. Those exhibitions allowed the visitor to “discover” the artwork of a reclusive artist like Darger within surroundings that invoked his cluttered living space; or to enter the psychedelic domestic universe of an artists like Von Breunchenhein. The pull of charismatic artists or reclusive biographies, and attraction among collectors to the adventure of the hunt for new and

\(^{315}\) See Chapter One.
undiscovered work at the margins of society, were factors that linked early twentieth-century Folk art collecting to Outsider art collecting, thus spawning a hybrid collection. Overall, collectors of traditional, anonymous Folk art and then contemporary self-taught art—from Cahill to the Rosenaks—most often framed the work in relation to their own narratives of discovery, just as Dubuffet had, in asserting himself as arbiter of Art Brut. I have argued that the artworks thus functioned primarily as souvenirs of that contact until deeply contextualizing exhibitions countered the displacement of those artworks into a New York City museum.

A shift in the museum’s programming toward single artist shows was driven by market forces in New York, to which the museum was directly tied, as Chapter Four will discuss. It also validated the strength of the artwork of individual contemporary self-taught [Outsider] artists. That type of exhibition offered the museum the opportunity to present contemporary Folk artists from the cultural margins to a New York audience largely unfamiliar with them, without having to contend with broader questions of ethics and nomenclature challenging the field. They likewise gave much needed context for artists’ oeuvres that often have strong internal consistency and stylistic development. The Black Folk Art in America show had been a lesson in the problems of asserting some essential aesthetic and iconographic continuity among the work of independently working artists. That exhibition also presented a moment when AFAM might have taken a more polemical stance toward its collection and self-taught art in general, to become a thought leader in the field. It would take still another decade until the 1990s when the museum’s exhibitions, subtly, began to assert a more well-rounded ground for the artwork in its collection, in lieu of overwhelmingly formal presentations that avoided any polemics.
Chapter Three: Outsider Art Environments: Two Case-Studies in Conservation and Decay

“Gardens of Revelation,” “Self-Made Worlds,” and “Sublime Spaces”

In the discourse of Outsider art environments in major publications on the subject, there has been a tendency toward aggrandizement. However well-intended those scholars have been, who sublimate Outsider art environments into worlds and revelations, I would argue that inflated language, when applied to describe impressive but humble environments made by self-taught artists, has the potential to patronize. Environments should stand by their own merits with realities that include fragility, decay, experimentation and compelling imperfections. Extending my thesis that Outsider objects become souvenirs of their collectors’ contact with the marginal, Outsider environments in this formulation are made into exotic locales – gardens, ruins, heterotopia—where insiders brave contact with Outsiders. They become sites of pilgrimage from which relics are returned. As in other chapters, this one focuses on the relationships between environments, their builders, and most importantly with collectors and other stewards. With this chapter, I consider the Outsider art environment “after the artist,” divested of the artist’s authenticating presence, and in the hands of institutional rescuers or appropriators, as the case may be. The two examples chosen here provide evidence of the measures taken by caretaker professionals to preserve, stabilize, and otherwise prepare Outsider environments for public consumption: Howard Finster’s Paradise Garden in Summerville, Georgia (begun 1970) and Kenny Hill’s environment, known as the Chauvin Sculpture Garden in Louisiana (begun

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316 The three titles in the heading refer to terminology used by: John Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995), Leslie Umberger and Erika Lee Doss, eds., Sublime Spaces and Visionary Worlds (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), and Roger Manley and Mark Sloan, eds., Self-Made Worlds (New York: Aperture, 1997). By far, the most common, and I feel the most appropriate term used to discuss building by untrained architects and artists, often around their own homes and using available materials, is “environment.” I use “environment” as shorthand for “art environment,” as the places to which I refer always feature some decorative, painted or sculpted elements. Because the two sites covered in this chapter are formally titled “Garden,” I use that term as well, but the term “Garden” is not appropriate for all environments.
There are many comparisons to be drawn between the two environments: both were produced by lone men motivated by intense Christian belief, for example, and both men moved away from their environments in the same year, 2000-2001. The sites stand in as examples for other environments which might likewise have been addressed here, such as Watts Towers, which also underwent an interesting and controversy-laden restoration, touched briefly upon later in this chapter. Crucially, both environments were subject to attempts, some successful and some grossly unsuccessful, at preservation [Figures 45 and 46].

Outsider environments sometimes become—in the hands of enthusiastic conservators—odd, symbolic engines of hope, particularly for depressed geographic areas. Arguments in favor of conservation have been offered by the advocates for both Finster’s and Hill’s sites in particular: regeneration for economically depressed regions, cultural tourism, lessons in tenacity and hope for future generations. These are arguments familiar to proponents of the arts and culture, broadly. The impulse to preserve them to those ends is understandable, if underserved groups might benefit. This chapter explores what is at stake in preserving Outsider art environments, and for whom, while addressing the major organizations working to document and preserve them in the United States, in particular, SPACES, Artplace America, and the Kohler Foundation. Those initiatives and organizations all operate under the assumption that preservation is the best and most honorable fate for Outsider environments after the death or abandonment of their creators. The thinking, at its worst, results in the gentrification of these

317 These two environments were originally chosen because they both formed part of my personal life experience and I thus felt some, however limited, authority in writing about them. Further, the original comparison to be made was between Hill’s Garden as a “rescued” environment and Finster’s as lost to decay. In the intervening years between 2011, when I first formulated this dissertation topic, and this 2017 document, Finster’s environment was rescued and is now undergoing refurbishment.

318 Although this dissertation has some international scope, the case studies within this chapter are limited to the United States. The organizations studied are limited to U.S. agencies. The European Outsider Art Association, for one example, participates in some conservation efforts abroad.
sites. Outsider environments, as heterotopic sites, where artists and their artworks often exist outside of capitalist systems of work and exchange, as I will discuss, thus are coopted through their restoration into those very systems.319

Perhaps now, with the looming specter of a Post-Anthropocene Era, is the time to address issues of preservation and ruin, documentation, and the alternative value of the Outsider environment as a metaphor for the human condition. From a pragmatic position, the value of these sites is obvious if one takes the stance that history must be revised to include the marginal, and that art history should extend to cover improvisatory artwork outside of professional and academic channels. From an experiential point of view, in spending time at the sites, the weight of upkeep is overwhelming. The detail with which I elaborate attempts at preserving these sites, and their vicissitudes, are to that end – of proving both the tenacity and good work of conservators, but also the overwhelming impossibility of maintaining these environments as they were built. At Paradise Garden, there is much more to be done to create a fully habitable site. It will also require the crossing over from preservation to fiction. If visitors are ever allowed to enter the World’s Folk Art Church at Finster’s Paradise Garden, the structure will be seen in a state never accomplished by Finster himself. Nearly a million dollars has gone into the project so far, with several million required for anticipated restorations. Locals are overwhelmingly not interested, and few actively support the project. As the case studies below demonstrate, a fluctuating series of reversals, exclusions, and even sanitary measures are often undertaken in order to prepare a site for official public use. What is at stake in the artificial reanimation of an environment after the artist has gone? What would it mean to let an environment fall into decay? How do objects become imminent metonyms of authenticity in these environments? How are

these sites, originally outside of privileged economies of time, money and place, recast as generative engines for change?

John Beardsley writes in *Gardens of Revelation* (1995) that Outsider art environments are difficult to describe, teetering as they do between being “part architecture, part sculpture and part landscape.”\(^{320}\) As Director of Garden and Landscape Architecture at Dumbarton Oaks and co-organizer of important Outsider and Folk art exhibitions discussed in Chapter Two, namely *Black Folk Art in America* (1982) and *The Quilts of Gee’s Bend* (2002), Beardsley is well poised to comment on Outsider environments as “handmade environments that express a personal, moral or religious vision, typically fabricated of found materials by people who aren’t necessarily identified by themselves or others as artists.” He continues, “These environments are made to surround and even engulf the home; they often have an obsessive character and are the result of many years of work.”\(^{321}\) Beardsley casts Outsider environments as “gardens of revelation.” He draws out comparisons to “an older more powerful conception of the garden as a place of inquiry and moral assertion,” but also to the garden as “bounded space” and microcosm.\(^{322}\) According to Beardsley, grottoes and gazebos of a type found in seventeenth and eighteenth century European, aristocratic gardens are mimicked somewhat unintentionally in the Outsider environments of Europe and the United States. I would suggest that there may not be a direct line connecting the two “garden” types, but instead, a comparable spirit of reverie, nostalgia and exoticism spurred by fantastic architecture that mimics ancient, royal or religious architecture, and by the incorporation of natural elements of flora, wind and light. The Finster case study below is a poignant illustration of this assertion. Beardsley reminds the reader that by

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\(^{320}\) Beardsley *Gardens of Revelation*, 7. Critical of discourse that emphasizes the isolation and eccentricity of Outsiders, Beardsley contextualizes individual art environments within local culture and within larger historical frameworks in all of his work on Outsider art.

\(^{321}\) Ibid.

\(^{322}\) Ibid., 9.
the nineteenth century, travel postcards and popular ephemera had begun to spread awareness of courtly garden styles throughout and beyond Europe. One could add that popular media such as newspapers and television in the twentieth century have dispersed visual cues about historic architecture and European gardens even into the rural reaches of the United States.

Whether intentionally or not, Beardsley posits, Outsider environment builders draw from older, established aesthetic and architectural traditions, and not only from a personal, visionary vocabulary of forms. This is a crucial argument that he makes as part of a larger project of disputing isolationist readings of Outsider environments. For one example, Outsider architect Howard Finster was inspired by British Gothic architecture. At the entrance to the (“rollin-chair” ramp) gallery built by Finster to exhibit his own work and the donated work of others, hangs a framed engraving of Winchester Cathedral. That image, its hand-written caption below, and its situation beside the entrance to the horizontally progressing gallery, suggest Finster’s inspiration for the gallery, which also has windows in the shape of pointed, Gothic arches [Figures 47 and 48]. One could speculate that the iconic spectacle of Gothic architecture and the multi-sensory, Catholic rituals performed therein, appealed to Finster’s personal sense of showmanship or his performative religiosity or even his sensitivity to the effects of light. The sheer ambition of the cathedral’s architects, and the building’s official import at a Christian monument must have resonated with Finster’s own ambitions. But he was also a man who was influenced by anything and everything near at hand, and it is unclear how Finster acquired the engraving.

Beardsley goes on to refute comparisons that align Outsider environments with theme parks such as Disneyland as places employing architectural mimicry, miniaturization and exaggeration of traditional architectural forms. The latter, he adds passionately, pander to
nostalgia through neutralized, mass culture. He points to the “profound economic differences” between theme parks (“built with masses of capital) and Outsider environments (“built with none”).323 His attitude betrays a sincere motivation on the part of scholars to elevate Outsider art through comparisons to more ennobled modes of aesthetics, and an attendant fear of minimizing them through association with popular art and kitsch. Although it may be true that one errs in grouping Disneyland with Outsider environments in a typology of places—they are not built or meant or received in the same way--Beardsley overlooks the possible aesthetic influence of those commercial entertainment parks on some Outsider environment builders, who draw from multiple levels of stimuli, including those deemed “high,” popular and “low.” Environment builders are often additionally aware of other Outsider environments.

Some European garden architects working at court in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, along with Romantic landscape painters, incorporated imagery of ancient, architectural ruins in their constructions, or imaginative reconstructions, of gardens. Alois Riegl pointed to the romance of the ruin in 1903, in his “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Developments,” writing, “Modern man… particularly enjoys the perception of the purely natural cycle of growth and decay.”324 Riegl famously argued against conservation and against nearly all efforts at preservation for historic monuments. He certainly did not intend this argument to encompass Outsider or vernacular architecture, but some of his arguments in this essay find application on that subject. Riegl, for instance, distinguishes between purely “historical” monuments, built to satisfy the politics or ideology of a contemporary builder and public, and “deliberate” monuments built with an eye to posterity. Outsider environments can be named

323 Ibid., 19.
historical or deliberate, only on a case by case basis, however many seem to lean toward the historical in as much as they were intended for their immediate circumstances and meant to be indicative of a place in time, if not one commonly memorialized. In the absence of continued maintenance, Outsider environments tend to fall into disrepair or to become overgrown more quickly than other types of gardens and architecture that is built by professionals. In some circumstances, recycled materials and approximated architectural forms impart to Outsider environments, from their inception, the feel, if not the deep history, of ruins. But the environments do not have the benefit of a prolonged, poignant settling into ruin as official historical, religious or public monuments do. However, attraction to the affective experiences attaching to sites of ruin may likewise draw some visitors to Outsider sites as they become metaphors of the human experience of life and death.

Without intervention, the time-frame of an Outsider environment generally corresponds to one artist’s life, or to an episode therein. After that, a site may only be reanimated. It is a problem endemic to site-specific installation, and we might point, as illustration, to the wrinkled crustiness of Lynda Benglis’s originally fluid latex pour, *Contraband* (1969), as it is exhibited out of its original context in the collection of the Whitney Museum in New York today. But whereas professional artists working in a site-specific mode participate in the unfolding conversations of art history and theory, and augment their work with writing—Robert Smithson, for example, certainly articulated his intentions with philosophical writings that attended his site-specific works—Outsider environment builders develop a more personal, idiosyncratic visual scheme that is often left unfinished and unarticulated. Outsider environment advocates are left at an impasse familiar to many conservators: how and how much to conserve and restore. Their special quest also involves decisions of how to ethically recount the experiences of the artist
within those, often lowly, surroundings. Although, according to Riegl, humans may delight in the sight of ruin, when poverty is romanticized, we risk promoting what has popularly been termed “ruin porn”—a term assigned at times, for instance, to photographs of the broken-down remnants of Detroit lately shown in art galleries. Even Riegl allowed for certain situations where, “the gentle intervention by the hand of man seems the lesser of two evils when compared to the violence of nature.” That would bestow some limited maintenance at sites deemed historically significant. The historical value of an Outsider environment may prove difficult to defend to an art or academic establishment not used to valuing histories of poor artists. In recent decades several environments have been elected to the prestigious U.S. National Register of Historic Places. The historical value of these sites may also be difficult to defend as their claim to “historicity” is tied to individual biographies, and to biographies that so often qualify as isolated. In her article, “Wandering the Old, Weird America,” Erika Doss applauds the “free-wheeling and liberatory” aesthetics of “rebel” Outsider environments in the United States. Although she does not write in overtly psychoanalytic terms, Doss does identify “vernacular environments” as simultaneously attractive and repulsive sites of repressed or “unspoken desires” for self-expression. An Americanist, she points to a conflict at the core of U.S. national identity—“abiding tensions” between the celebration of individuality and the maintenance of social order—that Outsider environments may arouse.

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325 Riegl 1996, 77.
326 This may account for a history of folklorists showing interest in Outsider environments, prior to art historians who have taken longer to make environments the topic of serious study. For a folkloristic perspective, see Jason Church, “Unicultural Ethnography: Preserving Outsider Art Through the Ethnography of Individual Outsider Artists,” paper presented at the Divine Disorder Conference, Natchitoches, Louisiana, 4 April 2012.
327 Those include Pasaquan and Paradise Garden, both discussed below.
328 Doss in Umberger and Doss 2007, 28.
329 Ibid., 32.
330 Ibid., 30.
In the 1974 catalog for a groundbreaking exhibition on Outsider environments, then-Director of the Walker Art Center, Martin Friedman wrote of them as “private utopias.”\(^{331}\) The possibility of a completely personal space colored by a resonant aesthetic summons the concept of utopia. However, Friedman’s conception of Outsider environments as utopias is rushed: utopias are, at least by Michel Foucault’s definition, neither personal nor localizable. If some environments contradict a mainstream culture and aesthetics, purposefully or not, then we might name them heterotopias, those “mirror spaces,” like carnivals, identified by Foucault in “Of Other Spaces” (Des Espaces Autres, 1967). As places of reversal, where refuse is made useful and paupers become architects, Outsider environments match many of Foucault’s criteria for the heterotopia. They are hyper-local, actual sites of difference from the dominant social order. They are further “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several sites that are in themselves incompatible.”\(^{332}\) For example, Ferdinand Cheval (1836-1924) was a French postal worker by trade, who built a palace of rock and concrete. He juxtaposed in one place an Egyptian tomb where he wished to be interred, a Hindu temple façade, and a mosque, among other architectural miniatures, collapsing architectural markers of space and time\(^{333}\) [Figure 49].

Further, Outsider environments can be sites of “heterochrony,” an “absolute break with traditional time.”\(^{334}\) Many, but not all, Outsider builders live and work in areas where traditions and a slow way of life are fast fading. Agriculture, factory work and fishing may still be viable trades, but are statistically diminished. For some urban, elite viewers, art environments may feel anachronistic. Add to that the propensity of Outsiders to keep irregular working hours, whether

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\(^{331}\) Martin Friedman, Introduction to Naives and Visionaries (Minneapolis: Walker Arts Center, 1974), 9.


\(^{333}\) For biographical information see Claude Boncampain, Le Facteur Cheval, piéton de Hauterives (Valence, France: Lee Bouquin-Peuple Libre, 1988).

\(^{334}\) Foucault 1997, 335.
due to advanced age, retirement, mental illness, or simply choice. Finally, to experience an art environment, the construction of which clearly consumed decades of a person’s attention, may prompt a confrontation with one’s own adherence to standards of time management. Many of these individual builders opt out of traditional capitalist economies of time like the work week, if they aren’t instead forced out or denied access in the first place--but so do a legion of young professional, urban freelancers in the twenty-first century.

Secluded as they may be, both geographically and metaphorically, Outsider environments have been known to cultural insiders for a century. Avant-garde artists concerned with reuniting art with daily life, particularly European Surrealists in the 1920s through the 1940s, were attracted to the praxis of these self-made worlds. They were specifically excited by the stone and concrete grottoes of Le Facteur Cheval’s Palais Idéal in Hauterives, France. Max Ernst referred to the French environment builder in his *Loplop Presents the Postman Cheval* (1932). That work is a paper and fabric collage that juxtaposes seemingly unrelated signs, including an ink drawing of coral, fabric imitating cracked stone and an opened, stamped postal letter, all into a biographical portrait of Cheval. The imagined landscapes of Ernst’s *frottages* also bear a visual resemblance to Cheval’s accretive, coralline Palais. On a philosophical level, Cheval’s environment resonated with the Surrealists’ experiments with spontaneity, convulsive beauty, mediumistic revelation, and “objective chance.”³³⁵ In Cheval’s case, it was “a chance encounter with a fragment of stone,” that he marveled over one day on his walk home from work that became “incentive to a life’s labor,” spent in collecting thousands of rocks and in building his

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palace environment. Cheval’s stumble over a rock, the fait précipité that becomes ubiquitous in the mythology of Outsider environment builders, so resounded with Surrealist leader André Breton’s artistic philosophy, that it inspired him to poetry. Acknowledging the propensity of artists and professional insiders to make of Outsider environments what they will, John Beardsley writes: “For Breton, the Palais Idéal was itself a kind of found object, which impelled his creativity much as the marvelous stone had inspired Cheval’s.” Beardsley’s idea of the Outsider environment as “found object” in the hands of an insider, or, in my own terms, of the Outsider environment as discreet signifier or “thing” to be deployed—rather than a living accumulation of objects or an arena of performed creative potential—warrants further exploration.

Gaston Bachelard’s discussion of “Nests” in his Poetics of Space is helpful in imaging the process through which a site may become a thing in the hands of a discoverer, such as Breton:

An empty nest found belatedly in the woods in winter mocks the finder. A nest is the hiding place for winged creatures. How could it have remained invisible? … But the dreams of today do not go this far, and an abandoned nest no longer contains the herb of invisibility. Indeed the nest we pluck from the hedge like a dead flower is nothing but a “thing.” I have the right to take it in my hands and pull it apart. In a melancholy mood, I become once more a man of the fields and thickets, and a bit vain at being able to hand on my knowledge to a child, I say: “This is the nest of a titmouse.”

Bachelard’s passage is uncanny because we should recognize the reification and of environments and the vanity of expertise involved in any appropriation of an Outsider

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337 See André Breton, “Facteur Cheval,” from Le Revolver à cheveux blancs (1932), excerpted in Beardsley 1995, 34.
338 Ibid., 36.
environment by cultural insiders. Add to that the tragedy of the deceased or otherwise departed artist. Bachelard continues:

And yet it is living nests that could introduce a phenomenology of actual nests, of the nest found in natural surroundings, and which becomes for a moment the center – the term is no exaggeration – of an entire universe. 340

If it was the artist who imbued a site with authenticity, how is that preserved after the loss of its energetic epicenter? One contemporary artist engaged with such questions of decay, entropy and time is Pierre Huyghe, and his installations – often moreso “environments”—strike interesting parallels with Outsider counterparts. His retrospective at the Centre Pompidou (September 26, 2013 – January 6, 2014) included some of his “Zootropes,” living, breathing and decaying sculptures that include animals (sometimes human animals) and plants alongside props and meta-art historical referents. That entire exhibition was situated within the détourned settings of the previous show that had taken place at the museum, a Mike Kelly exhibition. In that regard, Huyghe’s exposing of the layered and repetitive use of the museum space was itself a kind of bricolage, reminding one of the hodgepodge aesthetics and economies of reuse and refuse one finds at Outsider environments. In both cases, decay—in the Outsider case a byproduct of amateur planning and poor materials and, in Huyghe’s case, arguably, the subject of the artworks—lends a darkly romantic air and an intangible nostalgia for a past without a reference point. David Joselit raised the thesis of Huyghe’s work’s resistance to representative enclosure, in his review of Huyghe’s 2013 Untitled installation at dOCUMENTA 13 (Kassel), “Against Representation,” for Art vs.Image:

“Untitled” included a man, two dogs (one a white Podenco with a foreleg painted bright pink), a pile of concrete slabs, and various other components all amidst a muddy profusion of plant life. Within this aesthetic-cultural compost stood the sculpture of a reclining nude, a giant swarm of bees in place of her head….What emerged from this

340 Ibid.
moldering compost of objects were *images*: not just one image but as many as there were impressions conceived by spectators. And while every artwork functions in this way—as a device for receiving and transmitting images—“Untilled” resists its own smooth functioning, producing a theater of meaning’s ruin; its collapse into compost.\(^{341}\)

How to represent these situations [Huyghe’s term] / environments in their totality is precisely the crisis that Huyghe seeks to precipitate, and one precipitated by Outsider environments. The difficulty of representing Outsider environments is apparent when art insiders seek to reproduce them piecemeal in museums, as the discussion of the *Naives and Visionaries* exhibition will explore below. Issues of representation for Outsider environments branch into those of conservation and, finally, preservation. Joselit wonders, in a speculative turn, if artworks can exist that do not create subjects. He insists that Huyghe’s works splinter off into images that are not affixed to material, or even digital, supports. The artworks themselves exist within these images as perceived by humans, but also before and after those images (and humans). This aspect of Huyghe’s work departs from an appropriate comparison to Outsider environments, I would argue, because of the work’s insistence on contingencies and situations – the “images” in Joselit’s argument. Rather than that, Outsider environments hinge on a crusty physicality. Decay is not a process or a future state in the latter works, but the source material.

**Naives and Visionaries**

In 1974 the Walker Art Center produced *Naives and Visionaries*\(^ {342}\) [Figures 50 and 51]. Although its title is not fully indicative, that exhibition—the first and, arguably, last of its kind—focused on Outsider art environments and builders in the United States. Later exhibitions, like


the contemporary “Jesse Howard: Thy Kingdom Come,” at the Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis (January-May 2015), have showcased the work of individual environment builders, but none have approached the ambition of *Naives and Visionaries* in featuring multiple sites from across the country. Because these environments, nine of which were chosen for feature in *Naives and Visionaries*,

were massive, accumulative, and integrally tied to the land upon which they were built, the exhibition’s organizers relied on documentary photographs to represent them at the Walker. In a few instances, objects, signs and sculptures stood in as metonymic placeholders for entire sites as well. The 1974 exhibition came at a moment when a dialogue about site-specific, conceptual, and ephemeral artworks, and documentary representations of those artworks, was recently underway. The 1970s also saw a burgeoning attention to Outsider art, and particularly to its definition and exhibition in the U.S. *Naives and Visionaries*, then, participated in the formation of both art historical narratives. A review of the planning and execution of this exhibition points to issues I have put forth above, of conservation, representation, imaginative reconstruction and even the exoticizing of Outsider environments. The discussion should also prove that these issues were present at the beginning of insiders’ engagement with Outsider environments. Rather than viewing these environments in line with some of the avant-garde experiments with site specific sculpture produced at the time, this

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343 S.P. Dinsmoor’s Garden of Eden (built 1907-28) in Kansas is extant today, as are Fred Smith’s Wisconsin Concrete Park in Phillips (built 1948-1964), Tressa “Grandma” Prisbrey’s Bottle Village (built 1956-81) in Simi Valley, California, Simon Rodia’s Watts Towers (built 1921-1955) in Los Angeles, Herman Rusch’s Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden and Museum (built c.1952- c.1979) in Cochrane, Wisconsin and Louis Wippich’s Molehill Rock Garden (built 1952- c.1973) in Sauk Rapids, Minnesota. Jesse Howard’s hand painted signs are all that remain from his property, Sorehead Hill (extant 1944-83) in Fulton, Missouri, and, already by 1974, only photographs were left to document Clarence Schmidt’s visionary architecture from Woodstock, New York, begun in 1940 and destroyed completely by fire in 1971. James Hampton’s Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations’ Millenium General Assembly, a room-sized installation which had been removed from a garage in a home Hampton rented in Washington D.C. until his death in 1964, was borrowed from the collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Walker exhibition resorted, it would appear, to exoticizing exhibition strategies and comparisons to ancient, far off treasure troves.

