

# **CREATING** **CONNECTIONS**

Self-Taught Artists in the  
Rosenthal Collection

**Large Print Labels**



*Creating Connections* explores our mysterious relationships with works of art, both in their making and experiencing. It takes us on a journey into the meaning of art for its creators and makes us consider our responses to their work. It also examines historic approaches to the creations of self-taught artists and how we devise a more equitable and inclusive art history.

This exhibition celebrates the individuality of a diverse array of self-taught artists and their connections: their shared humanity, commitment to art making, and inseparability from their cultures. Some of these talented artists found inspiration in their communities, others from perusing magazines or visiting museums. While some used conventional art supplies, others creatively repurposed materials close at hand. Artists with representation in museums and galleries during their lifetimes appear alongside those whose creative output remained obscure or known only to a few people. For those artists who have faced enormous challenges, art has been a lifeline and a beautiful way to connect with and be seen by others.

In the 1990s, Richard and Lois Rosenthal began to collect work by self-taught artists. Since Lois's passing in 2014, the collection has continued to build through the mutual decisions of Richard and Katherine Rosenthal. The Rosenthals have imposed no strict parameters on the collection, acquiring only pieces to which they experience an immediate attraction. The artists' compelling stories and the messages they communicate appeal powerfully to Richard Rosenthal, who has made a promised gift to the museum of selected pieces in this exhibition.

# What is this art, and how do we talk about it?

As you look at this exhibition, you may wonder:

- What qualifies as museum-worthy art?
- Why are these works grouped together when they are so dissimilar?
- Does the work of self-taught artists become less interesting when other people provide materials and advice, becoming collaborators in the creative process?
- Does knowing the artist's biography enhance your appreciation of works of art?
- When does the promotion and sales of work by marginalized artists cross into exploitation?

Questions like these provide abundant food for thought.

Traditionally, notions of progress and a succession of art movements define art history. So, what do we do with work that doesn't fit? Many of the terms used in the past to describe the art of those working independently of the mainstream—such as “primitive” and “naïve”—are demeaning; they imply that the art is less worthy of consideration and devoid of aesthetic decision-making. The term “Outsider Art” dates to the 1970s and is still used in the marketplace to denote work made in isolation by those at the margins of society. This whole concept is not only misleading but sometimes cruel or racist. As many of these artists learned from others, even the now-favored “self-taught” is imperfect. Should we just call their work ART and leave it at that?

# Jean Dubuffet

Born 1901 Le Havre, France

Died 1985 Paris, France

## Le Circulus I

1984

acrylic on paper

This scribbly abstraction is the work of Jean Dubuffet, who appears in the Rosenthal Collection as a highly influential figure in the dissemination of the work of self-taught artists. Dubuffet, who studied art in Paris, became disillusioned with the pretensions and narrowmindedness of the gallery and museum system and the artists it valued. Seeking honesty and humanism, he rejected conventional beauty and embraced artists on the periphery of established cultural spheres. He found, as he stated, "more art and poetry in the words of the barber—in his life—in his head—than in those of the so-called specialists."

In 1945, Dubuffet initiated a collection of work he admired, some made by people institutionalized in psychiatric hospitals. With Surrealist Movement artists and writers and like-minded art dealers, he formed *the Compagnie de l'Art Brut* (Raw Art Company) in 1948 to promote their work.



## Henry Darger

Born 1892 Chicago, Illinois

Died 1973 Chicago, Illinois

### **49. At Jennie Richee, escape during approach of new storm nudged into enemy lines circa 1950–60**

watercolor, graphite pencil, and carbon  
transfer on paper

A meandering line of little girls appears in a paradise landscape in this illustration by Henry Darger for his 15,000-page novel, *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*. The fictional epic recounts the battles of the Vivian Girls against the Glandelinians, the people of an evil empire that enslaves children. This watercolor is one of more than 350, some bound in three large volumes, discovered shortly before the artist's death, causing a sensation in his native Chicago.

A solitary hospital janitor and dishwasher with a brutal childhood, Darger's imaginative art was a tool for survival and self-empowerment. Darger invented his own colors. He created his drawings by combining and tracing imagery he collected from magazines, comic books, and other popular ephemera and adding details freehand. These sometimes include penises on girls, for reasons unknown but perhaps related to his convictions about their bravery.

## Henry Darger

Born 1892 Chicago, Illinois

Died 1973 Chicago, Illinois

### At general Viviananna headquarters

#### 1 Jennie gets a toothache pulls it and uses it to scrap[e] cement from prison bars

circa 1930–40

watercolor, graphite pencil, and carbon transfer on paper

After making the elongated work on the other side of this piece, Henry Darger took three of his earlier drawings from his vast epic, *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*, and composed them into this triptych. The order of the narrative seems to go from right to left. In the scene on the right, the seven Vivian Girls, who represent forces of good, engage in an armed confrontation with their enemies from the child-abducting Glandelinia empire. The girls, in the

central image, appear in a prison cell from which they subsequently escape. At the left, they frolic in a fancy paneled room with a landscape painting on the wall. This black and white picture is typical of the source material Darger avidly clipped from magazines and catalogues.

# Unidentified Artist

## Cat Post

20th century

painted wood  
and found objects

“It’s always a double treat to visit Aarne Anton’s American Primitive Gallery—one, to see any current exhibition, and two, to visit his office/back room. It’s here that I spotted this cat totem (as Aarne called it). I teased that it looked more like a pole cat to me. In his slow dour way, he responded, ‘No, it’s a cat totem!’ Either way, it was used on a pier to which sailors tied their boats.”

—Richard Rosenthal

## **Clarence Woolsey**

Born 1909 Hugoton, Kansas

Died 1987 Waterloo, Iowa

## **Grace Woolsey**

Born 1921 Thompson, Iowa

Died 1992 Waterloo, Iowa

## **Caparena Figure**

1961–71

bottle caps, wire, wood, and nails

Is this tall-eared creature a rabbit or an alien with antennae? Hundreds of colorful metallic bottle caps with crimped edges give this ingenious sculpture a rough texture and subtle shimmer. The caps are oriented tops-out for the face, eyes, and feet, and wired together in coils to compose much of the sprightly piece. According to the Woolseys' nephew, Grace was the creative mind behind this farm couple's work, which began as a pastime on a snowy night in 1961. Clarence made wood frames from old fruit crates to form the underlying structures.

