

**VISIONS FROM OUTSIDE:
CREATING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING
INSPIRED BY EXHIBITIONS OF
OUTSIDER ART**

by

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To my husband, Bob,
whose love, support and understanding
allowed me to pursue this dream.
It would not have been possible without you.

To my Mother and Father
who, from an early age, instilled in me a love
of art as well as for museums.

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INTRODUCTION

What connects a giant tower that covers a city block and is composed of cement, rebar, broken crockery and seashells with a picture of a woman in a Mexican hat painted with mud? What is the relationship between a portrait of boxer Joe Lewis painted with house paint on leftover sheets of roofing tin and a quilt that is pieced from worn out clothing? How is an artist who interprets his automatic writing by reading it through a glass of water akin to one who realizes her faith by painting religious scenes of redemption? All of these disparate works are sheltered under the umbrella of Outsider Art. The presence of such a wide range of imagery, materials and personal vision is what gives the field its vibrancy. It also presents challenges and opportunities for museum professionals as they seek to study and interpret Outsider Art.

The term *Outsider Art* was created as a catchy title for a book published in 1972 on Art Brut by British humanities professor Roger Cardinal. French artist Jean Dubuffet, who coined the term *Art Brut* in the 1940s, was, along with fellow Surrealists, looking for an art form that came straight from the subconscious unmediated by cultural or artistic influences. Dubuffet, whose extensive art collection was primarily composed of art produced in mental institutions, placed strict parameters

on what constituted Art Brut. If he felt that an artist had too much worldly contact or had achieved even modest attention from gallery dealers, the artist was stricken from the Art Brut collection. In the United States, Outsider Art has avoided such restriction. Instead, it encompasses art by those with little knowledge of the art market who create work that is unconventional in concept and construction. Rather than being united by genre, such as landscape painting, or a similar style, like Cubism, the works share a raw energy and spontaneity.

Many Outsider artists begin to make art later in life, surprising themselves as much as their families and friends. This surge in creativity is often triggered by a life-altering event such as a personal illness or death of a loved one. Instead of traditional art materials, the creators in question use anything at hand – house paint, metal siding, wood veneer paneling, broken crockery or found objects. Their expressions are frequently narrative, portraying memories of important events in their communities or expressing religious beliefs. While these many shared characteristics are not exclusive to Outsider Art they are, to some extent, typical of it.

In addition to these many traits, there are many terms, each with its own group of proponents, that are often used interchangeably for Outsider Art. The spring 2005 issue of the British magazine *Raw Vision* lists over a hundred different possibilities on the inside back cover. Some of the more

frequently used include *self-taught*, *contemporary folk*, *visionary*, *psychotic*, *grassroots*, *maverick*, *marginal* and *vernacular*. There are those who eschew the term Outsider Art, contending that the notion of outsider versus insider carries overtones of segregation and elitism. Author Gary Alan Fine, who prefers to use *self-taught*, points out in his book *Everyday Genius*, the artists are very much a part of their communities and it is the “curators, collectors and scholars who are the outsiders.”¹

Even among major art museums and institutions, there is no consensus on terminology. The Contemporary Center at the American Folk Art Museum in New York exclusively uses the term self-taught art when discussing art created in the twentieth and twenty-first century. The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art, a private collection located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin straddles the divide by including both terms in its name. Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art in Chicago declares its allegiance via the magazine it produces entitled *Outsider* while the Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore “has something of a new age aura, focusing on the ‘visionary,’ rather than the more traditional categories of self-taught, folk, or outsider.”²

¹ Gary Alan Fine, *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 32.

² *Ibid.*, 253.

Taxonomy is a heated issue with individuals and institutions weighing in on all sides. “For starters, we don’t use the term outsider art for anything; please do not use it in conjunction with the John Michael Kohler Art Center in any way,” exhorted Leslie Umberger, Senior Curator of Exhibitions and Collections. She went on to elaborate that the Kohler is “involved in the exhibition, study and preservation of works by self-taught, vernacular and folk artist.”³

While not exactly synonymous, there is, admittedly, a certain amount of overlap among these terms and when faced with, for example, quilts from Gee’s Bend, Alabama, it is difficult to know which term best describes them. The techniques and design sensibility were passed down from their forebears. Does that lineage make it folk art? Are they still considered self-taught if they learned the craft from their mothers and grandmothers? The compositions lay far outside of the patterns used in traditional quilting. Does that make it Outsider Art? For the purpose of this study, Outsider Art, still the most recognizable and widely used term, is used. In this context, the “outsider” is not meant pejoratively. Instead, it refers to the presence of the artist outside of the art mainstream rather than culturally isolated.

In today’s art world, as the boundaries of art and acceptable

³ Leslie Umberger, Senior Curator of Exhibitions and Collections, John Michael Kohler

techniques and materials continue to expand, the line between outside and inside is increasingly blurred. Some Outsiders, notably Howard Finster (1915 – 2001), have bridged the two worlds. In 1979, after years working as an evangelical preacher, Finster claims that a drop of paint on his finger transmuted into a face which relayed a message from God. By all accounts a great raconteur, Finster recalls that he was commanded to “paint sacred art.”⁴ Heeding this vision, he began immediately to paint images inspired by the Bible. “Just the very thing I don’t believe I can do, that’s what God wanted me to try. So I started off right there to makin’ art and doing paintings.”⁵ He went on to make thousands of artworks, and some of the images were featured on album covers for R.E.M. and the Talking Heads, bringing his art international attention. His work was included in “Paradise Lost/Paradise Regained: American Visions of the New Decade” exhibited in the American Pavilion at the 1984 Venice Biennale, a very insider place for an Outsider artist.

Many younger artists are emulating the work of Outsider artists and even claiming their place as outsiders in order to capitalize on the market. In the past, artists ranging from the Surrealists to the Chicago Imagists have championed this art. The influences are apparent in art by

Arts Center, interview with the author, e-mail, Oakland, CA, 16 May 2005.

⁴ Howard Finster (as told to Tom Patterson), *Howard Finster, Stranger from Another Word – Man of Visions Now on this Earth* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 123.

many of these mainstream artists including Dubuffet himself. Alex Grey, for example, whose sophisticated artwork examines the relationship between mind and body, is frequently exhibited as an Outsider or visionary artist. He has a semi-permanent installation “The Chapel of Sacred Mirrors” in the Tribeca neighborhood of Manhattan where visitors can pay five dollars to see his eerie paintings of transparent-skinned figures. In spring 2005, during the Brooklyn Museum’s exhibition of paintings by the late Jean-Michel Basquiat, a talented New York artist with roots in graffiti art, the special Basquiat bookstore included two books on Outsider Art, connoting a connection between the artist and Outsider Art.

While exhibitions of Outsider Art offer many possibilities for public programming, the subject matter can raise difficult interpretive issues. Biblical references and prophecies, like those found in Finster’s work, are popular among Outsider artists. In today’s secular society, evangelical Christianity is a subject that makes many uncomfortable presenting educators with difficult decisions as to how best interpret the art. Educators must also decide whether to face some subjects head-on or avoid sensitive material. Examples of this include Henry Darger’s images of naked young girls with penises being tortured and enslaved to Eugene

⁵ Ibid., 125.

von Bruenchenhein's sexually charged photographs of his wife that cast her as a love goddess.

Museum educators face many challenges when developing educational programming for Outsider Art. To begin with, they have to decide something as basic as what to call it, realizing that many will dispute their choice. They need to define the boundaries of which artists and what work should be designated as Outsider Art. Museum professionals, as Cardinal advises, have a responsibility to interpret the art in a sensitive and non-sensational manner. "For us in turn to enter that milieu means that we must adopt a certain caution, so as not to violate it. If Outsider Art comes into being through an intense investment of the private self, it follows that, as we gain access to it, we have the responsibility not to treat it flippantly or patronizingly."⁶ The question arises, as the Outsider comes into museums, whether educators can create programming that sensitizes the viewer to its outsidership and maintains the traits that set it apart from art establishment insiders.

⁶ Roger Cardinal, "Toward an Outsider Aesthetic," in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, ed. Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 37.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this master's project is to identify ways that art museums are seeking to enhance the visitors' experience of Outsider Art through educational programming related to their exhibitions or collections of Outsider Art. After providing an historical context for Outsider Art and looking at the importance of education to the role of museums, this project will identify approaches that educators at art museums around the United States have taken in their programming. This project closely examines programs related to Outsider Art at three art museums. I will recommend how educators can develop educational programs that support the visions of Outsider artists rather than mainstreaming their art. I will present these conclusions and recommendations at the 2007 American Association of Museums conference in Chicago during a panel discussion for educators and curators at art museums. The topic will be "Creating Educational Programming Inspired by Exhibitions of Outsider Art."

Research Goals and Objectives

Goals

- To develop an initial understanding of the multiple terms used for Outsider Art and their consequence for interpretation.

- To identify and describe the expanding importance of educational programming and activities to the role of art museums.
- To examine in depth three museums' programs related to their Outsider Art collections or exhibitions.
- To recommend strategies and approaches art museum educators can use to create educational programs for exhibitions of Outsider Art that remain true to the spirit of the art.

Objectives

- To identify the challenges and opportunities that arise when Outsider Art is transported to the educational sphere of the art museum.
- To make recommendations about how educators can address these issues through educational programming and activities.
- To research and discuss the breadth of activities and programming for current or past museum exhibitions of Outsider Art.
- To develop a panel presentation for the 2007 American Association of Museums conference to be held in Chicago. Panelist will be from the three institutions that I studied in depth.

Methodology

The methodology selected for this master's project was comprised of four components: 1.) a review of relevant literature on Outsider Art as well as educational theory and practice; 2.) research on twenty-five art museums in the United States to identify Outsider Art exhibitions and programs, 3.) case studies of three museums offering public programming and activities for Outsider Art; and 4.) interviews with eleven members

of the curatorial and education staff at art museums and four experts on Outsider Art.

Literature Review

The literature review had two purposes: to provide background information on the development of Outsider Art and museums that exhibit it, and to examine the expanding role of education within museums. The literature review included books, exhibition catalogs, museum journals, museum web sites, museum catalogs and flyers, periodicals, and newspaper articles. It also provided information about the types of educational programming offered by art museums in conjunction with exhibitions of Outsider Art.

Initial Research and Case Studies

Initial e-mail inquiries to determine which exhibitions of Outsider Art would be on display in 2005 were sent in February of 2005 to nineteen art museums and art centers. (Shown in Appendix A.) Additional museums turned up during this research bringing the total contacted to twenty-five. I received programming information from twenty-two museums. (Listed in Appendix B.) From these responses, I identified eight types of programs offered in conjunction with Outsider Art exhibitions.

(Listed in Appendix D.) Based on my initial research, I was able to identify three institutions that took a more innovative approach to Outsider Art programming. I chose to analyze these programs and institutions in more detail. These three are the American Museum of Folk Art in New York, The American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, and the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art in partnership with the Auburn University Women's Studies Department in Auburn, Alabama.

Established in 1961 in New York City, The American Museum of Folk Art, with the addition of the Contemporary Center, has refocused its mission to include art by twentieth and twenty-first century self-taught artists from around the world. The museum is known for its scholarship and high level of professionalism. The American Visionary Art Museum, located in Baltimore, Maryland, which exclusively exhibits the work of Outsider artists, is only ten years old. The museum hosts one mega-exhibit annually around a central theme. The third museum, the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art is located on the campus of Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama. The primary source of educational programming information came from museum materials such as brochures and flyers supplied by each museum. Each case study includes a brief description of the museum including mission followed by an assessment of its educational programming. The relationship between the case studies

is analyzed in the Findings and Conclusions section.

Interviews

I conducted interviews with eleven educators and curators in person, by telephone and email. I inquired about the frequency of Outsider Art exhibitions; what challenges educators felt were inherent in developing programming for Outsider Art; and if visitor research was conducted. These interview questions are listed in Appendix C.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided my research. They were:

1. What challenges and opportunities should be addressed when developing educational programming for exhibitions of Outsider Art in art museums?
2. Have museums conducted visitor studies for exhibitions of Outsider Art and the accompanying programming ?
3. How can educators address the difference between the artist's experience creating the art and the audience's experience viewing the art in a museum?
4. What factors should be considered to sustain the Outsider quality of the art rather than mainstreaming it?

Limitations

I limited the scope of this master's project to art museums in the

United States that exhibit and offer educational programming about Outsider Art. Unfortunately, two museums were closed for renovation during the time frame of this project. These were the Smithsonian National Museum of American Art, which holds the largest collection of Outsider Art in the United States and The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center in Williamsburg, Virginia.

There are a few art centers that have been pioneers in the Outsider Art field notably Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art. While information from these organizations is included in this paper, my case studies focused on art museums rather than community centers. This enabled me to compare organizations with similar institutional commitments to educational programming as defined in the American Association of Museum's publication, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*. By limiting this project to three case studies, I was able to assess and analyze them in depth.

As the focus of this study coalesced it became evident that art museums are not conducting visitor research in relationship to exhibitions and programming for Outsider Art. This would have been valuable in determining which educational offerings are most effective. Since this was not a study on visitor research, it was out of the scope of this project to conduct such research

GLOSSARY

This glossary is provided to clarify the different terms that are used within this paper in regards to Outsider Art. There is no general consensus on terminology for Outsider Art. Everyone interviewed for this paper had their own preference. The definitions cited here are by either the person who coined the term or who serves as an advocate for its use.