Gregg Blasdel’s 1968 article for *Art in America,* “The Grassroots Artist,” was the vanguard piece that engendered curiosity about “grassroots” art environments among collectors and curators. The exact genesis of *Naives and Visionaries,* however, is difficult to pinpoint. Martin Friedman, director of the Walker from 1962 until 1990, had come across Blasdel’s work in *Art in America,* and the two had met in New York in early 1973. Friedman, forty years later, admits to having “always been drawn to oddball stuff.” That attitude—one positioning the work of environment builders as “oddball”—was commonplace in the 1970s, when those sites were understood largely in relation to kitschy roadside attractions, freak shows and “Americana” more generally. Friedman’s Introduction to the exhibition’s catalog reads like the prologue to an episode of the Twilight Zone:

The scruffy curiosa bordering the American highway includes such wonders as reptile gardens, instant pioneer villages, agate shacks, zoos and freak shows—glaringly announced by fluorescent billboards and pulsating neon. Sometimes, modestly juxtaposed among the roadway heraldry promoting these blandishments, crudely lettered signs invite the dazed motorist and his car full of travel-numbed children to visit quite another kind of attraction: hand-made universes created by elderly individualists.

Archived documents at the Walker reveal that “theater-sets, fun-houses, large-scale doll houses, large science fiction contraptions and religious constructions” were, early on, considered for inclusion in the exhibition, before stricter parameters were set. Notes further indicate that “the Barnum and Bailey Museum might be a good source,” and that wax museums

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345 Blasdel, “The Grassroots Artist,” *Art In America* 56 (September/October 1968), 24-41.
346 Blasdel mentions the meeting in a letter to Martin Friedman, dated 27 February 1973, in the archives of the Walker Art Center.
347 Personal communication with Martin Friedman, February 26, 2015.
348 Friedman 1974, 7.
were also considered during brainstorming sessions.\footnote{Ibid.} One Walker staffer’s request for information from Ripley’s Believe it Or Not was met with an irritated reply:

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We do have in our many museums, many items which we refer to as Folk art, such as Button Pictures, Stamp Paintings, Apple Dolls, Matchstick Models, etc., but I have no idea whether or not this is the kind of material that you are seeking. I am afraid we can be of very little help to you unless you are more specific in your request.\footnote{Letter from D.R. Copperthwaite, Exhibitions Director of Ripley’s International, Ltd. in response to information request by Ms. Judy Hoos, Museum Fellow at the Walker Art Center, dated 8 May 1975, in the archives of the Walker Art Center.}
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Already in the 1970s, the fields of Folk art and Outsider art were proximal, in the United States, as is evident in the planning files for \textit{Naives}. Organizers were aware of the landmark Folk art exhibition simultaneously being planned by Jean Lipman for the Whitney Museum in New York and discussed in Chapter Two.\footnote{See Jean Lipman and Alice Winchester, \textit{The Flowering of American Folk Art 1776-1886}, (New York: Viking Press with the Whitney Museum, 1974).} That exhibition showed works of Folk art made in the U.S. before 1886, and was scheduled to anticipate the nation’s bicentennial. Lipman’s text for that show, \textit{The Flowering of American Folk Art 1776-1886}, authored with Alice Winchester, remains a standard reference in the field. Curator of the American Folk Art Museum, Herbert Hemphill, was also consulted for \textit{Naives}. As we know from a handwritten letter of 1974, addressed to Friedman, Hemphill was “frustrated in wanting to do a carnival-circus show.”\footnote{Herbert Hemphill, from a handwritten letter to Martin Friedman, dated 21 March 1974, in the archives of the Walker Art Museum.} Phyllis Kind, a pioneering and influential Chicago Outsider art dealer, was contacted for her input on the exhibition, and notes suggest her collection of carnival and freak show posters as possible inclusions. Kind suggested the work of a few artists, among them Jesse Howard, who was included in the show, and Martin Ramirez--today among the most widely sought-after Outsiders, but not an environment builder.\footnote{Phyllis Kind, from a letter to Martin Friedman, dated 9 May 1973, in the archives of the Walker Art Center.} Some involved in the planning for \textit{Naives} suggested that the
exhibition might take a different approach, in framing the environments in the context of Pop art.\textsuperscript{355} At the same historical moment in the exhibition of Outsider art, Jean Dubuffet gifted his collection of \textit{Art Brut} to the city of Lausanne (1971), and was poised to install it in the Chateau Beaulieu, with the help of Michel Thévoz (1976). And in England, the Hayward gallery would mount its seminal “Outsiders” exhibition in 1979, the first institutional example of the use of the Anglophone translation of \textit{Art Brut}. Regarding environments, specifically, exhibitions in Chartres (\textit{Les bâtisseurs de l’imaginaire} at the Musée des beaux arts, 1977) and Paris (\textit{Les singuliers de l’art: des inspirés aux habitants paysagistes} at the Musée de l’art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1978), employed similar strategies as the \textit{Naives} exhibition, in using photographs and objects to stand in for Outsider environments. The latter exhibition, not entirely devoted to environments, was curated by Alain Bourbannais, Michel Ragon and Suzanne Pagé.

Perhaps late by contemporary standards of exhibition planning, by July 1974, just six months in advance of its opening, \textit{Naives} was finally focused on “large-scale environmental works.”\textsuperscript{356} The sci-fi and carnival aesthetics were dismissed, and a preliminary list of fifteen art environments plus eight alternates had been whittled down to nine, some of them thriving, and others lying in ruin. Martin Friedman had seen some of these Outsider art environments first-hand. He remembers meeting Simon Rodia while living in Los Angeles in the 1950s, as well as, later, visiting Grandma Prisbrey.\textsuperscript{357} The exhibition’s design however, was credited to Friedman’s wife, an experienced designer. Mildred “Mickey” Friedman (1929-2014) was the editor of the Walker’s \textit{Design Quarterly} from 1969 until the 1990s. She assisted Edward Larrabee Barnes (1915-2004), the architect of the Walker’s new building, completed in 1971, with the planning

\textsuperscript{355} Personal communication with Gregg Blasdel, March 3, 2015.
\textsuperscript{356} Philip Larson, from a letter to Murray Smither, dated 3 July 1974, in the archives of the Walker Art Center.
\textsuperscript{357} Personal communication with Martin Friedman, 26 February 2015.
and execution of its white-on-white interior spaces. The goals of Barnes’ redesign, to “create architecture that does not compete with art,” and to reduce “museum fatigue” by introducing a “sense of progression,” were drawn, somewhat contradictorily, from Bauhaus functionality and from the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright’s imposing Guggenheim Museum in New York, respectively. The Walker Art Center reopened to great fanfare in 1971 with Works for New Spaces, an exhibition of site-specific work, commissioned by the Walker for temporary installation in the new building. Martin Friedman curated. Contemporary sculptors Lynda Benglis, Robert Irwin, and Donald Judd were among the invited contributors, all of whom were associated with Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, Land Art, or Light and Space movements.

Although Barnes’ Modern, industrial space was tailor-made for such large, succinct installations as Irwin’s room-sized scrim piece, Slant/Light/Volume, it would soon host the unsanctioned messiness of Outsider environments.

The installation design of Naives and Visionaries was dramatic. Walls and display platforms for the exhibition were all built from exposed two-by-fours, painted a dusty grey-brown, which might imply a humble, rural setting. Photographs of the installation show an immersive, darkened environment, with visitors bathed in shadow. In some sections viewers stood in total darkness, looking at spotlighted black-and-white photographs and backlit color transparencies of the environments. The photographs and transparencies chosen consisted of a few broad, encompassing views of each environment, together with more creative detailed

359 See Martin Friedman, Works for New Spaces (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1971).
360 Judy Hoos Fox, who worked on “Naives” as a Fellow at the Walker in 1974, remembers a conversation she had with Robert Irwin wherein the artist gave his assessment of Friedman’s choice to mount “Naives and Visionaries.” According to Fox, Irwin opined that Friedman “put his ear to the ground in 1974 and didn’t hear anything” – meaning, as Fox explains, that Friedman produced the show in the subjectively diagnosed absence of another major contemporary art movement worth exhibiting at that historical moment. Personal communication with Judy Hoos Fox, 24 February 2015. Friedman denied that motivation, citing instead the timeliness of the Outsider material in the early 1970s, in our personal communication of 26 February 2015.
images emphasizing odd angles and the play of shadows to underscore the eccentricity of these places. In a few cases, the Walker commissioned new photographs of sites that had not yet been documented. In other cases, the shots were drawn from the existing archives of advocates for individual environments, such as Gregg Blasdel, who had earlier photographed Clarence Schmidt’s visionary architecture in Woodstock, New York. Professional artist Seymour Rosen, likewise contributed documentation of Sam Rodia’s Watt’s Towers. Rosen went on to found the most renowned not-for-profit organization dedicated to the documentation of Outsider art environments.

Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments (SPACES)

Since 1978 the non-profit organization SPACES (Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments), headquartered in Aptos, California, has catalogued Outsider environments across the United States. The aforementioned Seymour Rosen (1935-2006), a California photographer, founded SPACES “for the purposes of identifying, documenting, and advocating for the preservation of large-scale art environments.”361 From its base in California the foundation collects archival materials related to Outsider environments, including photographs, correspondence with artists and site caretakers, exhibition ephemera, news clippings and site plans. The creation of a digital platform, a cross-indexed digital archive accessible through the spacesarchive.org website, has encouraged crowd-sourced contributions to the database, which are vetted by the foundation.362

The holdings of the SPACES archive, although aspiring in scope, are uneven. Moreover, proprietors of many environments maintain their own mini-archives or submit them to nearby

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362 During the writing of this chapter, I communicated with SPACES, and contributed text and images from my site visit to Kenny Hill’s Sculpture Garden in Chauvin, Louisiana to the digital archive.
museums, complicating any effort at centralization. In general, environments—including Watts Towers, the first of Rosen’s interests—still suffer from poor conservation, in spite of SPACES’ effort at educating potential preservers. SPACES has created fifty meticulous state files to facilitate application for special historic or public status for environments, according to each state’s regulations. An online “preservation toolbox” offers templates to help ease the bureaucratic process and basic documents to guide the layman through the best practices of ownership, maintenance, documentation and preservation (including what not to touch without an expert conservator or historian). This is all in an effort to help the advocates of individual environments to acquire funding, which SPACES does not provide.  

Rosen was a self-taught photographer before becoming the founding director of SPACES. His first solo exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1962) took up the subject of Sabato (a.k.a. Sam, also called Simon) Rodia’s Watts Towers—those towering metal and concrete structures built by Rodia from 1921 to 1954 in an area of Los Angeles now infamous for the Watts Riots of 1965. Rosen was no doubt moved by the community effort in which he participated to save that environment when the city, prompted by safety concerns, threatened demolition in 1960. He mounted a later exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *In Celebration of Ourselves* (1976) which included photographs from other

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363 I asked directors at Paradise Garden and the Chauvin Sculpture Park about their experiences with SPACES. Both had corresponded with the organization, but had not used the archive or received notable assistance from SPACES.


Although Rosen felt an affinity for Outsider art, he was a definitive insider. He showed and photographed at the Ferus Gallery during its moment of Pop ascendency in the early 1960s. His shot of the installation of Andy Warhol’s *Soup Can* paintings arranged on a shelf during the latter’s first Ferus exhibition in 1962 is now canonical. Rosen’s tastes, leveling high and low to include popular and Outsider work, are perhaps not surprising, situated as they were in this Pop milieu. Andy Warhol’s own low-brow collection of Folk art, hoarded from antiques shops rather than carefully selected based on standardized tastes, was the subject of an exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum in 1970. His own tastes in collecting were more like an Outsider’s; he was a consumer more than a collector in that regard.

Rosen’s successor at SPACES credits him with the construction of the genre of “art environment.” As such, he might be added to an informal list, including Dubuffet and Cahill, of those who have defined and subdivided the Outsider genre. Seymour Rosen was not a wealthy man and he largely devoted his life to this not-for-profit work. His apparent passion to document environments may have fulfilled an urge to “collect” them. Current SPACES director, Jo Farb Hernandez notes that Rosen always called these sites “Folk art environments.” The term registers a particularly North American and idiosyncratic construction of the word “Folk.” The revised terminology now in use by the organization (“art environments”) is an attempt by Hernandez to choose more careful language, avoiding any implication of artistic exchange among the builders of art environments that might be inferred from the term “Folk.”

SPACES defines art environments as:

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367 See Chapter One.
368 Discussed here at length in the Introduction, and treated again in Chapter Two.
immobile constructions or decorative assemblages, monumental in scale or number of components. Art environments may be interior or exterior, and typically include elements of sculpture, architecture, bas-relief assemblage, and/or landscape architecture. Such composite works, produced additively and organically without formal architectural designs or engineering plans, owe less allegiance to folk, popular, or mainstream art traditions and the desire to produce anything functional or marketable, and more to personal and cultural experiences, availability of materials, and a desire for personal creative expression.\textsuperscript{370}

This is a thoughtfully written statement. The stipulations of immobility and of substantial scale support the use of the term “environment,” and the invoking of additive, personal, composite works— of \textit{bricolage}, in other words-- is mostly apt if one surveys the environments documented by SPACES. It is important to treat these similarities not as uncanny, but as signposts of the unspoken social circumstances and experiences shared among Outsider artists, such as sometimes-contradictory feelings of exclusion, nationalism, visionary religious faith, or the need to protest. To deny “the desire to produce anything functional or marketable” among all of the artists whose environments are catalogued by SPACES would be incorrect, and so the modifiers “less” and “more” within the definition wisely sidestep that totality. The definition continues:

They [art environments] are generally intended to be viewed in their entirety rather than as a grouping of discrete works. Studies of individual sites usually reveal the labors of a single, passionate worker (an artist in our eyes, but not always in those of the creator), typically—but not always—begun in the later years of their lives.\textsuperscript{371}

SPACES’ archival holdings reflect Rosen’s personal documentary efforts. The establishment of a centralized archive evinces the drive to encircle the material, and leaves out much of the art material that has been broken up for sale, that now circulates the market in diaspora, some of it being culled and reconstituted by the Kohler Foundation (discussed below).

\textsuperscript{370} SPACES website, “What is an Art Environment?” \url{http://spacesarchives.org/about/what-is-an-art-environment/}, accessed 26 February 2015.
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid.
The scanned documents available online include correspondences between SPACES and the staffs of individual environments, as well as public press releases and published articles. The photographs in the collection were taken by Rosen himself, by SPACES staffers, and, increasingly, by interested individual contributors. There is certainly educational value in SPACES’ effort, particularly in the democracy of its internet platform, which makes available ephemera for study. It is a resource for beginning researchers, with a sincerity of purpose but having no capital for major preservation projects. Curator of the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, Mark Sloan argues that the very “documentation of these environments is a kind of ‘visual archaeology’ which serves a vital historical function, allowing us to ‘deduce the life from these quarters.’”

Thus, Rosen’s archive serves an altogether different function than Dubuffet’s did. A theory does not explicitly underlie its existence and the compilation of the archive has been more collaborative in practice and spirit.

Paradise Lost and Found

Hello out there brothers and sisters, this is Howard Finster speaking to you from Paradise Garden and World’s Folk Art Church in Pennville, Georgia. I’m an artist. I do sacred art. And this place I’ve built here is a [sic] art headquarter [sic].

–Howard Finster, 1989

By the time Finster (1915-2001) left the property now called “Paradise Garden” in 1992, the four-acres of marshland in Pennville, Georgia that he had acquired back in 1961 had been transformed. Situated in an economically depressed area of Chattooga County, Pennville is an unincorporated community next to Summerville. Its main industry historically has been textile

373 Howard Finster, as told to Tom Patterson, Howard Finster, Stranger from Another World: Man of Visions, Now on Earth (New York: Abbeville Press,1989), 27.
374 Finster originally called the property the “Plant Farm Museum.” See the wall text of the permanent exhibition at the Paradise Garden Gallery.
manufacturing. After fifteen years as a preacher at the Chelsea Baptist Church in Menlo, Georgia, Finster acquired the land adjacent to Hays State Prison in Pennville with the aim of creating his own evangelical ministry there—a goal he accomplished, albeit non-traditionally. Finster had always been a tinkerer, and people around Summervillle remember him as their local bicycle repairman and mechanic. He was a collector of all manner of used material, much of it categorically trash. Jordan Poole, the current Executive Director of the Paradise Garden Foundation, jokingly quips that “today Howard might be on Hoarders,” referring to the popular contemporary reality show exposing obsessive hoarders in their morbidly overstuffed homes.

Finster found uses, often decorative, for the items he saved in repurposing them. He was aware of a phenomenon of roadside attractions, sometimes labeled “Americana,” and of a Georgia attraction on Lookout Mountain called Rock City. After an artistic and spiritual—the two were never far apart for Finster—epiphany at fifty-nine years of age, he began to paint.

375 According to the Southeast Industrial Development Association, major employers are two remaining textile mills, Mt. Vernon Mills (denim) and Mohawk Industries (carpet), along with the Hays State Prison. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2013 estimates, twenty-four percent of people in Chattooga County are living beneath the poverty level, despite an average employment rate.

376 Personal communication with Jordan Poole, November 18, 2014.

377 Finster had created another, smaller environment in Trion, Georgia in the 1940s. He called it the Roadside Park Museum. This environment featured a miniature replica of a local church with steeple and scale models of the “crystal mansions” of Finster’s visions, related to the New Testament verse John 14:2: “In my Father’s house there are many mansions. I go there to prepare a room for you.” See Finster and Patterson 1989, 95-99.

378 The story is oft-repeated: Howard Finster was painting a bicycle with white paint one day when he noticed a small blob of acrylic paint on his finger in the shape of a human face. A voice from heaven commanded him to paint. Finster replied that he did not know how to paint, to which the voice responded: “How will you know?” In later versions of the story told by Finster, he claimed the voice specified that he paint five thousand works of spiritual art, a number he surpassed by over forty thousand works, all meticulously numbered. Finster, following the command, took out a dollar bill and, looking at it, painted three successively larger portraits of George Washington on a metal object that remains in the Garden. This story is reproduced in several monographs on Finster, including Finster and Patterson 1989,123-4; John Turner, Howard Finster: Man of Visions: The Life and Work of A Self-Taught Artist (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989); and in one by his daughter, Thelma Finster Bradshaw, Howard Finster: The Early Years (Birmingham: Crane Hill Publishers, 2001). The story was thus repeated to me by Foundation Board Member Janet Byington, in our personal communication on November 18, 2014, and by Finster himself in an Oral History Interview from 1984 with Liza Kirwin, now in the Howard Finster papers (1932-1987) in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Finster received his first vision at three years old, when he witnessed his deceased sister coming down from the sky to speak to him.
He seems to have been in a near-constant state of creativity, building up an extensive art environment in under two decades that included eighteen independent wooden architectural structures (sheds) filled with junk and treasure, a “bottle house” made entirely of glass bottles set into cement, an immersive “mirror house,” the five-story World’s Folk Art Church and tower, and a network of mosaicked, cement pathways, grottoes and fountains. Every surface at Paradise Garden, hidden or visible, is covered with painting or some sort of decoration, be that plastic beads or trinkets suspended from paperclips [Figure 52]. Overall, Finster’s artistic style at Paradise Garden was more inclusive than edited, junky but impressive in scale and attention to detail.

Those who knew “Howard” describe a warm, insistent person who would preach and sing for hours unprompted, given the chance. Friend and academic, Norman Girardot, wrote in an obituary for the artist in 2001: “Shamans like Finster are mesmerizing tricksters who know the secrets of enchantment.” In that memorial issue of Folk Art Messenger, artist Susan Hankla wrote with a similarly honest affection: “Howard Finster had a remarkable way of selling himself which I’ll always view as the courageous way to push forward in life.” She noted both his self-promotion and his “sweet honesty.” Friends and acquaintances also describe, offhand, the range of substances fueling his ceaseless stamina, including strong chewing tobacco, Coca-Cola, and large amounts of coffee. Finster, it is said, would eat spoonsful of coffee grounds for a “pick-

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379 Three of those buildings were built entirely by Finster. The rest were partially constructed on the property when he acquired it, piece by piece.
380 As Finster became financially able (through repair work, the sale of his paintings, and eventually a $5,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts), he acquired land adjacent to his original property, and the buildings already on that land. For instance, the original, two-level structure of the World’s Folk Art Church was extant when he purchased the bit of land on which it sat. Finster sawed through the roof and began to add on the circular tower to the structure, which then soared another three levels through his efforts.
“me-up” during bouts of frantic creation, sermonizing or banjo performances.  
Although he rarely drank alcohol, and hand-painted signs all over the property warn of the dangers of hard drugs and cocaine, he did sip prescribed Hydrocodone to relieve a persistent cough. Empty bottles were found by subsequent owners of the property.

Finster was a charismatic figure, and by all accounts enjoyed the attention he received from an increasingly broad audience after Outsider art dealer Phyllis Kind popularized his artwork in her Chicago gallery beginning in 1979. One of his favorite quotes – and he had many – was, “I never met a man I didn’t love.” Indeed, the legendary “Howard” never turned away visitors or their questions, and never shied from dubious commenters on his religious visions or mental state. Although most people now living in the surrounding towns of Summerville, Pennville, Rome and Trion have not visited Finster’s environment, according to several members of the Paradise Garden Foundation Board, many are aware that a local, Finster, was a guest on the Johnny Carson show back in 1983. Finster was pulled in many directions

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384 Personal communication on November 19, 2014 with Donnie Davis and Michael Sanders, carpenters working for the Paradise Garden Foundation, local citizens and acquaintances of Finster’s. As with other reports about Finster’s personal character, this information was reported with a grinning bemusement, and was not intended as an indictment. The degree of Finster’s resort to substances is part of his self-construction, as Girardot suggests in his essay, “The Word Made Flesh: Howard Finster as Preacher-Painter-Performance Artist,” in Glen C. Davies, Stranger in Paradise: The Works of Reverend Howard Finster, ex.cat., (Champaign, Ill.: Krannert Art Museum, 2009), fn. 2: “No doubt this ‘coffee eating’ theme is part of the myth-making aspect of Finster’s persona and career – something that was both constructed and encouraged by Finster…”

385 Personal communication with Davis and Sanders, November 19, 2014.

386 That was the date of his first solo show at Phyllis Kind Gallery, Chicago. Art agent Jeff Camp had approached Finster earlier, in 1977, and had exclusive rights to show his work at the American Folk Art Company in Richmond, Virginia, for a few years before Kind’s arrival. Finster found ways, however, to skirt his deal with Camp, holding aside “tourist” art of a lesser grade to sell at cheap prices, or to give away for free to comers to the Garden.

387 Although Finster’s choice of “man” as substitute for “person” in this quote is typical of his era and historical context, some of his artwork does betray a particularly suspicious attitude toward the assumedly sinful nature of women such as is prevalent in much evangelical Christianity. Some works, like Woman Shall Compass Man (1978) convey his anxiety over the then contemporary women’s movement as a sign of the apocalypse, with attendant prophetic Bible verses such as Jeremiah 31:22. Text on the painting reads: “Women shall outnumber man and grow in great power before the end of the earth’s planet. The Prophets of god never fail.”

388 Both Byington and Poole related this to me in personal communication of November 18, 2014. Born and raised in the area, Poole used his own family’s lack of interest in the Garden and his experience in dealing with visitors firsthand as evidence for the evaluation of local awareness. He related a story about his family’s heirloom quilts to
during the waves of popularity he experienced during the late 1970s and 1980s, giving lectures and interviews and even week-long “teachouts” or “workouts,” such as the Mountain Lake Workshop organized by Ray Kass with Ann Oppenhimer in 1985, where Finster shared his art-making methods and visions with college students.  

By the time he moved closer into the town of Summerville, and off of the Paradise Garden property, Finster was concerned, as always, with promoting his spiritual message, but also with documenting his personal legacy. The Garden was in a state of disrepair even before his leaving. Beardsley, an early biographer of Finster, wrote:

In 1991, in what to me seems like an act of renunciation, he had an elevated, covered walkway built above its [the Garden’s] remains, leading from the old shop at one end to the church at the other. This long, narrow gallery houses both his art and his memorabilia. Finster’s garden, originally a museum of mankind, and then an evocation of paradise, now seems like a museum to his world-weary creator.

Beardsley’s reading, although poetic, may overly interpret what has otherwise been called a “wheelchair ramp.” In fact, Finster called it a “rollin-chair” ramp himself. Although it is a questionable assumption that Finster intended to circumvent the crumbling Garden via this ramp, Beardsley’s sentiment is correct: Finster abandoned Paradise Garden toward the end of his life and the gallery was a monument to his career. As he became older, his ill health required rest and he turned to mass production of more portable artworks to make money, employing markers and paper instead of paint and wood.

Because of the massive and constant upkeep required at the Garden – due to the sheer volume of material prone to rust and decay, and to poor planning coupled with problems of...
flooding and drainage on the property—subsequent owners struggled to manage the grounds during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Those involved with the garden now tend to shy away from questions about these “Dark Ages,” but there are a few articles documenting the decline. One such piece was written by Grant Alden for *No Depression* magazine in 1997, after several visits to the Garden throughout the 1990s, but the lazy tone of that article lends it an air of questionable accuracy (e.g. “Finster had just sold an important hunk of sidewalk to a museum, or a major collector, or somebody”). Nonetheless, one gleans generalities, such as the family infighting that took place between Finster’s offspring in their father’s waning years, with regard to managing his potentially profitable estate and artistic legacy. Alden reports that Finster’s son Roy and “talented” grandson Michael hung their own artworks for sale at the Garden, and alleges that vandalism, graffiti and theft were perpetrated by strangers and spurned family members alike.393

Patricia Leigh Brown reported in the *New York Times* in 1995 that: “Over the last two years, many of the most valuable objects from the garden have been vandalized or sold, some of them with Mr. Finster's permission, some without. And Mother Nature has not always been kind,”394 anticipating and corroborating Alden’s claims. She continued, assessing the Garden as “the place that once brought only joy to its creator, which he plans as his ‘burying place,’ [and that] has also inspired gothic family discord and a toll-free sales number (800-FINSTER).”