By 1971, there were more than 100 of these figures, at once delightful, strange, and abstract. For 25 cents, you could see them displayed in Lincoln, Iowa, with an array of the Woolseys' other bottle-cap creations, including small buildings, mailboxes, and a full-size bicycle. They called their exhibition "The World's Largest Pioneer Caparena" (or "Cap-Arena").

## **Ralph Fasanella**

Born 1914 New York City

Died 1997 Yonkers, New York

## **Meeting at the Commons—**

**Lawrence 1912**

1977

oil on canvas

In January 1912, textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, went on strike to protest reductions in their hours and pay while the mills raked in enormous profits. The strikers, mostly immigrants employed in grueling jobs, swelled to more than 20,000. After more than two months, the so-called Bread and Roses Strike (named for a line in a James Oppenheim poem) pressured the mills to improve dangerous working conditions and the wages of factory employees.



Born two years after this event, Ralph Fasanella grew up in Brooklyn, New York, in an Italian immigrant family and became a labor organizer. His passionate dedication to social justice led to his reflection on history. Striving for accuracy, Fasanella visited Lawrence to study the buildings, conduct interviews, and pore through accounts. For Richard Rosenthal, this detailed, panoramic painting evokes memories of meeting the artist, with whom a shared love of the Brooklyn Dodgers broke the ice.

# Unidentified Artist (American)

## **All We Ask Is a Fair Trial**

late 19th–early 20th century

oil on canvas mounted on wood panel

The banners in this painting and the composition's bold design resemble shop signs of the late nineteenth century. They suggest that the painter may have been a commercial artist by trade. The twin figures behind prison bars extend their hands towards us in a plea for justice that still resonates today. Whether the painting refers to a specific case has yet to be determined.

## Thornton Dial

Born 1928 Emelle, Alabama

Died 2016 McCalla, Alabama

## Street People

1988

painted cut sheet metal and concrete

It takes a village! Thornton Dial's *Street People* represent both a response to his Alabama community and an attempt to give back. Dial was committed to finding ways to improve life for his neighbors while making creative reuse of castoff articles. To employ disadvantaged people, he devised a project in which they would use discarded cans to cast concrete bricks for construction. The *Street People* may relate to this endeavor. Cylindrical cast-concrete bricks become the bases for a village of spirited, individualized figures that Dial cut from can lids and other scrap metal and then painted.

# Unidentified Artist (American)

## Spotted Hen

circa 1890

painted pine, sheet copper, and metal with mount

The unknown sculptor of this hen stretching her legs and spreading her wings skillfully translated typical animal behavior into a compelling work of art. From every vantage point, the composition is engaging.

This is one of the earliest works in the exhibition and relates to the Rosenthals' enthusiasm for nineteenth-century painted furniture. The exuberant polka dots somewhat conceal the sculpture's elegant form.

## Unidentified Artist (American)

### Bird House

circa 1920–30

carved and painted wood, wire

This imaginatively carved birdhouse catches the eye—the expressive face looks startled that a bird would nest in his mouth. This humorous birdhouse attracted the attention of a boy who delivered newspapers in the 1930s to the Western Pennsylvania homestead where it sat on a fence post. As an adult, that newsboy acquired the birdhouse he had long admired for his home. Nevertheless, years later, he and his wife, Jacqueline Homan, put it on the art market. In 1990, she wrote Richard Rosenthal with regret, “I was always sorry that I sold it.”

# Ned Cartledge

Born 1916 Canon, Georgia

Died 2001 DeKalb, Georgia

## Hell Ain't Half Full

1986

carved and painted wood

After years of carving “nice” things, as he called them, such as animals and fruit, Ned Cartledge found he could not be silent in his opposition to the Vietnam War. In about 1970, the Atlanta artist began making satirical relief sculptures to express his passionate views on politics and society. *Hell Ain't Half Full* cuts to the quick, taking aim at greed and hypocrisy in the name of religion.

As with many carvers, Cartledge's work emerged from the tradition of whittling as a creative pastime for boys. “As a boy of about seven or eight years old, I started carving little pistols and guns and little

things out of wood. You know, use to you could go around in back of a grocery store and get all kinds of packing crates and things that have great soft pine wood in them. My mother would fuss at me about getting her paring knife."

## **Eddie Arning**

Born 1898 Germania, Texas

Died 1993 McGregor, Texas

## **Untitled**

circa 1964–74

oil pastel and graphite pencil on dark blue paper

Eddie Arning was 66 years old and had spent most of his adult life in the Austin State Hospital when an occupational therapist introduced him to drawing. Between 1964 and 1974, Arning produced 2000 drawings, each work a manifestation of his intrinsic design sense. Advertisements from popular magazines became inspirations for Arning to interpret into "a good picture." He would transform the original image into a composition made up of patterns, repeated shapes, and suites of carefully chosen colors.

Arning may have referenced an advertisement with a couple drinking wine for this drawing, as the woman raises a wine glass. Both figures bend their legs as though seated on air. While the stylized trees set the scene outside, the



background presents questions. Is the white area a patio or possibly a beach? Is the blue area with black shapes a cloudy sky or water and rocks?

## **David Butler**

Born 1898 Good Hope, Louisiana

Died 1997 Morgan City, Louisiana

## **Nativity Scene**

circa 1980

painted cut sheet metal, plastic beads, and wire

David Butler said divine inspiration guided him to beautify his environment. He turned his house and yard into a fantasy world populated with imaginative creatures and scenes from the Bible and mythology. Butler cut roofing tin with a meat cleaver, hammer, and axe-head before adding vivid colors and patterns. This nativity was perhaps a window screen; we can imagine the striking effects of light penetrating the cut-outs in its intriguing design. Wires with found objects like beads set Butler's delightful conceptions in motion.

Unlike many self-taught artists, Butler achieved recognition as an artist during his lifetime. In the 1970s, the director of the New Orleans Museum of Art discovered Butler's work and organized a solo exhibition, the first of the artist's many public shows.