Art Brut is work produced by people immune to artistic culture in which there is little or no trace of mimicry (as is invariably the case with intellectuals); so that such creators owe everything – their subject-matter, their choice of materials, their modes of transcription, their rhythms and styles of drawing, and so on – to their own resources rather than to the stereotypes of artistic tradition or fashion. Here we are witness to the artistic operation in its pristine forms, something unadulterated, something reinvented from scratch at all stages by its maker, who draws solely upon this private impulses.⁷

Folk art must be defined in terms of: first, its acceptance of and dependence upon a communal aesthetic shared by a group of artists and their audience and shaped and reshaped by them over time; second, its traditional nature, with its conservative emphasis upon perfecting old forms instead of creating entirely new ones; and third, its transmission via apparently informal, yet often highly structured and systematic, means.”⁸

Outsider Art was a term coined by art critic Roger Cardinal in 1972 as an English synonym for **Art Brut** (which literally translates as "Raw Art" or "Rough Art"), a label created by French artist Jean Dubuffet to describe

⁷ Jean Dubuffet, translated by Roger Cardinal, "Toward an Outsider Aesthetic," in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, ed. Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 23.

⁸ Robert Bishop and Jacqueline M. Atkins, "Folk Art in American Life," *Viking Studios* (1995): ix, quoted in Gary Alan Fine, *Everyday Genius* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 29.

art created outside the boundaries of official culture; Dubuffet focused particularly on the art of the insane.

While Dubuffet's term is quite specific, the English term *Outsider Art* is often applied more broadly, to include certain self-taught or naive artists who were never on the extreme social margins. Typically, those labeled as Outsider Artists have little or no contact with the institutions of the mainstream art world, they often employ unique materials or fabrication techniques; much Outsider Art illustrates extreme mental states or unconventional ideas.⁹

Roger Cardinal updated his definition of Outsider Art in 1998. **Outsider Art** is an art that develops cantankerously against the grain of tradition and against the grain of a formal expectation about art...they find themselves scratching one day with a bit of nail against this soft bit of stone and suddenly they're making a mark which turns into a picture, which turns into a carving which then is set alongside other pieces and grows. And, it's that progression of the impulse, I think, that's the key.¹⁰

Self-taught Artists are those with no formal training who create in order to express an often intense and very personal vision or aesthetic, and whose work is usually unmediated by the standards, traditions, and practices of the culture of the art world, as embodied by the international art markets and established art institutions.¹¹

Vernacular means using a language or dialect native to a region or country, rather than a literary, cultured, or foreign language;...or, relating to, or characteristic of a period, place, or group. "Vernacular" denotes a language *in use* that differs from the official language of power and reflects complex intercultural relationships charged with issues of race, class, region and education.¹²

Visionary art refers to art produced by self-taught individuals, usually without any formal artistic training, whose works arise from an intensity

⁹ www.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Outsider_Art

¹⁰ Willem Volkersz, "Roger Cardinal on Outsider Art," *Raw Vision*, no. 22 (Spring 1998): 29, 25 – 29.

¹¹ http://www.getty.edu/vow/AATFullDisplay?find=self-taught&logic=AND¬e=&english=N&pre_v_page=1&subjectid=300257252

¹² Paul Arnett and William Arnett, *Souls Grow Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2000), xv.

of innate personal vision that revels foremost in the creative act itself. As such, it is not inherently created for sale or merchandising through developed or formal commercial channels. Except that they have discovered in themselves the ability to accomplish something extraordinary, visionary artist are often otherwise ordinary people from a wide variety of walks of life, including as well many who have been institutionalized, or who are elderly, disabled or from an industry not traditionally associate with the creation of art.¹³

¹³ American Visionary Art Museum flyer, AVAM 101

BACKGROUND

In order to trace the trajectory of Outsider Art in the United States, it is necessary to first examine the history of *Art Brut* in Europe. The term Outsider Art was introduced in 1972 as the title of the seminal book by British humanities professor and writer, Roger Cardinal. It was originally devised as an English equivalent of *Art Brut*, or “raw” art, coined in 1945 by the French artist Jean Dubuffet. He, along with fellow Surrealists, was looking for an art form that came straight from the subconscious, unmediated by cultural or artistic influences.

Throughout his life, Dubuffet struggled to define and confine the art he felt should be included within the realm of Art Brut. During the 1940s, when Dubuffet was beginning to collect art, he was searching for people who were creating art outside the cultural mainstream. Today, with the advent of television and the Internet, it seems nearly impossible to find such isolates. Outsider Art has developed in the United States more broadly as a term that is less about the artist being free of societal influences and more about the surprising and unexpected creative forces at work. Twenty years after its initial use, Cardinal revisited and redefined the term *Outsider Art* as “an art that develops cantankerously against the

grain of tradition and against the grain of a formal expectation about art.¹⁴

He emphasized how the art wells up from an unstoppable and obsessive need to express something that has been buried deep inside of the creator.

In the early part of the twentieth century, psychiatrists working in European mental institutions began to encourage patients to express themselves creatively. Through the analysis of this artwork, these physicians were seeking insight into the cause of the patient's psychiatric problems as well as possible treatments. One of the most influential psychiatrists was Dr. Hans Prinzhorn of the University Psychiatric Clinic at Heidelberg University in Germany. In 1920, intrigued by the connection between art and psychosis, he began to systematically collect the art and writings of institutionalized mental patients, amassing a collection of 5,000 works by 450 patients over the span of two years.¹⁵

Throughout the twenties and early thirties, Prinzhorn organized exhibitions of the collection and lectured extensively about his theories. This, coupled with his best-selling book *Bildnerel der Geisteskranken* (Artistry of the Mentally Ill), brought these patient's art to the attention of the general public. Exhibitions such as "Glimpses of the Imagery of

¹⁴ Willem Volkersz, "Roger Cardinal on Outsider Art," *Raw Vision*, no. 22 (Spring 1998): 29, 25 – 29.

¹⁵ Claudia Dichter, *Outsider Art: Collection Charlotte Zander* (Bonnigheim: Museum Charlotte Zander, N.D.), 24.

Primitives” fueled a growing interest in non-academic art especially among modern European artists such as Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee as they sought to reimagine the boundaries of art. Unfortunately, the artwork also came to the attention of the Third Reich. “The Art of the Mentally Ill,” which toured Switzerland and Germany from 1930 to 1933, was one of the last such exhibitions before the outbreak of war. As the Nazis gained political power, they sought to eradicate both modern art and that by the mentally ill. In 1937, *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art), a traveling exhibition organized by the Nazi Propaganda Ministry displayed modern art along side psychotic art from the Prinzhorn Collection. The Prinzhorn Collection was largely forgotten during World War II and due to this neglect remained intact until it was rediscovered in the early 1970s. Unfortunately, many of the artist-patients included in the Prinzhorn Collection did not fare as well. They disappeared during the war and were presumed murdered by the Nazis in their campaign to eradicate anyone perceived as inferior or deviant.

The Development of Art Brut

Some viewers who saw the Prinzhorn Collection, though, were unable to forget the impact of the art. As Europe began to recover from the war, there was a renewed interest in art by non-academically trained artists

especially among the avant-garde. The Surrealists in particular, driven by their interest in accessing the subconscious, looked to psychotics, psychics and visionaries for insight and inspiration. Fueled by memories of the Prinzhorn Collection, the French artist Jean Dubuffet traveled to Switzerland in 1945. There he visited psychiatric hospitals in search of art unfettered by the academic art world. During this and subsequent trips over the next two years, he was able to amass a large collection of art created by patients in these institutions. It was during his initial trip that he coined the term *Art Brut* in an effort to express what he felt lay at the core of this art and its appeal. Inspired by the art, he hoped to ultimately unlock his own creativity and fulfill his desire to become a professional artist.

Filled with an almost evangelical zeal for this “raw” art, Dubuffet formed the *Compagnie de l’Art Brut* (The Art Brut Society) with Surrealist artist/leader Andre Breton and others in 1948 to promote an understanding and appreciation of Art Brut. They planned to produce gallery exhibitions highlighting the collection accompanied by a series of monograms about the individual artists. The Society rented space in Paris where, in 1949, the first major exhibition of 200 works was held at the Galerie Rene Drouin. The catalog included Dubuffet’s manifesto *L’ Art Brut Prefere Aux Arts Culturels* (Art Brut in Preference to the Cultural Art) where the first cogent definition of Art Brut appeared.

It states:

What we mean by this term is work produced by people immune to artistic culture in which there is little or no trace of mimicry (as is invariably the case with intellectuals); so that such creators owe everything – their subject-matter, their choice of materials, their modes of transcription, their rhythms and styles of drawing, and so on – to their own resources rather than to the stereotypes of artistic tradition or fashion. Here we are witness to the artistic operation in its pristine forms, something unadulterated, something reinvented from scratch at all stages by its maker, who draws solely upon his private impulses.¹⁶

By the early fifties, Breton and Dubuffet were no longer in agreement, differing over the connection between Art Brut and Surrealism. Dubuffet was also changing focus and devoting more of his time and energy to his own burgeoning artistic career. The *Compagnie de l'Art Brut* was dissolved, and the Art Brut collection spent much of the next dozen years in obscurity stored at an estate in Long Island, New York. The collection eventually returned to Paris, but it was not open to the public and only intermittently exhibited. Concerned for its preservation, Dubuffet secured a permanent home in 1972 from the municipality of Lausanne, Switzerland, which promised to display the over 5,000 works of art in a facility devoted solely to the collection. Twenty-seven years after its creation, the Art Brut collection had come

¹⁶ Roger Cardinal, "Toward an Outsider Aesthetic," in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, ed. Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 23.

full circle, back to its country of origin.¹⁷

Parallel Developments in the United States

While Dubuffet was promoting Art Brut in Europe, a revival of interest in American folk art was emerging in the United States. Much of what today is classified as Outsider Art was, for lack of a better term, simply referred to as folk art. This encompassed everything from weather vanes to colonial portraits by untrained, itinerant artists. This inclusiveness was due in part to the lack, until Cardinal's book was published in 1972, of any acceptable English language alternative. Also, curator Jane Kallir felt that this grouping was a function of the American persona. She observed "Americans, instead, tended to lump all self-taught art together as expressions of the stereotypical rugged individualism that is so much a part of our national myth."¹⁸ The widespread use of the term folk art persisted well in to the 1980s and continues to this day making it difficult, in retrospect, to know what exactly was being studied, written about or exhibited.

American Outsider Art differs from folk art, which is "insider art,

¹⁷ Interestingly, the Art Brut collection moved to Lausanne the same year that Cardinal published the first English language book about art brut entitled *Outsider Art*.

¹⁸ Jane Kallir. "Introduction," in *Self-taught and Outsider Art: The Anthony Petullo Collection*, (Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 9.

the art of the community, an art that comes mostly from the central values of a society rather than its fringe elements.”¹⁹ Folk art draws on traditions and techniques that are passed down through the generations, and while it evolves as craftspeople add their own touches or respond to changes in the public’s taste, it doesn’t radically change. It is usually utilitarian – part of domestic life, such as pottery – and is often a source of income for the craftspeople. By contrast, Outsider Art is unconnected to traditional crafts. The artists give little thought to functionality or marketability.

Outsider Art also differs in several distinct ways from Art Brut. Since most of the early examples of Art Brut originated in psychiatric institutions, it is still largely equated with art of the mentally ill. While some Outsider artists may suffer from mental illness, it is not necessarily the common denominator for all of the artists. Outsider Art in the United States has also been impacted by slavery and its aftermath. Artists from the South, especially African American artists, played and continue to play an important role in the development of Outsider Art. The legacy of African belief systems and the tradition of storytelling are evident in their art.

Many of these artists are descended from slaves, or like Bill

¹⁹ Charles G. Zugg III, “Folk Art and Outsider Art: A Folklorist’s Perspective,” in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, ed. Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 145.

Traylor (1854 – 1947), were born during the final days of slavery. After a life spent on the Alabama plantation where Traylor was born, at the age of 82 he moved to Montgomery where he started to draw. Homeless, with little money, he drew on whatever scraps of paper he could find. Traylor, like most Southern Outsiders, lived most of his life in rural America far from the contemporary art scene. Another artist from Alabama, Clementine Hunter (1886-1988) recorded scenes of everyday life at Melrose Plantation where she lived most of her long life. Her pictures, drawing on first hand experience, illustrate what it was like to work the land, picking cotton and harvesting crops. She also commemorated important milestones in her community such as baptisms, weddings and funerals as well as drinking and dancing on Saturday nights.

Sister Gertrude Morgan (1900 – 1980) received a vision instructing her to preach the gospel and create paintings. From that moment on, she wore her trademark white clothing to symbolize her betrothal to Jesus. Her paintings, originally created as visual aides for her street preaching, showed scenes from the Bible and were accompanied by evangelical texts of her own creation. Painting on anything at hand, from Styrofoam meat trays to scraps of cardboard, she exhibited her work on New Orleans street corners as she preached in a deep-throated chant while accompanying herself on guitar and tambourine. Despite or perhaps because of adversity,

a large number of Outsider artists come from the South and share these influences of place and history.

Another geographical area, which played a pivotal role in the early development of Outsider Art, is Chicago. Russell Bowman, director of the Milwaukee Art Museum, explains this connection:

Perhaps, due in part to their own sense of being 'outsiders' in relation to the New York mainstream, Chicago artists since 1945 have demonstrated a continuing interest in outsider art. Their awareness and appreciation of the work of untrained artists, eccentrics, isolates, compulsive visionaries, and psychotics must be understood as part of a larger tradition in Chicago of exploring nonmainstream sources.²⁰

This interest was greatly fostered by the School at the Art Institute of Chicago where influential teachers like Whitney Halstead exposed generations of students to Outsider, folk and tribal art as well as work by the Surrealists and Dadaists. The Art Institute also had a direct connection to Art Brut. Dubuffet visited Chicago in 1951 and gave a lecture at the Art Institute entitled "Anti-cultural Positions" extolling the virtues of Art Brut and detailing his belief that "primitive societies" held a certain wisdom that Western culture could benefit from.²¹

²⁰ Russell Bowman, "Looking to the Outside," in *Parallel Visions*, ed. Maurice Tuchman and Carol S. Eliel (Los Angeles and Princeton New: Co-published Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Princeton University Press, 1992), 150.