Finster’s daughter, Beverly (one of four daughters and one son), purchased the property from her

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392 Grant Alden, “Paradise lost? Changing times at Finster’s fabulous Paradise Garden,” *No Depression* 10 (July-August 1997). *No Depression* is a magazine focusing on Folk and Roots music, so Outsider and Folk art form proximal subjects.
393 Ibid.
394 Patricia Leigh Brown, “Losing Paradise, Keeping His Faith,” *New York Times*, 29 June 1995. The tenor of discussion concerning Paradise Garden during the 1990s is indicated by a quick survey of the bleak titles of articles such as this one.
395 Although Finster did build a coffin for himself that still sits in a chapel in the Garden, he was not buried there, ultimately. There is a tombstone and a body buried on the property though – a county John Doe whom Finster took it upon himself to memorialize.
father in 1995, buying out her siblings with her father’s blessing. She worked in earnest to maintain the site by selling her father’s paintings, applying for funding and adding a more reliable fence to the grounds.\textsuperscript{396} In one article for the \textit{Atlanta-Journal Constitution}, she was quoted as calling the Garden “a money pit,” retrospectively\textsuperscript{397} [Figures 53 and 54].

The market for Finster works in diaspora remained fairly strong through the 1990s. Finster had sold paintings and had taken commissions all along, so authentic Finsters were not scarce, numbering a staggering 47,000. Those were mostly moralizing works on paper, on the subjects of Finster’s visions and sermons, or painted wood cutouts of religious or popular figures, always with text.\textsuperscript{398} In April 2013, two of Finster’s early paintings sold for $37,500 and $36,000, respectively, at Slotin Folk Art Auction in Georgia, indicating a resurgence of interest in the artist. However, with a profusion of the artist’s works on the market, prices normally range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars apiece. Folk America, a gallery begun by Finster’s patrons Jane and Larry Schlachter and located just a mile up the road from Paradise Garden, may boast the largest inventory for sale.\textsuperscript{399}

The next owner of Paradise Garden after Beverly Finster was Reverend Tommy Littleton, a preacher and real estate investor from Birmingham who ran the environment, largely \textit{in absentia}, as an organization called the Paradise Gardens Museum and Park, Inc. He purchased it in 2005. Under his care, at first, the environment remained in desperate condition. Although other buyers had expressed interest in purchasing the site from the Finster family, such as Chicago art dealer, David Leonardis, who drove from Chicago to Pennville on weekends to work

\begin{footnotes}
\item[396] Personal communication with Byington, November 18, 2014.
\item[397] Beverly Finster quoted in “Resurrection of Finster’s Paradise Garden,” \textit{Atlanta Journal-Constitution}, 29 April 2012.
\item[398] Finster’s works are, at best, fantastic and apocalyptic, demonstrating a natural grasp of allegory. They digress into the realms of theoretical physics, meteorology and bestiary fantasy. They are colorful and naïve, looking anachronistic in formal exhibitions, and are a perennial feature in the Outsider market.
\end{footnotes}
at the environment, Littleton won the bid for reasons that remain murky.\textsuperscript{400} Littleton admitted in 2007 that he had applied to no less than thirty-five organizations for assistance in maintaining the site, with no success.\textsuperscript{401} But by 2010, North Carolina gallerist Margaret Browne, in a cogent article for the \textit{Folk Art Messenger}, countered with seemingly good news: “They’ve achieved a resurrection of sorts, defying an art-world Greek chorus that had declared futile Littleton’s efforts to save the chapel and Howard Finster’s Paradise Garden.”\textsuperscript{402} She continued: “The sight of a stabilized chapel – a structure that was, until recently, collapsing – surprises a few volunteers at this Paradise Garden Work Day as they arrive at the scene. Most were expecting a more dire state of affairs.”\textsuperscript{403} Littleton is mentioned in Browne’s article as citing three reasons for the lack of original support for his organization’s efforts: the generally poor state of the economy at the time, the belief that the environment was beyond repair, and the belief (with some credence\textsuperscript{404}) that Finster did not desire the Garden to be preserved after his death. An energetic, thirty-one year old Chattooga County Commissioner, Jason Winters, who grew up in nearby Lyerly, soon took an interest in Paradise Garden. He saw it as a potential engine for economic development in the area, and welcomed the opportunity to draw cultural tourism to the Garden. “So many small communities would love to have the promotional tool that we’ve got,” he was quoted by a Florida newspaper as saying of Paradise Gardens. “We’re just now beginning

\textsuperscript{400} Leonardis had previously purchased the Vision House on the property that he then turned into a Gallery showing and selling Finster’s works that he already owned – so he had a vested interest in Littleton’s work at the Garden. He expressed impatience at Littleton’s efforts. See Brenda Goodman, “Saving a Folk Artist’s Paradise, Lost to Weeds and Ruin, Is a Tangled Affair,” \textit{New York Times}, 25 October 2007.

\textsuperscript{401} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{402} Margaret Browne, “Paradise Regained,” \textit{Folk Art Messenger} 22:1 (Summer 2010). Browne’s mother, Lynne Browne, was a member of the founding Paradise Garden Foundation Board.

\textsuperscript{403} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{404} The issue is raised in Browne 2010, which refers to Girardot’s personal communication with Finster about his wishes for the Garden’s legacy.
to be able to tap that resource.” Littleton, by then, was working with Winters, who had also brought in the Georgia Historic Trust, notably represented by the acting Paradise Garden Foundation Director, Jordan Poole. Poole’s influence is already apparent in Browne’s 2010 report, where his recommendations for intervention in the Garden are authoritative.

Chattooga County, under Winters’ direction, bought the Finster land for $125,000 in 2011 from Littleton, using $101,000 in grants from the Appalachian Regional Commission plus private donations (in lieu of public funds) accomplished through a grassroots campaign that appealed to a few affluent locals. At the time, Littleton believed that his organization would maintain control over the site after that purchase. Instead, the Paradise Garden Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, was begun to oversee the environment moving forward, and its ten local board members were drawn from area residents, including Janet Byington, who had helped to raise funds for the County’s purchase of the land. “We took a busload of garden club ladies from Chattooga County down to the High Museum,” she explained, where several of Finster’s works are on permanent display. Littleton’s interest in the garden had been as a religious vehicle at best, a personal pulpit at worst, and most people around the Garden now speak of his tenure as “water under the bridge.” His judgments on the current administration can be found on a Summerville web forum where he alleges they “have stolen our project, lease and website and [are] using it to promote gays and abortion with Christian history.” The controversy brings up an interesting conundrum in considering the fidelity to Finster’s own religious mission—an eccentric mix of conservatism and subversion-- in ongoing goals for

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406 See Browne 2010.
407 Based on comments he made in Browne 2010.
408 Personal communication of November 18, 2014.
409 Personal communication with Poole, November 18, 2014.
Paradise Garden. For instance, although the Foundation has begun hosting events on the property, it respects Finster’s moral beliefs by not serving alcohol to guests within the Garden.

The Paradise Garden Foundation signed a fifty-year lease for the land with Chattooga County. Jordan Harris Poole, who has been the most galvanizing figure in the restoration project, was brought in as Director as his contract with the Georgia Historic Trust neared its end. A Pennville native, whose art teacher was Beverly Finster, Poole remembers seeing “crazy” Finster’s property from the back seat of his father’s car on the way to visit family. Poole has a Master’s degree of Fine Art in Historic Preservation and worked previously at historic Mt. Vernon, George Washington’s home in Virginia. He brings a pragmatism, and experience in making difficult conservation decisions at Mt. Vernon to bear at Paradise Garden. Poole gave the following example in our discussion about his time at Mt. Vernon:

For instance, you’ve got a piece of roof that you’re redoing and there’s a board from the eighteenth century, but the board from the eighteenth century is rotten and is not holding up the roof any more. You know what? You have to remove it. Look at the building as a whole. But somebody else might have gone, “Oh, but its from the eighteenth century…” Well, you know what, it did its job for a long time.

Poole draws other, perhaps unlikely, comparisons between the two sites in pointing out their dual missions of preserving both “the man and the place.” That is, George Washington’s story might be told without Mt. Vernon, but the reverse is inappropriate. Poole says of Paradise Garden:

And that’s the same here: you can have books written about Howard himself and his art and all those things and minimally mention Paradise Garden, but you can’t do anything about Paradise Garden and not mention Howard. It’s how Paradise Garden can utilize the same thought process as branding at Mt. Vernon. Everything is “Howard Finster’s Paradise Garden.”

411 Personal communication with Poole, November 18, 2014.
412 Ibid.
413 Ibid.
Earlier in 2010, Paradise Garden had arrived on the Georgia Historic Trust’s short list of Places in Peril, because of a 2009 application begun by Littleton. That designation was a motivating and legitimizing factor in the county’s acquisition of the environment. However, its addition to the U.S. Department of the Interior’s National Register of Historic Places in 2012 – rare for a “young” site – was the event that gave Paradise Garden the imprimatur to garner major national grants. One other, rather well-known Outsider environment in Georgia, called Pasaquan, holds the status as well, since 2008.\footnote{\textsuperscript{414} Pasaquan was built by Eddie Owens Martin, who called himself St. EOM. The environment is featured in the monograph, Eddie Owens Martin, as told to Tom Patterson, \textit{St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan: The Life and Times and Art of Eddie Owens Martin} (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Jargon Society, 1987), and in “St. EOM’s Pasaquan: A Promising Future,” \textit{Clarion} 13 (Winter 1988): 52-55.} In 2013, Winters and Poole, along with Dr. Keith Herbert, an historian at the University of West Georgia, wrote a grant application, and the Paradise Garden Foundation was awarded $445,000 from Artplace America to be administered by the County.

**Artplace America**

Artplace America is the name of a vaguely politically positioned “ten year collaboration”\footnote{\textsuperscript{415} Artplace America website, “About,” \url{http://www.artplaceamerica.org/about/}, accessed 26 February 2015.} to funnel money toward site-specific community development. If SPACES functions through a kind of grassroots idealism, Artplace is instead linked into contemporary corporate interests. It is a clearinghouse that matches large foundations and corporate donors to sites needing funding, with relatively massive payouts. It counts among its donors national banks such as Chase Bank and Bank of America, federal agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the White House Office of Management and Budget, and philanthropic heavy-hitters such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. The criteria for award-winning applications to Artplace center around “creative
placemaking.” A term Artplace America borrows, “placemaking” has become a buzzword over the past two decades. Founded in the sociological work of Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte, and specifically Whyte’s book *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980)⁴¹⁶ and a subsequent film of the same title, placemaking entails the progressive application of social theory based on observations of how people behave in communal spaces.⁴¹⁷ The approach, officially, “helps citizens transform their public spaces into vital places that highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation and serve common needs.”⁴¹⁸ Traditionally, these places have been urban.

Contemporary placemaking, under the banner of Artplace America, collapses genres, awarding grants to environments, playgrounds, learning centers and workshops, whether urban or suburban. There are no size or aesthetic requirements. Paradise Garden was appealing to the 2013 award committee because it was a rare rural, and potentially communal place.⁴¹⁹ What the winning projects share is an impetus toward revitalization, progress and relevancy, rather than aiming to lay a varnish over an historic site. For the price of a few hundred thousand dollars some of the wealthiest financial institutions in the country can garner tax benefits, advertising opportunities and the appearance of good will and community engagement, and can recuperate what were previously anarchic spaces into groomed and well-mannered reiterations of the

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⁴¹⁷ Whyte observed and catalogued the common behaviors of people in public, urban spaces, including their interactions with architectural features such as ledges, fountains and benches. He and his team studied the human flows, pauses and rests in these spaces, to understand why some spaces “work” as places, and some do not. His underlying measure of success for a site was understood to be the number of people inhabiting a space, and the duration of their use of it. There is an implicit difference in this discourse, between a “space” as a geographical site defined by architecture with social potential, and a useful, fully social “place.” This follows Heidegger’s distinction laid out in “Building, dwelling, thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1993 [1977]), 343-364.

⁴¹⁸ Project for Public Spaces website, “About,” [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org), accessed 26 February 2015. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS), the official mouthpiece of the movement, was organized in 1975. The core assets of a place, according to this organization are: sociability, usefulness, accessibility and positive image.

⁴¹⁹ Personal communication with Poole, November 18, 2014. Although the Garden has potential to be communal, its location is remote, so access is limited. Events like holiday tree lightings and children’s art exhibitions bring some community togetherness at the place. The most communal events may very well be “work days” related to the Garden’s rescue and maintenance.
consumerist ethos—all the while capitalizing through predatory financial practices on the very communities they purport to serve with these programs. Placemaking relies on the premise that communities can manage, archive and grow their own environments if given the money to do so, so an advocate was needed at Paradise Garden to guide the project. A turn in emphasis toward cultural tourism and economic growth for Chattooga County, and perhaps the attendant turnover of administration at Paradise Garden, had much to do with its being selected as a 2013 grant winner. However, many people close to the project believe Finster’s environment had the magnetic potential all along. Howard Pousner, who writes frequently on Paradise Garden for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* quipped in one article, “Finster could have accurately listed ‘creative placemaker’ on his business card,” referring obliquely to Finster’s infamously long list of twenty-two self-identified professions.420

Rallying national attention and local identity around the Garden is part of the three-pronged approach laid out on the environment’s website and in the Paradise Garden Foundation’s annual report of 2012-2013, titled “Phase I: Stabilization”:

Some people see only the spiritual nature of the Garden, some only see the art, and others may see both but also see that it can draw cultural tourism to an economically depressed part of Georgia and help boost the local economy. It is the job of the Foundation to balance all three of these elements in order to make this project a success.421

National attention has been easier to garner, according to Poole, than local support. With an additional grant from the Educational Foundation of America and smaller grants from elsewhere, the Paradise Garden Foundation raised $700,000 in initial funds to begin its restoration project in 2012. A formerly abandoned property with a run-down house across the road from the Garden was purchased and transformed by Poole and his team into Foundation offices and an Artist In

Residence apartment.\textsuperscript{422} That lodging is replete with antique furnishings and art, including some of Finster’s work, a kitchen and bath, and is available for artists and scholars to study Finster’s work while in residence on the grounds. Poole takes a modest salary for his full-time work as Director, and two part-time carpenters, Michael Sanders and Donnie Davis, maintain the property and work on select, rotating projects of restoration at the direction of the Foundation. They, arguably, know the environment most intimately.

At Paradise Garden the objective at first was “triage.”\textsuperscript{423} Many of the environment’s structures, sculptures and pathways were on the verge of collapse due to flooding and material decay. The climate in the North Georgia hills is wet, with multiple freeze and thaw cycles each year. As per the stipulation of the Appalachian Regional Commission when originally funding the purchase of the Finster property, Chatooga County was required to contract a firm to perform a professional site evaluation. Lord, Aeck and Sargent, a design and architecture firm with six offices across the Southeastern United States, produced the Site Management Plan, with recommendations for structural stabilization and maintenance. Finster’s buildings, the Site Management Plan confirmed, needed steadying, and years of collected debris had to be dredged from drainage canals. Poole told a local newspaper at the time of their first interventions that the property’s water table was thereby reduced by six or seven inches, easing their future efforts at discovery\textsuperscript{424} \{Figures 55, 56 and 57\}.

Poole and his crew first stabilized the major buildings in the Garden, including the Church, by adding wooden beams alongside any rotting or unstable, original wood. Those beams

\textsuperscript{422} I stayed there for the student rate of fifty dollars per night, and was given a set of keys to access the Garden any time, day or night, at my leisure.

\textsuperscript{423} I used this term in conversation with Poole during my visit to Paradise Garden in November, 2014, and discovered that Margaret Browne had likewise used it in her 2010 article to describe the early activities of conservation undertaken at the Garden, when Poole was first brought in with the Georgia Historic Trust.

became a skeleton upon which Finster’s vintage constructions now physically hang. The new beams gracefully buttress roofs and walls, and are painted black. The tactic, Poole explains, even-handedly differentiates the new beams from old, but also camouflages them among generally dark interiors. New roofing was added to some structures, and that is visible as metallic, although likewise carefully camouflaged from below, so that it does not overly detract from Finster’s accidental architectural aesthetic. Although the most visible symbol of the Garden is the World’s Folk Art Church, it remains uninhabitable at the time of this writing.425 The Foundation hopes, in its next push, “Phase II: A Revival,” to raise nearly one million dollars to refurbish it426 [Figures 58, 59 and 60].

Apart from adding infrastructure to buildings, the implementation of a plan to resurrect and amend usable, concrete, mosaicked pathways throughout the environment has been complicated but rewarding. Poole speaks knowledgeably about the lime content of certain concrete mixtures that Finster used, and how they crumbled while the land was flooded for years. Layers of silt were removed to reveal a tangle of pathways, pools, planters and manmade streams throughout the back (formerly the front) of the property. Poole took up the objects impressed by Finster into some of those crumbled walkways—glass and pottery shards, coins, beads and tools—and reset them in a more durable concrete mixture with the help of local high school students, who purportedly relished the opportunity to creatively reconstruct the Garden.427 Some of the paths retain Finster’s original decoration, with biblical and moral quotes spelled out with

425 Davis and Sanders, the staff carpenters, took me with a lantern up the three-story winding staircase into the top level of the tower. They said that I was one of approximately ten visitors who had been up into the tower since the Foundation’s takeover. The building is still overwhelmingly cluttered with artworks, decoration and junk, although they are tackling the project room by room. The upper levels are not entirely safe to walk through, but are apparently stable enough for occasional and dexterous invitees. The central stairwell leading up through the middle levels (the upper levels are accessed by attached foot ladders) is almost completely mirrored and hung with Finster family photos.


427 Personal communication with Poole, November 18, 2014.
tesserae, standing out among abstracted patterning. Guests can now walk a complete circuit of the Garden following these safe, paved paths, with a printed guide that points out ten different points of interest, and suggests an itinerary. Finster’s version of the Garden experience was less choreographed, to be sure, but also unsafe, un navigable and shape-shifting [Figure 61].

The Georgia Department of Economic Development prepared a Tourism Research Team Report for Paradise Garden in 2013, with suggestions for marketing the environment to tourists. At the suggestion of that report, the Foundation is now offering “naming opportunities” for newly built or restored areas of the property. None of Finster’s original structures are available for branding, but one can name an as-yet un-refurbished “Interior Community Room of the Folk Art Church” for a on-time fee of $50,000, or the “Tourist’s Center Gallery” for $25,000 “in honor or in memory of a loved one or as a community corporate citizen that supports this project.”*428* The Tourist’s Center, Gallery and gift shop are located in space that was once the Finster home, which became an impromptu gallery and greeting space during the Beverly Finster and Littleton years. The renovations to that interior are impressive, and were some of Poole and the Foundation’s first interventions, along with the aforementioned infrastructure efforts.

Visitors now enter into a small, manicured space with custom cabinets, flat files and track lighting, showcasing framed high-quality Finster prints, and a range of less expensive reproductions for sale for fifteen to forty dollars apiece. The walls are painted in tastefully bright shades of blue and yellow, complementing prints of Finster’s colorful artwork.*429* In an adjacent room, scores of t-shirts are available, along with custom “Paradise Garden” scented candles and birdhouses made from pieces of Finster’s glass and ceramic detritus. One purchases these items through a wireless IPAD interface that simultaneously collects visitor contact information while


*429* Some of Finster’s friends and collectors have licensed the works they personally own for reproduction, for little or no fee, in support of the Foundation’s work at Paradise Garden.
emailing receipts. Visitors might also elect to fill out a short questionnaire about their experience at the Garden, travel or lodging plans, and purchases within the County. That information has helped Poole to compile, not only attendance numbers, but also data about the spending of tourists in the local area, in order to bolster expectations of economic generation for the Garden [Figures 62 and 63]. One room in the Tourist’s Center has documentary shorts about Finster, and his 1983 Johnny Carson appearance, playing in loops on two flat screen televisions. Hearing Finster’s incessant diatribes, anecdotes and singing in the background, the visitor gains a greater sense of what a visit to the Garden might have been like during his lifetime. Auditory demonstrations of several of Finster’s less disturbing sermons offer insight into what might be called Finster’s “performance art.”

Examples of Finster’s hoarded paint cans and brushes, and his homemade stencils or “dimensions,” as he called them, are arranged creatively under Plexiglas near a bulleted explanation of his methods. The Gallery attached to the gift shop is newly constructed, but designed to continue rooflines of the adjacent, originally domestic building. Because one wall consists entirely of glass, natural light floods into the whitewashed space with high ceilings [Figure 64].

For its permanent installation, the Foundation looked to a recently popular, 2010-2011 traveling exhibition on Finster, *Stranger in Paradise: The Works of the Reverend Howard Finster*, for inspiration. That exhibition was organized by the Krannert Art Museum, curated by Glen C. Davies, and featured groupings of Finster’s artworks in modern galleries. Davies combined a loose chronology and thematic presentation, dividing the show into categories like

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430 For discussion of the performative aspects of Finster’s oeuvre and some consideration of the relationship of his aesthetic to the aesthetics of evangelism, see Girardot, “The Word Made Flesh,” in Davies 2010. An interesting future study might delve deeper into a comparison of the aural cadences of the “fire-and-brimstone” tent revival sermon and Finster’s visual rhythms.

431 Personal communication with Byington, November 19, 2014.

432 Personal communication with Poole, November 19, 2014.

433 It traveled from Champaign to Chicago, Illinois, then to Auburn, Jacksonville, and Nashville. See Davies 2010.
“Historical, Personal and Cultural Heroes.” Other sections focused on Finster’s visions or sermons as illustrated through his visual art plus vitrines showing personal ephemera. The Paradise Garden Gallery’s permanent exhibit is more biographical in emphasis than that exhibition was – all of the display material has been gathered from the environment to document Finster’s life and career, and his idiosyncrasies—but the appearance is similar. The Foundation obtained the right to reproduce on the Gallery walls, verbatim, the wall text from *Stranger in Paradise*. With headings such as “Howard’s Vision,” and “Significant People in Howard’s Artistic Career,” the text is folksy and familiar without being patronizing. It strikes an appropriate tone for the place, given Finster’s tendency toward familiarity.

The catalog for *Stranger in Paradise*, edited by Davies, offers several first-hand accounts of Paradise Garden from the perspectives of Finster’s historian, dealer and collector acquaintances. In their respective essays, Norman Girardot, Phyllis Kind, and James (Jim) Arient, all retell their first encounters with Howard Finster. To be clear, their essays are less about Finster, than their own experiences of Finster, and so I detail them here in support of my thesis about the collectors of Outsider art. In that sense, they repeat the trope of the discovery of the Outsider, some more presciently than others, with passages such as: “This is what I remember about my first, and in many ways mythic encounter with Howard Finster,”434 and “We thought perhaps we’d get a piece of souvenir art on our visit, but it wasn’t a priority as we really just wanted to see the Garden and meet Howard.”435

Particularly in the case of the Arient essay, the writer convinces the reader of his intimacy with Finster with passages about helping Finster to open his mail and manage his finances. He refers dubiously to some of Finster’s other acquaintances as “hangers-on.” Arient also recounts a

story wherein Finster offered to baptize his young child in a creek running through Paradise Garden. The Arients declined: “It took us but a moment to opt for a conventional baptism back home.” 436 Given Finster’s history as a preacher, the Arients’ stated affection for him, their admission in the article that they did choose to baptize their child, and the tradition in North Georgia of river baptisms, Finster’s proposal was not so outlandish. Parental choices about the religious upbringing of children as well as considerations for their safety are personal. But the inclusion of this in a public catalog essay seems to slight Finster, and to put him in his place within a given power dynamic, with a wink and nudge to the cultured reader.

In all of the restoration, rebuilding, annexation and amendment at Paradise Garden, the Foundation’s aim has been to court a middle ground – honoring Finster’s vision while fostering a “placemaking” sensibility. It seeks to occupy that “sweet spot between tended and wild,” as Pousner put it. 437 In all of the structures that the Foundation has cleared and refurbished, hard decisions were made about which objects should be retained and which should be discarded. A formal decision-making model has not been framed, despite a very clear plan of action being in place. The present ramshackle aspect of those refurbished structures is deliberate but sanitized; many items have been straightened and replaced in rows or groups, and decades of dirt and dust have been cleaned away. The sheds were formerly packed with items Finster had collected, but now visitors are able to enter the spaces. Poole is honest about the difficulty of deciding whether to save or discard at Paradise Garden:

People have got to go back to the philosophy of ‘what are you trying to do here?’ That’s what I was saying about the Garden. I think we are a little afraid to go through these buildings because there’s so much stuff. If the stuff is obviously trash – yes, he might have touched it – but is it holding you back? So we literally had to go through each

436 Ibid.,
building and take it all out, stabilize, and then put what was ‘of the artists hand’ and the authentic elements back.\footnote{Personal communication, November 18, 2014.}

Jack Pyburn, an architect and conservation specialist with Lord, Aeck and Sargent, spoke at the Divine Disorder conference in Louisiana in February, 2012. He characterized Finster’s building style as “stream of consciousness,” with a “theme of salvation holding it together” – that is, in contradistinction to any planned or narrative scheme.\footnote{John Pryburn, “Planning to Stabilize, Document, Conserve and Interpret Howard Finster’s Paradise Garden in Summerville, Georgia,” paper given at the Divine Disorder Conference, Northwestern University, Natchitoches, Louisiana, February 15-16, 2012.} Pyburn’s challenge was to convert that rambling sensibility into an approach to interpretation and ongoing treatment at the Garden. He acknowledged, with a resigned practicality that echoes Poole’s own, that enclosing the space within fences and choreographing visitors’ paths removes some of the \textit{frisson} of the authentic Finster experience. Pyburn maintains that ephemeral elements of the Garden hold the potential to communicate “the spirit and energy of Howard, through his use of light, wind, and vegetation,” given their semi-authentic context within “the stabilized and conserved extant features Howard installed in the garden.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Finster Exhibited at the High Museum of Art, Atlanta

Evocations of Finster are called for in a Garden that has been stripped of his best artworks: those paintings that convince viewers of his talent and imagination, and that he was an unflagging religious zealot, have been sold as individual pieces to collectors over the years. Some of his sculptures, including a large sculptural serpent mound from Paradise Garden, were sold to the High Museum in Atlanta in the mid-1990s. The High was the first North American
museum to retain a curator of Folk art in the 1990s. The “Folk art” at the High is not the same as Cahill’s (eighteenth and nineteenth century, Northeastern, agrarian, middle-class, anonymous, white) Folk art. It is rather, “contemporary Folk art,” from the early to mid-twentieth century in North America, and sometimes referred to in the museum’s wall text as “self-taught art.” By the criteria of this dissertation, it is “Outsider art,” although the museum does not use that terminology. Many of the represented artists are, appropriately, from the Southeastern United States. Most emerge from lower-class backgrounds, if not outright poverty, or, in some cases, slavery. The works in the collection are overwhelmingly religious or “visionary,” with a number of biographical “memory paintings” collected as well.