## **Minnie Evans**

Born 1892, Long Creek,  
North Carolina  
Died 1987 Wilmington,  
North Carolina

### **No. 79**

1946

crayon, pen and ink (several colors), and graphite pencil on paper mounted on a second sheet of paper

Minnie Evans began drawing in her spare time in 1935, often on whatever paper she could find. In the beginning, her work was nearly abstract, composed of simple lines, but starting in 1944, she produced drawings with figures, animals, and plants. These became increasingly detailed and surrealistic over the years. As Evans explained, lyrical compositions appeared to her, sometimes through dreams or spontaneously without forethought. "God has sent me teachers....The angel that stands by me, answers me...and directs me what to do."

Evans drew *No. 79* the year after World War II ended, which was a traumatic time for the artist; her two sons had enlisted to fight, and blasts from nearby military compounds that trained fighter pilots and tested rockets disrupted her life. This image of an angelic figure offering a heart to a unicorn in a garden setting seems to depict the world peace she hoped would come.

# **Sister Gertrude Morgan**

Born 1900 Lafayette, Alabama

Died 1980 New Orleans, Louisiana

## **Mothers Day**

circa 1960–74

crayon, tempera or gouache,  
and pen and ink on cardboard

The bold, exuberant art of Sister Gertrude Morgan was intrinsic to her ministry as a Pentecostal Christian evangelist. She ecstatically communicated biblical messages to send people on the road to salvation. This is one of several pieces in which she combined vivid text and imagery to proclaim her joyful intimacy with the Lord. The "PRECIOUS BRIDE" dressed in white represents Morgan herself, declaring her marriage to God. "DADA" in her text refers to Jesus Christ.

Morgan cared for orphans in Alabama before moving to New Orleans in 1939. There the self-appointed Sister preached on the streets and founded the Everlasting Gospel Mission at her home. Though Morgan was an original, her

spiritual mission had origins in the Baptist and Holiness movements. Passionately committed to her sanctified purpose, she created a front porch gallery to display her artwork and recorded music.

# Malcah Zeldis

Born 1931 New York City

## Peaceable Kingdom

1987

enamel paint on Masonite

Malcah Zeldis, who grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in Detroit, began to paint in earnest at the age of 43 after graduating from Brooklyn College. Her work is inspired by biblical and historical subjects, fairy tales, personal heroes, and events from her life. Zeldis has developed a style that reflects her admiration of detailed Flemish paintings of the 1400s with multiple figures and the bright colors used by Haitian artists.

Edward Hicks's *Peaceable Kingdom*, an icon of nineteenth-century American art, inspired this exuberant painting that celebrates living in harmony—for humanity as well as animals. Updating the setting from an untamed forest to a New York City park, Zeldis puts her spin on the traditional image. The crowd includes Zeldis's heroes, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr., and likely the artist and her friends.





Edward Hicks (American, 1780–1849), *Peaceable Kingdom*, circa 1834, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1980.62.15

## **Nellie Mae Rowe**

Born 1900 Fayetteville, Georgia

Died 1982 Atlanta, Georgia

## **Pink Pig**

mid-20th century

crayon on paper

Nellie Mae Rowe's childhood was marked by her family's economic hardships that forced her to pick cotton from a young age. First married at age sixteen, Rowe moved with her husband to Vinings, Georgia, where she worked as a domestic servant. Her responsibilities left little time for creative pursuits. Finally, at age 48, after the death of her second husband, Rowe embraced her independence and the imagination of her childhood.

Rowe first embellished her yard with handmade dolls and ornaments before she began to draw. Her whimsical compositions feature animals and other motifs drawn in saturated, jewel-like colors. Here, the calm simplicity of the pig enclosed in a heart is in contrast to the rest of the drawing crowded with animals, a human figure, and a large flowering tree.

## Henry Darger

Born 1892 Chicago, Illinois

Died 1973 Chicago, Illinois

## Blengin

circa 1920–30

watercolor, graphite pencil, and  
blue carbon transfer on paper

In the rich fantasy world of the Chicago artist Henry Darger, *Blengin* is short for *Blengiglomenean*, a creature of his invention yet similar to mythological beings across time and cultures. Darger's Blengins are serpents sharing human and animal characteristics. They appear in his watercolors in various forms—sometimes more human, other times more animal—and evolved over the decades.

Unlike the artist's later watercolors (represented elsewhere in this exhibition), in which he extensively appropriated elements from printed matter, Darger largely drew this fanciful work by hand. He used children's watercolor sets, but rather than painting with the standard colors as they came, he crushed the dry pigment blocks and mixed them to create his own hues. The decorative patterns and candy-like colors make this a magical beast.

## **Thornton Dial**

Born 1928 Emelle, Alabama

Died 2016 McCalla, Alabama

### **A Moose That Has a Back Can Do Anything in the Woods**

1989

paint and cut and painted high-pile carpet  
on canvas mounted on wood

The Alabama artist Thornton Dial explained that Black residents of the United States had to be resourceful to survive. For Dial, who worked for a railway car manufacturer, items for which most people no longer had use were full of creative possibilities. Here, he repurposed old carpeting to suggest the shaggy coat of a moose and make the animal stand out in relief from the generously painted forest background. "Cutting out tin and carpet and stuff come natural like drawing," Dial said. "The mind do the imagining. I got where I could bend and twist the old materials as beautiful as I could draw it out with a pencil."

Animals, in Dial's personal symbolism, are sometimes stand-ins for Black men or the artist himself. Racism and the power dynamics in American society were among his foremost thematic concerns. Dial's fierceness and expressive deployment of found materials earned him museum recognition in his lifetime.

## Ronald Lockett

Born 1965 Bessemer, Alabama

Died 1998 Bessemer, Alabama

### Traps

circa 1989

wire, painted wood, chain-link fencing,  
found sticks, cut sheet metal, and nails

This evocative construction comes from Ronald Lockett's *Traps* series. Deer that appear to be caught in chain-link fencing not only express Lockett's deep sympathy for animals but allude to human struggles, environmental devastation, and racial discrimination.