²¹ Colin Rhodes, "The Origins of Art Brut," *Raw Vision*, no. 29 (Winter 1999/2000): 50, 50 – 55.

During the mid-1960s, a group of local artists including Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson, most of whom had studied at the Art Institute, formed the Chicago Imagists. They drew on a variety of sources for artistic inspiration ranging from flea market finds to the Outsider Art of Joseph Yoakum (c. 1890-1972) whom they discovered and befriended. Unlike most Outsiders, Yoakum left his home in the South and traveled widely before settling in Chicago. His landscape paintings, he claimed, were of places from around the world that he had visited while working as a sailor and circus entertainer. The artist and his abstracted geological formations greatly affected Nutt and Nilsson both personally and artistically. Recognizing the significance of his art, the Chicago Art Institute established a large collection of Yoakum's drawings and archival material.

Another legendary Outsider artist lived in Chicago during this time. After his death in 1973, the amazing life work of isolate Henry Darger (1892-1973) was discovered in a Chicago boarding house. Working as a janitor at a Catholic hospital by day, Darger spent every other waking moment creating an astounding amount of artwork, including a 15,000 page story entitled *The Story of the Vivian Girls in What is Known as the Realm of the Unreal of the Glandeco – Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*. To illustrate this epic,

Darger taught himself to draw, adapting images he collected from newspapers and magazines. The Realm of the Unreal was a harsh world where children were enslaved and tortured in their battle against evil. Darger cast himself as General Darger, a hero and protector of the Vivian girls. The owners of the boardinghouse who had befriended Darger were totally unaware of his obsessive output but luckily, upon his death, they recognized the contents of his packed room as something extraordinary and preserved them. After keeping the room intact for a number of years, it was dismantled and the Museum of American Folk Art in New York acquired the bulk of the collection.

The Development of Outsider Art

As early as the 1930s, curators were championed folk art as an expression of populism. Holger Cahill organized “American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America” for the Museum of Modern Art in New York.²² This was followed in 1936 by an exhibition entitled “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” which showed work by well-known contemporary European artists along side work by the Outsider artists who had inspired them. Freelance writer and art critic Claudia Dichter pointed

²² Susan C Larson, “The Strange and Wonderful World of California Folk Art,” in *Cat and a Ball on a Waterfall*, ed. Henry Jones (Oakland, California: Oakland Museum Art Department, 1986), 48.

out the significance: “ all the paintings hanging together enjoyed equal status, the exhibition marking the first time in the history of art that works by outsiders were presented in a setting regarded as the fine art centre par excellence.”²³ New Yorkers were able to view and compare the American and European counterparts in back to back exhibitions.

Throughout the 1950s, Abstract Impressionism and Minimalism monopolized the American art scene. The Art Brut collection, which during this era was housed in an estate in upstate New York, elicited little interest. A core of dedicated collectors and enthusiasts, though, remained committed to the preservation and exhibition of folk and Outsider art. The Museum of International Folk Art was founded in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1953 with a mandate to “preserve the world’s folk arts and to promote their understanding.”²⁴ Four years later, the extensive American folk art collection of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, which had grown in size and importance since the thirties, found a permanent home, the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Popular Art Center, adjacent to Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. In 1961, the Museum of Early American Folk Art was established in New York City, dedicated to preserving and studying all

²³ Claudia Dichter, *Outsider Art: Collection Charlotte Zander*. (Bonnigheim, Germany: Museum Charlotte Zander, N.D.), 24.

²⁴ www.moifa.org The Museum of International Folk Art website. 21 March, 2004

facets of American folk art.²⁵ The first director was Herbert W. Hemphill who, over the next 30 years, became a major collector and leading advocate of Outsider Art.

From the mid-sixties onward, Outsider Art developed a growing acceptance among collectors in the United States who valued its power and immediacy. They began to develop extensive collections despite the lack of support among museum professionals, art critics and gallery directors. With little written about the topic, these mavericks became essentially self-taught collectors often traveling the backroads of America to discover new artists and collect their work. The release of *Outsider Art* in 1972 finally gave a name to this distinctive art as well as increased visibility. Author Joey Bracknor credits the perseverance of collectors: “Indeed, this response (by collectors) has been impressive and its persistence over the last three decades has pressured the art world to name, define and deal with it.”²⁶

During this time, only two galleries were regularly exhibiting Outsider Art – the Phyllis Kind Gallery in Chicago, which had strong ties to the Chicago Imagists, and the Janet Fleisher Gallery in Philadelphia.²⁷

²⁵ Early was later dropped from the name

²⁶ Joey Bracknor, *Outsider Artists in Alabama* (Montgomery, Alabama: Alabama State Council of the Arts, 1991), 10.

²⁷ In contrast, the spring 2005 issue of *Raw Vision* included advertisements by 23 galleries and a number of on-line sources.

When Phyllis Kind opened a New York gallery in 1975, it was the first in the city to exhibit Outsider artists including Howard Finster and Joseph Yoakum. Other galleries followed including the Rico Maresca Gallery and American Primitive in New York and the Judy Saslow Gallery in Chicago.

Over the next ten years Outsider Art once again began to appear in museums. This was due in part to the nation's Bicentennial celebration, which motivated the United States government to sponsor exhibitions celebrating American know-how and ingenuity. Like the Depression era interest in American folk art, the Bicentennial fervor was a celebration of populism. In 1970, Hemphill curated "Twentieth-Century American Folk Art and Artists" at the Museum of American Folk Art in New York. Six years later, he organized "Folk Sculptures USA" at the Brooklyn Museum.

In 1976, the Whitney Museum of Art organized a solo exhibition of work by former domestic Minnie Evans, the first retrospective of an Outsider artist at that major New York institution. Later that year, "The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly" was included in "Two Hundred Years of American Sculpture" as part of the Whitney's Bicentennial celebration. This room-sized installation created by Outsider artist, James Hampton (1909 – 1964) was

discovered, like Darger's, after Hampton's death in 1964.²⁸ The art world was beginning to take note and art museums were exhibiting Outsider artists not with folk artists but alongside their contemporary art peers.

Increased Visibility for Outsider Art

The 1980s saw an increase in exhibitions of Outsider Art including the blockbuster exhibition "Black Folk Art in America, 1930 – 1980"²⁹ organized by the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. Close to 400 drawings, paintings and sculptures lent by seventy-eight individuals and institutions traveled for to six major museums. "Art critics, folklorists, specialists in African American art and material culture – not to mention collectors and dealers – applauded the exhibition's daring and the power of the work itself."³⁰ The sheer number of artworks and lenders showed that momentum had quietly been building around Outsider Art. Other prominent museum exhibitions included "Outside the Mainstream: Folk Art in Our Time" organized by the High Museum in Atlanta, considered

²⁸ Hampton was the only African American included in this exhibition which the NAACP picketed, protesting the absence of minority artists.

²⁹ Clearly, there still is no consensus on terminology.

³⁰ Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, "From the Sahara of the Bozart to the Shoe That Rode the Howling Tornado: Collecting Folk Art in the South," in *Let it Shine, Self-Taught Art from the T. Marshall Hahn Collection*, ed. Susan Mitchell Crawley (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 52.

an early leader in collecting and exhibiting Outsider Art.³¹

Museums on the West Coast were also showing Outsider Art, notably “Folk and Outsider Artist of the West Coast” organized by the Long Beach Museum of Art in 1984. Shortly after, “The Ties that Bind, Folk Art in Contemporary American Culture” originated at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio and traveled to three other museums, including the San Jose Museum of Art. In 1992, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art organized the exhibition “Parallel Visions, Modern Artists and Outsider Art” which, through exhibiting Outsider Art alongside the work of contemporary artists, examined the influences and connections between the two. This positive comparison was very different from the disparaging one the Nazis had made when they similarly paired the work of modern artists and those from the Prinzhorn Collection in the “Degenerate Art”³² exhibition in the 1930s. The Nazis were expressing disdain for art, which they viewed as depraved. Drawn from over 100 collections, “Parallel Visions, Modern Artists and Outsider Art” was accompanied by a catalog with essays by prominent scholars and traveled internationally to Spain, Germany and Japan.

³¹ The title is a subtle way of incorporating folk art and the still relatively new term, Outsider Art.

Increased Legitimacy for Outsider Art

With increased visibility came legitimacy as a select group of art museums began to actively collect Outsider Art. The National Museum of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution became the most important repository for Outsider Art when, in 1986, it acquired over 500 pieces from the collection of Herbert W. Hemphill, dubbed “Mr. American Folk Art” by *Connoisseur*, as well as many works from his friends and fellow collectors Chuck and Jan Rosenak. “The Museum’s director, Elizabeth Broun, sums up the acquisition’s significance.

For those who championed its cause through decades of official neglect, finding folk art in museum galleries next to Hudson River landscapes and abstract Expressionist canvases is long-awaited legitimization, affirming the collector’s independent judgment and giving overdue recognition to artist who worked without formal training, critical acclaim or financial reward.³³

This collection was celebrated with an exhibition “Made with Passion: The Hemphill Folk Art Collection of the National Museum of American Art,” which opened in 1990 accompanied by an extensive catalog. The Smithsonian collection already included Hampton’s “The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General

³² The Los Angeles County Museum restaged “Degenerate Art” but excluded the work by artists from the Prinzhorn Collection.

³³ Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, in *Let it Shine, Self-Taught Art from the T. Marshall Hahn Collection*, ed. Susan Mitchell Crawley, (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 56.

Assembly,” the first example of outsider art that the museum acquired. A permanent wing at the National Museum of American Art, dedicated to exhibiting Outsider Art, guarantees that a portion of the Smithsonian’s collection is always on display.³⁴

Outsider Art Gets its own Museum

In 1995, a museum opened dedicated to exhibiting art “produced by self-taught individuals usually without formal training whose work arises from an innate personal vision that revels foremost in the creative act itself.”³⁵ The American Visionary Art Museum, located in the revitalized Inner Harbor area of Baltimore, Maryland, held an inaugural exhibition “Tree of Life” was curated by photographer, folklorist and writer Roger Manley. Dedicated to exclusively exhibiting Outsider Art, the museum initially was not a collecting institution. Rather, yearly it invited a consulting curator to develop a theme and assemble an exhibition, through loans, to fill the entire space. After a year, the entire museum is de-installed and a new exhibition with a new concept and curator is put on display. Themes have ranged from “The End is Near,” which examined the Apocalypse, to “Treasures of the Soul: Who is Rich”

³⁴ The National Museum of American Art is currently closed for renovations and is slated to reopen July 4, 2006.

³⁵ www.avam.org the website for the American Visionary Art Museum, 18 March, 2005.

and “Love: Error and Eros.” The museum has established a permanent collection, a portion of which is always on display, but it continues to produce one thematic show a year.

Other museums followed, developing collections of Outsider Art. In 1989, the Milwaukee Art Museum acquired over two hundred works from Michael and Julie Hall, who were inspired to collect by Hemphill. Southern museums, such as the New Orleans Museum of Art in Louisiana and the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama, extensively exhibit and collect Outsider Art especially by regional artists. Located in Atlanta, Georgia, the High Museum established one of the country’s first folk art departments in a general area museum in 1994. It has a curator who oversees a collection of 500 works. Seven years later, what is now the American Folk Art Museum inaugurated its new building in mid-town Manhattan on the same block as the Museum of Modern Art. The new facility includes the Contemporary Center, which focuses on twentieth and twenty-first century art and also has its own curator. It opened with a comprehensive exhibition of work by Chicago outsider Henry Darger. By the close of the twentieth century, Outsider Art had definitely come inside of the art establishment as well as the art museum’s walls.

Museums and the Visitor Centered Experience

While exponents were struggling to define Outsider Art and its relationship to the art world, art museums were also experiencing growth and change. Museums were transitioning from object-oriented institutions with an emphasis on scholarship and research to a more visitor-centered experience. David Ebitz, former Head of Education and Academic Affairs at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles explained,

Today the focus is on...exhibitions, installations, empowerment, and communities, on the “constructivist museum” and “free-choice learning,” and on the role educators have in providing participatory experiences that lead visitors to the construction of personal meaning.³⁶

During the 1970s, education departments gained credibility and importance which, in turn, led to an expansion in educational programming designed to help the visitor have a meaningful museum experience. At the same time, many forces were converging on art museums to ensure that the institutions as well as exhibitions and programs were relevant to a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse society.

Current education theories embraced by art museums are built on the groundwork laid by early twentieth century philosophers especially

Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980) and John Dewey (1859 – 1952). They both looked at the active role of learners in constructing knowledge and the complex nature of conceptual change. Piaget believed that for learning to take place, new information must be integrated with the existing mental framework. Through this process of assimilation and accommodation the student’s ability to learn increases. Dewey posited that education must engage with and enlarge experience.

Dewey, through his writings and teaching, had a profound influence on modern thought as well as social action. His research was based on the belief that “learners are not ‘in’ a situation like paint is ‘in’ a bucket; rather experience is an active transaction that coordinated doing and undergoing.”³⁷ Dewey felt that greater emphasis should be placed on problem solving and intellectual development rather than on simply memorizing lessons. For learning to take place, it requires “integrated settings that foster discussion, challenge the learner, make connections to issues of interest to the learner, and provide guidance for application in the world outside the museum.”³⁸ Dewey believed that educators need to play

³⁶ David Ebitz, “Qualification and the Professional Preparation and Development of Art Museum Educators,” *Studies in Art Education* 46, no. 2 (Winter 2005), 151, 150 – 169.

³⁷ John Dewey, quoted in “Learning in Interactive Environments: Prior Knowledge and New Experience,” in *Public Institutions for Personal Learning*, ed. John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking (Washington D. C.: AAM, 1995), 45.