The High Museum relies on a full portfolio of curatorial strategies – from formal presentation in modern galleries with pedestals and spotlights, to immersive, environmental context (in the case of the Finster gallery), to suggestive, thematic grouping – in its treatment of Folk art. Five large, permanent galleries provide an elegant setting. Howard Finster’s artwork is given special attention and space at the High Museum, which boasts the 1994 “Paradise Project” to purchase works out of the Garden. Perhaps to mitigate the deracinating aspects of an otherwise largely decontextualized Folk collection, and certainly to nod toward the nearby Pennville environment, one small room provides as backdrops to Finster’s sculptures wall-sized murals of Paradise Garden [Figures 65 and 66]. They are enlarged photographs taken from a

441 That position has been held by Folk and Outsider art scholars Joanne Cubbs, Lynne Spriggs and Susan Crawley. Susan Crawley resigned from her curatorial position at the High Museum in 2013 and now works independently. At the time of this writing in 2015, the museum publicized a 2.5 million dollar endowment to advance Folk art initiatives at the High, including the search for and endowment of Crawley’s replacement, the Merrie and Dan Boone Curator of Folk and Self-Taught Art. See the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Press Release of 28 August 2014. Crawley’s replacement, Katherine Jentelson, was announced in February 2015.

442 As demonstrated in a “Conversations with a Curator” video series available on the High Museum’s Folk art Department website, the approach to the material there is primarily formal, but peppered with biography. Former curator Susan Crawley points out the rhythmic lines and North Georgia iconography in a painting by Linda Anderson, and addresses Nellie Mae Rowe’s use of color. Crawley presents the artist’s skill as something developed through practice and experimentation. See the High Museum of Art Atlanta Folk art Collection website, http://www.high.org/Art/Permanent-Collection/Folk-Art.aspx, accessed 7 March 2015.
ground-level perspective. But the room is finally a sterile abstraction of Paradise Garden, where Finster’s painted metal barrels rest on white pedestals and his concrete serpents are pristine and intact. Elsewhere, one of Finster’s entirely painted bicycles, crawling with serpents and figures, hangs theatrically suspended over a portion of mosaicked pavement removed from the Garden. The pavement rests in a shallow, custom-made wooden box atop loose gravel, softly evoking Paradise Garden. Similar gravel boxes were used to situate some of Finster’s wood cutouts, which he placed on stakes to be pushed into the ground, in the Krannert Museum installation of the 2011 Strangers in Paradise exhibition. These literal contextualizations of Finster’s work in installations at the High resemble those single-artist shows staged beginning in the 1990s at the American Folk Art Museum. They unintentionally acknowledge the gap between the reality and the representation of Outsider environments.

Kenny Hill and the Chauvin Sculpture Garden

“It’s about life and living and everything I’ve learned.” – Kenny Hill

The unincorporated town of Chauvin, Louisiana is a two-hour drive South from New Orleans. Roughly a quarter of the population of 3,400 there still relies on income from the fishing, shrimping and crabbing industries that have been hurt by an increase of hurricane activity in the Gulf of Mexico over the past two decades and by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010. Some locals work for the oil companies, in refineries or offshore, and still others have taken jobs in retail developments in the nearby city of Houma. Over the past several decades vacationers have entered the traditionally Catholic, Cajun French community, building raised fishing and hunting camps along the waterfront, which have been immune to the nearly annual

443 Based on information in the United States Census Bureau’s report on its 2009-2013 American Community Survey.
flooded. The town has grown along two veins of transportation: a two-lane highway and, next to it, Bayou Petit Callou.

Kenny Hill was a reclusive man when he came to Chauvin in 1988, and until he left in 2000. He squatted on a plot of land along the bayou until the landowner struck a deal with him for a small annual lease. Constructing a house for himself first, Hill then began his sculpture garden in the remaining space on the 60,000 square foot property. The Chauvin Sculpture Garden, as it is referred to today, is Kenny Hill’s art environment. Smaller, and more intentionally planned than Paradise Garden, it also has a more subtle history of institutionalization. Because Hill shunned attention for himself and for the Garden, he was able to build for a decade unmolested. Because his artwork was not easily portable – all of his sculptures are painted cement over iron reinforcement bar (“re-bar”) – awareness has not yet spread about Hill through the dispersal of his artwork onto the Outsider market or into museums. Thus, Hill is not so appropriable through his artwork, as Finster has been [Figure 67]. In 1990, Hill began to sculpt. His work was not immediately visible to the public, as the property was overgrown on the street side with lush, semi-tropical vegetation, but from the highway across the bayou, and from boats, passersby began to see sculptures rising up and Hill himself regularly working atop scaffolding. Hill was raised in Springfield, Louisiana, to the north, and traveled, probably out of the state, every year to work on masonry projects during the summer months. In the winter, he returned to his house and the Garden in Chauvin, where it was warm enough to work year-round. Hill’s experience as a professional bricklayer has made a difference in the ability of insiders to rescue and maintain the environment now that he has abandoned it. Hill

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444 Publications on Kenny Hill have been limited. A paperback volume of photographs with introductory essays by early advocates of the Park, Dennis Siporski and Deborah Cibelli, heartoffact, was self-published by Friends of the Chauvin Sculpture Garden in 2009 and is available for purchase online. See also Pegi Taylor, “The Art of Disappearing,” Salon.com, 24 January 2001, and a documentary film by Zach Godshall, God’s Architects, 2008.
understood not only masonry techniques, but also materials, and the mortars and cements he mixed for both sculptures and paths have stood up to the waterlogged climate far better than Finster’s more approximated concrete mixtures and materials.

Throughout the 1990s, Hill created a densely symbolic environment populated by angels, multiple self-portraits, eagles, sinners, cowboys and maidens. All are roughly life-sized, thin, hollow figures with attenuated limbs. Professor of sculpture at Nicholls State University (NSU), in Thibodaux, Louisiana, Michael Williams, who now oversees the Garden as part of his position at the university, notes that the specific types of bodily distortions in Hill’s work – a lack of attention to “internal anatomy and musculature” -- are common among the work of untrained sculptors.\(^{445}\) Hill’s tools were common. He used a fork and spoon to carve surface detail into cement formed over wire mesh and rebar. A forty-five-foot tall brick lighthouse, with figures clinging to its exterior in a semi-narrative scene, forms the centerpiece to Hill’s Garden. He wired circular, incandescent bulbs as flying angels’ haloes, and a cement waterfall on the bayou side of the lighthouse was outfitted with plumbing. It flowed with real water when connected to a garden hose.

A complete iconographic analysis of Hill’s environment is difficult in view of an absence of any record of the artist’s own insight into its cryptic symbolism, and is outside the scope of this dissertation. As Frédéric Allamel, the initial scholar to visit Hill’s Garden, wrote in a 2007 chapter, before proceeding to a sociological discourse on Outsider art and messianic imagery in general: “The spatial narrative of his [Hill’s] deep spirituality would require a detailed hermeneutics.”\(^{446}\) The reappearance of Hill’s self-portrait in various guises, on horseback, fallen onto the lap of an angel, supporting an alighting eagle, with bleeding heart, and once, with a

\(^{445}\) Personal communication with Williams, November 22, 2014.

divided face painted black and white, suggests a personal narrative layered atop Christian symbolism of apocalypse, judgment and redemption. Dr. Deborah Cibelli, Professor of Art History at NSU, has presented observations on Hill’s religious iconography,\textsuperscript{447} drawing comparisons to Renaissance themes. Hill seems to me to have been in touch, instead, with the drama of Baroque sculpture, although there is not direct evidence of his awareness of seventeenth-century European art. Theatricality characterizes the Garden. Besides tricks of hydraulics and illumination, Hill treats some sculptural compositions practically with the flair of Bernini, almost defying gravity. Angels seem to float, their forms supported through illusionistic connections. Elsewhere in the Garden, he emphasized the uncanny presence of polychrome figural sculpture with trompe l’oeil painting and the addition of found objects as props. At the back of the property, a sculpted little girl kneels looking at her painted reflection in an illusionistic pool swimming with fish. Trailing along the right side of the Garden, a line of nude, anguished figures painted head to toe in sooty black, wail and convulse as if consigned to purgatory or hell. As they process, the figures transform. Flying angels greet the march, and the figures emerge into color, with one man’s hind leg still partially in monochrome as he steps into the light [Figures 68 and 69].

Hill’s deliberateness and awareness, and his possible art historical grounding, are evident also in the self-referential components of the Garden. The Garden is organized into nine circular, cement plateaus connected by cement paths. From that plan, Hill rendered a miniature, graphic abstraction of the site. The plan shows nine circles within a larger circle, and might easily be mistaken as an astrological map [Figures 70 and 71]. The emblem may have been intended as a key, but proves more of a riddle as Hill never explained it to anyone. He did post

copies of the abstraction at various crucial places in the Garden, for example, near the entrance and next to a self-portrait that points toward it. His punning “Heart of Fact” inscription, also at the entrance on the street side, implies that this Garden—artwork or artifact writ large—is a calcification of Hill’s own heartache. His heart is shown literally to bleed in a self-portrait nearby the inscription. Some have assumed the artist intended “Heart of Fact” as the name of the environment.448

When Kenny Hill left the property in 2000, upon eviction, he left no instruction for the care or for the destruction of the Garden. He did write “Hell is Here, Welcome” in red paint across the cabinets in his kitchen, and he decapitated a sculpture of Christ as he left.449 A Notice to Quit the property from 2000, currently visible to guests in the Garden’s Visitor’s Center, testifies to the tense situation. Julius Neal, Hill’s longtime neighbor, now deceased, was quoted with respect to Hill’s apparent crisis of faith: “Kenny loosened up about six months before he left. He wouldn’t talk right and raised all kinds of hell.”450 Neal acted as steward and unofficial tour guide at the environment for years after Hill’s departure, offering his version of its meaning to anyone who wandered onto the property.451 In 2009, Neal admitted to a local newspaper that his memory of Hill’s explanations was less than acute: “If I knew it would turn out like this, I would have written them down. A lot of them I forgot.”452 Now elderly, Hill lives with family in North Louisiana, after a decade spent living in Arkansas. Despite the fact of his being alive, most interested parties, even those current caretakers of the garden and myself, have not sought

448 See Allamel 2007.
449 Personal communication with Cibelli, February 21, 2014.
451 See Neal’s obituary by Nikki Buskey, “Chauvin shrimper kept watch over sculpture garden,” The Daily Comet, 25 May 2009. In 2002, when I visited with my mother, Neal came over to greet us after only a few minutes. His house is built just at the edge of the property line on the right side of the Garden. In the time leading up to Hill’s apparent breakdown and departure, Neal recalled, he would leave fresh fish for Hill on the porch of his house, but Hill would not come out to speak to him.
an audience with Hill, instead deferring to reports by a single authority, Dennis Siporski, that
Hill would rather not be disturbed. Williams has heard that Hill resents that “people are making
money” from the Garden--a false but understandable assumption on his part.  

Besides Neal, there were only a few intercessors who spoke to Hill about the Garden
while he lived there, including a close friend and Chauvin local, Keith Peters. Frédéric Allamel,
who saw the Garden twice in the 1990s, met Hill in 2000, just before the artist’s departure. Allamel
included the Chauvin Sculpture Garden among other environments in his essay for
Sacred and Profane (2007), and has called his encounter with Hill “schizophrenic.” He
elaborated for the French Art Brut journal, Gazogène: “Breaking his vow of silence, he explained
to me the space in a dizzying monologue. In this verbal deluge, at the edge of delirium,
punctuated by surprising vocal explosions and violent clapping of hands, the environment
became more and more systematic.”<sup>456</sup> Dennis Sipiorski met Hill in the late 1990s while a
Professor of Visual Arts at Nicholls State University in nearby Thibodaux, Louisiana. Hill’s
own comments about the Garden have been distilled down to a few select quotes through
Sipiorski, a lively character who sometimes arrives at Garden events dressed as Elvis. Most
notably, when asked if the garden represented his vision, Hill replied obliquely to Sipiorski, “It’s
about life and living and everything I’ve learned.” That broad dismissal, taken up as a default
slogan for the Garden, must have rung with a shred of clarity, couched as it apparently was in the
esoteric nonsense and brilliance of Hill’s speeches. Sipiorski remembers of Hill: “It was like

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453 Personal communication with Williams, November 22, 2014.
454 Allamel was attending a crawfish boil at Neal’s house and wandered over the property line and into the Garden. Hill eventually came out and began to speak in an animated fashion—so much so that others at the party next door came to inquire whether Allamel was in some danger. He did not, however, feel threatened by Hill. Personal communication with Allamel, January 6, 2015.
455 Ibid.
talking to a guru — very Zen,” and “If he’d cleaned himself up and put on a suit, you’d think he was an old college professor, talking about how it takes the whole being to make art. He was way beyond art as a thing.”

Sipiorski became aware of the Garden through NSU biology professor Gary Lefleur. The pair was alarmed to find that Hill had left the property in January 2000. Sipiorski, a Wisconsin native, was vaguely familiar with the Kohler Foundation and its efforts to preserve the work of “artist-environment builders” like Hill. They petitioned the Kohler Foundation, based in Sheboygan, which agreed to purchase the land in Chauvin to restore the Garden. Terri Yoho, then Executive Director of the foundation, accepted this as her first project in early 2000. Yoho contracted sculpture conservators to mend and paint figures, metallurgists to address rusty expanding rebar, and biologists to control banana trees and other “destructive” flora. An architect and further contracted planners worked with the Army Corps of Engineers to reclaim some land from the bayou and to build a bulkhead to allay further land erosion. The Foundation added a chain link fence around the Garden, less as demarcation or security—theft and vandalism have not been a significant issue—and more so because the fence acts as a strainer, Yoho says, keeping out large debris during floods. These interventions were the first steps toward reclaiming, but also in taming Hill’s property. The Kohler Foundation’s mission to preserve

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459 Yoho revealed, in our personal communication of January 7, 2015, that she receives some “frivolous calls,” but Sipiorski’s enthusiasm and credentials compelled her to consider the Hill project. The Foundation’s first goal in assessing a site, she told me, is to identify a recipient institution to take over the preserved property, “to adopt this baby.” The Kohler Foundation does not disclose financial information, so the budget and final cost of the purchase and restoration remain unknown to the public and to me.
460 Ibid.
Outsider environments *in situ* requires its staff to make difficult decisions about where to intervene in order to make the space more publicly usable and the artwork more stable.

The Kohler Foundation

The Kohler Foundation is a charitable organization that works to preserve what it terms “folk architecture,” “vernacular environments,” and “art environments,” initially by acquiring properties where those endangered environments exist. There is some inconsistency in the Foundation’s language regarding environments, but not in its mission. Originally focused on environments and architecture within Wisconsin, the Foundation expanded its purview, first with Hill’s site, to aid threatened sites elsewhere in the United States. Typically, after sending expert conservators to stabilize an environment, a property is turned over to a local university, museum, or other appropriate institution, importantly to remain *in situ* wherever possible. Providing only a recommended plan of maintenance, the Kohler’s role after the turnover of an environment is limited. The Foundation honors requests for a limited semi-annual allowance of funds, upon request by the local institution maintaining an art environment.⁴⁶¹

Representatives of the Kohler Foundation were sent to Paradise Garden during the Beverly Finster and Littleton years to estimate conservation costs. At that time, Yoho regrets, the cost of stabilization there was “just more than we could take on.”⁴⁶² The Foundation is now engaged in its most challenging project yet: the restoration of Eddie Owens Martin’s Pasaquan in Buena Vista, Georgia. Yoho believes that the effort is already producing ripples through the

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⁴⁶¹ Personal communication with Williams, November 22, 2014. For a history of the Kohler Foundation and an explanation of its procedures, including specific details of the preservation and/or acquisition of several environments, see Lisa Stone, “A Road Well Traveled: The Kohler Foundation and Site Preservation,” in Umberger and Doss 2007, 409–421.
⁴⁶² Personal communication with Yoho, January 7, 2015.
economically depressed southern community, and that the Foundation has the competency to accomplish this restoration after their recent work at The Garden of Eden environment in Lucas, Kansas.\textsuperscript{463}

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center, funded by the Kohler Foundation, houses partial art environments that, for one reason or another, could not remain in place.\textsuperscript{464} In one case an entire environment, “The Rhinestone Cowboy” Loy Bowlin’s Holy Jewel Home from McComb, Mississippi, was relocated to the grounds of the Center for preservation and exhibition. \textsuperscript{465} In other cases, the Center works to rescue or assemble large portions of a single Outsider’s oeuvre, suggesting that Outsider work, even when not technically environmental, is more potent when accumulated. The Center’s official statement reads:

\begin{quote}
Along with in-depth work to preserve art environments came the realization that not all of them could be retained on their original site. The Arts Center, following the conviction that objects made as elements of an art environment relate to one another and bolster overall meaning in a way that isolated components do not, made caring for large bodies of inter-related objects from dismantled art-environments the primary thrust of its collecting efforts.\textsuperscript{466}
\end{quote}

There are countless precedents for preserving historical furnishings, indeed the architecture of entire rooms, and re-contextualizing those environments in the “period rooms” of major art and history museums addressed briefly in Chapter Two. Elsewhere, some Modern and avant-garde artists’ homes and studios have been preserved or reconstituted within museums. For instance, André Breton’s Paris apartment, where he installed his eclectic art collection, was a capsule of Surrealist objects for decades after his death, until the scandal of the collection’s

\textsuperscript{463} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{464} This is only one aspect of the Arts Center’s program, but a major research area. The Center holds temporary and permanent exhibitions of Outsider and contemporary art on its expansive indoor and outdoor grounds.
dispersal at auction in 2003. (Such was the outcry that Fiachra Gibbons of The Guardian
mockingly called the auction the “Passion of André Breton.”)\textsuperscript{467} The Centre Pompidou acquired
over two hundred of the works from that collection and a wall from Breton’s apartment for
display behind glass at the National Museum of Modern Art, Paris as \textit{Le Mur de l’Atelier}.
Constantin Brancusi’s Paris studio has likewise been reconstituted, twice. It is now installed in a
building designed by Renzo Piano for that purpose at Place Beaubourg.\textsuperscript{468}

There is a precedent for the collecting of Outsider environments beyond Kohler. The
Smithsonian American Art Museum moved James Hampton’s delicate wood, paper and tinfoil
artwork, the \textit{Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations’ Millennium General Assembly}, from
South Carolina to Washington, D.C. after its discovery by a landlord upon Hampton’s death in
1964.\textsuperscript{469} Technically more object than environment, the room-sized installation was formerly
staged in Robertson’s garage. In its current position in a first floor gallery of the museum, the
\textit{Throne} produces less shock than it must have elicited when situated in a garage, glimmering in
otherwise lowly surroundings. The importance of that original, although untenable, situation
cannot be overstated, and argues for the meaning to be gleaned from encountering Outsider
environments \textit{in situ}. Babatunde Lawal writes in “Anticipating Ethiopia’s Rise to Glory:

\footnotesize

Rereading James Hampton’s *Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations’ Millennium General Assembly*:

The installation of the assemblage in a shabby garage is more than fortuitous. First, it recalls Christ’s humble birth in a manger, his trials, martyrdom and subsequent resurrection to eternal stardom as the ‘King of Kings.’ Second, the location conjures the vision in African American theology of an impending ‘Zion’ when downtrodden ‘Ethiopia’ would rise to glory from the humiliation of slavery, lynching and racism.  

The Future of the Chauvin Sculpture Garden

The Kohler Foundation donated the Chauvin Sculpture Garden to Nicholls State University, to be overseen by the Art Department there. Sipiorski directed the environment’s care during his time at NSU, before he moved on to a position at Southeastern Louisiana University, two hours away in Hammond. Michael Williams is now paid to run the Garden in his spare time. As an experienced sculptor and carpenter, he decides when and how to make repairs to broken sculptures and to cracking paths on his own authority. There is no master list of items needing conservation, “besides the one in my head,” Williams quips. There is also no schedule of maintenance. The casual attitude seems more in line with the culture of the place, and with Kenny Hill’s ad hoc building plan, than does the official strategic plan in place at Paradise Garden. A current endeavor of Williams’ is to reattach the pointing, dismembered arm onto one of Hill’s self-portraits, after the recent success of a similar reattachment on the figure of Christ with the cross [Figure 72]. Apart from amorphous plans to repair the brick lighthouse structure and to attend to the obviously crumbling surface of one of Hill’s circular platforms within a rotunda, the current upkeep of the site is a rather *laissez faire* matter [Figure 73].

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471 Personal communication, November 22, 2014.
Occasionally groups of college students visit to help retouch paint on fading blue angels with golden hair, and docents learn to mix paint colors to match those specified by the original Kohler art conservators as accurately representing Hill’s palette. Recent touch-ups look particularly brash until they become muted by exposure. Anyone is welcome to help, as LeFleur told the *Houma Courier* in 2009: “It’s a privilege to get involved. You can’t really get that in a museum,” and “In a way, you are helping Kenny with his art.”472

Upon purchasing Hill’s bayou-side property in 2002, the Kohler Foundation acquired also the land across the road and built a Visitor’s Center and Art Gallery, also donated to Nicholls. Regarding that annex, Yoho argues the importance of “some concrete aspect of community outreach” at each environment.473 Although no one involved in the Hill project seems to think it has potential as a major economic engine for tourism in the area, Williams and Cibelli both give credence to the idea that the Garden might be used to draw attention to the ecological plight of South Louisiana and its peoples’ traditional way of life. They see it as symbolic of resilience and regeneration – a place resurrected from the bayou—but the overall tone is one of resignation to the inevitable demise of the place in time.474 As at Paradise Garden, caretakers in Chauvin point to the tenacity of the artist working with little money or education, and to the inspirational possibilities for future artists, particularly for children.

The University maintains a website for the Garden, available in English, French and Cajun French, appropriately. Although the park is open to visitors every day, with no admission fee, the Center and Gallery are staffed only on weekends by an enthusiastic young group of

473 Personal communication with Yoho, February 7, 2015.
474 Personal communication with Williams, November 22, and Cibelli, November 21, 2014.
docents. Their wages are paid by grants from the Houma Regional Arts Council that must be renewed every year, usually by LeFleur. Sales of souvenirs such as stickers and t-shirts bring in money to the Garden, but those sales are slim due to a lack of merchandising and advertising. Visitor information is collected through voluntary entries in the Garden’s guestbook. A documentary film in the Center, in part about the Garden, is currently only available for purchase on VHS. Compared to the energetic momentum at Paradise Garden, the drive to raise money at the Chauvin Sculpture Garden is not so palpable, but neither is it so pressing.

Enshrined in a small room in the Visitor’s Center are the personal effects that Hill left behind, which Sipiortski and Lefleur and Kohler Foundation representatives took it upon themselves to collect from the environment and from Hill’s patchwork house. Low display cases provide a voyeuristic entry into Hill’s life alone on the bayou\textsuperscript{475} [Figure 74]. There are handwritten letters and song sheets with tunes that Hill wrote and submitted to magazine competitions. His reading glasses and house keys are there, alongside amateurish paintings and drawings, framed family photos and archery bows—artifacts of a man who valued his privacy. It raises the question of when a person’s material legacy comes within the realm of public property. Like artifacts collected from a battlefield, the objects stand in as relics of Hill’s life. As Doss has written, there is an aspect of pilgrimage in the attraction of visitors to Outsider environments. But she downplays, perhaps overly so, the traditional concentration of “special qualities of a holy person” at a pilgrimage site, in favor of a conception of pilgrimage in “contemporary America as quests for self-discovery.”\textsuperscript{476} True, the personal belongings of famous persons are often so

\textsuperscript{475} Hill was married as a young man around the age of twenty, to a teenage woman. They had three children. He divorced his wife and neither she, nor his children, lived on the Chauvin property.

\textsuperscript{476} Umberger and Doss 2010, 34.
encased for display in historical homes, but those persons also asserted themselves into public life in ways that Kenny Hill would have refused.

As at Paradise Garden, the Chauvin Sculpture Garden includes a bright, but otherwise unremarkable gallery space in the Visitor’s Center for the exhibition of contemporary artists. Those may be students affiliated with Nicholls or, just as often, professional artists whose paintings or drawings have been culled for themed exhibitions. Williams points to oversized sinks in the gallery – a reminder that the space was intended as a multi-use studio and exhibition space, and possibly as a residence for working artists. The Garden’s budget does not allow for the insurance required to cover even a temporary artist in residence, and so Williams arranges intermittent shows to fill the space for now. The Kohler Foundation also acquired the land adjacent to Hill’s environment to the left of the property. That lot has been cleared and mowed and a few larger pieces of contemporary sculpture dot the lawn [Figure 75]. Williams speaks of his desire to organize outdoor sculpture exhibitions in the space, but seems to doubt that will come to fruition: “It’d be good to get some more pieces in here for a few years at a time, but it’s hard to find the time or the budget to get it going.”477

There is a kind of communal, although very informal, oversight of the Garden among Chauvin residents. One 2009 article in the Tri-Parish Times declared, “One man’s art is the Tri-parishes’ treasure.” Visitors are acknowledged by waves and nods from the porches of neighbors. At the annual Blessing of the Fleet, locals and Kenny Hill fans gather at the environment to watch decorated shrimping boats pass on Petit Callou, on their way to a blessing performed by the monsignor of Chauvin’s Catholic church.