Around Birmingham, Alabama, a tradition thrived among Black communities of making art out of scrap materials. Lockett, who lived in Pipe Shop, a poor neighborhood in industrial Bessemer, found a mentor in his older cousin, the artist Thornton Dial. He also took inspiration from the yard environments in which many Southern artists expressed their creativity. Lockett knew from boyhood that he wanted to be an artist. In a poignant film made

two years before his death at age 33 of HIV-related pneumonia, he noted, "When I feel lost in my life, I go back to my artwork to get in touch with myself and regain who I am." He expressed hope that his art would be seen and make a difference.



## **William Hawkins**

Born 1895 Union City, Kentucky

Died 1990 Columbus, Ohio

### **Did Comets Kill the Dinosaurs? #1**

circa 1986

enamel house paint, cornmeal,  
and collage on Masonite

When Willam Hawkins moved from rural Kentucky to Columbus, Ohio, in 1916, he took on numerous menial jobs to make ends meet. Always an entrepreneur, Hawkins found creative ways to supplement his income, including making paintings that he marketed for what his clientele could afford. Hawkins had sold his art independently for nearly fifty years when a young art student convinced him to enter paintings at the Ohio State Fair, leading to New York gallery representation. From 1981 until his death, Hawkins rose to national prominence.

Hawkins's paintings are characterized by their dramatic scale, striking aesthetic choices, bold execution, and references to popular culture. A

restless experimenter, Hawkins incorporated collage and found objects into his work. Wanting to add dimension to flat surfaces, he invented a modeling paste by mixing cornmeal with paint. Hawkins worked to give each painting a sense of energy and life of its own.

## **Bessie Harvey**

Born 1929 Dallas, Georgia

Died 1994 Alcoa, Tennessee

## **Peace**

1987

found wood, beads, feathers, glitter, and paint

Bessie Harvey's *Peace* seems animated with an intense and magical energy. Some scholars view Harvey's transformations of tree roots and branches as an extension of African art and religious beliefs. She perceived spirits in the organic forms and saw her role as to reveal them as God instructed: "I talk to the trees.... There's souls in the branches and roots. I frees them." She also felt obligated to teach Black Americans "the truth about themselves," as her daughter, Faye Harvey Dean, notes. "Because everything we know, everything we have ever learned and been taught, for generations, was what we were taught by another race, not our own."

Harvey was confident in who she was. "She had such an imagination that she would take us places where we've never been before," Dean reminisces. Harvey shared her small sculptures with the patients at the Alcoa, Tennessee, hospital where she worked, until a visitor with art world connections recognized their sales potential.

## **Bill Traylor**

Born circa 1853 Dallas County (near Pleasant Hill),  
Alabama

Died 1949 Montgomery, Alabama

## **Exciting Event in Blue: Four Wild Men, Barking Dog, Perched Bird, and Construction**

circa 1939–42

tempera, graphite pencil, and ink  
(or watercolor) on thin cardboard

Surrounding what may be a fountain is a circular arrangement of gesturing figures. But what are they doing? In the foreground is an older man walking with two canes and a running man with a rifle. At the top, a dog barks at a bird who stands firm, while a man may be attempting to strike it. Is this bird a stand-in for a man who is threatened but resilient?

Born in rural Alabama, Traylor was a child when legally emancipated from enslavement in 1865. Yet, in the decades after the Civil War, the persistent system of oppression continued to shape the context of his life and his art. Traylor labored for

his former owners until the late 1920s, when he moved to Montgomery, the state capitol. It was there that he made over 1000 drawings. Although, as a Black man, Traylor was prohibited from learning to read and write, he created a unique visual (and sometimes subversive) language to share his sharp perceptions of rural and urban life.

## **Nek Chand**

Born 1924 Barian Kalan

(now Pakistan)

Died 2015 Chandigarh, India

## **Standing Man**

circa 1951–80

painted fired clay, broken china, rocks, and concrete

A road inspector in Chandigarh, India, Nek Chand constructed a mythical world he described as his poetry with rocks and a child's dream. Large groups of figures and animals surround architectural elements and waterways—all made out of concrete and decorated with objects found at demolition sites and rubbish heaps. "I had many ideas; I was thinking all the time. I saw beauty and art in what people said was junk." Working illegally on government property at the edge of the city, Chand's environment encompassed twelve acres when a city work crew discovered it. The public fell in love with Chand's world, which was

officially named the Rock Garden and opened to visitors in 1976. Chand continued to work until his death in 2015, by which time the Rock Garden had expanded to thirty acres. Today, it welcomes thousands of visitors each day.



## **Martín Ramírez**

Born 1895 Tepatitlán, Mexico

Died 1963 Auburn, California

## **Untitled, Super Chief**

1954

graphite pencil and pastel on paper

Martín Ramírez made exquisite choices in line, patterns, and materials. The tunnel at the center of this dramatic work creates the illusion of deeply receding perspective that pulls you in. The tilting train, requiring an abrupt turn to enter the tunnel, seems to barrel ahead at lightning speed.

When the farm he owned was failing, Ramírez migrated from Los Altos Jalisco, Mexico, to El Paso, Texas, to earn money to bring back to his family. But in 1931, he was confined for life to a California state hospital, where he insisted he was not mentally ill and simply could not speak English. Scholar Leslie Umberger has written, "The images Ramírez drew speak of a yearned-for homeland, and seemingly chart the self-hood and identity he feared losing hold of in a place that had stripped

him of everything.” For this artist, who could see passing trains from the windows of his ward, the locomotive may have represented freedom and the way home.

## **Janet Sobel**

Born 1893 Ekaterinoslav, Ukraine

Died 1968 Plainfield,

New Jersey

## **Untitled (JS070)**

1946–48

enamel paint on canvas board

Janet Sobel's granddaughter recalled, "Although Gramma left many of her siblings behind in the Ukraine, she remembered them in her art. Faces from her past—people who spoke her language—were there on canvas or on paper, or envelopes or whatever surface was under her hand.... They created the familiar in a country that was never quite her own."