³⁸ George Hein, “John Dewey and Museum Education,” *Curator* 47, no. 4 (October 2004): 425, 413 – 427.

an active role in this process – to continually challenge students, nurture open-mindedness and reflection and promote independent thinking.

His ideas greatly influenced self-made millionaire and art collector Alfred C. Barnes. After collecting art in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Barnes built a 23-gallery mansion in suburban Philadelphia to house his vast art collection. Upon retiring from the business world, Barnes turned to the study of philosophy, education and aesthetics. Dewey's writings, especially "How We Think," greatly influenced him. This led him, in 1918, to attend Dewey's weekly seminar on scientific methods in education at Columbia University. He and Dewey, an avid museum visitor, became life-long friends and collaborators.

Barnes formed the Barnes Foundation in 1922, incorporating both Dewey's educational and populist ideas as well as his own desire to provide nondiscriminatory access to art and education. He stated in the bylaws that "the plain people that is, men and women who gain their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, schools, stores and similar places, shall have free access to the art gallery."³⁹ Barnes established the Foundation as an art school, rather than as a museum, where students from all walks of life could study the collection as well as learn art techniques.

The Foundation was a testing ground for Barnes' ideas. Believing that a museum is made up of relationships between the works of art, rather than the merit of each individual item. Barnes created idiosyncratic installation of the art, in what he called ensembles. These juxtaposed major European paintings with antique metal work, painted furniture and African sculptures. He published a number of essays on his theories as well as a book, *The Art in Painting*, which is still used today as a basis for the Foundation's art education courses. Dewey's theories on the interrelationship of the intellectual, emotional and physical on the aesthetic experience greatly influenced Barnes' writings. As the first Director of Education, Dewey used his speech at the opening ceremonies to dedicate the Foundation to the Cause of Education.

During the next decade, museums began to re-examine their role in society. With massive unemployment brought on by the Great Depression, many art museums opened their doors to the general public for the first time in an effort to provide uplifting and educational diversions for the unemployed. Some offered free art classes, workshops and lectures initiating a gradual shift from serving a small select group of scholars to providing educational services for the general public. For the next thirty years, though, educational activities were primarily composed of

³⁹ Barnes Foundation, Mission Statement, The Barnes Foundation website,

collection-based lectures for an informed and educated audience. Change came slowly to these venerable institutions.

The Revitalization of Museums

Education became a national priority when President Lyndon Johnson's administration launched the Great Society program in 1964. This mandated that educational institutions, including museums, provide equal opportunities for all citizens.⁴⁰ With the expansion of governmental support, came growth in museum offerings and increased accountability. Supported by taxpayers' dollars, museums could no longer stay detached from events within their communities. Author Hilde Hein traces the history of this change in *Museums in Transition*:

A consensus emerged, favorable to government support of museums and to the fostering of collaboration between museums and institutions of formal education at all levels, as well as among museums themselves. In a decade of optimism new museums sprang up throughout North America, and old museums underwent dramatic restructuring and revitalization.⁴¹

This was a period of social upheaval in the United States, fueled by

www.barnesfoundation.com

⁴⁰ Museums were officially designated educational institutions in 1969

⁴¹ Hilde S. Hein, *The Museum in Transition – A Philosophical Perspective* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 115.

growing public resistance to an increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam and a call for racial equality at home. Museums were not immune to this erosion of authority as many citizens questioned the relevancy of institutions increasingly viewed as elite and Eurocentric. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, women, minorities and the disabled lobbied for their right to be equal members of American society. Minority artists demanded to be displayed on museum walls and included in museum boardrooms.

In 1969, the Metropolitan Museum of Art responded to this criticism with “Harlem on My Mind.” The museum’s flamboyant young director Thomas Hoving, in an attempt to prove the relevancy of the museum to its African American community, commissioned a photography exhibition about the history of Harlem. It outraged African American artists whose artwork was not included in the exhibition. While considered controversial by many, especially by the African American audience that it sought to attract, it was attended by hundreds of thousands of visitors.

Women, too, were experiencing a shift in consciousness. Feminist artist Judy Chicago worked for over five years to create the collaborative installation piece *The Dinner Party*. Hosts of volunteers embroidered table runners and created platters that celebrated the significant contributions of

39 women throughout history. As feminist scholar Amelia Jones writes:

One of the central goals of The Dinner Party which foregrounds ‘feminine’ techniques (embroidery, ceramics, china painting) was to confront the public domain of high art (the province of men, who empower themselves by excluding women’s culture as low art or craft) with the private realm of domesticity (conventionally assigned to women).⁴²

Completed in 1979, it toured extensively throughout the United States and influenced a generation of women. Other feminist artists such as Betye Saar and Faith Ringgold looked at the exclusion of women, specifically African American women, in the history of Western culture. The rise of feminism led many to question the lack of representation of women artists in major museums. Out of this grew the activist group, the Guerilla Girls, who so famously pointed out that rather than exhibiting artwork by women artists, most museums display artwork *of* women – the majority of which are nudes.

As the call for equal rights expanded, members of the disability community sought access to the institutions, including museums, from which they had been excluded both physically and intellectually.⁴³

Museums were also being challenged to develop strategies for exhibiting

⁴² Amelia Jones, “Feminist Strategies, Feminist Conflicts, Feminist Histories,” in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, Amelia Jones, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 29.

non-mainstream artists and new art forms including installations, earthworks, new media and Outsider Art as well as innovative ways of interpreting them. Over the next decade, those outside of the cultural mainstream demanded entry, and they wanted their voices heard.

In an effort to be more responsive, museums turned to community advisory groups to inform them on the needs and desires of an increasingly diverse audience including cultural groups, neighbors, educators and people with special needs. Museum educator Lisa Roberts commented on this new commitment in *From Knowledge to Narrative: Education and the Changing Museum*: “This cooperative spirit marked an important step in making the production of knowledge and exhibits a shared process, open to everyone who might have a stake.”⁴⁴ With the assistance of these groups, museums began to reach out to underserved members of their community by offering programming that supported diverse cultural values. The Oakland Museum of California, for example, holds a community altar building festival each fall to celebrate the Prehispanic holiday of Dias de Los Muertos, an important holiday for their Latino neighbors. Over the past twenty-five years, as museums have

⁴³ While these struggles continue to this day, important headway has been made including the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the most comprehensive federal statute protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities.

⁴⁴ Lisa C. Robert, *From Knowledge to Narrative* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 69.

become more socially responsible, their educational programming has become more in tune with the communities that live just outside their doors.

Museums Place Education at the Core of Their Identity

Government support of the arts grew beginning in the 1970s. New agencies were created to support and promote the arts as a fundamental part of every citizen's life and an intrinsic part of the educational system. With a change in institutional priorities, museum educators moved from the periphery to a core position within the museum hierarchy, becoming mediators between museum staff and an expanding audience. Seeking to integrate learning into all museum activities, educators turned to current educational theories to inform them on how best to help visitors construct meaning and optimize understanding during museum visits.

Educators also began to accept the visitor as an active partner in the museum experience. Former Boston Children's Museum Director Michael Spock points out this change in attitude

the visitor contributes to, constructs, and helps create the visitor experience... There is the assumption that the visitor or companion is not some poor soul in need of enlightenment, but a smart and capable collaborator. So it isn't that the visitors are expected to work for their insights, but that

they might actually have something to contribute to the exchange.⁴⁵

This new viewpoint sounds very much like the educational ideas Dewey promoted a half a century earlier.

As educators developed a better understand of the many interests, skills and personal goals of museum visitors, they employed new approaches to make educational programming more relevant to an increasingly diverse audience. These include discovery rooms, gallery games and interactives, workshops, outreach programs, publications and special events. Many museums offer free drop in art activities that allow visitors of all ages to watch master artists at work, make crafts related to current exhibitions and view world-class music and dance performances thus creating a conceptual bridge between visitors and the art on display. On-site art academies offer more in-depth art classes on many topics for a variety of ages.

Lectures, forums and symposia continue to be important components of museum programming for those that want more in-depth knowledge. Audio-tours in a variety of languages allow visitors from many cultures to learn about the art on display in their native language and

⁴⁵Michael Spock, "Elegant Programs and Conversations," in *The Interpreters Training Manual for Museums*, Mary Kay Cunningham, (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2004), xi.

at their own pace. Close captioning provided access to visitors who are deaf or hearing impaired while descriptive narration helps the visually impaired navigate through and experience art that they are unable to see. Advances in technology now allow visitors to access additional information, pose and answer question about the art and e-mail files to their home computer encouraging active participation in the visit and extending it beyond the museum's walls.

Excellence and Equity in Museum Education

Recognizing their role in creating an educated society, the American Associations of Museums (AAM) formed the Standing Professional Committee on Museum Education as an advocacy group to keep educational issues at the forefront. In 1984, AAM released *Museums for a New Century*, which highlighted the importance of education to the role of museums as public institutions. The report, though, questioned the creation of separate education departments within museums, warning that this could isolate the educational function from other museum activities. Many museum educators felt the report undermined their authority and expertise at a pivotal time, as museums were transitioning from an object-oriented model to a more visitor-centered approach.

The AAM formed a committee in 1989 to follow up on *Museums*

for a New Century. Their recommendations, published in *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* in 1992 solidified the importance of education to the mission of museums. This monograph called for museums to fulfill their responsibility to enrich the lives of all citizens. "They must recognize that the public dimension of museums leads them to perform the public service of education – a term that in its broadest sense includes exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation and dialogue."⁴⁶ Excellence and equity were identified as fundamental to the mission of museums.

The report presents an action plan with ten principles accompanied by recommendations for steps to be taken. These principles challenge museums to focus on audience, learning, scholarship, interpretation, collaboration, and decision-making, as well as personnel, and professional development. The report emphasizes the importance of educational programming and its vital connection to public service.⁴⁷ It also underscores the importance of visitor studies in assessing the effectiveness of exhibits and programming.

Museum educators now agree that much of the learning that was actually happening in museums is free choice – guided by the visitor's

⁴⁶ Ellen Cochran Hirzy, ed, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* (Washington DC: American Association of Museum, 1992), 8.

personal interests, influenced by social and cultural context, and built on previous knowledge and experiences. John Falk and Lynn Dierking, who direct the Institute for Learning Innovation, have written about this extensively. “These types of learning are deeply motivating because they may rekindle memories, embellish previous knowledge and reinforce identity, extending understanding in personal, idiosyncratic ways.”⁴⁸ Debate continues as educators try to reach a consensus on the most effective methods for facilitating learning. Art museums are exploring educational theories and strategies including constructivism and Visual Thinking Strategies.

The constructivist approach to education is gaining influence among educators. With roots in Dewey’s research, it integrates prior knowledge with life experience. Constructivist theory stresses the importance of providing an environment that is physically, socially and intellectually accessible to visitors while acknowledging that they possess a variety of learning styles and interest. In a constructivist model, the visitor makes connections between their experience and the objects on display, translating this information into personally relevant knowledge.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸ John H. Falk, and Lynn D. Dierking, *Lessons Without Limits* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 16.

Two conditions must be present for learning to take place. First, the learner must be an active participant in the process. “Second, constructivist education requires that the conclusions reached by the learner are not validated by whether or not they conform to some standard of truth,” explains George Hein, a leading proponent, “but whether they ‘make sense’ within the constructed reality of the learner.”⁴⁹

Falk and Dierking, in their groundbreaking studies of the visitor experience, incorporate current research in psychology, sociology and evolutionary biology to holistically inform their research on meaning making in museums. They developed a framework, “The Contextual Model of Learning,” which organizes the complex elements that influence learning in museums into eight key factors. These factors are divided into three contexts – personal, sociocultural and physical. They believe that museum visitors come with their own personal motivation, prior knowledge and preferences. Often, their museum visits are a social outing with friends or family. These social interactions, as well as those with other museum visitors, contribute to the construction of knowledge. Visitors are more receptive to learning if the physical setting of the museum provides a free-choice environment that is comfortable and well designed. Falk and Dierking have found that all of these factors must be

⁴⁹ George Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 34.

present or it is more difficult for the visitor to construct meaning.

Cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen and museum educator Philip Yenawine, too, integrate the work of other theorists, primarily L. S. Vygotsky (1896 – 1934), into their studies. Vygotsky, a contemporary of Piaget and Dewey, felt that other theorists were not focusing enough attention on the social dimension of learning. He formulated that there is a zone of proximal development (ZPD) that lies between what learners can accomplish alone and what they are capable of through interaction with others. Professor Jeremy Rochelle explains, “The restructuring process that intertwines spontaneous and specialized concepts occurs in social interaction and is mediated by sign systems, such as language and drawing.”⁵⁰ Vygotsky examined how discovery and inquiry conducted in a social environment allowed the learner to transform knowledge into personal insights and perspectives.

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) grew out of Housen’s extensive research on aesthetic learning in art museums dating back to the 1970s.

Designed to help elementary school teachers integrate art appreciation into

⁵⁰ David Ebitz, “Qualification and the Professional Preparation and Development of Art Museum Educators,” *Studies in Art Education* 46, no. 2, (Winter 2005), 151, 150 – 170.

their curriculum, museum professionals are becoming increasingly interested in this strategy. VTS proposes a five stage developmental model for aesthetic learning. It emphasizes the direct link between finding context and meaning in visual art and the development of cognitive skills. In the initial stage, beginning viewers share their observation and pose personal interpretations through guided questioning. Through these open-ended discussions, participants form a personal connection to the art and develop confidence in their ability to construct meaning from it. As the viewer becomes more sophisticated, they look for the artist's message and analyze technique and composition. In the ultimate stage of aesthetic development, "the viewer makes equal use of all his faculties: perceptual, analytical, emotional. In the end, based on what he sees, what he knows, and what he feels, the viewer reconstruct the work of art for himself, again and anew."⁵¹

Educators now concur that visitors come to museums with different goals, expectations and interests and create their own personal meaning from these experiences. As Leslie Bedford, Director of the Leadership in Museum Education program states, "in other words, visitors bring their imaginations – their ability to hypothesize, empathize, create a story, acknowledge and resolve conflict or 'to think of things as possibly

⁵¹ Abigail Housen, "Three Methods for Understanding Museum Audiences," *Museum*

being so.”⁵² This creative process is already taking place. The challenge for art museum educators, then, is to inspire and expand upon the imaginative thinking of the visitor and to develop programming that will insure learning is taking place.