Embodied Precariousness

477 Personal communication with Williams, November 22, 2014.
What is missing from the contemporary Garden in Chauvin is Kenny Hill’s self-built, three-room, two-story residence. An example of what Allamel calls “eco-architecture,” the house was erected entirely from scrap and repurposed materials.\footnote{478} It was not up to code when the environment was purchased by Kohler, and it was also straddling the property line, an ostensibly irremediable problem. A poignant loss, it can be seen as a symbol of the erasures that need be made when Outsider environments are made public. On the other hand, we might also consider the public opening of such a house, had it been conserved, to be an incursion into a person’s privacy, particularly in the case of a person like Hill, who did not seek publicity. In Finster’s case, his residence was first refurbished as a gallery and now a gift shop-- a transformation I suspect Finster would not mind so long as it was in the interest of spreading his religious “message.” At both sites, there are built spaces nearby but outside of the environments’ boundaries, such as the offices and Artist-in-Residence apartment at Paradise Garden, and the Visitor’s Center and Gallery in Chauvin [Figure 76]. Those outposts provide anchors in the world beyond the environment, and become proverbial seats of establishment from which the environments are viewed, managed and interpreted from safe distance.

Hill, although forced out by eviction and personal crisis, was decisive in his abandonment of his environment, never seeking the preservation of his artworks. Finster, although always outspoken, was more ambiguous. He told Tom Patterson in 1995: “And if I’m gonna leave somethin’ for a contribution to the world, I’d like that garden to be finished up.”\footnote{479} But it was not so simple a choice once Finster approached his own death. Norman Girardot, a Professor of Religion at Lehigh University wrote in \textit{Coming Home: Self-Taught Artists, The Bible and the}

\footnote{478 Personal communication with Allamel, January 5, 2015. Allamel gives great credit to the Kohler Foundation for their work at Hill’s environment, but laments the loss of the house that held so much information about Hill’s lived experience, as well as Hill’s technical and creative abilities as a builder.}

\footnote{479 Finster and Patterson 1989.}
American South (2004) of the “embodied precariousness” of Outsider environments, and of Finster in particular: “Finster certainly wanted his garden to live, but at the same time he recognized the snaky decay that was creeping over his body, his family and his garden.” He went on: “Most of all he [Finster] believed in the need to build new worlds and never to accept the permanence or perfection of anything on this earth.”

Despite an intimation of the precariousness of Outsider environments and even admissions that Finster may have favored the total abandonment of the Garden in his later years, Girardot ended that 2004 essay with the argument that those art environments can and should be resurrected, as his title affirms: “Where there is no vision the people perish.”

In making decisions about the future of Outsider environments, we must consider the state of completion in which they are left by their original builders. For Finster, the work was never done. He was compelled to change and attracted to impermanence as a spiritual concept, as Girardot explains above. His was a working Garden; like a growing organism, always complete and always incomplete. It was improvisatory, immediate and performative. As Daniel Prince wrote in 1984:

Some of the problems the preservationist runs into have to do directly with the artist and his identity. The folk environmentalist, as much as any artist, lives and works in a dynamic manner. He is “process” oriented, to a degree that discovering objects and using

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480 Norman Girardot, “Where There is No Vision the People Perish: Visionary Artists and Religious Environments in the American South, “Coming Home: Self-Taught Artists, The Bible and the American South (University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 100. Girardot’s choice of the work snaky, and his emphasis on it, probably refers to Finster’s own iconography of snake mounds, to the possibly underhanded actions of Finster’s family members, and to the insidious decay of nature and natural things including the human body and built environments.

481 Girardot’s complex and changing position on the preservation of Paradise Garden is discussed in Browne 2010, where she quotes an email statement from Girardot, in which he claimed that Finster: “favored the idea that, after he passed on to other worlds, the Garden would follow the natural order of things and be recycled back into the earth.” Finster apparently did change his mind before his death, according to Girardot, again quoted in Browne: “Howard changed his mind about cremation and also (with a little good-hearted prompting from friends like Littleton and C.M. and Grace Laster) the viability of the Garden in its original incarnation.” If that is true, then Finster did not believe that the Garden could be maintained to his personal standards, in his absence.
them overwhelms an endgoal. Mâholy[sic]-Nagy noted that indigenous and intuitive work of architecture is, as Goethe said of folk art, “like God, spoken this instant.”

If Finster’s Garden was “spoken this instant” as a performance, then Hill’s was an essay, crafted deliberately. Because of the logo of nine circles he created and embedded in the Garden, we know that his plan was nearly but not totally finished when he left in 2000. One of the prearranged, circular concrete platforms was left undecorated, with protruding pipes. Elsewhere angels fly with bare rebar wings, spiky and uncovered by Hill’s usual cement over wire mesh. Hill was done, if not finished, when he left.

Art environments might be arguably worth preserving, on a case by case basis, but there should be consideration to permitting a degree of ruin and decay to inhere as authentic aspects of those environments, such as has been done at Paradise Garden and the Chauvin Sculpture Garden, if to a minimal degree. As John Preble, the builder and proprietor of the “UCM” (you-see-em) Museum, an art environment in Abita Springs, Louisiana, says of his dingy, overgrown property, crawling with lizards and turtles: “It’s a jungle down here. Of course its gonna [sic] look like that. You can only fight it for so long.”

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483 Personal communication with John Preble, November 22, 2014.
Chapter Four: Outsider Art on the Market: The Outsider Art Fair and Non-Profit Art Centers

This chapter posits the Outsider Art Fair (OAF) as the major defining institution of Outsider Art in the United States from the 1990s until the early 2000s, when a shift began to emerge, with Outsider art leaving its former barrier to appear in more mainstream venues. I suggest here that Outsider art as a category was offered by a market of dealers and collectors during that time as the last artistic frontier of sincerity in art making, as had been so-called “primitive” art in decades past. This positioning of Outsider art by the insider market came after a decade of the calculated experiments of conceptualism – considered cold by some-- and the privileged regressions of neo-expressionism. This examination of the OAF should thus contribute to the continued positioning of Outsider art as a latent exoticism, but it also functions as an echo chamber for the issues endemic to Outsider art. In its twenty-four years of existence, the OAF has had critics and defectors, and the controversies surrounding it are those that have defined the Outsider field broadly: nomenclature, biography, quality and canonicity. Setting the Fair as a central concern, then, the chapter engages the points of view of major galleries exhibiting Outsider art in the United States since the 1990s until today, that have been perennial exhibitors at the OAF, including Ricco/Maresca, Carl Hammer, Phyllis Kind, Fleischer-Ollman, Cavin-Morris, Galerie St. Etienne, and Andrew Edlin galleries. Edlin, notably, with his venture, Wide Open Arts, purchased the Fair in late 2012 from former owner Sanford Smith. The chapter also touches briefly on influential exhibitions of Outsider art mounted during the 1990s, around the founding of the OAF.

The rise of the non-profit art center for developmentally disabled and mentally ill artists will also be traced from the 1970s until today as it relates to the presence of those centers at the OAF since 2004. Those centers have played a strong role in the mainstreaming of Outsider
artists, and served as a countering force in demystifying the Outsider artist during the 1990s. Namely, Elias Katz and Florence Ludins-Katz pioneered the non-profit arts and disability center through the creation of a trio of locations in Northern California: Creative Growth Center (CGC) in Oakland, The National Institute of Art and Disabilities (NIAD) in Richmond, and Creativity Explored in San Francisco. All three locations provide working space for disabled artists, many of whom attend daily for years or even decades. The centers also provide gallery space and representation, while remaining attentive to the financial considerations that need be made for artists receiving disability assistance. Although art centers of the type might be considered a California phenomenon, the Fountain Gallery in New York (founded June 2000), which serves as both workshop and representative for exclusively mentally ill artists, has also made a measurable impact through its exhibition activities and participation at the OAF.

As in the other sections of this dissertation, both stagnant and changing exhibition strategies at the Outsider Art Fair remain a focus here, as they are demonstrable nodes in a larger evolution of the status of Outsider art in the contemporary art market. Biography—how much of it to include and to what end—has consistently been a controversial issue surrounding Outsider art, and dealers at the OAF tend to form two categories: those that advocate an aesthetic focus versus those that highlight sensational life histories.484 I contribute to the discourse by relating this divide, which has been identified by others, through new analysis of these exhibitions. Much of this relates, qualitatively, to empty space. Just as conspicuous consumption and aesthetics of excess communicated wealth and power in centuries past, volumes of empty, often expensive, real estate communicated the same in the art world of the latter twentieth century. Clean, spare exhibitions are still linked to a cool aesthetic modernism particularly in New York, where

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484 This was also pointed out in MacFarquhar “Is it Art?”: “There have always been two types of Outsider fans: the empowerment type...ultimately more interested in artists than their work, and the aesthetes, interested in the art for its formal qualities.”
MoMA’s exhibition style palpably dominates and has inflected the design of some gallery spaces. The opposite of that style might be characterized as cluttered, and thus assumedly less discerning. Nonetheless, many of the exhibitors at the OAF still hang booths with volumes of crowded artwork. Meanwhile, by contrast, the choices made by curators of non-profit centers about how to exhibit the work of mentally or physically disabled artists, position those artists as increasingly mainstream. They deploy the restrained exhibition style that now evinces professionalism, if not the avant-garde, in twenty-first century contexts.

Outsider Art in the 1990s: A Bastion of Sincerity?

In 1992, the Wall Street Journal ran a front-page story by Ken Wells, who had been sent to Lausanne to cover the Collection de l’Art Brut.485 Considering that publication’s financial concern, his assignment was not to report on a curious collection, but, rather, to comment on the rise of a commercial market for the genre of art that one encountered there. The article’s title reported that, “‘Outsider Art’ is Suddenly the Rage Among Insiders,” as a “major art trend of the 1990s,” and drew no distinction between Art Brut and Outsider art.486 Wells, therein, introduced to a wider public the major arguments explaining the international rise of Outsider art that would be repeated by journalists and Outsider advocates at the OAF over the next two decades. These observations had been suggested to Wells by his sources—Outsider art scholars such as John Maizels, founder of Raw Vision, and art historian Roger Cardinal, credited with coining the term “Outsider”—and thus were not unmotivated. Outsider art, Wells reported, offered an alternative genre that countered disenchantment with the contemporary commercial art market. Collectors,

485 Ken Wells, “‘Outsider Art is Suddenly the Rage Among Art Insiders,’” Wall Street Journal, 25 February 1992. Art-Talk would similarly herald a “Recession Boon for ‘Outsider Art,’” 10 March 1993, shortly after the first OAF. That article mentioned the founding of Raw Vision in 1989 and the opening of Intuit in Chicago, as well as the still reasonable prices (from $300 up to $3,000, often) of Outsider artworks.
486 Ibid.
as Cardinal told Wells, were attracted to more sincere forms of expression than had been popular in the preceding decade. Only six months before Wells’ writing, for instance, a Julian Schnabel work at auction at Sotheby’s had failed to garner a single bid, the crowd responding with applause and scattered laughter.487 Wells also pointed to the price of Outsider art—in 1992 not “wildly expensive”—as an attractive factor.488 He went on to imply the possibility of improvement in certain marginalized individuals’ circumstances that might be achieved through the discovery and sale of Outsider art. To that point, he narrated the biography of Gerald Hawkes (1943-1948), a formerly homeless man who managed a modest living from the sale of his artwork as a minor contemporary Outsider artist managed by an insider.489 In relating several Outsider biographies such as Hawkes’, Wells demonstrated as well the allure of eccentric life stories as a considerable draw for buyers.

If Wells’ article indicated a boom in interest among buyers (both in the U.S. and abroad), the reception of Outsider art among art institutions in the U.S. was still relatively cool, at least according to some insiders, such as Los Angeles County Museum of Art senior curator Maurice Tuchman. That same year, in 1992, Tuchman with Carol Eliel staged Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art at LACMA, a pendant exhibition to its 1986 The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985.

I contend in this brief analysis that, although Tuchman’s

488 Ibid.
489 Hawkes is now in the collection of the American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore. The insider alluded to here is in fact Rebecca Alban Hoffberger, the founder of the AVM.
490 The 1986 exhibition sought European Spiritualist and Theosophic, occult (and not necessarily visual) sources for the imagery of twentieth-century, abstract art. Books relating to those anti-rational, anti-materialist philosophies, and found in the inventories of the exposed artists, as well as discreet images from those texts, were juxtaposed with works of abstract art in order to counter prevailing histories of Modernism that had avoided the metaphysical since Nazism was linked to Theosophy in the 1930a. Alfred Barr, from his seat of considerable influence at MoMA, jettisoned the spiritual in favor of formalist genealogies, also in the 1930s. There were certain scholars who had taken up the spiritual line of art historical enquiry since the late 1960s, such as Rose-Carol Washton Long. See Maurice Tuchman’s “Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art,” in The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985,
exhibit made gains in the presentation of marginalized art in the wake of previous attempts, it nonetheless persisted in foregrounding Modern art at the expense of Outsider art. The latter was presented as buttressing the former, as partial and not fully-fledged to stand alone as artwork by comparison to its Modern counterparts. Language in the Parallel Visions catalog, the title of the exhibition and the installation itself all support this thesis.

Incarnations of Parallel Visions were booked abroad in Switzerland, Spain, and Japan, but Tuchman lamented that no U.S. institutions had accepted the show: “We offered this to every American Museum and not one came through.” While he, with artist Red Grooms, whose work was compared to Outsider art in Parallel Visions, preferred to blame a lack of daring on the part of those U.S. institutions that declined the show, those museums may have debatably rejected Tuchman’s exhibition on the grounds of its size. They may have also resented its particular redress of modernism, or they may have wished to avoid the critical disaster of another “affinity” show such as that of MoMA’s 1985 ‘Primitivism’ in the 20th century: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern. Tuchman, in his Introduction to the Parallel Visions catalog, distanced himself from the more troubling aspects of the “Primitivism” premise by foregrounding causality rather than similarity between Outsider art and Modern art. Thus,

ex.cat. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986),17-61, for the curator’s version of the exhibition’s thesis. “Mystical and Philosophical Themes in Modern Art,” was the theme of the 1986 Annual Meeting of the College Art Association. See also the special edition of Art Journal 46:1, Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art (Spring 1987).


“common denominators” were not drawn at the LACMA show, between the two genres, “independent of direct influences,” as they had been in some sections of Primitivism.

Tuchman wrote, “we intended to reveal… that the bold, elemental, figurative expressiveness characteristic of much twentieth-century art is due in part to the appreciation and influence of the art of compulsive visionaries.” That euphemism, “compulsive visionaries,” was chosen as a descriptive counterpart of “Outsider” for Parallel Visions, after the pool of considered influencers had been culled from a Primitivist lineup. Art including, “children’s, shamanic and voodoo from tribal Africa, Oceanic and Haitian, Australian aboriginal bark and acrylic painting, graffiti, the environmental ‘sculptures’ of French and American builders especially in the early part of this century [Outsider environments], and, of course, the art of self-taught, completely alienated persons, who have often been isolated in mental hospitals,” had at first all been considered.

Although some see Parallel Visions as an important moment of exposure for Outsider art—and the catalog essays are an undeniable contribution to Outsider scholarship—the heroes of that exhibition were Modernists. Despite a near-equal quantitative representation of both Modernist and Outsider artists (of seventy-four total, forty were Modern and thirty-four were Outsider), Outsider work was signified there in the service of revising a view of artistic Modernism that relied on staid genealogies. The exhibition, according to Tuchman himself, “came to focus increasingly on a specific lineage of modern Western artists and on their

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495 Tuchman Introduction, 10.
496 Galerie St. Etienne, for example, established by Otto Kallir in New York in the 1930s, originally to show Expressionism, now deals in “self-taught” art, and mounted an exhibition, “Parallel Visions II,” in April-May 2006 to acknowledge the influence of the original LACMA show on the field. The “Parallel Visions” catalog is listed, among books by Maizels, Cardinal and Rhodes, as one source in a very brief bibliography for the entry “Outsider Art” in the Grove Encyclopedia of American Art, Vol.1 (New York: Oxford, 2011). Noteworthy contributions to the catalog were delivered by Roger Cardinal and Sarah Wilson.
relationship with the work of compulsive visionaries in particular.” In this formulation, the “modern Western artists” were the actors relating as they willed to the inanimate “work” of Outsiders, with Outsider artists excluded from the equation altogether. We see the same active/passive inequity in the subtitle of the exhibition, “Modern Artists and Outsider Art,” as Christopher Knight noted in passing in a scathing review of the exhibition for the *Los Angeles Times.* One might attribute this to the required or circumstantial absence of the Outsider artist, thus leaving his or her work as surrogate. However, in some instances the Outsider was indeed known personally to the Modern artist, as Tuchman acknowledges in his introduction. Such was the case with Louis Soutter’s influence on Dubuffet: Soutter was a cousin of Le Corbusier, through whom Dubuffet became acquainted with him.

Within the installation of “Parallel Visions,” artworks, Outsider and Modern alike, were integrated into an aestheticized treatment. They mingled in an undifferentiated sameness of display [Figure 77]. The look of the show was formed overwhelmingly by the glossy architectural spaces and veneers of the earlier LACMA buildings designed by William Pereira in the late 1960s. Artwork lined the walls at eye level, minimally framed and evenly spaced. Smaller sculptures were encased on pedestals and larger or more awkward shapes were given platforms along the walls. Because there were not pairings or overt groupings, a gentle visual conversation was suggested between objects within each section, with limited wall text to give specific cues of influence. Where there was explanatory text, it seems from installation images to

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497 Tuchman Introduction, 10.
498 Christopher Knight, “Shortsighted ’Visions’: A major presentation at LACMA stumbles while tracking the influence on Modern art of obsessive, visionary pictures made by untutored laymen,” *Los Angeles Times,* October 16, 1992. Knight objected to the premise of the exhibition on a number of points. He suggested that artists like Dali and Schnabel — held up as examples in the exhibition—strategically adopted Outsider styles through calculated imitations. If the implicit aim of the exhibition, that Knight gleaned through Tuchman’s explicit comments against conceptual art, was to offer a model “on which contemporary artists might rebuild a less calculating aesthetic” than had been seen in the conceptual art of the 1980s, these were not appropriate examples and, perhaps, there truly were none to be found.
have accompanied only the Modernist works, subtly setting those pieces as anchors and the surrounding Outsider art as supporting documentation. A large, Dubuffet *L’Hourloupe* sculpture, for instance, appears in one archival photograph in a room with several of Alõise’s drawings and a Wölfli work.499 Both artists formed part of Dubuffet’s *Art Brut* inner circle [Figure 78]. The *Art Brut* works, with the Dubuffet, share a cellular construction organized through the repetition of interlocking organic shapes in a netlike mass. But other, more controversial examples of Dubuffet’s direct appropriations would certainly have proved more provocative.500 Apart from a dash of wall color and a few instances of graphic title text at entrance and exit, the exhibition was uniformly painted in neutrals and white, and the highly polished floors of the building lent the formality of mid-century design. To the casual attendee in 1992, it must have appeared conservative, bordering on a retro-corporate aesthetic as one would have encountered at the early exhibitions of American Folk Art Museum in the 1960s, in the lobbies of the Time Life and Paine Webber Gallery buildings.

The catalog of the exhibition included brief biographies of the thirty-four Outsider artists, to correct a lack of knowledge about them among the public, and thus engaged in the tendency to highlight biography when treating Outsiders, justifiably or not.501 The inclusion of artist biographies in exhibition catalogs is common practice, but it is notable that biographies of the modernists were not included. Neither were photographs of the Outsider artists included, as Tessa de Carlo announced in her positive review of “Parallel Visions” with Susan Dintentfass for the *Los Angeles Times*. The pair, in a patronizing turn, applauded the curators’ restraint in

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499 The Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne, was not lending at the time, so these were borrowed from elsewhere, although both artists are heavily represented at the Collection.

500 See my Introduction for a short discussion of accusations of Dubuffet’s copying of *Art Brut*.

withholding photographs of “strange” looking Outsiders, as Eliel regarded them.\footnote{They quoted Eliel as saying, “A lot of these people, to be honest, looked strange. We didn't want people to focus on what they looked like, and their strangeness, instead of on the work.” DeCarlo and Dintenfass “The Outsiders.”} That review continued to echo Wells’ aforementioned article in seeding the contemporary draw toward Outsider art in its assumed sincerity, “heartfelt efforts,” and “undeniable force.”\footnote{Ibid.} Tuchman rejected the conceptualism of the Pictures Generation, while implicitly embracing Neo-Expressionism. Julian Schnabel, for example, was included in “Parallel Visions;” he claimed the influence of Simon Rodia’s encrusted, ceramic shard towers in Watts, California.

On the whole, the arguments that Wells reported for Outsider art in 1992, including lower prices and an attraction to interesting artist biographies, remained standard. But the most reported justification for the genre, by far, during the 1990s, was Outsider art’s supposed authenticity as a prophylactic or corrective to the jadedness of the previous decade. Outsider art purportedly had the messy, visceral passion and angst of Neo-Expressionism and none of the privilege, plugged in as the artists of the latter movement were to the gallery system and influential patrons. As it was created by artists outside of influential circles and art historical lineages, Outsider art was nothing like mainstream Neo-Expressionism in terms of intent. However, Outsider art as the genre that was shown at the OAF, as an imagined, collectible, and saleable category— and, I reiterate, not as it was intended by its creators—similarly couched conservative agenda within redemptive promise. By conservative agenda I mean that, both Outsider art, as it was coopted, exhibited, marketed and positioned, and Neo-Expressionism as a movement, maintained commodifiable formats of painting and sculpture (at least the pieces of Outsider art that were prized on the market did) in the face of the return of the readymade for conceptualism, and even the dematerialization of the art object. Investigations into the performative, conceptual and installation aspects of Outsider art, such as those currently being...
tried by Valérie Rousseau at AFAM, had not yet been explored at the outset of the OAF. Further, in spite of challenges to sovereign authorship leveled by Appropriation art (until that too became a commodity in the hands of someone like Koons), Outsider art became a source of, I suggest, retrograde yearning for genius and mastery. As Benjamin Buchloh wrote in his 1981 *October* article, “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting,”\(^{504}\) of the first, inter-War regression into figuration, “the atavistic notion of the master artist is reintroduced to continue a culture oriented to an esoteric elite, thus guaranteeing that elite’s right to cultural and political leadership.”\(^{505}\) By extension, the insider’s selective identification of artistic mastery, in the case of Outsider art, reinstated his right to the same leadership. In both the case of Outsider art and Neo-Expressionism, the reception of the artwork as nostalgic and “auratic,” as Buchloh termed it, was crucial. While Buchloh, in his Marxist critique, located the danger of Neo-Expressionism in its crypto-nationalistic, conservative ideology, Outsider art was used—against its will—to similarly bolster that “frankly elitist notion of subjectivity [which] ultimately opts for the destruction of the very historical and cultural reality that it claims to possess.”\(^{506}\) Thus, the Outsider artist’s point of view was only relevant as it was transcribed by the insider, and at the expense of the reality of its production.

The criteria for sourcing “real” Outsider art became increasingly subjective. Sensing this problem, Jenifer Borum asked, “Will the real outsiders please stand up?” in an article for *New Art Examiner* of 1993. That article compared academic and commercial presentations of Outsider art, as emblematized by *Parallel Visions* and the first Outsider Art Fair (1993). She suggested that the two events were so opposed in their implicit definitions of Outsider art as to

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505 Ibid., 46.  
506 Ibid., 67.
effectively cancel one another: “this unlikely pair of exhibitions foregrounded the shaky foundation of the erstwhile subset of art history by revealing inconsistencies so glaring as to render the term outsider obsolete once and for all.”

Although she had separate criticisms of the Outsider Art Fair, her major criticism was focused on *Parallel Visions*, embodied by curators Tuchman and Eliel. Borum located the major issue of *Parallel Visions* beyond “its failure to live up to grandiose theoretical claims” and beyond “Tuchman’s [anti-conceptual] conservative doublespeak” regarding Modernism, and rather with the exhibition’s narrow and arguably exclusive, Eurocentric version of Outsider art. She argued that it matched Tuchman’s equally conservative, Eurocentric version of modernism, thus drafting a hierarchy within an already marginalized field. The Outsider Art Fair, on the other hand, wrote Borum, “painted a vivid picture of cultural diversity,” by including, namely, a healthy amount of work by African-American artists alongside work by canonical European Outsiders [Art Brut artists], as we shall see. Although her point about elitism and race and class bias within the LACMA show is well-taken, her favoring the OAF, which she claimed, “afford[ed] the viewer interpretive freedom” through its breadth, seems at odds with her earlier point about a worrying want of fixity in the definition of the Outsider genre.

An “Fledgling” Fair for Outsider Art

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507 Jenifer Borum, “Will the Real Outsiders Please Stand Up,” *New Art Examiner* 20:10 (1993): 41-44. Borum’s larger project was an argument against retaining the category and of the blanket use of the term “Outsider” based on the genre’s gross internal inconsistencies.

508 Ibid. Borum refers here to Eliel’s claims of a “moral” influence of Outsiders on insiders rather than a formal one, as that was explained in Eliel’s “Moral Influence and Expressive Intent: A Model of the Relationship between Insider and Outsider,” in *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, ex.cat. eds. Maurice Tuchman and Carol Eliel (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1992), 18.

509 Ibid. To be fair, “Parallel Visions” did include works by some American Outsider artists, such as Howard Finster, and Mexican Outsider artist Martín Ramírez. Borum acknowledged the fact in her article but seems to have been yet unsatisfied by the demographics.
The Outsider Art Fair was born of part commercial and part scholarly interest through an established fair director, Sanford Smith, who employed at the time a graduate student in art history who was writing her thesis on Outsider artists. Sanford Smith and Associates began work in 1992, opening the first fair in January 1993, after success in mounting other niche fairs such as the Fall Antiques Show (begun 1979) and the Princeton Antiques Show (1984). It is telling of Outsider art’s patrimony in the New York art scene of the early 1990s that it would arise under the management of Smith, whose fairs tended and tend to concentrate on antiques, ephemera and design markets—all areas with besmirched status in the art/decorative arts/craft hierarchy. Smith and his staff work at identifying what they perceive to be “‘holes in the market’… filling them with distinguished shows.”

For instance, the National Black Fine Art Show, NYC (1994) was an interesting, but ultimately short-lived caveat for Smith, although it went on under different direction. Besides the Outsider Art Fair, The New York Antiquarian Book Fair (begun 1979) and several of Smith’s fairs for specific art dealers’ associations continue to run annually until the present.