Sobel came to the United States at fourteen following her father's death in an anti-Jewish pogrom (an authorized massacre). After the births of her children, she began making paintings using unorthodox techniques and materials, such as dripping lustrous enamel from a pipette. In the 1940s, through her son's intervention, Sobel's work

appeared at the celebrated New York galleries of Peggy Guggenheim and Sidney Janis. Although Jackson Pollock, soon famous for his drip paintings, “furtively” viewed her work and said it impressed him, the disparaging descriptions as a “primitive” and “housewife” dismissed Sobel’s role in the early history of Abstract Expressionism.

# **Hiroyuki Doi**

Born 1946 Nagoya, Japan

## **Untitled**

2002

pen and black ink on Washi paper

Do you find this drawing soothing and meditative? It is entirely composed of tiny circles in differing sizes, arranged in formations that seem to slowly drift and pulse. The circle is a universal form with many associations, such as cells, water droplets, the void, or the infinite.

After the death of his younger brother, Hiroyuki Doi, a Tokyo chef, became "obsessed with thoughts about life and death. To ease these feelings I turned to art... When I finally discovered circle drawing, I started to feel very relieved." He said, "By drawing I start to feel calm. I start to feel something other than myself allowed me to draw these works." The immersive experience Doi describes is common to many art makers. Although he draws without preconceived schemes, he is sensitive to the effect of his choices on the viewer. Devoted to

handcraftsmanship, Doi selects handmade "Washi" papers and fine-tipped Japanese "Pilot DR" drawing pens.

## **Carlo Zinelli**

Born 1916 Verona, Italy

Died 1974 Verona, Italy

### **Untitled**

1962–64

watercolor and gouache on paper

The mysterious watercolors of Carlo Zinelli typically feature imagery covering the page. Silhouettes of people in profile dominate and always face to the left. Most of his figures are men, but occasionally women are also included, as seen here. In the 1950s, Zinelli, in simplified abstract form, depicted animals, buildings, and trees reminiscent of his childhood as a farm laborer. Some subsequent, darker pieces suggest the violence of war, which he had experienced traumatically firsthand in the 1930s during Italy's engagement in Spain.

In 1956, a sculptor created a new art studio at the San Giacomo psychiatric facility in Verona, Italy, where Zinelli's family committed him in 1947. For Zinelli, who could no longer communicate verbally with other people, art was an essential touchstone.

With an intense creative drive, he spent eight-hour days in the studio. He balanced the colors across his compositions, selecting a distinctive suite of hues for each piece.



## **Jean Dubuffet**

Born 1901 Le Havre, France

Died 1985 Paris, France

### **Annal XII (Annale XII)**

1978

pen and black ink with collage elements on paper

If you assumed that this ink drawing was the work of a self-taught artist, you would be wrong—although it is not surprising. Jean Dubuffet was a pioneer in the appreciation and promotion of artists working beyond the confines of the “art world.” He admired the creative work of children as well as many of the adults included in this exhibition. Modern artists throughout the twentieth century embraced art that, to their eyes, appeared unconventional and suggested avenues to the creation of new and exciting work. Here, Dubuffet pays homage to Picasso, the master of Cubism, in the figure at upper left and to his self-taught heroes elsewhere. He once wrote, “I feel that every work of art should in the highest degree lift one out of context, provoking a surprise and a shock.”

**Friedrich**

**Schröder-Sonnenstern**

Born 1892 Kaukehmen, East Prussia (now in Russia)

Died 1982 Berlin, Germany

**Death Winking in the  
Moral Apple of Life  
(Der schielende Tod im  
moralischen Lebensafpel)**

1956

crayon on cardboard

In this precise, vividly colored crayon drawing, Friedrich Schröder-Sonnenstern distilled the natural form of a halved apple on a plate to abstract shapes. He reimagined the fruit's core as a sinister, winking death's head with crossbones. Small, widely spaced eyes stare up from the plate. Scholars have suggested that the artist's once-stated philosophy may have been a commentary on post-war Germany: "I write poems about the fundamentals of social justice, about the decay of civilization."

The Surrealists and Jean Dubuffet were fascinated with Schröder-Sonnenstern, whom they embraced for his extreme inventiveness and unfiltered disregard for social niceties. His artwork is frequently carnivalesque and erotic, featuring sexual imagery and confections of human and animal forms.

## **Adolf Wölfli**

Born 1864 Bern, Switzerland

Died 1930 Bern, Switzerland

## **Elisabeth Bieri**

1907

graphite pencil and crayon  
on paper

This tapestry-like drawing from 1907 was one of Adolf Wölfli's first in color. Look for his name hidden amid the dense ornamental patterns and myriad heads, birds, and musical notations. Wölfli worked for the family of Elisabeth Bieri, whose name appears near the bottom, during his profoundly troubled boyhood.

At the Waldau psychiatric facility in Bern, Switzerland, where he was institutionalized for 35 years, Wölfli reportedly went through a pencil every two to three days and never used a straight edge. All total, his imaginative opus comprised 25,000 pages of fantasy autobiography interwoven with poetry, artwork, and musical compositions. Wölfli was among the first artists diagnosed with severe mental illness to be recognized and collected. In

1921, Walter Morgenthaler, a Waldau psychiatrist, published an influential book in which he notably described Wölfli's creative output as art and identified him by name instead of a number. This book encouraged Jean Dubuffet and his colleagues to seek out individualists like Wölfli.

# Edmund Monsiel

Born 1897 Wozuczyn, Poland

Died 1962 Tomaszów Lubelski, Poland

## Untitled

1958

graphite pencil on paper

Edmund Monsiel's drawings feature central figures surrounded by faces with staring eyes. He often included a messianic or religious inscription. Written here (in Polish) is:

Wonders upon wonders  
how to mess with you  
and who has not seen  
the devil has not heard  
of it looking like this now

Monsiel created a collection of intricately detailed drawings in the last 20 years of his life. Each work was both a coping strategy and a manifestation of his struggles with the traumatic events he witnessed during World War II. The Nazi invasion of Poland triggered Monsiel's schizophrenia. During

their occupation of his hometown, the Nazis randomly selected his brother-in-law for execution. After Ukranian soldiers burned down his parents' house during fighting with the German army, Monsiel retreated into solitude, shunning human interaction as much as possible.