Studies Journal 2, no. 4 (Spring/Summer 1987): 43.

⁵² Leslie Bedford, “Working in the Subjunctive Mood: Imagination and Museums,” *Curator*, Vol. 47, no. 1 (2004): 7, 5 – 10.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The biggest challenge that museum professionals face when transporting Outsider Art into the educational sphere of museums is losing that “otherness” that sets it apart from contemporary art. The artists did not intend for their creations to be displayed in the formal setting of an art museum. As art historian Susan Vogel points out, this is not a condition unique to Outsider Art. “Museums provide an experience of most of the world’s art and artifacts that does not bear even the remotest resemblance to what their makers intended.”⁵³ It becomes the task of the museum educator to develop educational programming that is faithful to the spirit of Outsider Art. I set out to research the breadth of programming offered for exhibitions of Outsider Art. Through this research, I identified three institutions that I studied in depth that are leading the way in enhancing the visitors’ experience of Outsider Art. These results are presented individually for each institution.

For this master’s project, I sent an initial email query in February 2005 (see Appendix A) to nineteen museums that I had identified as exhibiting Outsider Art. Two were closed for renovations I asked the

⁵³ Susan Vogel, “Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 191.

remaining museums for information about programming offered in conjunction with exhibitions of Outsider Art. During the course of this research, I identified eight additional museums including the six museums that have hosted “The Quilts of Gee’s Bend.” The Museum of Biblical Art opened in New York with an inaugural exhibition of Outsider Art entitled “Coming Home! Self Taught Artists, the Bible and the American South.” I contacted it and the Art Museum of the University of Memphis, which organized and first exhibited the show. I then acquired programming information from twenty-one museums and art centers. I interviewed eleven educators and curators in person, by telephone or by email. (See Appendices C and D.)

Art museums that did present educational programming most frequently offered: lectures targeted to adults; gallery tours; film screenings; and drop-in art activities for children and families. The most frequently offered programming is lectures. An example is “Jimmy Lee Sudduth,” a lecture presented in early 2005 at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts. Susan Crawley, curator of folk art at the High Museum of Art spoke on the art and life of Alabama Outsider artist Sudduth in conjunction with the exhibition that she organized. The next most frequently offered programming was gallery tours. A typical example is the tour offered by the Museum of Biblical Art, New York, for its

inaugural exhibition “Coming Home!: Self-Taught Artist, the Bible and the American South.” Entitled “For Glory and Beauty,” it was led by Liana Lupas, Curator of Rare Scriptures at the American Bible Society. The other frequent offerings are drop-in activities for children and their families such as story readings in the galleries.

Less frequent are activities that allow visitors to interact directly with the art. Yet, I was able to identify some such programs. One was a partnership between the Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and the nearby Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. A class on Outsider Art used the gallery which displays the Petullo Collection as its classroom. Participants studied the art and artists and visited the home/studio of a local Outsider artist, Mike “Ringo” White. This program allowed the students to experience first hand his art and environment. For their final project, the students curated an exhibition using art on loan from the Petullo. They also recreated a portion of Ringo’s living room, essentially an extension of his art, as part of the installation. Through this process, curator Katherine Murrell⁵⁴ felt the students gained insight into his creative process that they were, in turn, able to share with visitors to their exhibition.

⁵⁴ Katherine Murrell, Curator of the Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art, interviewed by the author, by telephone, 18 April 2005.

Despite offering some programs such as lectures, tours, activities and classes, I discovered that art museums have conducted very little formal visitor evaluation, to date, to measure visitors' reactions to Outsider Art exhibitions and programming. What exists is anecdotal. For example, one curator responding to my questions about visitor evaluation stated: "We have been showing this work for 30 years, it is very loved here, especially as a lot of it is Midwestern in origin."⁵⁵

Clearly, most educational programming offered in conjunction with exhibitions of Outsider Art was fairly conventional, primarily lectures and gallery talks. This surprised me because of the unconventional nature of Outsider Art. However from my research, I was able to identify three institutions that take a more innovative approach to programming, keeping in the spirit of Outsider Art and recognizing its possibilities. I chose to examine these museums and their programming in more depth. They are the American Folk Art Museum, New York City; the American Visionary Art Museum, located in Baltimore, Maryland; and the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at the University of Auburn, Alabama. I felt that these three museums provided a variety of perspectives from the firmly established New York museum to the relative newcomer to the university art museum.

⁵⁵ Ibid., interviewed by the author, by email, 8 July, 2005.

The Contemporary Center at the American Folk Art Museum is a leader in providing scholarship for self-taught and Outsider Art. In the spring of 2005, the museum hosted a series of special events entitled “Intensely Darger” that explored the life and often difficult work of Chicago isolate Henry Darger (who was discussed in the prior section of this paper). Additionally, his work was included in the museum’s exhibition “Self and Subject.” The American Visionary Art Museum is the only museum in the United States to focus exclusively on Outsider Art. Since 1995, themed exhibition such as this year’s offering, “HOLY H2O: Fluid Universe,” have provided a wide array of public programming and activities. My third case study focuses on the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art which is hosting “The Quilts of Gee’s Bend.” This is a traveling exhibition, providing the opportunity to compare programming presented by different venues for the same exhibition. I conducted interviews with museum staff members in person, by telephone and e-mail. Additional interviews with experts on Outsider Art added a valuable perspective.

In presenting the findings and conclusions for this master’s project, I have treated each of the three case studies individually. Each section relates the museum’s mission and its connection to Outsider Art. I take an in-depth look at the public programming and activities offered by the

museum. The conclusion presents the four major themes that emerged during this project. This is followed by recommendations for art museum educators for developing programming for Outsider Art.

THE AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

Founded in 1961, The American Folk Art Museum moved to its permanent home at 53rd Street in mid-town Manhattan in 2001. Covered in a subtly textured white-bronze facade, the sophisticated building forms a triumvirate with the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Arts and Design. Its mission statement reads, “The museum is devoted to preserving the rich folk heritage of the United States through the presentation of exhibitions, educational programs, special events and publications of the highest quality, including its award winning quarterly magazine, *Folk Art*.”⁵⁶ With the transition to a new location, it reconfigured its name from the Museum of American Folk Art to indicate its commitment to both traditional folk art and self-taught artists from around the world and to better reflect the international scope of the collection. As one of the curators commented, “We had to think

⁵⁶ www.guidestar.org Mission statement, the American Folk Art Museum, 1 May, 2005.

globally – after all here we are in New York, one of the most global of cities.”⁵⁷

In response to a growing interest in Outsider Art, the Contemporary Center at the American Folk Art Museum was established in 1997 “to provide leadership in the field of self-taught artists and their work through research, study and collection of their work.” Brooke Davis Anderson, the Curator and Director of the Contemporary Center, is one of only two curators in the United States with this specialized focus. “The American Folk Art Museum has been looking at this material longer than any other institution,” she pointed out. Indeed, the museum acquired its first piece of Outsider Art, a bas-relief carving by Elijah Pierce, over thirty years ago. She noted that the museum does not “view this as a separate type of art but frames the work within the contemporary art world.”⁵⁸

In 2000, The Contemporary Center established the Henry Darger Study Center, which focuses on the work of Darger. The museum became the largest repository of his work after acquiring a massive archive of his manuscripts, drawings and source material as well as 22 paintings through a combination purchase and gift from Kiyoko Lerner who, with her late

⁵⁷ Brooke Davis Anderson, Curator and Director of the Contemporary Center of the American Folk Art Museum, interviewed by the author, in person, 14 April 2005, New York, N. Y.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

husband Nathan, were Darger's landlords. Darger's work, which exemplifies many of the challenges inherent in creating programming for Outsider Art, is continually on display at the museum.

On view in the spring of 2005, "Self and Subject" explored the world of contemporary portraits by Darger as well as other Outsider artists including A. G. Rizzoli, Grandma Moses and Bill Traylor. While some of the works were realistic renderings, often of icons from popular culture, others were more psychological in nature. As Lee Kogan, Curator of Special Projects for the Contemporary Center explained, "through portraits, artists reveal themselves and their subjects, producing individual and at times, the more universal traits of their sitter."⁵⁹ Rizzoli's drawing, for example, used his skill as an architectural draftsman to depict his mother as a Gothic "kathredal" (sic). He, like many of the artists was often more intent on capturing the essence of their subjects rather than a true likeness.

In the spring of 2005, the museum held a series of events entitled "Intensely Darger" which investigated Darger's writings including the 15-volume epic *The Story of the Vivian Girls in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnina War Storm Caused by the*

⁵⁹ The American Folk Art Museum School Programs 2004 – 05 booklet.

Child Slave Rebellion. The programs included a literary event, a lecture and a dance performance. In mid-April, the American Folk Art Museum hosted a two-hour read-a-thon of Henry Darger's intense and often cryptic writings. Throughout the "Very Darger Evening," forty volunteers read from an unbound volume of his epic saga before a standing-room-only crowd which included collectors, dealers and museum members as well as people new to Darger's art. Anderson commented, "we had the new and the old, the mature and the young – the whole gamut."⁶⁰ By holding and reading from one of Darger's manuscripts, those in attendance felt a personal connection to the artist and his obsessive world. Anderson pronounced the read-a-thon the most successful program at the museum to date as evidenced by the capacity crowd and enthusiasm of the audience.

Other events in 2005 included a film screening and lecture by Academy Award winning director Jessica Yu whose documentary, *In the Realms of the Unreal: The Mystery of Henry Darger*, tells both his personal story as well as that of his protagonists, the Vivian Girls, through sensitive narration and subtle animation. David Sterritt, film critic for the *Christian Science Monitor*, gave the film four stars. *The San Francisco*

⁶⁰ Brooke Davis Anderson, Curator and Director of the Contemporary Center of the American Folk Art Museum, interviewed by the author, in person, 14 April 2005, New York, N. Y.

Chronicle praised it as “spellbinding... The film is a thoughtful and inspired exploration of the man’s life and leaves the viewer with a sense of wonder about the lives of countless people with unknown talents that deserve recognition.”⁶¹ It provided an opportunity to see many of his drawings enlarged on the big screen as well as to learn how Yu came to be inspired by his work.

The series concluded with a performance of Seattle-based choreographer Pat Graney’s new dance, *the Vivian girls*.⁶² Known for taking visual art as a point of departure she, like Yu, was unable to forget Darger’s art and spent ten years researching and working on the choreography. While the dance was not commissioned by the museum, the Director of Education, Diana Schlesinger, saw an opportunity to partner with the dance troupe as a novel way to explore the world of Darger and investigate how other artists have been influenced by his work. This partnership attracted both museum patrons and modern dance devotees, bringing a new audience to Darger’s art and to Graney’s choreography.

The American Folk Art Museum’s commitment to both informal and formal education is clearly evident through the breadth of offerings

⁶¹ John McMurtie, “Darger’s phantasmagoric ‘Realms’ comes to life in spellbinding film,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 December 2004, F7.

⁶² The use of lower case letter for the *Vivian girls* is the choreographer’s.

for students and educators. In addition to tours and related art activities for school groups the museum partners with individual schools to provide in-depth art experiences. Accredited workshops for educators offer strategies for incorporating Outsider Art into core. Schlesinger, with a curriculum team of six, composed of art, English and ESL teachers as well as museum staff, designed a high school curriculum entitled *In the Realms of Henry Darger*. They determined that “The curriculum may be used as a guide to examine Darger’s art not only as a remarkable body of work but as a vehicle for a dialogue between students and teachers on some of the more challenging topics of our time.”⁶³ Janet Lo, Manager of School and Docent Programs, commented that Darger’s work, which includes elements of sexuality, violence and fantasy, has special appeal for teenagers. She observes “teens exhibit a very high level of engagement and a keen interest to find out more about the artist and his life.”⁶⁴

Over a dozen high school teachers in the New York area are using the curriculum. The museum has also filled requests for single curricular units. Most requested are the sections on heroes, heroines and gender and on good and evil. Lo believes that these issues are pertinent, especially for New Yorkers, in light of the events of September 11, allowing teens to

⁶³ *In the Realms of Henry Darger. A High School Curriculum* from the American Folk Art Museum.

discuss their concerns about future acts or terrorism. The unit on heroes, heroines and gender investigates notions of bravery and prompts student's to discuss their criteria for who is a hero and to define acts of heroism. Darger maintains that "in moments of great peril, women are to the fullest, braver and more collected than men."⁶⁵ This segues into a discussion of gender – often nebulous in Darger's work – to a discussion about diversity, sensitivity and tolerance. Darger's work draws clear lines between good and evil in his depictions of the heroic Vivian Girls and the evil Glandelinian military. Students are asked to identify visual clues in Darger's work that enhance the sense of evil or illuminate the appearance of goodness. Then, by drawing their own representation of goodness, the students investigate their perception of good and evil.

Included in the packet are brief overviews of Darger's life, and of his artistic development. A description of his writings, which are composed of a 15,000 page manuscript, weather journals and an autobiography is accompanied by color reproductions of his art. Each of the six units includes an introduction, lesson plans listing the relevant New York learning standard. These topics are the artist and society; children

⁶⁴ Janet Lo, Manager of School and Docent Programs, American Folk Art Museum. interview with the author, by telephone, 14 July, 2005.