Sociologist Julia S. Ardery wrote briefly on the genesis of the OAF in her monograph on Outsider artist Edgar Tolson, after speaking with founding organizer Caroline Kerrigan Lerch in 1998:

Two of the firm’s young associates, Caroline Kerrigan, then a graduate student of art history, and Smith’s son, Colin, conceived of the event after spotting a front-page news story in the Wall Street Journal: “‘Outsider Art’ Is Suddenly the Rage Among Art Insiders.” With advice from New York dealers Aarne Anton, Roger Ricco, and Frank Maresca, who had participated in the firm’s Fall Antiques Show, Kerrigan and Smith polled 110 galleries to gauge interest in such a sales venue, then inviting thirty-three “quality” dealers from the United States and abroad…Smith and Kerrigan asked Lee

Kogan of the Museum of American Folk Art to organize a symposium at Phyllis Kind’s New York gallery in conjunction with the 1993 fair.  

Caroline Kerrigan remembers today that she and Colin Smith “became a little bored” with the “blue chip” shows they had been producing for Sanford Smith. Both aged in their twenties at the time, Kerrigan was knowledgeable about Outsider art—she was writing a thesis on Outsider art and popular culture—and Colin Smith was eager to join the effort of mounting a new fair. Sanford Smith was apparently dubious of the idea, but conceded that staging the Outsider Art Fair would be a good exercise for the pair. “I figured I’d lose ten thousand dollars, but these two kids would learn to run an art fair,” he told me, referring affectionately to both Kerrigan and Smith, “They had a passion for the material.” Some of the established dealers they polled were also wary of the venture, doubting the number of galleries that could procure quality artwork that fit squarely into the Outsider category, and thus they explicitly advised against it. Kerrigan asserts that some of those gallerists were territorial about their stake in the Outsider landscape. “But in a way they were right,” she says, “The quality wasn’t right, but it did reflect the marketplace at that time.” After some debate over naming the event within Sanford Smith and Associates, and among its advisors, “Outsider” was settled upon as the most expedient, albeit imperfect, term to label the type of art Kerrigan and Colin Smith sought. The official logo of the OAF, after a few years, came to include the words “visionary,” “intuitive,” “self-taught,” and “Art Brut,” in acknowledgment of various contingents of thought on the appropriate nomenclature among the participants [Figure 79].

513 Personal communication with Caroline Kerrigan Lerch, 20 April 2015.
514 Ibid.
515 Personal communication with Sanford Smith, 18 June 2015.
516 Kerrigan did not specify which of the galleries gave the warning.
517 Smith Personal.
The inaugural 1993 Outsider Art Fair was held in the Puck Building in downtown Manhattan, a Romanesque Revival building at Lafayette and Houston streets in SoHo built in the 1880s. The building was modernized and renovated for luxury apartment and commercial space beginning in 2009, prompting the OAF to move to Midtown. In 1993, however, it had a unique architectural character, particularly in eccentric, original interior spaces. Inside the Puck building, two high-ceilinged ballrooms were connected by a narrow hallway. With a vestibule space near the entrance that also housed exhibitor stalls, those spaces formed the three main exhibition areas during the OAF. In each of the two large rooms, lean, cast-iron columns painted white with floral capitals supported a white wood-paneled ceiling. Sheer drapes with flounced valences filtered some natural light into the space, and large, crystal chandeliers fitted with light bulbs added a jaundiced glow. There were curtains of cast-iron over entrances and stairwells, and other flourishes here and there. Altogether the décor lent an air of fading nineteenth-century elegance and eclecticism. The Puck building, although “quirky,” was one of the few SoHo venues of appropriate size within Smith and Kerrigan’s OAF planning budget, and locating the OAF in SoHo in 1993 was important in distinguishing it as a contemporary art fair [Figure 80]. By the early 1990s, however, the Soho art scene was imperiled, perhaps making way for this second- or third-tier market. Many contemporary galleries were shuttering their large Soho spaces in favor of cheaper rents in formerly industrial buildings on the West side in Chelsea. This same cohort of gallerists had rushed upon Soho from the Upper East Side after Paula Cooper’s gallery opened there in 1968 and Leo Castelli retreated downtown in 1971.

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518 The Puck building was completed in 1885, first renovated in 1984, and designated a New York City landmark in 1983.
519 Kerrigan Personal. They could not afford the Park Avenue Armory at a rate of $8000 per day, but the Puck building was rented at $2000 per day at that time. Walls for booths would not fit upstairs at the Puck, so, although a second floor was available for shows, the first floor was the only usable space.
In a further two paragraphs on the OAF, Ardery subtly implied that, although Smith and Associates promoted the first OAF as “cutting edge”—that was the precise language from the 1993 press release—some choices in the marketing and planning of the first show seem to have been geared toward a more established, wealthy patronage. Many of the dealers and buyers involved had indeed come via the more conservative Fall Antiques Show, according to Sanford Smith.\(^{520}\) Ardery quoted Colin Smith as saying that Sanford Smith and Associates staged the fair in Soho to attract “contemporary people” rather than “upper east side antiques people,” but, ultimately, that “it doesn’t do the show any good unless the people who come in are knowledgeable enough and have the resources to buy.”\(^{521}\) To that point, Ardery noted that Smith and Associates advertised the fair, not on independent or even “Top Forty” radio stations, but on two all-classical, and two all-talk radio stations in the New York area, presumably of the type that skew toward an older demographic of cultured New Yorkers.\(^{522}\) Although serious antiques and Folk art collectors such as Jerry Lauren (of Polo Ralph Lauren) and William Louis-Dreyfus formed a core of buyers alighting annually upon the OAF preview benefits, Kerrigan and Lerch did succeed in attracting a young crowd. The press often mentioned the makeup of the attendance as younger, more hip, or simply different than that of other fairs. A 1998 review in *Antiques and the Arts Weekly* assessed: “Patrons were noticeably youngish, casually well-dressed, and included a healthy proportion of couples with youngsters. From all appearances, the buyers of outsider art are the same people who are making a market in vintage Modern furniture and contemporary crafts, rather than those who collect Abstract Expressionism or

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\(^{520}\) Smith Personal.

\(^{521}\) Ardery *The Temptation*, 195.

\(^{522}\) Ibid.
French antiques.” Attendance numbers at the Puck building steadily swelled from a total 4,500 for the entire weekend in 1993 to a reported 8,000 by the year 2000.

In 1994, critic Roberta Smith, who rarely misses the opportunity to comment on the fair, appraised the second OAF as a “fledgling art fair…higher in quality than last year’s effort.” That fair, as had the first, included work by artists from both the European Art Brut and Contemporary American Folk art camps, grouped together as Outsiders. Art Brut artists included Wölfli, Madge Gill and Gaston Chaissac, whose work formed a core of Dubuffet’s own collection, and American Outsiders included Anna Mary Robertson, known as Grandma Moses, Martín Ramírez, and Bill Traylor. The American delegation of artists alone represented a swath of individuals with markedly different backgrounds, as Borum’s 1995 article indicated. Grandma Moses began making naïve art as an elderly woman in New York; Ramírez was a Mexican immigrant confined in California after a schizophrenia diagnosis; and Traylor was born a slave in Georgia, remaining poor during his entire life. Their appearance in lower Manhattan as some unlikely redeemers of the expressionist impulse must have seemed oddly quaint to the Manhattanite audience. The profiles of these artists must have also led on to timely discussions of identity in art.

In its first year, the OAF attracted thirty-three vendors, and that number held relatively steady over two decades that saw a few major dealers as perennial attendees, and a slew of others

523 Judith Gura, “Good Press, Great Crowds, New Collectors,” Antiques and the Arts Weekly, 27 February 1998. Antiques Review reported the contrast in its March 1993 issue: “Uptown at the 39th annual Winter Antiques Show, the rarified atmosphere presented a reminder of how relatively refreshing the Outsider Art show was…Unlike the noisy, talkative ambiance that crackled through the Puck building, an air of hushed reverence pervaded the Seventh Regiment Armory on Park Avenue. Wide, carpeted aisles and urns brimming with lush flowers were background to sixty-seven pristine booths gleaming with vetted, expensive, perfectly placed furniture, porcelain, silver, mirrors and other antiques. Long mink coats swathed many visitors” (35).


coming in and out of participation. As galleries around the United States began to offer Outsider art, European Art Brut galleries became sufficiently confident in the quality of their co-exhibitors’ offerings to attend the OAF as well. Exhibitor stalls in the Puck building were built out from freestanding framework, and, as at most art fairs, exhibitors paid for larger stalls and those in locations more trafficked by attendees. This resulted in dealer “ghettos,” where lesser-known dealers selling less expensive artworks shared smaller, sometimes cramped spaces.

“The fair is a microcosm of the business, and dealers seem to be positioned in order of importance,” wrote Larissa MacFarquhar for New York Magazine in 1996. In the first room New York dealers Phyllis Kind, Ricco/Maresca, and Luise Ross, and German dealer Susanne Zander were consistent tenants, and in the second room were galleries such as Carl Hammer, Fleisher-Ollman, Aarne Anton, and Cavin-Morris. The gallerist Marion Harris, profiled in the 1996 MacFarquhar article, was unfortunately “stuck in Siberia” near the snack bar.

Some dealers crammed multiple artworks onto limited wall space, thus creating frantic, anxious atmospheres in their exhibition stalls. Others chose to hang pictures “salon style,” not from lack of space, but for accumulative effect. Sanford Smith recalls instituting a policy, after witnessing these troubling installations for a few years, requiring one foot of blank space at the

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526 Phyllis Kind Gallery participated every year until Kind’s retirement in 2010, and Ricco/Maresca and Carl Hammer attended every year until a 2012 controversy, returning in 2013. Galerie St. Etienne, Susanne Zander, Luise Ross and Marion Harris were other perennials, along with Cavin-Morris and Fleischer Ollman—the latter two until a 2000 rift with Smith. American Primitive Gallery, Henry Boxer Gallery and Galerie Bonheur were also there from the beginning, although missing some years.

527 Smith Personal.

528 Sanford Smith and Associates does not retain contracts for longer than ten years, so the specifications of booth size and price are not available today in their records. Sanford Smith, himself, does not remember the price points offhand, but did acknowledge in our conversation of 18 June 2015, a range of cost options for dealers at the OAF, related to placement and size of booth. He guessed that early booth rentals ranged from $12,000 to $15,000.

529 MacFarquhar “Is It Art?”

530 Ibid.
top and bottom of each exhibit wall. Kerrigan, who stayed on as director of the OAF for twelve years, later going on to direct the Metro show, says of the early Fairs:

Some of the less experienced gallerists, who didn’t have a knack, would put things up in salon style. A lot of the artwork fought with other of the artworks. Outsider art can be bright and often has a lot of detail. I don’t think it [the hang] did it [the artwork] justice. Some of the work needs space, and I think that was a problem. If you really looked through some of the booths, they had great work nonetheless. Some people even thought that type of display added to the show’s charm. They liked that better. We [Kerrigan and Smith] didn’t want it to look junky. We wanted the work to be taken seriously, so we tried to coach those gallerists, to encourage them to hang less if they were hanging that many artworks.

Images in the annual report by Antiques and the Arts Weekly from the 1995 OAF offer glimpses of the atmosphere, if not a full picture, but seem to corroborate Kerrigan’s and Smith’s concerns. Posing in her booth, for example, dealer Laurie Carmody of Galerie Bonheur (St. Louis, opened 1980) stood before a wall hung densely with paintings of various sizes by various gallery artists, some framed simply in black, some with gilded frames, some only matted or not framed at all [Figure 81]. The paintings continue beyond the frame of the photo in all directions behind Carmody, above her head four feet up, and down below her ankles. (Apparently, Smith’s “buffer” rule had not yet taken effect). Galerie Bonheur traditionally showed work by self-taught artists from the Caribbean (Haiti) and Latin America, alongside works of Eastern European folk art. Another photograph, published with the former, showed dealer Frank Miele’s (New York)

531 Smith Personal.
532 Kerrigan Personal.
533 “Annual Tribal Gathering of Outsider’s Insiders at The Puck,” Antiques and the Arts Weekly, 3 March 1995. Neither Smith nor Kerrigan hold images from the earliest fairs in their archives, and none of the gallerists I polled digitized the photographs they had taken, and thus most were lost. The best access to images that I had was through publications like Antiques and the Arts Weekly. Although those archives contain back issues of the magazines in which the images were originally published, I have yet to be able to acquire original hard copies or digital versions of those images. Acquiring further images of the early OAFs at the Puck building is a pursuit that I hope to continue after this writing.
534 I intentionally do not capitalize “folk” here, to indicate a difference in European and American meanings of the word, as explained in the Introduction of this dissertation.
booth hung to the gills with “things that have passed the test of time,” as Miele put it. His exhibit—matched in quantity of work and equally varied in size and mounting, but perhaps with just a bit more wall space left above and below the paintings—featured work by what Miele considered canonical naïves from Europe and the U.S.

Not all dealers at the OAF were so liberal with their installations. Antiques Review registered the dichotomy: “The show contained an astounding number of objects. Although some booths featured a few hand-picked treasures, many were hung floor-to-ceiling with artworks, while additional pieces leaned on the floor against the wall or filled bins.” The number of works hung seems to have been inversely proportionate to the cost of those works. For example, in a photo published in the same Arts and Antiques article cited above, Chicago gallerist and major Outsider art dealer, Carl Hammer displayed a select few Dargers priced at $20,000 to $30,000 apiece—one of them placed perpendicular to the wall, forming a partition in the booth, and highlighting custom double-sided framing [Figure 83]. Only a few other artworks are visible in the shot: five works on paper by an unidentified artist, hung symmetrically with the largest at the center, floated in identical shadow box frames further down the wall past the Dargers. Similarly restrained in its presentation, Susanne Zander Galerie of Cologne showed a large Augustin Lesage (1976-1954, French) painting valued at $35,000, alone on a white wall [Figure 84].

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535 “Annual Tribal Gathering.”
536 Those included Lawrence Lebduska, Maurice Sullins and Gustav Klumpp. Lebduska was included in the 1938 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, “Masters of Popular Painting,” discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.
537 Suzy Farbman, “Premier Outsider Art Fair,” Antiques Review (March 1993): 34. Frank Maresca of Ricco/Maresca Gallery, known for its Modern and finely curated presentation of Outsider art, was quoted in that article as saying, “We feel work should be properly presented and conserved. It should be given the respect it deserves, not treated like a step-child.”
538 Darger’s illustrations to his fictional manuscript, In the Realms of the Unreal: The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion, number in the hundreds and are of uniform size, large-format, horizontal and double-sided. At Christie’s Paris on 2 December 2014 a Darger of this size and type, double-sided, was brought to auction with an estimated sales price of €180,000-€250,000.
The sentiment around the first OAF was a mix of confusion and excitement, according to Kerrigan and Smith. A few amateur observers accused organizers of courting a carnivalesque atmosphere; it is true that some attendees took it upon themselves to arrive in costume, some even with their own artwork in tow. Although it was not the climate intended for the fair, Kerrigan and colleagues accepted the ludic spirit that resulted: “It was all kind of fine, but we had a hard time policing it. People were excited. There was a lot of energy because many people felt that they were also Outsider artists.”539 Organizers tolerated artists who hung work on the fences outside of the Puck building for sale, without paying OAF fees for exhibition. One dealer parked an RV outside the event and sold artwork from that station. As recently as 2012, when the fair was held in Midtown, artists dubbing themselves “Outside the Outsider Art Fair” could be found on the sidewalks of Thirty-Fourth Street for the duration of the fair. Some artists appeared at the OAF on official business. For instance, Mr. Imagination, represented by Carl Hammer, posted himself in the gallery’s booth to discuss his work, despite the fact that he resented the Outsider label.540

Given the range of artwork for sale, much of the marketing energy and expense put forth by Sanford Smith and Associates in those years was directed toward explanatory measures. Kerrigan and Smith attempted to clarify “Outsider art” for the public in their press releases by writing about specific artists who might be considered canonical Outsiders. They elaborated artists’ biographies to that end, but were later criticized for the strategy by Outsider art insiders such as gallerists Randall Morris of Cavin-Morris and John Ollman of Fleisher-Ollman, both of whom exhibited on many occasions at the fair. To be direct, all dealers at the OAF indulge in

539 Kerrigan Personal.
some amount of biographical baiting when pitching clients, but some, like Carl Hammer, resent a focus on an artist’s history rather than on the formal strength of a work of art.541

Rather than demonize those dealers promoting biography, and Kerrigan and Smith, for that matter, one might argue that an artist’s background is interesting to any buyer, and that the relation of an Outsider biography might help to incrementally normalize a range of experiences. The abuses by dealers who fabricate or elaborate salacious biographical details have tainted the positive possibilities of their argument, yet there are still arguments to be made for an approach that balances aesthetics with biography. MacFarquhar summed it well in 1996, writing, “Aesthetes tend to overreact to the fact that outsiders’ wacky life stories are such a large part of their appeal to collectors. While rich white people eager to meet poor black artists clearly have the potential to be irritating [at best], life histories are often helpful explanatory substitutes for the art history that puts contemporary works in context.”542 Arguments over biography, as well as those over the standard of quality for the work for sale at the OAF, erupted in 1999. In a dramatic action, in April of 1999, Morris and Ollman issued a joint press release in the form of an open letter to the American Folk Art Museum (then the Museum of American Folk Art) in protest of the OAF, declaring their withdrawal from the 2000 fair (slated for January 27-30, 2000) on professional and ethical grounds. Only a few years earlier in 1995, Ollman held a positive outlook for the fair, saying, “Collectors are becoming more sophisticated and dealers are responding.”543 Roger Ricco, of Ricco/Maresca, echoed the sentiment that same year, even crediting Smith: “Sandy recognized that he needed to bring in more serious dealers. He got rid of

541 See DeCarlo “Art Lite.”
542 MacFarquhar “Is It Art?” The potentially “irritating,” “rich white people” to which she referred were collectors Gael and Michael Mendelsohn, who recited to her their experience of leaving the Ritz Carlton to spend a night visiting Outsider artist Thornton Dial in Georgia: “Mrs. Dial made all the southern black fried food that I’ve never had before, with the grease and the oil and about six million grams of fat. My husband wanted to kill me at the time…”
543 “Annual Tribal Gathering.”
the most borderline art, the cutesy-pie objects.” But the OAF failed to meet the standards of Morris and Ollman, ultimately, and their manifesto, faxed directly to the American Folk Art Museum and to the publication *Antiques and the Arts Weekly*, but not to Sanford Smith, detailed their grievances to the public as well as industry insiders.

Morris and Ollman objected, ostensibly, to a focus on biography at the fair, but quality was their major concern. Because the OAF was not vetted, they argued, inferior work lowered the standard of the field—the de facto standard being set, that is, by the OAF itself. Although Smith, Kerrigan and Smith reserved the right to remove any single item from the floor of the show, that privilege had been invoked in years past infrequently, and even then, only in the case of fraud or fakes. There were few who came to the defense of the OAF specifically in favor of its policy against vetting at the time of the 1999 Morris-Ollman withdrawal, although the *Maine Antiques Digest* mounted an argument, writing, “An unvetted fair is inevitably a mélange of diverse quality reflecting the range of material available on the marketplace… Connoisseurship is refined by seeing both the very best and, ideally in the same venue, other work that helps clarify why the best is as good as it is.” Many gallerists and, most vocally, Carl Hammer, agreed that there was a quality-control problem that called for better discrimination in selling, collecting and connoisseurship in the field. Years earlier, Hammer, who was nonetheless in constant attendance until a separate 2012 OAF rift, had stated, “I’d be just as happy if there were never another Outsider Art Fair…Let’s put together the six best dealers of contemporary art and the six best dealers of Outsider art… let them hold their own.”

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544 Ibid. Ricco/Maresca did not withdraw with Morris and Ollman in 1999.
In general, the major galleries continued to support the OAF through the controversy, albeit with reservations, not only through continued annual participation, but through public statements as well. Frank Maresca considered it “important” for his gallery to continue to bring Outsider artwork of remarkable quality to the OAF for the sake of public education, and Phyllis Kind called the Morris-Ollman statement “sophomoric and counterproductive.” And perhaps most notably, official spokespersons from the American Folk Art Museum lauded Smith for his continued cooperation with the museum, which gained a measurable boost in audience, membership and patronage each year through its partnership and official sponsorship of the OAF that included an annual preview benefit.

There were some points to the Morris-Ollman statement so rife with contradiction that they landed poorly even among Outsider art insiders that agreed with the vetting issue. For instance, Morris and Ollman were not the first to object officially to the term “Outsider,” but they disguised a semantic debate as an ethical one. Their statement read: “There is no such thing as ‘Outsider’ art except as created by those with vested interests and the wrongfully informed press. No two academics can define it. We believe it is not an entity that can be defined as separate from Art in general.” Morris added in an interview, “If I am talking about a Pollock am I talking about alcoholic art?” While the objection, out of context, is logical, the reality is that Morris and Ollman had both for decades specialized in what would casually qualify as “Outsider” art—by any other name—precisely by subtracting it from “Art in general.” They had openly cultivated clients and collections with a focus on “self-taught” or “idiosyncratic” art, as

549 Ibid. In the initial mounting of the OAF in 1993, Lee Kogan, an AFAM curator, was heavily involved, even organizing a symposium, “Uncommon Artists: A Series of Cameo Talks.” In 1995, AFAM reported $15,000 in book sales at their booth at the OAF and museum spokesperson Susan Flamm testified to the Museum’s support of the Fair: “The museum has always been involved in this field, we’ve always considered it our mission to show work out to the present day. What’s more, this [the OAF] seems to be the greatest arena of new collectors and they are museum supporters,” (quoted in “Annual Tribal Gathering”).
they would prefer it, and now sought to jettison the strategy that had brought them market success in a grand gesture of denouncing the fair. Both galleries, it must be noted, did subsequently deliver on a promise to program mainstream and ‘self-taught’ art (although rarely one with the other), as did many other galleries such as Ricco/Maresca and White Columns, that now cultivate programs mixing contemporary, mainstream art with Outsider art.°550

Another point of contention for Morris and Ollman, as detailed in the 1999 statement, involved a superficially benevolent complaint about the presence of artists making, promoting and selling their own works within a few dealer booths at the OAF. The pair assessed, putting on paternalistic airs, that those Outsider artists were themselves being exhibited as oddities, and thus exploited at the fair. Certainly in the annals of history there have been too many circumstances where the exhibition of an exotic outsider has been an ethical issue, and Morris and Ollman played on those very sensitivities in raising their objection. It is well known that European imperialist powers exhibited colonial visions of the world in microcosm at ethnographic expositions such as the Paris Exposition of 1878, the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of London in 1886, the British Empire Exhibition of 1924-5, and the Exposition Coloniale in Paris in 1931.°551 In the U.S., the Smithsonian Institution helped to mount ethnographic exhibits on the grounds of misguided versions of Darwinism, Enlightenment thinking and manifest destiny at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and the Chicago Exposition of 1893, among other instances. In all these cases, for reasons that include but are not limited to sheer curiosity,

°550 The Fleisher-Ollman website currently states: “This revised curatorial mission—recently amended to remove from discourse entirely the ‘self-taught’ label as a distinct entity—has become particularly relevant as many contemporary artists eschew the academic in favor of intuitive practice.” See http://www.fleisher-ollmangallery.com/history.htm, accessed 25 July 2015.

national identity formation and justifications for slavery and colonialism, human beings were exhibited in “native villages” among scaled architecture indigenous to various homelands, and prodded to or rewarded in producing attendant visual and performance arts. Those exhibitions broadly revealed what Clifford has articulated in a different context as, “the restless desire and power of the modern West to collect the world.”

Awareness of those particular abuses of the past and their continued resonance in everyday racism and classism was timely in the early 1990s, attending a swell in scholarly post-colonial studies and the appearance of identity politics as an artistic paradigm. Inquiry into themes of exile, translation, power and hybridity by literary scholars and philosophers such as Spivak, Appiah, Bhabha and Said formed a core of a “post-colonial” methodology that posed questions of “who speaks” and “for whom” in response to patriarchal and imperial violence. In 1992, one year before the premier Outsider Art Fair, artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña dressed themselves as “natives” of a fictional Caribbean island and locked themselves in a cage, performing dances and telling stories at various sites for onlookers. They chose locations such as Irvine, Madrid and London, all sites with histories of colonialism or xenophobia, in which to enact the performance. Audience reactions formed part of the piece, and ranged from compassion to sexual aggression. Many believed that the artists were “authentic” natives. To dispute the persistent myth of the ignorant, prelapsarian aboriginal, and to highlight the paradoxical appearance of “authentic” natives at modern colonialist spectacles such as the ones listed above, the pair operated a jumble of objects from within the cage, from tribal artifacts to laptop computers, and wore grass skirts along with Converse sneakers and gas masks. Coco Fusco responded in an interview in 1993 with a comment that might be commuted to the 1999-552.

2000 Outsider debate, with a caveat that the stakes for subaltern peoples have been more grave than they have been for many Outsider artists: “This fetish about authenticity is connected to an idea that the non-Western being [Outsider artist] doesn’t have a sense of reflexivity about him or herself… The bottom line is they [dominant groups] don’t want us to be part of the same present or the same time.”