# Charles Benefiel

Born 1967 Venice Beach, California

## Random Numeric Repeater #5

2001

pen and ink on paper

In Charles Benefiel's language, each symbol corresponds to spoken sounds or music notes and counteracts the reduction of human life to numbers (Social Security numbers, passcodes, phone numbers, etc.). "Each [Random Numeric Repeater] drawing was made up of more than 20,000 characters written in stream of consciousness and represented a ptheonetic [sic] numeric language that I had created as a zen drawing exercise."

Benefiel uses his drafting skills to create intricate and detailed drawings that help him cope with his obsessive-compulsive disorder. The artist is open about his mental health problems, hoping his art can help others. "I'll never forget...this one kid who was in a major battle with heroin, walked up to one of my drawings, and he was like, 'I know



this. I've been there. I've done this.' To know that you're communicating with those people is the most important thing in the world."

# Nick Blinko

Born 1961 Watford, England

## Untitled

1985

pen and black ink on paper

Nick Blinko is best known in England as the lead singer, lyricist, and guitar player for the punk band Rudimentary Peni. His drawings grace the band's album covers and posters, adding a layer of visual chaos to their music. Art making is central to Blinko's life, yet to work on his drawings, he risks his psychological health. Because the drug he takes for his schizoaffective disorder inhibits his creativity, he stops taking his prescribed medication when he draws.

Blinko has drawn intricate compositions since childhood and often works for sixteen hours at a time. Each piece starts with a central figure around which he gradually adds other large forms until the space between is full. In the end, a crowded web of interconnected figures, faces, and symbols cover the page.

## **Donald Pass**

Born 1930 Cheshire, England

Died 2010 Oxford, England

## **Landscape beyond**

### **the Veil**

2000

watercolor and pen and ink on paper

The British artist Donald Pass enjoyed art world success in the 1940s and 50s as an abstract painter and educator. (John Lennon was his student.) But his career took an abrupt turn in 1969 when he had a visionary experience in a graveyard. Encountering a tomb in the winged shape of the Royal Airforce insignia, "everything began to change and a tremendous darkness surrounded me," Pass explained. "The whole landscape, churchyard, near and distant fields, seemed filled with thousands of figures. Stretching to the horizon. In the blackness was a tremendous light; large winged figures with faces like lions.... A veil had been lifted and I would never again see anything in the same way."

Pass shared this life-altering experience in work he created for the rest of his life in his studio near Oxford, England. Winged figures that suggest ascending souls and cascading angels evoke themes of death and resurrection.

# Ken Grimes

Born 1947 New York City

## WOW

1992

acrylic on canvas

"Synchronicities," for Ken Grimes, are signs of extraterrestrial intelligence and alien intervention. Thus Cheshire, repeated at the top of this painting, is both the Connecticut town where the artist grew up and the home in England of another Ken Grimes, who won a huge soccer pool by calling seven straight ties at odds of 1.5 million to one.

Since the mid-1980s, Grimes has been using his art as an agent of revelation to record his discoveries and beliefs. Using a mix of text and imagery taken from science fiction, popular culture, and astronomy, Grimes hopes to inspire people to think about the existence of aliens, how they affect our lives, and the importance of contacting them. He works only with black and white paint so that his messages are clearly stated.

## **Mary K. Borkowski**

Born 1916 Sulphur Lick, Ohio

Died 2008 Dayton, Ohio

## **Toil, Strength, and Devotion**

1973

hand stitching with silk thread on velvet

A collection of childhood memories on the family farm near Sulphur Lick, Ohio, inspired Mary K. Borkowski. In this needlework landscape, her father plants a field, diligently followed by the dog Tilly and Mary's beloved cat Sweetie Pie. Sheep turn toward her grandmother's home to escape the coming storm. "Tucked back in God's country, it was a big thing when we saw an airplane going over high in the sky. My favorite bird is the beautiful cardinal, so I had to include him and by his facing the horses in a test of bravery shows not by our size do we overcome."

Collector Richard Rosenthal first saw Borkowski's work in the early 1970s and decided to visit her Dayton, Ohio, home. "I was stunned by the detail, the drama, and the way she told a story with the deftness of her fingers.... [She was] soft spoken, welcoming.... Her work was as striking as it was abundant."

## Earl Cunningham

Born 1893 Edgecombe, Maine

Died 1977 St. Augustine, Florida

### Mill

1949–77

oil on fiberboard

The boatman and painter Earl Cunningham loved old things and imagined an idyllic nineteenth-century America. In *Mill*, Indigenous people in canoes (and wearing war bonnets) share the river with large commercial sailing vessels. Incongruities of time, place, and scale are typical Cunningham fare. With fir trees and pink flamingos on one riverbank and palms on the other, aspects of his native Edgecomb, Maine, merge with St. Augustine, Florida, a subsequent home. Multiple viewpoints, flattened elements, and simplified shapes are common to the artist's tranquil landscapes. Applying rich colors to smooth fiberboards, he crafted enamel-like surfaces.



Cunningham exhibited his paintings in Over Fork Gallery, a curiosity shop he opened in Florida. Although little interested in selling his work, he envied the fame of Grandma Moses. He created business cards on which he declared himself a "primitive" artist, a then popular term for the homespun self-taught painter.

## **Mary K. Borkowski**

Born 1916 Sulphur Lick, Ohio

Died 2008 Dayton, Ohio

### **House Huntin'**

1967

hand stitching, quilting, and appliqué on fabric

"Flossie [my dog] died in October leaving a big vacancy in my life. About 9 o'clock on Friday, January 13, the following year, I was in the living room, working on a quilt, when suddenly at the front door came a loud 'MEOW.' I opened the door and there stood a black, green-eyed, half-grown kitten looking up at me, seeming to be demanding entrance. I said, 'Come on in, Sweetie Pie.' She did, and stayed eighteen years. My sister and I carried logs from a near-by park for scratching posts, but she preferred my newly upholstered chair."