⁶⁵ *In the Realms of Henry Darger. A High School Curriculum* from the American Folk Art Museum.

and adults; forces of nature; heroes and heroines and gender; good and evil; and fantasy and reality. The developers of this material did not downplay Darger's disturbing images of children being victimized or the gender bending paintings of naked little girls with penises. Instead, they encouraged discussion of complex issues including, sexuality, symbolism and morality

Before the American Folk Art Museum devoted the resources for this level of programming, other museums struggled to interpret Darger's art. Art educator and curriculum developer Jerry Stefl was hired by the Terra Museum of American Art in Chicago when it hosted an exhibit of Outsider Art. Stefl developed a handout entitled *Violence and Sexuality: Discussion of Techniques to Approach the Work of Henry Darger*. This was for the benefit of the docents who, according to Stefl, were "terrified" of discussing the Darger's art. It suggested conversations that docents could initiate with visitors to de-sensationalize the work.⁶⁶

The American Folk Art Museum is also dedicated to building partnerships and developing new audiences for Outsider Art through special programs and community outreach. One example is the Teen Docent Program, which, after being piloted in-2002 – 2004 is now a full-scale initiative. During the 2004 – 05 school year, ten teens from La

Guardia and Vanguard High Schools participated in the weekly 32-session program. In light of the success, an 18-week program was added to accommodate ten students from the Urban Academy. The Teen Docent Program is designed to teach high school students the role of folk and self-taught art in American history and culture. They develop skills in visual and critical thinking as well as public speaking while learning about potential careers in museums and the arts.

The teens choose one artwork from the museum's collection to "adopt." They conduct extensive research on this and eventually seven other pieces. These eight objects compose the content of their tour. Lo commented that every teen invariably picks one or two works by Darger. They conduct mock tours for the other participants who provide peer feedback. When the training is complete, the first tour is for their high school classmates. This expands to include other grades at their school, other schools and tours for teen docents from other New York museums.

The teens selected to participate in the Teen Docent Program are chosen not because they are stellar students but because of the potential they exhibit in the application and interview process. School counselors advise the museum as to who would benefit most from the experience. Both Vanguard High School and the Urban Academy are transition

⁶⁶Jerry Stefl, curriculum developer, interview with the author, 18 June, 2005.

schools where students who had to leave their high school are sent to complete their education. These teens have experienced many hardships in their lives and frequently suffer from low self-esteem. Lo said, for example, three out the twenty had lost immediate family member to violence.⁶⁷

The museum actively partners with other museums, schools and community organizations. Anderson feels that collaboration is very important for her personally and for the museum. “I always like it when there is a cross-over. I’m always more energized when people don’t know what we do but know other, equally important things.”⁶⁸ The museum recently partnered with the Studio Museum of Harlem to explore the parallels between their respective exhibitions: and “Artistry and Innovation: African American Art from the Collection of the American Folk Art Museum” and “Bill Traylor, William Edmondson and the Modernist Impulse”

Together the museums developed a two-part program entitled “Dialogues: Seminars on Contemporary Intersections in Art.” As the program brochure stated, by “focusing on the position of self-taught (folk)

⁶⁷ Janet Lo, Manager of School and Docent Programs, American Folk Art Museum. interview with the author, by telephone, 14 July, 2005.

⁶⁸ Brooke Davis Anderson, Curator and Director of the Contemporary Center of the American Folk Art Museum, interviewed by the author, in person, New York, N. Y.

art within modern art and the art world, this discussion will interrogate assumptions and illuminate connections across cultural and academic landscapes.”⁶⁹ In the second session, African American artists Kerry James Marshall, Faith Ringgold and Alison Saar discussed the influences of contemporary African American self-taught artists on their art and that of other contemporary artists.

THE AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM

While the American Folk Art Museum “is salted more with seriousness,”⁷⁰ the American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM) celebrates creativity and inspiration. The museum was founded in 1995 by Rebecca Hoffberger, whose personal vision led to the creation of the first and only museum in the United States devoted to Outsider Art. As she stated in the *New York Times*, “I’m a junkie for fresh views of reality.”⁷¹ A former psychiatric nurse with no formal art background, she is a self-taught museum director. Located in Baltimore, the museum’s mission states, “the American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM) is dedicated to the study,

14 April 2005.

⁶⁹ The American Folk Art Museum Press Release, “*Self & Subject*,” 2005.

⁷⁰ Brooke Davis Anderson, Curator and Director of the Contemporary Center of the American Folk Art Museum, interviewed by the author, in person, New York, N. Y. 14 April 2005.

⁷¹ Edward M. Gomes, “Building a Refuge of Respectability for Art on the Fringe,” *New York Times*, 18 January 2001, E2.

collection, preservation, and exhibition of visionary art and to increasing the public's awareness, knowledge, and understanding of this manner of artistic expression."⁷² The museum has an annual attendance of 55,000.

"AVAM is one of a new breed of museum, dedicated not to artifact but to action." stated Marcia Semmes, the museum's former Director of Public Relations and Development.⁷³ A guest curator develops an exhibition, which fills most of the galleries and is on view for a year. Over the past ten years, themes have included "The End is Near: Visions of Apocalypse, Millennium and Utopia" and "High on Life and Transcending Addiction." A prescient exhibition entitled "The Art of War and Peace; Toward an End to Hatred" opened a month after the events of September 11th but had been in the planning stage for over a year.

"Golden Blessing of Old Age" showcased art produced by Outsider artists over the age of 60, highlighting that there is no cut-off age for creativity. During this exhibition, the museum partnered with the National Institute on Aging to conduct The Vital Visionary program, which paired fifteen medical students with volunteers over the age of 65. Together, they toured the exhibition, met with one of the artists and participated in a drawing activity. "Vital Visionaries had two key goals: to

⁷² American Visionary Art Museum, *AVAM 101*.

⁷³ Marcia Semmes, "Vital Visionaries: The Museum Cure," *Museum News*, 84, no.3 (May/June 2005): 62, 59-62.

foster medical students' improved understanding and appreciation of older people and remind senior participants about their own creative possibilities.”⁷⁴

An essay describing this program entitled “Vital Visionaries: The Museum Cure” won the 2005 Brooking Paper on Creativity in Museums. This award honors innovative thinking in the museum field. *Museum News* reprinted the article in its May/June 2005 issue and the American Association of Museums posted it on their website. The three judges commented, “We always ask if museums matter and this one does. It is creative, innovative and true to its mission. The big question this paper asks is ‘Can museum education change lives?’ The answer is a resounding YES.”⁷⁵ Deemed a success by all of the participants, the National Institute on Aging plans to pilot this program at other museums.

“HOLY H2O – Fluid Universe,” the 2004-05 exhibition is divided into subthemes ranging from “Initiation and Holy Water” which looks at cross-cultural rituals linked to water to “Troubled Waters” which examines environmental issues centered on the scarcity of water. The interpretive wall text, screened directly onto the exhibit walls, includes scientific facts, philosophical musings, poems by Persian mystic Rumi and excerpts from *The Book of Vodou*. Beverly Serrell, in her book *Exhibit*

⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

Labels points out, "In art museums, a new sense of narrative and interpretation might mean making art more accessible and recognizing creativity among all people not just artists."⁷⁶ The American Visionary Art Museum by incorporating many voices tries to stimulate the visitor to look at the subject from different viewpoints.

One dilemma the museum undoubtedly faces is the visitor's desire to touch the compelling surfaces on display. The addition of automata by Carlo Zapata allows those visitors to give in to this irresistible urge by providing sculptures that are button activated. In Zapata's "Cardinal's Trip," an almost life-sized man gently rocks a mitered cardinal seated in a small boat back and forth as his head sways in counter rhythm. For visitors who want to talk with the creators of this work, the museum offers a "Meet the Artist" series. For a week in the spring of 2005, Zapata, visiting from Europe, worked every day at the museum on a new automaton. Visitors could watch his inventive incorporation of cams and cranks and try to decipher the hidden meaning in his work as well as assist him with his sculptures.

The museum offered visitors the chance to participate in two different workshops with Sue Jackson, the founder of London's Cabaret

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁶ Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels, An Interpretive Approach* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1996), 17.

Mechanical Theater, which loaned Zapata's work for the exhibition. One class provided each student with a wooden automata kit produced by Ms. Jackson. This was the starting point for creating their own kinetic sculpture. The other workshop introduced the participants to an unusual way to make mechanical toys – using food. They used cookies as cams and transformed pasta into ratchets, creating moveable parts for toys. Fellow “Holy H2O” artist Nancy Josephson whose installation “La Siren” dominated the exhibition, conducted shrine workshops included classes in how to create sequined libation bottles, decorate memory jars and make “Down ‘n Dirty” mosaics.

AVAM's commitment to “self-tutored human creativity”⁷⁷ extends to the performing arts. Its manifesto states: “the public presentation of appropriately related examples of such breakthrough creative achievement is deemed to be of particular importance to AVAM's effort to convey a deeper comprehension of and appreciation for the roots of visionary art and thought.”⁷⁸ Combining a focus on performance with an interest in creative reuse, the museum offers *A Homemade Instrument Exploratory Workshop and Concert* appropriate for teachers, students and parents. Participants can create a variety of instruments, including the

⁷⁷ American Visionary Art Museum, *AVAM 101*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Flop-a-phone made from rubber flip-flops or a traditional Australian aborigine instrument, the didjeridu, constructed from PVC piping.

Outsider artists primarily use materials that are readily available, recycling many items so that their original use is obscured. “The Exquisite Trash” series, designed for “imaginative pack rats and discerning dumpster diggers,”⁷⁹ is inspired by this sense of creative reuse. It challenges participants to combine “visual art with visionary invention.” *Exquisite Trash* offerings range from a workshop with the Black Cherry Puppet Theater, using trash to fashion a puppet, to *The Dumpster Diver Workshop* where participants learn how to create toys, sculpture and jewelry from found objects.

The American Visionary Art Museum encourages recycling on a grand scale – with art cars. Guest artist David Best is renowned for his intensely encrusted sculptures including a monumental art car cooperatively created by hundreds of people. While at AVAM, he collaborated with neighbors from the South Baltimore Homeless Center to create an entry for the ART CAR CARavan and Artscape Parade. Another program featured St. Louis art car artist Lucy Harvey and two staff members from the Exploratorium, a San Francisco museum that stresses the interrelationship between art and science. During this drop-in art car

project, participants were encouraged to cover a 1992 Volvo sedan with small objects and sculptures powered by crickets – tiny, battery driven computers that are programmed to respond to light, temperature or touch, creating a car that flickers and flashes. Teachers can download *The Road Scholar*, a guide for creating art cars with their students from the museum’s website.

The museum also hosts the Baltimore Kinetic Sculpture Race held each spring. This community event is an open invitation to create a moveable sculpture. Powered by pedaling or paddling, the resulting vehicles participate in a city-wide race that transverses both land and water. This year’s entries included everything from a giant birthday cake to a huge elephant and more than one dragon.⁸⁰ “Race is a misnomer here. No one’s really rushing. Wacky, wheeled and often wobbly sculptures wind ever so slowly through the streets of Baltimore... fueled by nothing more than imagination and the power of the pedal.”⁸¹ To win is not the object, obviously, in a race that has a next-to-the-last award. Rather, the point for the race and all of the museum’s programs is to show that

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Information and pictures are on-line at www.kineticbaltimore.com.

⁸¹ Teresa Wiltz, “Was Art Ever So Moving? In the Kinetic Sculpture Race, Ideas that Just Might Knock You Out,” *The Washington Post*, 1 May 2000, C1.

everyone is creative if they are provided with a supportive environment in which to experiment – free of the fear of failure or being judged.

THE JULE COLLINS SMITH MUSEUM OF FINE ART

Cheryl Rivers, instructor at the American Folk Art Museum's Folk Art Institute as well as a writer with a specialty in Outsider Art, recommended I investigate the traveling exhibition "The Quilts of Gee's Bend" She pronounced it one of the top exhibitions she had seen in the last year. In fact, she was so impressed that she purchased the catalog, a video-documentary about the artists and the two-CD soundtrack of gospel music from Gee's Bend.⁸²

"The Quilts of Gee's Bend," organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston was originally scheduled to be exhibited in two cities in 2003. It is now half way through an extended tour of twelve venues across the United States. The exhibition has received tremendous acclaim as it traveled to such prestigious institutions as the Whitney Museum in New York and the Milwaukee Art Museum in Wisconsin. In 2005, it was on display at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. In the fall, it will move to the Jule Collins Smith Museum of

⁸² Cheryl Rivers, writer and instructor at the Folk Art Institute, interviewed by author, in person, New York, NY, 12 April 2005.

Fine Art. All of the museums that have hosted this exhibition offered their own variation on public programming and activities.

The 70 quilts included in this exhibition were created by 46 African-American women who have spent their lives in the small, isolated community of Gee's Bend, in Southwestern Alabama.⁸³ Gee's Bend, which is situated in a horseshoe-shaped bend in the Alabama River, was virtually cut-off by the river from the rest of Alabama. Farmers, descended from slaves owned by John Gee (for whom the Bend is named) raised cotton until declining prices and the Great Depression left them destitute. "Because the inhabitants of Gee's Bend were left largely to themselves for nearly 100 years after the end of the Civil War until 1965, many of the community's traditions and folkways survived virtually unchanged well into the twentieth century. Quilting is one of the most important of these traditions."⁸⁴ The quiltmakers are part of a long tradition of women who have passed their techniques and sense of design down through at least four generations.