In the case of Outsider art, the problem has been the exclusion of the artists, if not the art, from the professional, commercial, and institutional venues that the OAF represents. Volition, on the part of artists working at the OAF, made all the difference, as they elected to be present in the same space and time as dealers and buyers. Further, the appearance of these artists at the OAF—some, fair attendees engaged in unsanctioned self-promotion, and some, gallery artists installing themselves in the booths at the behest of the dealers or autonomously—was less than programmatic. Mr. Imagination explained his sculptural bottle-cap constructions at the Carl Hammer booth for several years, and joked with visitors about charging to be photographed. Another unknown artist, reportedly at the 1999 fair, was giving out free drawings from a sketchbook to interested visitors, and Purvis Young, a well-known, middle-aged, African-American, Outsider artist, painted and sold work as the fair buzzed around him that year. That kind of subversive potentiality for Outsider artists challenged Morris and Ollman, it would seem, although perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the measures that Ollman took in the 1990s to banish the Outsider artists with whom he dealt from contact with even himself. According to a New York Times article of 1996, related to that year’s OAF, Ollman testified that in order to

554 Gregory Warmak, also known as Mr. Imagination (1948–2012), was a Chicago man represented by Carl Hammer since the 1980s. He began making elaborate bottle-cap regalia after a near-fatal gunshot wound left him in a coma for six weeks, during which time he had visions of “ancient cultures.” See Ramona Austin, “Fire and Redemption: Interview with Mr. I,” Raw Vision 76.
avoid “contamination” of the work of Outsider artists through cultural influence, the dealer never met with his gallery artists, never provided them materials, and avoided any hint of interference in their artistic, financial and personal lives.\textsuperscript{555} Ollman was not alone in his lengths of isolation. The \textit{Times} article also quoted Jack Lindsey, then curator of American Decorative Arts at the Philadelphia Museum as saying that his criteria for collecting would “disqualify more than a few of the works in the recent Outsider Art Fair.”\textsuperscript{556} Specifically, Lindsey required of his Outsiders that a dealer not interfere in the creative process, that the artist’s background be free of interference, presumably education or access to high culture, and that an artist’s parents’ “background [be] likewise unsullied.”\textsuperscript{557}

Morris and Ollman did not completely absent themselves from the OAF weekend in 2000. Instead they staged special exhibitions: Cavin-Morris Gallery was located at that time just a block away from the Puck Building and Fleisher-Ollman rente space in the vicinity. Their 1999 statement in protest had specifically requested that visitors explore galleries in the area around the 2000 OAF. Accusations of “piggybacking” were leveled in both directions, and, in the end, Cavin-Morris Gallery returned to the OAF by 2004, although Fleisher-Ollman never did return—until Smith was no longer the fair’s owner.\textsuperscript{558} Apart from this misappropriated moment of ethical pause, the OAF suffered from occasional slings and concerns over exploitation,\textsuperscript{559} but continued to bring in crowds.

A Shifting Landscape for Outsider Art

\textsuperscript{556} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{557} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{558} Sanford Smith asserts, from his perspective, that he never allowed Ollman back into the Fair. Personal communication.
The renovation of the Puck Building in 2009 prompted Sanford Smith to move the OAF to the eleventh floor of the Vornado Building on Thirty-Fourth Street off Fifth Avenue, and the fair ran smoothly there for a few years.\(^{560}\) In 2011, Dr. Valérie Rousseau, art historian, founder of a Canadian Outsider environments non-profit (Société des arts indisciplinés), who later married dealer Andrew Edlin, came on as an independent programs director at the OAF, putting together on-site panel discussions and presentations featuring an international range of experts in Outsider art. The fair’s formerly, exclusively off-site programming had been organized in years previous by the American Folk Art Museum, but, although AFAM was still the official sponsor and beneficiary of the OAF in 2011, relations between that institution and Sandy Smith had been tense for a number of years. The tension, tangentially related to the present narrative of the OAF, involved the initiation of The American Antiques Show (TAAS), owned entirely by AFAM but managed by Keeling Wainwright Associates, at the Metropolitan Pavilion (Eighteenth Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues) from 2002 until 2011.\(^{561}\) From his point of view, Smith testifies that TAAS wrested away dealers—beholden to trustees of AFAM as their major long-term collectors—from his Fall Antiques Show.\(^{562}\) Others would argue that TAAS redefined American antiques, along lines more closely allied with AFAM’s definitions of

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\(^{560}\) That building contained design showrooms for the gift industry, and the eleventh floor had been built out as a permanent tradeshow floor to accommodate the several annual tradeshows produced by tenants of the building. The OAF was the first art fair to occupy the space, which held close to sixty permanent vendor booths, saving Sanford Smith and Assoc. the expense of installation and breakdown. In 2014, Amazon.com leased most of the building for a new headquarters and distribution center.

\(^{561}\) A program published by AFAM for the 2009 TAAS included its mission statement: “The American antiques Show is an annual benefit for the American Folk Art Museum. All net proceeds from the Benefit Preview, Educational Series, special events, and general admission support the museum’s exhibitions and educational programming. No part of sales made by the show’s exhibitors is received by the museum. Our mission is to raise funds for the American Folk Art Museum through the Benefit Preview and the four days the show is open to the public; to foster the public’s knowledge and appreciate of American Folk Art and Americana through an educational and collecting/buying event for both the connoisseur and the novice; and to support the work of dealers and collectors who create a marketplace where ideas, expertise and passion for this field can flourish.” Archives of the American Folk Art Museum.

\(^{562}\) Smith Personal.
American Folk art. Although the title of the show was not indicative, Folk art, including textiles, pop Americana and even tramp art, was more popular at TAAS than “brown furniture,” historically a draw at antiques fairs. *Antiques and the Arts Weekly* reported in 2004, that after weak sales at the show’s first few incarnations, revenue for the galleries was up, and warned, “do not compare the American Antiques Show to the old Fall Antiques Show…”\(^{563}\) Karen Rosenberg noted, regarding the installation style at a mature 2010 TAAS: “The mix is eclectic but notably uncluttered, much like the permanent galleries of the American Folk Art Museum”\(^{564}\) [Figure 85].

A 2012 controversy around the OAF involved the exodus of legacy galleries, Carl Hammer and Ricco/Maresca, for the first time in twenty years. Unlike the 1999-2000 rift, this withdrawal did not involve an overt statement, but rather a reluctance on the part of those gallerists to commit to the 2012 OAF, left unaddressed in public. Suffice to say, their shared decision—as long-time friends, sometime professional partners, and standard-bearers for the commercial Outsider field—involved a firestorm of professional and personal politics surrounding the recent 2011 bankruptcy of AFAM, the transformation of TAAS into the Metro show in 2011-12, their membership on the Metro advisory board, complex relations between Sanford Smith and the American Folk Art Museum, and general rumblings of dissatisfaction with the Midtown format of the OAF and its continued relevance.\(^{565}\) There was also the issue of

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\(^{565}\) This controversy, although part of the present narrative, will not be treated at length here for a few reasons: the issues were never clearly stated, and those involved remain close-lipped and evasive to this day. More importantly, the aspects of this controversy left untreated here did not center on debates that define Outsider art, but rather on professional politics, and so are outside the purview of this study. To clarify, but only briefly: the premiere 2002 TAAS neatly coincided with the opening of AFAM’s new building next to MoMA on Fifty-Third Street, and the end of the show was coincident with AFAM’s 2011 bankruptcy that would force the institution to sell that building. TAAS was sold to the Art Fair Company in 2011, which continued to run it as the Metro Show beginning 2012,
non-profit arts and disability centers increasing their presence and influence at the OAF, which, although it should not be overstated as a primary cause of the withdrawal, is pertinent to this study of how the OAF shaped the Outsider genre.

For the first time, in 2011, AFAM was not the preview beneficiary at the fair. The institution was lately amidst financial ruin and a spate of staff layoffs, and its future was uncertain. The sponsorship went temporarily to Creative Growth Center and Fountain Gallery, two arts and disability centers that also presented exhibitor booths at that year’s fair. Creative Growth had appeared at the OAF as a merchant since 2004, and Fountain Gallery since 2009, both non-profit centers selling works created by artists from their respective centers in Oakland and New York. An influx of non-profits was to follow into the OAF. The Gallery at the Healing Arts Initiative (HAI) also staged a booth in 2011, and the Land Gallery of Brooklyn, a division of the League Education and Treatment Center arrived in 2012, along with the Envelope Project in support of Read Alliance, Konbit Shelter, a project to build sustainable architecture in Haiti, the Resources for Human Development (RHD) Outsider In Gallery, and Pure Vision Arts, an Initiative of the Field Institute. Scott Ogden of Make Skateboards also rented a booth at the 2012 fair, to sell skateboards decorated with classic Outsider art.566

Some of these initiatives were out of place at the OAF, but in general, the map and tenor of the fair was changing, reflective of the rise of such non-profit centers across the U.S. and in Europe. Work by contemporary artists, rather than absent twentieth-century “masters” populated the walls of the OAF, and sometimes to the ire of experienced dealers. Speaking on a panel at the 2011 OAF, Roger Ricco of Ricco/Maresca openly aired some of his frustrations with the change,

albeit with changes to nearly every aspect including scope, overall design and roster. Maresca and Hammer were early on recruited to its advisory committee.

566 Ogden had been on the Outsider scene for some time by that point, having produced with Malcolm Hearn the documentary Make (Asthmatic Kitty, 2011), which profiled several Outsider artists including Prophet Royal Robertson and Hawkins Bolden.
in a rare and candid public conversation with moderator Jason Bowman, then director of Fountain Gallery. Ricco, who speaks frequently and engages considerable fundraising as an expert on autism and art, bemoaned the incursion of non-profits into the commercial sphere that he had worked to hone over twenty years since the fair’s inception. He had likewise helped to build the reputation of CGC—now a competitor in the Outsider market—through various gestures of support over the years, including a gallery exhibition, Creative Growth Artists, held at Ricco/Maresca in 1997. Several of CGC’s artists, even renowned Outsider artists Judith Scott and Dan Miller, had been represented by Ricco/Maresca. Ricco questioned Fountain Gallery’s and CGC’s dual status at the same time as beneficiaries of the fair and merchants.\textsuperscript{567} He was correct that a shift had been signaled, but Fountain, and particularly, the Creative Growth Center, was not new to the field. In fact, CGC has operated as a venue for “Outsiders” since the 1970s, growing as a major influencer in the Outsider market over the past two decades and complicating the paradigm at the OAF that excluded Outsider artists from commercial venues.

Reversing the Paradigm: Arts and Disabilities Centers as Forces of Inclusion

Two shifts in the social position of disabled individuals occurred in the 1970s that led to an attendant shift in resources for disabled artists. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and, in particular, Section 504--won after a long civil rights campaign that included sit-ins staged by disabled protestors--guaranteed equal access to public spaces, resources and transportation as well as voting and housing for individuals of all abilities.\textsuperscript{568} As Pamela Kay Walker, an artist

\textsuperscript{567} Notes taken by the author at the 2011 OAF panel.

\textsuperscript{568} Section 504 states that “no qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall be excluded from, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that either receives Federal financial assistance or is conducted by any Executive agency or the United States Post Office.” From A Guide to Disability Rights Laws (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, July 2009). See also Fred Pelka’s The ABC-Clio Companion to the Disability Rights Movement (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1997), and Joel Schapiro’s
paralyzed by Polio in early childhood, has written, the climate around the Rehabilitation Act was revolutionary: “This meant all kinds of doors would open for us… city council meetings, county services, universities, companies with federal contracts, buses…WHAT?! Did I say buses? Yep, *buses*.”

A second major shift involved the so-called “mainstreaming” of disabled persons, particularly the developmentally disabled, out of large, state-run, custodial institutions, where many had previously been cloistered, and into supervised group homes, autonomous living situations, or the care of family members. Judith Scott (1943-2005), perhaps the most globally famous, developmentally disabled Outsider artist, suffered under what was normalized institutionalization during her childhood and young adulthood in the mid-twentieth century.

Beginning in the 1970s, artist and educator Florence Ludins-Katz, M.A., and psychologist Elias Katz, Ph.D., a California couple, began organizing to meet the needs of some newly mainstreamed, disabled citizens. The three centers for arts and disability that they opened, Creativity Explored (founded 1983), the National Center for Art and Disability (founded 1982), and the Creative Growth Center (founded 1972), remain leaders in an increasingly successful field.

Florence Ludins-Katz was raised under the influence her parents’ progressivism. Her

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570 According to Karen L. DeWeaver’s article, “Deinstitutionalization of the Developmentally Disabled,” *Social Work* 28:6 (November-December 1983): 435-9, social work, which had previously focused on mental illness and child welfare, became more interested with the living conditions of developmentally disabled persons in the late 1960s and 1970s.


572 In this chapter, I refer to all three of the sites as “centers.” Unless individually named, comments may be taken to apply to all three, because of their shared founders, and because of the Katzs’ consistency of philosophy and program. In the case of nuances among the policies of the centers, they are referred to individually by name.
mother was a suffragette and her father was a socialist who organized a work cooperative before the Depression. A leftist and union organizer herself, Ludins-Katz earned a masters in art and education from Columbia before marrying Elias Katz. The Katzs moved to the San Francisco Bay area, where they would found their centers, in order for Elias to work at the Sonoma State Home for the Mentally Retarded, as it was then called. His work in the 1960s and 1970s concerned the institutional care of the developmentally disabled, and transitions to home and community life for those patients. In the preface to *Art and Disabilities: Establishing the Creative Art Center for People with Disabilities* (1990), they diagnosed the climate at the founding of their centers:

> In contrast to earlier beliefs, there is a widespread agreement that disabled people not only belong in the community but should be active members of the community, and should not be forced to exist in state institutions isolated from their fellow citizens. As a consequence, large numbers of disabled persons now live in the community. But the question remains—how can they lead more normal lives? Certainly it is not normal to wander about the streets or to remain isolated in one’s room at home. Therefore it becomes necessary to provide many types of community activities and facilities to meet their special needs and desires.

The acknowledgment of these individuals as “fellow citizens” with their own desires not dictated by doctors or caretakers, symptomatized the attitude with which the Katzs approached realization of their art centers. They wrote *Arts and Disabilities*, not to memorialize charity, but as a practical resource for others wishing to undertake similar work of establishing centers. It includes such appendices as “Clients’ Rights” and “Personnel Manual and Job Descriptions.” An illustrated section, “Adaptations for People with Disabilities” offers suggestions for adapting

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brushes or pens for use with headgear or foot operated apparatuses. Despite that pragmatism of mission, the Katzs simultaneously forwarded the transcendental possibilities of art making for all people. They believed that creativity could not be repressed without great emotional damage to a person, and that it must be expressed for “well-being and growth.” Some of their language about creativity, as the “core of man” or as “burst[ing] forth as a surge of flood water when the dam has been removed,” resembles early twentieth-century Expressionist rhetoric describing primal urges to art within all humans, such as Kandinsky would call “indefinite stirrings of the urge to create,” or what Prinzhorn named, “a kind of intrinsic process; the preconditions for its development are present in every person.”

Elias Katz’s 1944 thesis, published one year later as a book, *Children’s Preferences for Traditional and Modern Painting*, offers clues to his philosophy. His interest in this study, the conclusions of which draw implications about a natural human pull toward abstraction that becomes muddied by culture with age, suggest Katz’s sympathy with Expressionist ideas about creativity and even *Art Brut*. Katz’s book provided results from a quantitative study he performed, asking several thousand elementary school children to select between “traditional” painting (represented by one of Raphael’s Madonnas, for example) and “modern” painting (a

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575 Ibid.
576 Ibid., 3
577 Ibid., 5
580 Katz *Children’s Preferences*. In his review of Katz’s book for *The Elementary School Journal* 45:9 (May 1945): 534-5, Jessie Todd summarized Katz’s results: “From a test administered to approximately twenty-five hundred boys and girls in Grades II through VI, the author found that the majority of children like traditional paintings better than modern as they proceed from Grade II to Grade VI and that children of parents of higher socioeconomic status like traditional paintings better than modern, while children in underprivileged districts prefer modern to traditional paintings.” One critic of the study reminded readers of Katz’s conceit: that slide reproductions could stand in for actual paintings. For that brief but strident criticism, see the review by James W. Grimes in *Educational Research Bulletin* 25:5 (May 8, 1946): 134.
Picasso mother and child painting, for instance). Although Katz was not surprised to find that most children (two-thirds on average, across age and socio-economic ranges) preferred “traditional” painting, he found that children were statistically more open to “modern” painting than adults. His results seemed to prove that children became acculturated—or worse, indoctrinated—to prefer realism as they move toward middle school. Further, the study found that children in underprivileged schools, perhaps with less access to high Western culture in the form of “traditional” paintings, preferred Katz’s examples of “modern” art. One contemporary reviewer was not surprised by this result, imparting his own racist assumptions, in 1945: “[Art] supervisors obtain their greatest satisfaction from the artwork of children from poorer districts—children of talented foreigners and of Negroes who are not afraid to express their emotions in art.” Elias Katz did not overtly subscribe to that kind of primitivism, preferring to look to patterns of socialization and upbringing, such as parents’ attitudes toward paintings, home décor, and attendance at art museums, as explanatory factors. The Katzs, in general, more often tempered their own talk, and particularly that regarding art centers for the disabled, toward a politically cognizant and realizable philosophy, only tinted with the transcendent. On the whole, evidence of long-term experience and professionalism pervaded their writing. The sincerity of the Katz’s philosophy, however, was not without a note of paternalism. Some contemporary disabled artists have pointed out the tendency of founders of arts and disability centers to come from the non-disabled population, and with ideas for what is best for those who are disabled.

581 Katz Children’s Preferences, 48-49.
582 There were some issues with Katz’s method: pairs of paintings were matched for similar subject matter, meaning no non-objective paintings were shown, and images were reproduced to a uniform size, even in cases where scale factored as a major point of formal interest in a painting. One critic of the study reminded readers of Katz’s conceit: that slide reproductions could stand in for actual paintings. For that brief but strident criticism, see the review by James W. Grimes in Educational Research Bulletin 25:5 (May 8, 1946): 134. Bjarne Sode Funch also explains, in The Psychology of Art Appreciation (University of Copenhagen and Museum Tusculanum Press, 1997) that Katz’s method proposed “preference” to children on flimsy, binary grounds.
583 Todd Review, 534.
Condescending platforms may offend some, such as Walker, who writes about the “disability fad” taking place in the decades after the Rehabilitation Act.\footnote{Walker Moving Over the Edge, 46-53.}

A 2011 exhibition, “Create,” at the UC Berkeley Art Museum, brought together work by artists from the three Katz centers. In his Introduction to that catalog, curator Lawrence Rinder assessed the Katz’s methodology that encouraged artists to “create new works specifically for exhibition and sale, make frequent visits to local galleries and museums, and have regular access to artist mentors who assist them in developing new approaches and techniques,” as directly opposed to what Roger Cardinal had in mind with his 1972 conception of the deeply isolated “Outsider.”\footnote{Lawrence Ritter, Create, ex.cat. (University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, 2011), 9. Ritter also notes that work coming out of Creativity Explored, the Katz’s center in San Francisco, influenced the “Mission Style,” in some small part. The “Create” exhibition (May 11, 2011-September 25, 2011) brought together works made by artists attending one of the three Katz-founded centers in the Bay area.} Cardinal’s version of the Outsider, mirroring Dubuffet’s, was both broader and more difficult to describe, encompassing individuals not necessarily, expressly disabled yet existing on the margins of culture. Most individuals working in the Katz’s centers are developmentally disabled, and many have attendant physical handicaps or sense impairments. They self-select as participants at the centers rather than being discovered from obscurity.

Rinder’s “Create” exhibition, however, was criticized by the local Berkeley disability community as “mono-vocal” because no disabled artists or scholars participated in its planning and execution, and none of the featured artists publicly participated in the surrounding programming. Petra Kuppers asked in “Nothing About Us Without Us: Mounting A Disability Arts Exhibit in Berkeley, California:”

> What would it mean for an art institution to honor non-verbal communication, or present dense and uncertain verbal fields as part of the discourse about art, not just as part of the art? It might mean this: we wouldn't just have non-disabled people speaking about and
pondering the meaning of disabled artists' work, but an expanded field of communication.\textsuperscript{586}

Kuppers’ critique echoes concerns raised by Jean Fisher, twenty years earlier, over the “colonized” representation of Native American art in U.S. exhibitions. Fisher explained the “epistemological crisis” precipitated by disruptions of Native authorial voices into arenas of art.\textsuperscript{587}

In the 1980s and 1990s, the predominant model—and the one that the Katzs subscribed to throughout—was the sociopolitical model of disability.\textsuperscript{588} Coined by disabled scholar Mike Oliver, elaborated by Blandy, among others, and more recently summarized by disability scholar Jennifer Eisenhauer, the model reverses the onus of disability onto society: “Rather than viewing disability as an individual limitation, a sociopolitical orientation to disability engages disability and the very concept of limitation as social constructions by emphasizing how such discourses serve to oppress those with disabilities.”\textsuperscript{589} Thus, it is environment, policy and infrastructure that prohibit the disabled from fully participating in society, not their bodies. This orientation acknowledges the prejudices of “ableism,” the cultural privilege awarded the able-bodied.\textsuperscript{590}

Despite their investment in this sociopolitical orientation to disability that should ideally promote


\textsuperscript{588} This was preceded by a “functional-limitations” model, which defined disability by a persons individual set of perceived limitations.


\textsuperscript{590} On ableism, see Fiona Kumari Campbell, *Countours of Ableism: the Production of Disability and Able-ness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
integration in cultural space formerly annexed by the abled, all of the Katz’s workshops remain segregated spaces, used exclusively by disabled students. This was not ideal, even at founding, and the couple acknowledged that, “Since the great majority of these persons are still not admitted to existing facilities, because of the many negative attitudes toward them, and the cost of modifications necessary to accommodate them, it becomes imperative to establish a separate art center.”

Twenty-first century models of disability move beyond the sociopolitical mode to an “affirmative model” that “challenges tragedy-based discourses.” The affirmative orientation is “held by disabled people about disabled people,” and this orientation comes in to focus through some CGC exhibitions, for example, that are not only curated by CGC artists, but engage with the concepts of identity and disability. For example, from May until June 2015, the gallery show “In Habit” exposed works that turned on a theme of repetition or habit-- those comforting, sometimes vexing, compulsive rituals that many individuals with mental illness and developmental disabilities live with daily, often driving artistic production. “Reclaiming: A New Asylum” (January 23-February 27, 2014) featured works by CGC artists “for whom a history of institutionalization informs private visions and an intent to communicate.” A recent exhibition series titled “Point of View” affords CGC artists opportunities to curate and install exhibitions in dialogue with curators, and to create larger works or installation art. Exhibitions like these impart the acknowledgment of reflexivity among CGC artists, similar to that which Coco Fusco craved for “non-Western” people.

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593 Ibid.
At Creativity Explored, NIAD and the CGC, “students,” as they were called in the Katz’s literature, now called “artists” by staff and peers, share supplies and communal workspace provided at no cost to them. They also keep personal storage space and may informally claim workstations. Individuals of widely varying levels of mental and physical ability share facilities, resources and instructors and foster a sense of community. The centers offer materials and programs for working in diverse media, from acrylic finger painting to sophisticated printmaking and woodworking, although the focus remains on visual rather than performing arts. Students direct their own activities and electively participate in classes taught by visiting artists or staff artists who are professionals themselves. Although the large majority of those teachers are not disabled, some precocious students may be trained to teach as well. The Katz’s manual indicates that some talented students might enter into pre-vocational and vocational training to become professional artists, although current CGC Director Tom diMaria stressed in a recent lecture that vocational training was not the goal of CGC. Most importantly, art therapy is not now, nor has it ever been a part of programming at the centers.

An aspect of community outreach is essential to the mission of each center, in bringing artists into concert with art outside the center and with members of the larger local community through art. Since 2001, all three centers have included on-site gallery space. Each center

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596 DeMaria’s lecture was delivered at the USSEA Annual Conference, “An Inclusive World: Bridging Communities,” held at the Queens Museum, 17 July 2015. This may signal a difference in the centers, operated independently, as Creativity Explored’s mission statement clearly reads: “A key focus of Creativity Explored's services is to support those individuals with developmental disabilities who wish to become self-employed artists in creating and operating fully viable and profitable businesses.” See “Mission Statement: Our Purpose,” website for Creativity Explored, [https://www.creativityexplored.org/about](https://www.creativityexplored.org/about), accessed 29 April 2015.

597 According to its 2014 annual report, artists from Creativity Explored that year created puppets for the San Francisco Girls Chorus performance of *Noye’s Fludde* and joined with Sunnyside Elementary for a year-long “art cart” program in which Creativity Explored artists and their artwork “provided the content, examples, and inspiration for nine different art education exercises” for school children. See “Creating Opportunities,” *Creativity*
operates robust merchandising and art licensing programs as well as online web stores, but CGC has garnered the most commercial success. So, for example, one can purchase original artworks, postcards, apparel and books featuring work by artists from CGC—and artists are duly compensated. If original artworks are sold through the gallery, or at fairs such as the OAF, artists receive standard gallery commission of fifty percent. Some artists receive disability assistance and CGC works with those individuals and their families to assure that sporadic, sometimes substantial, gallery income need not interrupt benefits. And on “payday” all artists receive a paycheck for their work in the gallery, regardless of whether the work has sold, with those making larger and more frequent sales receiving appropriate commissions. The exhibition style in the Creative Growth Center gallery, which is directly adjacent to its massive workshop space, is fresh and contemporary. Thoughtful, sometimes probing, thematic exhibitions rotate through the space on a bi-monthly basis, and the work is installed to professional standards. Curators finds imaginative use for the multi-level space, sometimes with the assistance of workshop artists [Figure 86]. CGC artists are frequently shown in mainstream venues. It becomes unremarkable to “include” work by contemporary Outsider artists in gallery shows, if not major institutional exhibitions. In the case of CGC artists, particularly those whose work has gained international attention and a sizeable market, the “Outsider” label is unnecessary.

The Contemporary Outsider Art Fair

In 2013 the Outsider Art Fair was held for the first time in the month of May, intentionally rescheduled to occur more closely with other of the New York art fairs featuring

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598 This is the impression I get from conversations over the past five years with curator, Catherine Nguyen and manager of the Paris CGC gallery, Gaela Fernandez.

contemporary art, such as the Armory show and Frieze. That shift corresponded with the first change in ownership during the OAF’s twenty-three year history. With its reemergence in 2013, under the new ownership of Wide Open Arts, the OAF offered itself as a hip, relevant art fair. Through a new format and fresh marketing, and now completely vetted, the OAF was positioned in line with contemporary art shows, and importantly out of step with design, antiques, and Folk art fairs with which it had formerly been associated. The fair moved that year into a Chelsea space on Twenty-Second Street formerly occupied by the Dia Foundation [Figure 87]. Although it appeared that Edlin had authorized the change in venue to bolster the fair’s new image, in fact, he had purchased the lease for that space for the 2013 OAF as part of his deal with Smith. 599

After visiting the 2013 fair, Roberta Smith rejoiced, “For the first time in its 20-year history, it occupies a building retrofitted for art: the industrial, concrete space of the former Dia Art Foundation. This places it in the western reaches of Chelsea, once again confronting the world of contemporary insider art with irrefutable proof that the most lasting work comes from unstoppable emotional necessity, an especially useful lesson for the moment,” 600 the last portion of her statement still towing the line of Outsider art’s messianic sincerity [Figure 88].