—Mary K. Borkowski, "Sweetie" from  
*The Pets in My Life*, 2002

## **Mary K. Borkowski**

Born 1916 Sulphur Lick, Ohio

Died 2008 Dayton, Ohio

## **Her Last Goodnight**

1985

hand stitching and appliqué on fabric

Mary K. Borkowski was an award-winning quilter before she began to create her "thread paintings." In 1965, Borkowski realized that the center design of her quilts held messages, and she decided to focus on these and forgo the rest of the quilt: "My mind was full of stories.... I will tell stories with needle and thread." Inspired by her life and current events, Borkowski's fiber art displays her mastery of the medium.

*Her Last Goodnight* honors Borkowski's beloved cat, Sweetie Pie, who entered Borkowski's life on Friday the 13th and died on Friday the 13th, 18 years later. Depicted here is the last night Sweetie Pie went up the stairs to sleep on Borkowski's bed. "She came up to me and licked first my left ear, then my right ear.... I realized her sudden licking of my ears was her way of telling me she loved me and was leaving now."

# **VISIONARIES + VOICES**

**Large Print Labels**

In association with *Creating Connections: Self-Taught Artists in the Rosenthal Collection*, we present a selection of pieces by artists who work at Cincinnati's Visionaries + Voices (V+V) in this gallery. Established in 2003, V+V is a non-profit organization that provides creative, professional, and educational opportunities to more than 125 visual artists with disabilities. Artists working at V+V actively contribute to the greater arts community through creative, educational, and strategic partnerships with local and regional artists, schools, and business leaders.

The V+V studios buzz with creative energy, inspiration, and possibility. Artists work intently, using paint, clay, metal, fabric, colored pencils, ink, papier mache, collage, photography, assemblage, glass, wood, and digital materials. They develop their own styles, techniques, and subjects in a supportive environment that encourages self-expression and creative growth.

The Cincinnati Art Museum and V+V partnership began in 2017. Teaching artists from V+V offer educational programs for all ages and abilities through the museum's Division of Learning and Interpretation. Staff and artists from the studios also

take part in the museum's initiatives by participating in the Accessibility Community Advisory Council. Collectively, we are growing a more inclusive arts community in Greater Cincinnati.

To learn more about Visionaries + Voices, please visit [www.visionariesandvoices.com](http://www.visionariesandvoices.com).

# Cathrine Whited

## Meat Drawings

2019

pencil and colored pencil on paper

Courtesy of the artist

The subjects of Cathrine Whited range from household objects and food to fictional characters. Her work becomes a way of processing, understanding, and collecting pieces of our culture commonly overlooked, mirroring our lives and the objects with which we are surrounded. Each rendering typically depicts one character or unit and is labeled akin to a scientific journal. When one drawing is complete, it is checked off the list. Cataloging something like a slice of cheese, for instance, may be humorous at first, but also quickly becomes something confrontational and unavoidable. Experiencing all the drawing collections together begins to tell a different story, expanding the meaning beyond humor to something greater.

# Tyler Spohn

## **Birds, Ships, Mermaids, Divers, and Fishes**

2019

gouache on paper and illustration board  
Courtesy of the artist

Tyler Spohn makes art with the sensibility of a great illustrator. Working with images from photographs and popular culture, Spohn produces original gouache paintings that contain direct, frontal compositions, fine lines, and immaculate details. Spohn eliminates any unnecessary elements, often omitting backgrounds in favor of solely representing his subjects. Value is flattened into solid color, giving his work a graphic quality like some early twentieth-century commercial art. A quiet observation and attention to subtle features are revealed in his inked line work.



# Amy Hayden

## Untitled (Two Drawings)

2023

colored pencil on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Amy Hayden is a mixed-media artist who translates her personal experiences into various materials. Her use of abstraction through geometric patterns, repetition, and *especially* color is an outward expression of her inner self. Her artwork conveys a sense of lively optimism and hope through her active line work and compositions, which captivate the viewer upon engagement. Every mark has a deliberate place within Hayden's work. Though the world around us is often changing, Hayden captures her feelings on paper so that they remain present, bold, and attentive. She has begun to take a very active role in the Cincinnati community and is always working towards bringing art and happiness to those around her.

# Rosalind Bush

## Untitled

2020

mixed media on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Finding inspirational imagery in various art books, Rosalind Bush appropriates well-established iconography across the fine art landscape. Bush is primarily concerned with studying the figure, often referencing the works of the great masters or photo portraits from *National Geographic*. Experienced with papier-mâché, markers, and various other media, the artist now works in acrylic or watercolor as she focuses on refining her new figurative paintings. Bush chooses to define areas of her subject with dark outlines, bringing attention to the foreground. The eyes are sharp and often pupil-less. Her distinctive aesthetic creates works that are energetic and bold.

# Linda Kunick

## Untitled

2022

mixed media on paper

Courtesy of the artist

As an artist, advocate, and activist, Linda Kunick is a force of nature. Working primarily on paper, Kunick creates bright, colorful abstractions with crayon and colored pencil, often combining themes of nature and religion. Most notably, her consistent use of the butterfly appears as a symbol of freedom, change, and growth. Kunick has overcome a variety of obstacles and insecurities, which is obvious in her presence; she exudes confidence and internal fortitude. She empowers others around her both in the studio and in her work. Kunick creates work in the belief that the act of viewing art can be transformative and that her ideas and joy can be communicated and shared with the world.

# Courtney Cooper

## Cincinnati Map

2010

ballpoint pen on collaged found paper

Cincinnati Art Museum; Museum Purchase:

Alice and Harris K. Weston Endowment for

Contemporary Art

2014.26

Courtney Cooper's intricate map drawings are expressions of civic pride. He begins his monumental pieces by gluing together sheets of copy paper pulled from recycling bins at Kroger, where he works. Building up layers of paper over time, the artist creates expressively irregular surfaces and covers areas of his drawings he wishes to rework with additional sheets. Cooper's complex works appear abstract from a distance, but close looking provides ample rewards. Phrases and quotes from the artist's daily experiences, television, and film appear amid dense networks of streets and key landmarks, all rendered with precision. Note the references to Cincinnati's German heritage and Oktoberfest, with which Cooper is fascinated.