The quilts, completed between 1920 and the early 1990s, are on loan from the Tinwood Alliance, a non-profit foundation dedicated to studying and preserving vernacular African American art. Deemed one of the most important shows in the world by the *New York Times*, the quilts

lack the rigid repetition of traditional quilts. Rather, they possess the improvisational spirit and idiosyncratic sense of composition found in twentieth century abstract painting or mid-century jazz music. The bright colors and vertical strips also bear a marked similarity to the applied Kuba cloth and asymmetrical Kente cloth of West Africa, where the quilter's ancestors hearken from.

The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts located at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama will host the exhibition in the fall of 2005. The museum is still finalizing its programming schedule but the university's Women's Studies Department has been working for two years on "The Quilts of Gee's Bend in Context," a curriculum project with an accompanying photography exhibition. Its goal is to develop "an interdisciplinary, multicultural project to contextualize the quilts in their historical, social, economic, and cultural milieu."⁸⁵ Located only a hundred miles from Gee's Bend, the Women's Studies department also seeks to examine Alabama's place in the history of the United States.

During the summer of 2004, a group of teachers were recruited to participate in the first phase of the curriculum project entitled "The Quilts of Teaching: The Possibilities of Multidisciplinary Curriculum

⁸³ Gee's is pronounced like the letter "G."

⁸⁴ Chrysler Museum of Art Press Release, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*.

Development Using Instructional Technology.”⁸⁶ Using the collaborative nature of quilting as a metaphor, its goal is to develop a web-based curriculum for teaching issues related to the Gee’s Bend quilts. Teachers participated in an intensive, four-week session at Auburn University’s main campus. Teachers chose to attend either of two sessions – one with a focus on art and literature or the other on the social sciences, mathematics and economics. They met with faculty researchers who had begun their background research the previous year and who provided history and context for the quilts. Instructional technology staff provided training in the computer skills necessary for designing Web-based teaching material.

The project examines the social and political ramifications of quilting for poor African American women with little access to educational training or the ability to travel beyond their immediate community. This is framed by issues of gender, class and ethnic equality. It seeks “to rethink the American story from the radical perspective of people who were never its beneficiaries and who are too often placed at its margins in historical and cultural accounts of America.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵University of Auburn, Auburn, Alabama website, www.auburn.edu/academic/other/geesbend/

⁸⁶University of Auburn, Auburn, Alabama website, www.auburn.edu/academic/other/geesbend/

⁸⁷ Ibid.

There are units about local history, politics, art and literature. For example, one lesson plan looks at the quilts in relationship to the musical tradition of the blues and asks students to express their reactions to both art forms through poetry. A lengthy unit on Alice Walker's book, *The Color Purple*, examines the structure of the book in relationship to quilts. The resulting curriculum materials include teaching units, study guides and sample assignments is available free to any teacher with access to the Internet. Rather than a static site, teachers are encouraged to add units or project ideas.

The quilters are attending the opening reception in Auburn and will meet with students from local high schools as well as the university. This will be a relatively short trip for the quilters who have attended events at many of the museums hosting the exhibition. For most, attending the opening reception at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in 2002 was the first time they had traveled out of the state of Alabama. Their subsequent bus trip to attend the opening reception at the Milwaukee Art Museum was filmed for a documented about the quiltmakers and Gee's Bend.

Twenty-five of the quilters traveled to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art for the opening event, "Every Quilt Tells a Story Family Day." The daylong event, attended by 2,500 visitors, was filled with family-oriented art activities including quilt-inspired art activities. "The

Gee's Bend quilters were featured artists and talked with guests in the galleries about their art, their community and their personal histories.” commented Karleen Gardner, Assistant Curator. “Meeting these talented women and engaging with them on-on-one was a highlight of our visitor's experience.” In the afternoon, the Gee's Bend quiltmakers participated in a round table discussion moderated by a professor of African American Studies from a local university. It was attended by a standing room only crowd of almost 300, and many people who had hoped to attend were turned away due to the full house. “Through the talk, visitors gained insights into the lives and creative processes of the quilters. Truly a success, this event brought a diverse audience to the Brooks and exposed them to this nationally acclaimed exhibition and its artists.”⁸⁸

Many quilt-related activities have been offered by the host museums. The slow process of quilting where women share stories as they work together to finish a quilt has inspired storytelling programs at both the Brooks and the Milwaukee Art Museum. Many programs also acknowledged the importance of music in the rural south. The Brooks offered music from both ends of the spectrum. Two local church choirs sang Gospel music on consecutive Sundays and one evening the Memphis Symphony Orchestra performed choral music. The Jule Collins Smith

⁸⁸ Karleen Gardner, Assistant Curator of Art, The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art,

Museum, inspired perhaps by the curriculum unit on the blues, presented music by Willie King and the Alabama Blues Connection.

These three case studies are powerful examples of how art museums can go beyond the traditional offerings of lectures, docent tours, and family drop-in activities to develop new models for interpretation inspired by the stories and visions of Outsider artists. Programs like the American Visionary Art Museum's "Vital Visionaries: The Museum Cure," and curriculum projects such as the American Folk Art Museum's "In the Realms of Henry Darger" and Auburn University's "Gee's Bend Quilts in Context" all show the creative possibilities for educational programming for Outsider Art. Dewey and more recent educational theories based on his work point out the importance of experiential learning. It is important for art museums to actively engage the visitor so they can make personally meaningful and memorable connections to Outsider Art. Knowledge is always developing and, so too, should educational programming in order to remain relevant for the museum visitor in the twenty-first century.

interview by author, by email, Oakland, CA, 22 May, 2005.

CONCLUSIONS

The unconventional nature of Outsider Art offers opportunities for museum educators to develop programming that is as imaginative as the artwork itself. I found, though, that educators are just beginning to tap this potential. While museum professionals generally accept Dewey's long-standing view of the learner's role as an active participant in constructing knowledge this was not reflected in the educational programming. Most of the art museums contacted for this master's project still focused on the traditional curatorial model. They offered passive programs such as lectures or gallery talks in conjunction with their exhibitions of Outsider Art. These afford little opportunity to create art inspired by the Outsider Art on display. Some museums, however, are experimenting with programs like artmaking activities, partnerships and curriculum development.

Other than the traveling exhibition, "The Quilts of Gee's Bend," museums rarely offered the public a chance to meet the artists or see them in the process of making art. This personal connection with the quilters is one reason that "The Quilts of Gee's Bend" has proven so popular. Art museums also have not interviewed visitors to find out what educational programming they would find of value when viewing Outsider Art.

The research findings presented here point to four main conclusions: the importance of conducting visitors studies in conjunction with Outsider Art; the significance of fostering partnerships with the community in order to expand the audience for Outsider Art; the ability of Outsider Art to be used to assist in aesthetic development as well as a tool for dialogue about broader social issues; and the potential of Outsider Art to inspire creativity in the viewer. The research for this project indicated that two museums, The American Folk Art Museum and The American Visionary Art Museum, are leading the way in creating programming that enhances the visitor's experience with Outsider Art. Additionally, I found that there are two Outsider Art curriculum projects that extend the museum experience into the classroom. One, "The Quilts of Gee's Bend in Context," at Auburn University in Alabama took the curriculum into cyberspace.

Visitor Studies

None of the museums contacted for this master's project had conducted formal visitor studies to determine what their visitors understood about Outsider Art, what their reaction to the work was or what they would like to know more about. Museum professionals responded that they knew their audiences and understood how they felt

about Outsider Art based on anecdotal evidence. Some did admit that visitors questioned why this work was being exhibited in a museum. Educational research has determined that since visitors bring their own personal experiences, interest and understanding with them when they are looking at art, they also form their own assumptions about what they are viewing. To insure that the visit is an educational experience, museums must be informed about their visitor's knowledge and understanding of Outsider Art.

Partnerships

Museum educators spoke of the importance of collaborating with other organizations to strengthen ties to the community as well as to develop new audiences for Outsider Art. Collaborations came in many forms. The most successful, such as the American Folk Art Museum's Teen Docent Program, help participants to form a personal connection to Outsider Art and a source of pride in the museum and themselves. By connecting with new audiences, partnerships can give viewers a new outlook, as did the collaboration between the American Folk Art Museum and the Pat Graney Company. Graney's choreography, based on the art of Henry Darger, exposed the dance community to the work of an Outsider artist they were previously unaware of. Partnership can also create shifts in

attitude and opinions. The American Visionary Art Museum developed *Vital Visionaries: The Museum Cure* in partnership with the National Institute on Aging. This pilot program paired elders from the community with first year medical students. This experience highlighted the future doctor's misperceptions of seniors and changed the medical students' attitude toward them. Partnerships expand the opportunity for people to learn about and make personal connections with Outsider Art.

Curriculum Projects

Outsider Art can be effectively used as a tool to encourage discussion of art and culture. Two organizations capitalized on this by developing curriculum projects. The staff of the American Museum of Folk Art, collaborated with educators to develop a high school curriculum that examines issues relating to the work of Outsider Henry Darger. Facing head-on the difficulties inherent in his subject matter the team has developed a curriculum that examines some of the issues that teenagers face growing up in urban America including courage and personal identity. It also looks at the role of the artist in our society and the importance of creativity in our lives.

The Women's Studies Department at Auburn University where the "Quilts of Gee's Bend" travels in fall 2005 has developed a curriculum

that examines issues of social justice, equality and access to power against the backdrop of Gee's Bend, Alabama. It looks at the interrelationship of art, music and literature and the powerful effect they can have.

Outsider Art, which is non-academic and less intimidating than most contemporary art, offers many entry points for discussion. Much of the art is narrative with inspiring personal stories of the artists who overcame obstacles to create it. The many possible interpretations of the storyline allow people to engage in personal meaning making. It encourages viewer to express their opinions and ideas. The evocative nature of the art lends itself to curriculum development.

Art Making

Educational programming for Outsider Art should celebrate the creative spirit in all of us. Outsider Art provides the perfect opportunity to offer art classes inspired by the work. *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* shows that art created by poor African American women in an isolated southern community rivals contemporary art created by artists with significantly more access to education, materials and resources. It is important to include Outsider artists, if possible, when discussing or demonstrating the art. Outsider Art can assist the visitor in letting go of preconceived ideas of what constitutes art, what credentials are necessary to be considered an

artist and instead invite the visitor to access their own creativity. By learning about the lives of the self-taught creators, viewers can realize that we are all artists. After all, if self-taught artists from all walks of life have their creative output displayed on museum walls, we can conclude that we all have some form of creativity just waiting for the opportunity to be expressed.

By fostering partnerships, generating discussions and inspiring creativity, Outsider Art can engage viewers in personal meaning making. It can inspire them to make visual art as well as make films, choreograph dances and write poems. By stimulating both the visitor's memory and imagination, educational programming can create an aesthetic encounter that leads to personal growth. Forming personal connections to Outsider Art can be a transformative experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Museum educators need to think beyond traditional interpretive strategies when designing educational programming for Outsider Art. This is an opportunity to develop new models for interpretation that take their cues from the stories and visions of the Outsider artists. While Outsider Art encompasses a wide assortment of styles and forms, this should be viewed as a unique opportunity for innovative thinking. The following five recommendations provide some guidelines for museum educators as they strive to develop effective educational programming for Outsider Art.

Provide a context for Outsider Art.

Rather than a resume, biographical narratives provide Outsider artists with their artistic credentials. Museum professionals need to provide sensitive and non-sensational background information and context for both the artist and artwork. This will help visitors make meaning from a type of art that they are unfamiliar with and often unprepared to find on display in art museum.

The widespread disagreement on what to call this art makes interpretation more complicated and can be confusing for museum visitors. Educators should use the term they feel is most appropriate while

explaining that it is not the only choice. Henry Darger, for example, is a classic Outsider – a recluse who produced a massive body of work shaped by his own loneliness. Howard Finster, inspired by a vision of God to preach through painting, certainly can be considered a visionary artist. The women who created the “Quilts of Gee’s Bend” are most appropriately called self-taught. Certainly, they are all united by their position outside of the art mainstream.

Conduct visitor studies.

Art museums need to conduct visitor research in conjunction with exhibitions of Outsider Art. Formal visitor studies assist museum professionals to better understand the needs of their audience. It is difficult to make informed decisions about programming without some insight into the attitudes, skills and knowledge of visitors. Educators need to be cognizant of what visitors want to know more about so they can satisfy that curiosity. Evaluation also exposes misinformation that visitors can construct allowing for necessary adjustments to interpretation. Ultimately, visitor information assists educators to design public programming that is more in tune with Outsider Art and the interests of its audience.

Engage in Partnerships

Museum educators should look beyond conventional sources to form partnerships. Through collaborations, the participants gain a new perspective of others, are inspired by new ideas and even experience a change in attitudes and behavior. By engaging in partnerships, museums promote a shared vision and make connections to their local communities and people who might never visit the museum. These mutually beneficial experiences share resources and provide a sense of interdependence while expanding audiences for Outsider Art.

Encourage discussions of Outsider Art

Educators should use Outsider Art as a tool to discuss art as well as to talk about related topics. During the course of this research, it became apparent that Outsider art, rather than intimidating visitors as much contemporary art does, instead stimulated conversation. This is, in part, because it offers multiple interpretations of the artist's life or interior world. This dialogue can be informal and encourage museum visitors at all levels of aesthetic development to develop opinions about art. It can also be more formal school curriculum projects allowing educators to extend the museum visit into the classroom allowing for more in-depth study of Outsider Art as well as issues related to their students' lives.

Inspire the visitor to express themselves creatively.