What Edlin did do, if he did not select the change of venue, was to finally vet the works sold at the show. The quality of vendors was visibly lifted. Ricco/Maresca and Carl Hammer returned as merchants, and, with Edlin’s wife, Rousseau’s, recent appointment as Curator of Self-Taught Art and Art Brut at the American Folk Art Museum, the OAF’s relationship with that institution was righted. All but the most qualified of non-profit centers were excused from

599 Smith was unsatisfied with the location, but had been forced to seek a new site for the 2013 OAF before his sale to Edlin because the Vornado building at Midtown would no longer host fairs and trade shows on the eleventh floor. Edlin, according to Smith, was pleased with the Chelsea location. His gallery is blocks away on Ninth Avenue, and as a gallerist, the Dia building appealed to him on as aesthetic level, despite an issue of the show space being divided among four floors accessed by a dizzying narrow stairwell. Smith Personal Communication.

the fair, leaving CGC, Fountain, HAI and Land as strong representatives among forty total vendors. Wide Open Arts staged the first OAF Paris that year in October for European vendors with a few New York galleries participating, among them Cavin-Morris and Fleischer-Ollman.\textsuperscript{601} Two booths were reserved for guest-curated exhibitions, and Rousseau, as Program Director, arranged for Massimiliano Gioni, Curator of the New Museum and of that year’s 2013 Venice Biennale to speak at the fair.\textsuperscript{602} The Outsider Art Fair continues to exert a presence among the spring art fairs in New York each year. More and more of the participating galleries now show Outsider art, outside of the fair’s context, within exhibition programs including mainstream contemporary art. If this is the result of market pressures, then it is a good thing.

\textsuperscript{601} Ricco/Maresca and Carl Hammer will exhibit in the October 2015 OAF, among other vendors from diverse cities including Turin, Budapest, Moscow and Tokyo. See the annual exhibitor Press Release available on the new OAF website, \url{http://www.outsiderartfair.com/wide_open_arts}, accessed 29 July 2015.

\textsuperscript{602} Those were solo exhibitions of the Swiss photographer Mario Del Curto and the North Carolina-based artist, Renaldo Kuhler.
Conclusions: The End of Outsider Art

In the contemporary moment, Outsider art finds a new situation within art venues that remove its cordon in order that Outsider works might be leveled with mainstream work. This does not mean that these exhibitions are without their problems. For example, Rosemarie Trockel’s absorbing 2012 New Museum retrospective, *Cosmos*, curated by Lynne Cooke, seemed to annex Outsiders Morton Bartlett, Judith Scott, and James Castle, plus seven others, to her oeuvre, in exhibiting them alongside her work without comment. The *New York Times* review of the show described her as a pseudo-Outsider due to her agoraphobia, despite a long career as a professional artist. Cooke also, it should be noted, exhibited scientific objects and the paintings of an orangutan along with volumes of Trockel’s own work and these Outsider objects, and all with the explanation that Trockel “liked them.” It was a fantastic show to behold, as a true *Wunderkammer*, but yet again framed—*en vitrine* in a dark room—Outsider art as the fever dream of an accomplished insider artist, and with troubling piracy. Robert Gober, that year, curated Forest Bess’ work at the 2012 Whitney Biennial in lieu of presenting his own. Bess’ work, which, in part, referenced in multi-media his own auto-genital mutilation and aspirations to becoming a hermaphrodite, stood in as a kind of readymade in Gober’s larger oeuvre exploring themes of queerness and embodiment – less troubling as a conceptual gesture than perplexing.

I would argue that, among these recent, mainstream exhibitions featuring Outsider art, the 2013 Venice Biennale was the most successful. The centerpiece selected by the biennale’s curator, Maximiliano Gioni, was Marino Auriti’s “Encyclopedic Palace,” borrowed from the

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603 This was pointed out to me, and in these terms, by Anna Chave at the time. Personal communication, 24 October 2012. See Randy Kennedy, “An Artist’s Solo Show Contains Multitudes,” *New York Times*, 23 October, 2012.
permanent collection of the American Folk Art Museum [Figure 89]. The inclusion of Auriti’s work brought American Outsider art the most attention to date on a world stage. Auriti’s Palace, built in his garage as a scale model of his patented design for an unrealized museum to house the history of human creation, was shown during his lifetime, but remained largely obscure until after his death. The questions that the object provokes, teetering as it does at the intersection of private vision and universal aspiration, became an organizing principle for Gioni’s exhibition that blurred, if not erased, lines between insider and outsider. Something of Auriti’s dashed dreams for his project also resonated with Gioni’s interest, throughout the exhibition, in a transgressive erotics of obsession (see, for instance, his inclusion of Outsider Morton Bartlett) and in melancholy, which is driven by nostalgia for a lost innocence or a richer world or a purer vision. Similarly featured in Venice that summer, and similarly untutored, Carl Jung’s illustrations for Liber Novus were a prolonged visual attempt by the psychologist to transmute inner visions into collective archetypes. The book, bound in red leather and secreted away for nearly a century, was recently published amid controversy, and without Jung’s consent. Gioni’s exhibition about “reconciling the self with the universe,” turned on a similar dialectic to the *Black Folk Art in America* show, in exhibiting private efforts with universal resonance, but set aside forced aesthetic comparisons and essentialism, for the better.

The Biennale’s foci as written by Gioni in its two-volume catalogue were themes—“integrity,” “paranoia,” “tenacity,” “affinity”—for which Outsider art has been brought to testify before, but at the Biennale, Outsider art was leveled as exemplary among a diverse order of things. Gioni did not attempt a purification of the category as others had, but rather he muddled the category of Outsider art through this exhibition. Nor did he attempt to mediate or translate it as others have. Secrets were kept. As in Trockel’s 2011 New Museum retrospective, Gioni’s
Venice exhibition loosely took the form of a *Wunderkammer*. That format reinstates a mode of collecting together that draws unresolvable networks among objects—networks of clues, allusions and excess information—that enchant the viewer and the objects. Sixteenth-century *Wunderkammer* relied on resemblances, themselves symptoms of God’s plan, unknowable to humanity. Although today enchantment need not involve a supreme being, the Biennale did imply the hope of finality or a transcendent ground. Gioni restated, through fragments, the conundrum of immanence and transcendence in the contemporary world. If Outsider objects are destined to remain in a kind of “semantic atrophy,” as souvenirs and talismans, *hapax legomena*, untranslatable signs, always at second hand—even while Outsider artists are themselves disenchanted by progressive initiatives—perhaps they have found their milieu in this mode of exhibition.

Understanding the position of curators and scholars who inherit the problems and collections of Outsider and Folk art in a contemporary world, I sympathize with attempts to ethically and intelligently exhibit it. However, as I have argued here, Outsider art as a category has been primarily shaped and understood through the translations of insiders. Time and again, in the case studies given here, Outsider art has been framed by narratives of discovery and made into an ideological vehicle for insider aims, whether those be benevolent or careerist or otherwise. Because inflated language has been an endemic problem in the chronicling of Outsider art, I resorted to exhibitions as tangible assertions of the Outsider field through the twentieth century until the present. An analysis of those exhibitions has not yielded easy conclusions, and some exhibitions which I had been quick to criticize revealed themselves as complex reiterations of the Outsider problem itself. For example, the installation created by Thévoz for Dubuffet’s collection in Lausanne forces the visitor to push past uneasy
psychological and phenomenological sensations in a strange setting to discover *Art Brut*. It thus recreates the trope of braved contact with marginal characters for the viewer. Beyond that, I argued that it betrays the anxiety that *Art Brut* might lose its power when institutionalized, in alluding to the presence of the objects without allowing them full visibility. Directors and curators there are aware, no doubt, of issues with the odd installation, but maintain the space, as I have shown, as a “museum of itself.” The recent addition of a gallery space there dedicated to the history of the collection and the museum underline that self-awareness. The installation at Lausanne is not likely to change, and thus will remain as an encapsulation of the idea of *Art Brut*. Latitude in the original stipulations that the artwork must not travel, such as I pointed to in the first chapter here, has allowed *Art Brut* greater visibility as it now travels to exhibitions around the world on loan. Two recent 2017 monographic exhibitions at the American Folk Art museum, *Carlo Zinelli* and *Eugen Gabrischevsky*, featured the work, for instance.

At the American Folk Art Museum, the dream of a sizeable, custom-designed structure for the permanent exhibition of the museum’s collection was realized in 2001, with the completion of a building on fifty-third street, on the same lot as the museum’s originally rented quarters, plus a few more. Much had changed for the museum by 2001, but much remained the same, such as conservative leanings and a bifurcated collection: for instance, the Philip Morris Company underwrote the founding 2001 Darger exhibition in the new space, as well as the purchase of the Ralph Esmerian collection of traditional Folk art that year. The building design by William Tod, Billie Tsien and Associates, which brought together strands of Brutalist and post-modernist architecture, was both beloved and heavily criticized. Jerry Saltz prophesied: “Books and dissertations will be written, panels will be convened, ridicule will be heaped, as our descendants look back at these atrocious buildings and wonder how so much went so wrong. The
American Folk Art Museum will probably be the first to be razed, and not the last.” Bleak and vertiginous, overall, the building’s industrial interiors were warmed with beautifully stained wood inset into concrete floors at the center of each gallery [Figure 90]. Although some of the aforementioned, progressive and contextualizing exhibitions of contemporary Folk art were held in this space (including the illustrated Von Bruenchenheim show and the several Darger exhibitions), the Tsien building, on the whole, presented a sumptuous textural backdrop for the formal display of Folk and Outsider art along the lines of the museum’s founding exhibition aesthetic—now tempered by a multifold increase of accompanying text and programming. Two highly popular exhibitions (2007 and 2009) of the work of the Mexican-American, asyled artist, Martín Ramírez, serve as examples. While making strides in research into his biography and influences that included Mexican colonial architecture, the shows were hung to give each breathing, linear landscape its due attention. Folk objects, likewise, looked impressive in the space. For one exhibition of colonial and nineteenth-century decorated furniture of 2006, titled, “Surface Attraction,” curator Hollander mounted large pieces of wooden, decorated furniture directly onto the wall to assert their objecthood and to focus viewers’ attention on superficial effects.

Despite a majority of breakout exhibitions focusing acutely on individual Folk genres (quilts or carousel horses, etc.) and alternatively, individual contemporary Folk artists, the permanent collection and a long-term exhibition, “Folk Art Revealed” (2004-2009) continued to force into conversation objects of these various orders within the institution’s framework. The latter exhibition anticipated Massimiliano Gioni’s installation at the entrance of the Arsenal section of the 2012 Venice Biennale discussed above, in setting Marino Auriti’s inventive Encyclopedic Palace at its center, with objects ranging from Shaker furniture to a bicycle repair
shop trade sign to obsessive Outsider drawings displayed around it in a constellation of undifferentiated objecthood—one thing after another after another. But whereas Gioni’s exhibition orbited around themes of enchantment and clandestine knowledge, the American Folk Art Museum’s collection brought together a self-taught hodgepodge of objects vaguely linked through their being made by non-professional artists. The long-term exhibition’s title (“Folk Art Revealed”), in emphasizing the museum’s role in “revealing” these objects, is another example of the institution’s emphasis on its own arbitration in differentiating mere items of novelty from transcendent artistic masterpieces.

The Williams-Tsien building, although dramatic on Fifty-Third Street, would not ultimately drive sufficient interest to AFAM to cover its thirty-one million dollar design and construction costs [Figure 91]. The façade of the building, a textured, opaque sheath of irregular, rectangular tombasil panels, was less than hospitable, and both entry doors were hidden behind it. Although striking, the façade allowed little insight into what one might behold inside, and, at a mere forty feet across and five stories tall, the building registered as a monolith. As the museum defaulted on its bonds in late 2011, with bankruptcy looming, Roberta Smith pleaded in the New York Times: “Please. Someone, everyone, do something to save the American Folk Art Museum from dissolution and dispersal. Or at least slow down the process…” Inevitably, the museum did succumb to bankruptcy. It would retain its charter with the collection temporarily dispersed throughout host institutions across the country, and an exhibition program to continue at Lincoln Center. AFAM has moved on in recent years to create a state-of-the-art archive and office space in Queens, and has gained critical praise for recent exhibitions at the Lincoln Center gallery that broaden the purview of Folk and Outsider art. The Collections and Education Center in Queens, due to open to the public in September 2017 will be an interesting space for the
exhibition and study of Folk and other contemporary self-taught objects. A study center accessed through a locked door, the gallery will function much like Dubuffet’s *Foyer* did for the close appraisal of the work, but ideally with a broader base of visitors. Although the American Folk Art Museum’s founding and historical exhibition style tended to decontextualize Folk and Outsider objects in favor of Modernist, aesthetic presentations, in the legacy of Cahill and Halpert, et al, their research and programming allows for greater and greater context for this artwork, and exhibitions follow suit. With Chapter Two, I hoped to prove Outsider art, the category, was a direct descendent of Folk art in its makeup, exhibition and treatments.

With Chapter Three, I argued that the restoration and continued maintenance of Outsider art environments may be an untenable project. Efforts to transform environments like Finster’s and Hill’s into visitor’s centers or to use them for economic regeneration, run counter to the spirit of the places which were built outside of traditional economies of usefulness. Those efforts require sanitary measures that make the spaces safe and palatable for public consumption. Again, my research has revealed the complex and highly sincere perspectives of conservators who take up these herculean efforts, as well as their honorable points of view which hold that Outsider art environments are worthy of capital and human investments in upkeep. My conclusion here is to agree to the worthiness of these places, but to add that preservation may not necessarily be the best course to honor their makers. Although I want to argue for a socially just equation of people’s lives and artist’s efforts across socio-economic categories, and for investments in bringing awareness to groups with little visibility, I am wary of the usefulness of the exposure of the private lives and spaces of Outsiders. At the least, aspects of disarray including the unkempt and irregular, should be permitted to adhere as aspects of these places if they were features of their design.
The contemporary market for Outsider art remains strong, if no longer at its peak. The leveling of Outsider art into the category of contemporary art feels to be more and more of an inevitable conclusion. It will require insiders to relinquish the frame of their discovery and translation of objects, and much more contextualizing information and self-description about artworks produced by marginalized artists. The term “Outsider” remains useful to term a set of objects produced and collected in the twentieth century – and a set of objects that will continue to be exhibited as such in extant collections. Going forward, however, insiders must exhibit a level of restraint and awareness when exhibiting and collecting the work of those groups who might be easily co-opted into a contemporary Outsider cohort. Exhibitions like Gioni’s, which do not attempt, through some curatorial authority, to resolve the unknown or troubling or messy aspects of these artworks made outside the mainstream – beyond what the artists themselves have offered-- supply a compelling model that deserves further exploration in practice.
Figure 1. Exterior façade of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne. Photograph by the author, March 2015.
Figure 2. Adolf Wölfli, illustrations from *From the Cradle to the Grave*, 1911. Wölfli was the famed patient of Dr. Walter Morgenthaler, examined in his book on the art of the mentally ill (1921). Dubuffet collected Wölfli first and he remains the foremost *Art Brut* artist.
Figure 3. Marie standing in front of asylum artwork collected by Cesare Lombroso in Turin. Illustration from Alison Morehead’s *Musée de la folie*, 105.
Figures 4 and 5. Dubuffet’s first Foyer downstairs at Drouin gallery. Archives of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne.
Figure 6. Rear exterior façade of Editions Gallimard building, the location of the second *Foyer*. Contemporary photograph.
Figure 9. The building that housed the collection during the 1960s, Rue de Sèvres, Paris. Archives of the Fondation Dubuffet, Paris.
Figure 10. The collection installed at the Rue de Sèvres, n.d. (probably 1970s). Archives of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne.
Figure 13. Plan for renovations to the Chateau de Beaulieu, 1975. Elevation of barn with permanent installation at right. *24 heures*, édition Lausanne et environs, Lausanne, 6 April 1975. Archives of the Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne.
Figure 14. Interior of the contemporary installation of the Collection de l’Art Brut, which has changed little since its original installation in 1976. Photograph by the author, March 2015.
Figure 15. The barn at the Chateau de Beaulieu under renovations in 1975. Photograph, originally published in *Tribune de Lausanne*, 5 September 1974. Archive of the Collection de l’Art Brut.
Figure 16. Text panel describing Dubuffet’s donation of the Collection to Lausanne, hanging in the store at entry to the collection. Photograph by the author, March 2015.
Figure 17. Interior view of Collection de l’Art Brut upon entry into main gallery, first floor. Photograph by the author, March 2015.
Figure 18. Interior view of second floor of the Collection de l’Art Brut from central stairwell. Photograph by the author, March 2015.
Figure 19. Artworks from the Collection de l’Art Brut encased in black with low lighting. Interior of the Collection de l’Art Brut. Photograph by the author, March 2015.
Figure 20. Concrete sculptures by Nek Chand under a rear stairwell in very low lighting. Interior of the Collection de l’Art Brut. Photograph by the author, March 2015.
Figure 21. Interior installation of the Collection de l’Art Brut with artwork by the American artist Henry Darger at left in special double-sided cases. Photograph by the author, March 2015.
Figure 22. Allen Eaton’s “Arts and Crafts of the Homelands” exhibition, installed in the Rochester Memorial Gallery. Photograph, 1920.
Figure 27. *Andrew Jackson*, wooden figurehead, c1834, in the “American Folk Sculpture” exhibition. Photograph, 1931. Courtesy of the Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey.
Figure 28a. Installation view of “American Folk Sculpture” at the Newark Museum. Photograph, 1931. Courtesy of the Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey.
Figure 28b. “Modern German Applied Arts” exhibition at the Newark Museum. Photograph, 1912. Courtesy of the Newark Museum Archives.
Figure 29. “American Painting and Sculpture, 1862–1932” exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, 1931. Photographic Archive, the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Figure 30. Two non-sequential pages from the catalog of *American Folk Art*. Archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Figure 34. Angel Gabriel weathervane. Paint on sheet metal, c1840. Collection of the American Folk Art Museum, accessioned 1963.
Figure 35. Life magazine cover, 22 February 1963. A model poses with a wooden Folk sculpture from the Museum’s collection. Courtesy of the American Museum of Folk Art Archives.
Figure 36. Installation view of “Fabric of the State” exhibition at the Museum of American Folk Art. Photograph, 1972. Courtesy of the American Folk Art Museum Archives.
Figure 37. Installation view of “American Needlework” exhibition at the Museum of American Folk Art. Photograph, 1967. Courtesy of the American Folk Art Museum Archives.
Figure 40. Installation view of “Cutting Edge: Contemporary American Art from the Rosenak Collection” exhibition. Photograph, 1990. Courtesy of the American Folk Art Museum Archives.
Figure 41. Installation view of “American Folk Sculpture” exhibition at the Museum of American Folk Art. Photograph, 1975. Courtesy of the American Folk Art Museum Archives.
Figure 42. Installation view of “The Art of William Edmondson” at the Museum of American Folk Art. Photograph, 2000. Courtesy of the American Folk Art Museum Archives.
Figure 44. Installation image of “Eugene Von Bruenchenhein” exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum. Photograph, 2011. Courtesy of exhibition consultant, Asad Pervaiz.
Figure 45. Exterior of the grounds of Howard Finster’s Paradise Gardens in Pennville, Georgia. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 46. View of one section of Kenny Hill’s sculpture garden, Chauvin, Louisiana. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 47. Entrance to the (rollin’-chair ramp) gallery, Paradise Garden. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 48. Engraving of Winchester Cathedral, at the entrance to the gallery, Paradise Garden. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 49. North face of Cheval’s Palais Idéal at Hauterives, France. Photograph, 2012. Courtesy of the Palais Idéal de Facteur Cheval Monument Historique.
Figure 50. Installation of Naives and Visionaries, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1974. Photograph courtesy of Walker Art Center.
Figure 51. Installation of Naives and Visionaries at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1974. Photograph courtesy of Walker Art Center.
Figure 52. Handmade tinfoil ornaments hanging from a roof awning at Paradise Garden. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 53. An overgrown portion of the Paradise Garden property, before restoration. Photograph, January 2012. Courtesy of the Paradise Garden Foundation.
Figure 54. A derelict structure on the Paradise Garden property near a trash heap. Photograph, March 2013. Courtesy of the Paradise Garden Foundation.
Figure 55. An overgrown planter built by Finster on a soggy portion of land in Paradise Garden, before restoration. Photograph, 2012. Courtesy of the Paradise Garden Foundation.
Figure 56. Inmates from Hays State Prison working in the same area of the garden. Workers removed layers of silt to discover a network of paths, ponds and water features that Finster had built. Photograph, 2012. Courtesy of the Paradise Garden Foundation.
Figure 57. The area refurbished. Photograph, August, 2013. Courtesy of the Paradise Garden Foundation.
Figure 58. Painted, black wooden boards and posts installed in Paradise Garden buildings for structural support. Photograph, 2012. Courtesy of the Paradise Garden Foundation.
Figure 59. Painted, black wooden boards and posts installed in Paradise Garden buildings for structural support. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 60. Inside the tower of the World’s Folk Art Church. It has not been cleared and is unsafe for occupation. Artworks, tools and raw materials litter the space, and the walls and ceilings are decorated with objects. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 61. Workers restoring mosaicked paths at Paradise Garden. Photograph, 2012. Courtesy of the Paradise Garden Foundation.
Figure 62. The Gift Shop at Paradise Garden. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 63. The Gift Shop at Paradise Garden. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 64. Exterior view of the World’s Folk Art Church (at left) and the newly constructed Gallery (right). Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 65. Installation of Howard Finster’s work at the High Museum, Atlanta. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 66. Installation of Howard Finster’s work at the High Museum, Atlanta. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 67. A polychrome, concrete self-portrait by Kenny Hill, in the Chauvin Sculpture Garden, Louisiana. In this, one of seven self-portraits in the Garden, Hill holds a conch shell to his ear with his right hand. He holds a horseshoe with his left. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 68. Illusionistic “flying” angels at Chauvin Sculpture Park. Photograph, November 2014
Figure 69. Illusionistic “flying” angels at Chauvin Sculpture Park. Photograph, February 2015.
Figures 70 and 71. The “logo” or plan that Kenny Hill used throughout his Garden. Photographs, February 2015.
Figure 72. Self-portrait with arm broken at elbow. Hill, bare to the waist, is identified here by the belt he wears with the Garden’s logo/plan at front. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 73. One of Hill’s sculpted self-portraits, with the logo on his belt buckle, lies in the lap of an angel, pointing to another instance of the logo. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 74. Hill’s personal items in a display case and hung on the walls of the Visitor’s Center in Chauvin. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 75. The grounds for contemporary sculpture at the Chauvin Sculpture Garden, beyond the fence that marks the boundary of Hill’s Garden. Photograph, November 2014.
Figure 76. The Gallery across the road from the Chauvin Sculpture Garden, built by the Kohler Foundation. Photograph, February 2015.
Figure 77. Installation of “Parallel Visions” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1992. Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
Figure 78. Installation of “Parallel Visions” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1992. Dubuffet’s *L’Hourloupe* sculpture at left, with works by Wölflı and Aloïse on the wall at center. Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
Figure 79. Outsider Art Fair logo, as it appeared in an advertisement for the 2010 OAF. Personal archive of the author.
Figure 80. View of the Outsider Art Fair at the Puck Building, n.d. Courtesy of Sanford Smith and Associates.
Figure 81. Dealer Laurie Carmody (left) with collector Cynthia Ross at her booth for Galerie Bonheur at the 1995 Outsider Art Fair at the Puck Building. Photograph, 2015, printed in *Antiques and the Arts Weekly*, 3 March 1995.
Figure 82. Dealer Frank Miele at his booth at the 1995 Outsider Art Fair at the Puck Building. Photograph, 1995, printed in *Antiques and the Arts Weekly*, 3 March 1995.
Figure 83. Dealer Carl Hammer at his booth at the 1995 Outsider Art Fair at the Puck Building. Photograph, 1995, printed in *Antiques and the Arts Weekly*, 3 March 1995.
Figure 84. Susanne Zander (right) and Claudia Dichter, both of Galerie Susanne Zander, at their booth for the 1995 Outsider Art Fair. Photograph, 1995, printed in *Antiques and the Arts Weekly*, 3 March 1995.
Figure 85. Booth of the Outsider Folk Art Gallery at The American Antiques Show (TAAS) at the Metropolitan Pavilion. Photograph, 2011, courtesy of the Outsider Folk Art Gallery.
Figure 86. The CGC gallery during the exhibition, “Unraveled,” featuring work by Judith Scott and other CGC artists. Photograph, October 2012.
Figure 87. Stairwell of Center548, formerly the Dia Foundation Building in Chelsea, during the 2015 Outsider Art Fair. Photograph, 2015.
Figure 88. View of the Outsider Art Fair at the former Dia Building in Chelsea. Photograph, January 2015.
Figure 89. Maurino Auriti’s Encyclopedic Palace (c1950s), installed in the Arsenale at the 55th Venice Biennale. Photograph, 2013, printed in *Artforum* (September 2013)
Figure 90. Installation view of the “Martín Ramírez” exhibition installed at the American Folk Art Museum. Photograph, 2007, courtesy of the Archives of the American Folk Art Museum.
Figure 91. The former American Folk Art Museum building, designed by Billie Tsien, next to the Museum of Modern Art building on 53rd street. Photograph, published in the *New Yorker*, 10 May 2013.
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