Cooper has worked at Visionaries + Voices studios since 2003. In 2014, the museum featured his drawings in the exhibition *Cincinnati Everyday* and acquired this elaborate example. *Raw Vision*, an international publication on self-taught artists, recently dedicated an article to Cooper's work.

**Courtney Cooper**

**Piranhas**

2006

pen and gouache on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of James L. Thompson

2017.27

# Jenny Crowe

## Untitled (Two Drawings)

circa 2018

pen and marker on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Fragments of truth and information create visually complex images in these drawings. Somewhere between poetry and painting, words are layered and overlap enough to visually flatten. Jenny Crowe works methodically from left to right and top to bottom, filling the empty space until the viewer is trapped somewhere between the impulse to read and a pure visual experience. She approaches her work with intense focus and always handles each material with determination. "I am trying to get a style to emerge by placing colors and shapes where I want them." Crowe's work varies from text-based poetry to stylized figures and abstracted collages. Her figures often appear visually after writing about them in a larger narrative, developing a full story before or after their completion on the page. The fragmentation in Crowe's work comes from her philosophy that "fragments of life get pieced together like a puzzle."

# Katie Hefele

## Untitled

2021

marker on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Katie Hefele loves to work in grids, constructing complex imagery based on drawn armatures. Inspired by stained glass designs and logic-based imagery, she begins the drawing process by outlining and mapping the entire surface. She then carefully applies color to balance the movement of the viewer's eye through the geometric panels. Her work is a wonderful mix of color, constraint, and optimism. Each defined area in the picture plane creates another chance to reflect and move towards creating a more complex understanding of color or mood.



**Curtis Davis**

**Untitled**

2023

marker on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Creating at the Visionaries + Voices studio since 2011, Curtis Davis dismisses unnecessary embellishments, abstracting subjects in his drawings to the simplest of shapes. His impulse to make art and quick gestural movements results in an abundance of new drawings produced daily.

# Curtis Davis and Robert McFate

## Untitled

2023

acrylic paint on wood

Courtesy of the artist

Multiple layers of paint add complexity to Curtis Davis's found object sculptures, here made in collaboration with Robert McFate. A fresh daily batch requires they paint over the previous day's finished work. Thick layers conceal the history of painting underneath. Reworking builds up an impasto whose candy-like layered edges reveal the collective history of the piece. The artists create tension with an expansive surface of broad opaque shapes.

# Dale Jackson

## Untitled

2015

marker on poster board

Courtesy of the artist

With everyday materials, Dale Jackson creates unlikely associations and complex poetry. Using a sharpie marker and colored poster board, he writes in a stream of consciousness style which becomes direct visual poetry. Common motifs in his work include, Motown, classic cars, the Beatles, and excerpts from his daily life. The combination and specifics of these elements create something humorous, timely, and humble. Jackson exhibited at the Rob Truitt Gallery in London and received the Spirit of Independence Award from the local LADD (Living Arrangements for the Developmentally Disabled) organization in Cincinnati. His work has also been exhibited in New York City at White Columns Gallery and in Cincinnati at the Contemporary Arts Center, Semantics Gallery, and Thunder-Sky Gallery.

# Adam Maloney

## vs. Angry Dad

2022

mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

"My name is Adam Maloney. I draw and I do installation work, and sound work, including audio installations. What I do really is romanticized pop art, or pop romanticism, oftentimes in the form of guerilla art. Besides drawing on paper and canvas, I often work on everyday found surfaces. I usually use cheap retail store bought materials, basically anything that I can get my hands on is utilized. The work tends to concern nuclear terrorism, pop, and science fiction, classic nineteen eighties video games, and wholesale pop culture eroticism featuring the everyday girl-next-door beautiful woman. Frenzied and archaic two-dimensional compositions express simple themes and ideas.

January 2002, I was in a near fatal car accident. I suffered a traumatic brain injury and I was comatose for ten days. My traumatic brain injury gave me weakness and contracture in my left arm, hand, leg, and foot. Following surgeries and extensive therapy, I am now using a cane to walk. In addition to high anxiety, I've been diagnosed with severe depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, and bipolar disorder. Self-induced art therapy has been the key factor in my recovery thus far, giving me a means of both dealing with my disability, venting my anxiety, and the ability to make a meaningful contribution to society."

# Rob Bolubasz

## Untitled

2020

pen on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Intricate line work, sometimes incorporating the names of people and objects of value to him, characterizes Robert Bolubasz's drawings. Using pen or pencil, Bolubasz weaves a network of intersections that cover the paper and create a complex arrangement of jagged linear elements. This mesh is akin to a personal map: a landscape of the artist's preferences and relationships. He repeatedly folds and unfolds the paper, transforming it into an object: worn, used, and compartmentalized.

# Raymond Thunder-Sky (1950–2004)

## C.G. & E. Crew

undated

marker and watercolor

Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of James L. Thompson  
2017.28

Raymond Thunder-Sky roamed Cincinnati construction sites searching for inspiration for his thousands of drawings. Carrying a construction worker's lunch box full of paper and drawing supplies, Thunder-Sky became a beloved local character. A friend of his noted, "Raymond was a cultural and spiritual figure who, through the persistence of his art making and brave exploration of his own aesthetic universe became a touchstone for what it means to be creative and alive."

Raymond's father Richard Brightfire Thunder-Sky was a Mohawk who had worked in movies before becoming an ironworker. It was the latter occupation that inspired his son's art. Raymond Thunder-Sky's drawings are carefully delineated with clean lines and include inscriptions describing the scene. A mix of reality and imagination, the compositions pull the viewer into his world.

# Andrew Hostick

## Untitled

2019

colored pencil on illustration board

Courtesy of the artist

For Andrew Hostick, the art making process begins by observing printed art history references and advertisements. He then abstracts and simplifies the imagery, carefully balancing color relationships. Colored pencil is repeatedly pushed into the illustration board like an etching tool until the entire surface is saturated, giving the image a beautiful sheen. He works and reworks the entire surface (even white on white) with unparalleled intensity. In addition to drawing and illustration, Hostick has explored cyanotypes, ceramics, and printmaking.



**Andrew Hostick**

**Untitled (Two Drawings)**  
2022

colored pencil on paper  
Courtesy of the artist