Museum programming should include a variety of hands-on art activities inspired by the methods, materials and visions of Outsider artists. When possible, the artists should be invited into the museum to talk about and demonstrate their art. This may be a new experience for many Outsider artists and may require mentoring on the part of museum staff. Educators should offer a participatory learning experience that fosters creativity rather than emphasizes perfecting technique. It can focus on the intrinsic pleasure of engaging in a creative activity. This allows for artistic exploration that is free of restrictions and judgment – one that celebrates creativity. As Roger Cardinal asserts in his seminal book *Outsider Art*,

What one should seek is not to analyze the product so much as to attune oneself with the creative process; not to spot masterpieces but to respond to the vitality of the expressive act itself.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Roger Cardinal. *Outsider Art*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972) 54.

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Appendix A
Initial e-mail query

Purpose: To identify exhibitions of outsider art

I am a graduate student in Museum Studies at John F. Kennedy University, Berkeley, California where I am currently conducting research for my master's topic. The purpose of my project is to identify ways that educational activities and programming can help increase museum visitors' enjoyment and understanding of Outsider Art.

I am hoping that you can provide me with information about current or upcoming Outsider Art exhibits and accompanying programming at your museum.

I appreciate your assistance and I hope to visit your museum as part of my research.

Sincerely,
Rose Kelly

Appendix B
Museums that were sent initial e-mail query

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center (currently closed)

American Folk Art Museum, New York, New York

American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland

Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught & Outsider Art, Milwaukee

Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois

Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia

Intuit: The Center of Intuitive and Outsider Art, Chicago, Illinois

John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Mennello Museum of American Folk Art, Orlando,

Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Montgomery Museum of Fine Art, Montgomery, Alabama

Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia

Museo Italo Americano, San Francisco, California

Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (currently closed)

New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana

Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, Illinois

UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, California

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How often does the museum exhibit self-taught/outsider art?
2. Has the museum developed any educational programming in conjunction with self taught/outsider art? Do you have any printed materials that you could send me?
3. What are the biggest challenged in developing programming for exhibits of self taught/outsider art? Is terminology one of them?
4. Who was your primary or target audience for exhibits of Outsider Art? How did you identify that audience group?
5. What are the biggest challenges for visitors in understanding self taught/outsider art?
6. Does the museum conduct any visitor research or evaluation in conjunction with exhibitions of self taught/outsider art?
7. If so, do you have any visitor survey results that I could get copies of?
8. Do you have any recommendations of other people I should talk to about my topic?
9. Do you have anything else you would like to tell me?

Appendix D

Appendix E

List of Interviewees

The following is a list of people interviewed for this project that includes their institution of affiliation.

Brooke Davis Anderson,
Curator and Director of the Contemporary Center
The American Folk Art Museum, New York

Kathleen Gardner
Assistant Curator of Education
The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, Tennessee

Brigid Globensky
Senior Director Education and Public Programs
Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin

Beth Hancock
Curatorial Assistant, Folk Art
High Museum of Art
Atlanta, Georgia

Janet Lo
Manager of School and Docent Programs
The American Folk Art Museum, New York

Katherine Murrell,
Curator
The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Maggie Muth
Education Coordinator
American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland.

Tara Cady Sartorius
Curator of Education
Montgomery Museum of Fine Art, Montgomery, Alabama

Marcy Sperry
Education Director
Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, Chicago, Illinois

Diana Schlesinger
Director of Education
The American Folk Art Museum, New York

Leslie Umberger
Senior Curator of Exhibitions and Collections
John Michael Kohler Art Center

I also consulted with:

Norman Girardot
Professor of Religion. Organizer of Finster Symposium
Lehigh University

Cheryl Rivers
Instructor and writer with a specialty in self-taught art.
The American Folk Art Museum Folk Art Institute, New York

Jerry Stefl,
Curriculum developer
Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, Chicago, Illinois

John Turner
Collector and independent curator of Outsider Art
Berkeley, California.

Appendix F Resources

Curriculum Projects

In the Realms of Henry Darger: A High School Curriculum
American Folk Art Museum
45 West 53rd St.
New York, NY 10019
www.folkartmuseum.org

The Quilts of Gee's Bend in Context
The Women's Studies Department, Auburn University
Available free, on-line
www.auburn.edu/academic/other/geesbend

Coming Home - Folk Art Lesson Plans
The Art Museum University of Memphis
Available free, on-line
www.amum.edu

Art Car Plans - Road Scholars
American Visionary Art Museum
800 Key Highway
Baltimore, MD 21230
www.avam.org

Relevant Websites

Folk Art Messenger: The online journal for the Folk Art Society of America - www.folkart.org

Raw Vision: The website for the International Journal of Intuitive and Visionary Art, Outsider Art, Art Brut, Contemporary Folk Art, Marginal Arts - www.rawvision.com

Intuit: the Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art - www.art.org

Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education: - www.leinstitute.org

Museum of International Folk Art - www.moifa.or

**AAM Annual Meeting
Chicago, Illinois
April 2007**

SESSION PROPOSAL APPLICATION FORM

Submission Requirements

YOUR SESSION SUBMISSION MUST:

1. Be completed fully (You may indicate if a section is not applicable but do not leave any sections blank)
2. Include a session chair
3. Confirm participation of all presenters
4. Contain at least one presenter who is currently working in a museum
5. Not be handwritten
6. Agree to the terms in the Session Chair Agreement
7. Adhere to the word limit specifications

Proposals that fail to meet any of these requirements will not be considered for SPC endorsement or reviewed by the National Program Committee.

Instructions (See Session Proposal Application Instructions)

I. SESSION TITLE (No more than seven to 10 words)

Creating Educational Programming Inspired by Outsider Art Exhibitions

II. SESSION OVERVIEW (100 words or less for each section)

- A. **AUDIENCE** “Creating Educational Programming Inspired by Exhibitions of Outsider Art” will be of interest to the education and curatorial staff at art museums who are seeking ideas for interactive programming. While the examples discussed will be for exhibitions of Outsider Art, the suggestions are also applicable for other non-traditional art forms.
- B. **FOCUS** This panel discussion will focus on how museum educators can develop programming that helps visitors better

understand exhibitions of Outsider Art. The discussion will include examples from three different museum-related programs that use Outsider Art in innovative ways. These include programming and curriculum related to the artwork of Outsider artist Henry Darger; using programming for an exhibition of Outsider Art to form a partnerships with the National Institute on Aging; and creating curriculum that explores issues of race, class and gender in regards to African American quiltmakers.

- C. **OUTCOMES** Attendees will gain insight into the challenges and opportunities that arise when Outsider Art is transported to the educational sphere of the art museum. Panelists will provide examples of ways that their museums have used Outsider Art as a tool to engage in partnerships, create dialogue and foster creativity. Audience members will receive a handout that lists various resources mentioned in the discussion.
- D. **RELEVANCE** In today's art world, as the boundaries of art and acceptable techniques and materials continue to expand, educators are challenged to create appropriate educational programming. Museum professionals need to think beyond traditional interpretive strategies when designing education programming for Outsider Art. This session provides models of interpretation that show how educators can take their cue from the stories and visions of Outsider artists.

III. SESSION SUMMARY

- A. **Description for the AAM website and final program** (not to exceed three sentences): Museum educators will learn ways to think beyond traditional interpretive strategies when designing educational programming for Outsider Art. Following a brief description of Outsider Art, the three presenters will discuss the challenges and opportunities they face when developing educational programming for Outsider Art exhibitions. They will share examples of these programs and answer questions posed by the audience.
- B. **Description for the AAM preliminary program** (one sentence): Join in a discussion on how to develop educational programming that is directly inspired by exhibitions of Outsider Art.

C. Confirmed SPC or affiliate organization endorsement if applicable
(see Endorsement section on Session Proposal Instructions): Not applicable.

IV. CHAIRPERSON

First Name: Rose

Last Name: Kelly

Title:

Institution:

Address: 4701 San Leandro St. Studio 4

City/State/Zip: Oakland, CA 94601

Telephone: 510-261-5340

Fax:

E-mail: rosebags@california.com

Qualifications (100 words or less): Rose Kelly graduated from John F. Kennedy in Berkeley, California in 2005 with a Masters of Fine Arts in Museum Studies. She is the former curator at the National Institute of Art and Disabilities in Richmond, California. The topic for this presentation grew out of her Master's Project "Creating Educational Programming inspired by Outsider Art Exhibitions," which researched the challenges and opportunities inherent in developing such programming.

Major points to be covered (100 words or less): Ms. Kelly, as chair will give an overview of Outsider Art and its terminology. She will then introduce the panel participants and facilitate the discussion as well as the question and answer portion of the session.

V. PRESENTERS ALL presenters must be confirmed, and all information complete. Please photocopy this page if you have additional presenters.

Total number of presenters, excluding chairperson(s): 3

First Name: Diana

o Confirmed

Last Name: Schlesinger

Title: Director of Education

Institution: American Folk Art Museum

Address: 45 West 53rd St.

City/State/Zip: New York, NY 10019
Telephone: 212-265-1040
E-mail: dschlesinger@folkartmuseum.org

Fax:

Qualifications (100 words or less): Ms. Schlesinger is Director of Education at the American Folk Art Museum in New York City. She was project coordinator for “In the Realms of Henry Darger,” a curriculum guide for high school teachers based on the often disturbing art by Outsider artist Henry Darger. She also organized a series of programs entitled *Intensely Darger* that focused on his work in the spring of 2005.

Major points to be covered (100 words or less): Ms. Schlesinger will discuss her experience working with a team of educators to develop a curriculum that faces head-on the difficulties inherent in the subject matter of reclusive Outsider artist Henry Darger. Geared to high school students, the curriculum examines many of the issues that teenagers face growing up in urban America including violence, gender and identity.

First Name: Rebecca

o Confirmed

Last Name: Hoffberger

Title: Founder and Director

Institution: The American Visionary Art Museum

Address: 800 Key Highway

City/State/Zip: Baltimore, MD 21230

Telephone: 410-244-1900

Fax:

E-mail:

Qualifications (100 words or less): Ms. Hoffberger is the founder and director of the American Visionary Art Museum located in Baltimore, the only museum in the United States that exclusively exhibits Outsider Art. In 2003, The American Visionary Art Museum exhibited “Golden Blessings of Old Age” which showcased art produced by visionary seniors.

Major points to be covered (100 words or less): Ms. Hoffberger will talk about AVAM’s partnership with the National Institute on Aging. Together, they developed the pilot program *Vital Visionaries: The Museum Cure* which paired elders from the community with first year medical students who together toured the exhibition, met the artists and created artwork. This experience challenged the medical students’ misperceptions of senior citizens. This pilot program seeks to positively impact their future medical care of the elderly.

First Name: Mary o Confirmed
Last Name: Kuntz Ph.D.
Title: Director of Women's Studies
Institution: Auburn University
Address: 6010 Haley Center
City/State/Zip: Auburn, AL 36849
Telephone: 334-844-6363 Fax:
E-mail: kuntzme@auburn.edu
Qualifications **(100 words or less)**: Ms. Kuntz has a Ph.D. in Classics from Yale University. She is an Associate Professor of Classical Greek and Latin as well as Director of the Women's Studies Department at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama.

Major points to be covered **(100 words or less)**: Ms. Kuntz will discuss the two year process which resulted in "The Quilts of Gee's Bend in Context," a web-based curriculum project. The Women's Studies Department at Auburn University worked with more than a dozen scholars to develop a three-part program in conjunction with the exhibition "The Quilts of Gee's Bend." They researched the quilts, developed web-based materials including a curriculum that examines issues of social justice, equality and access to power against the backdrop of the quilters and their lives in Gee's Bend, Alabama.

VI. CONTENT
(Check only one in each category)

A. LENGTH

- X. Single Session (75 min.)
 Double Session (150 min.)

B. FORMAT

- Ask the Specialist(s)
 Case Study
 Forum
 Interactive
X. Panel Discussion
 Point/Counterpoint

C. TYPE

- Best Practice

- CEO/Director
- Discourse/Dialogue
- X. New Ideas
- Nuts & Bolts
- Research
- Theme

D. LOGISTICAL SET-UP

- X. Theater-style
- Other (Please describe alternate room set-up and convincingly articulate a need for it.)

E. SUBJECT (Check only one)

- Administration
- Collections Stewardship
- Communications
- Diversity
- Ethics/Legal
- Evaluation
- Globalization
- Governance
- X. Interpretation
- Leadership
- Planning
- Technology

X. (Please check) By submitting a session proposal, I agree to fulfill the expectations in the Session Chairperson Agreement. Failure to fulfill these expectations will jeopardize your acceptance as a session chairperson or presenter at future AAM annual meetings.

“Outsider art” is relatively new in Japan and, as a genre, works made by self-taught Japanese artists are still not very well known on the category-delineating, label-loving international art scene. Wellcome Collection’s Japanese exhibition comes at a time when outsider-art dealers and collectors are hungry for new discoveries. In general, in this specialized field, Asia still represents a largely unexplored territory. For the most part, they have emerged from art-therapy programs sponsored by what are known as social-welfare organizations, whose structures and funding sources tend to differ from those of comparable nonprofit institutions in the United States. Outsider art is art by self-taught or naïve art makers. Typically, those labeled as outsider artists have little or no contact with the mainstream art world or art institutions. In many cases, their work is discovered only after their deaths. Often, outsider art illustrates extreme mental states, unconventional ideas, or elaborate fantasy worlds. The term outsider art was coined by art critic Roger Cardinal in 1972 as an English synonym for art brut (French: [a bʁut], "raw art" or "rough art"), a Although outsider art is often presented as a recent discovery, these ideas, Maclagan reveals, belong to a tradition that goes back to the Renaissance, when the modern image of the artist began to take shape. In *Outsider Art*, Maclagan challenges many of the current opinions about this increasingly popular field of art and explores what happens to outsider artists and their work when they are brought within the very world from which they have excluded themselves. ...more. Get A Copy. Kindle Store \$19.63. I've always been fascinated by Outside Art and the idea of its creators as being outside the norm. Generally, self-taught and often on the margins of society – it's the need to create without the usual motivations which is intriguing.