

The Outsider Art Project

Exploring Inclusion, Diversity,
Equity and Access: MCLA 2020

THE OUTSIDER ART PROJECT

Exploring Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access



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Authors (in order of appearance): Tony Gengarelly, Cynthia Barros, Ian Mosher, Tala Rousseau, Emma Snyder, Ella Suters, Dale Borman Fink, Gregory Scheckler

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Book design: Gregory Scheckler

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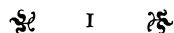
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INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

By Tony Gengarelly, Phd.

What do we mean by Outsider Art? Is it art outside the cultural mainstream; untutored and unfettered by social and formalist expectations? Accomplished by artists with developmental disorders or other perceived disabilities? Art from another ethnic or cultural group; from people with a unique geographic location? Or just a label for art that doesn't seem to fit into any other category? And how does the term "outsider" impact on the way we view such art; the way we see a particular artist who creates it? Is "outsider" a positive attribute or a negative assessment? Does the label help or hinder our appreciation of the art, the artist? Or, is the term just irrelevant? Finally, how do we define ourselves as creative individuals; where do we fit in? Also, in the broader sense, how does "outsider" condition the way we see others, relate to our IDEA values of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access?

These questions and more are considered here by a dedicated group of students and mentors, who took extra time during very trying circumstances this past school year to pause and look at the term "out-

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sider," to ponder its impact on their views about art and their sense of who they are as creative people.

In the fall of 2019, with an idea for an innovative course in the arts, I began to assemble a team of interested colleagues. Professors Greg Scheckler (Art) and Dale Borman Fink (Education) agreed to join me, and the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at MCLA awarded us a Faculty Fellowship Grant to support what became an extra-curricular mini-course on Outsider Art.

In early 2020 students were recruited (ten at first, and ultimately the five whose work is included here) often without the promise of academic credit or any other incentives except an interesting adventure into an unusual and different world of art.

Our journey began with an orientation meeting in late January to outline the course and the goals of the project. Students and faculty would work together, share the encounters with Outsider Art as well as the creative responses and personal reflections that followed. The only requirements were full participation and the completion of a Final Project—for many this course was to become a non-graded adventure into personal discovery. The curriculum framework involved two direct engagements with Outsider Art along with pertinent readings and class interactions via Canvas to explore and exchange reactions and ideas.

In mid-February the class visited the Williamstown home of Jessica Park, an artist on the autism spectrum. Jessica gave a tour of her paintings, including a work in progress, and answered questions about her art and the life passions it reflected. Prior to the visit the students read a book on Park's life, *A World Transformed*, published by the Jessica Park Project at MCLA. The Park Project (www.mcla.edu/JessicaPark) has been a co-sponsor of this endeavor with all three faculty participants members of its Advisory Committee.

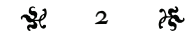
In early March the class made a field trip to the Bennington Museum where they encountered a variety of Outsider Art; the spectacular collection of "Grandma" Moses paintings being one of the highlights. Museum curator Jamie Franklin, also a member of the Park Project Advisory Committee, along with Education Coordinator, Deana Mallory, provided background information and uncovered more

examples of art and artists outside mainstream museums and established studio practice. The class was exposed to a whole range of Folk Art and had opportunities to view a variety of original and different expressions of art.

The following weeks involved much discussion and thinking about the implications of these encounters. Art labels and definitions came under scrutiny and the students began to place themselves as artists in the context of an art world suddenly turned upside down. The faculty mentors facilitated this process with careful interactions that provided information when needed but allowed time as well for the students to come to their own conclusions and express them in a personal and artistic format. What follows are the students' written reflections and creative interpretations.

We have also included here some of the course readings and classroom presentations to expand the range of considerations about this vast and constantly evolving subject. Finally, mentors Dale Borman Fink and Greg Scheckler have provided accounts of their own experiences with Outsider Art along with responses to the students' work. We have all been on this journey together.

As beneficiaries of this rare opportunity to go beyond the usual class schedule and format, we would like to thank Lisa Donovan, Erica Barreto, Adrienne Wootters and the MCLA Institute for the Arts and Humanities; Rachel, Paul and Jessica Park; Jamie Franklin, Deana Mallory and the Bennington Museum; also Terrie Pratt and many others who helped us navigate this atypical extra-curricular exercise.



PRESENTATION AND KEY QUESTIONS

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access through Encounters with Outsider Art.

Presenter: Tony Gengarelly, Ph.D., MCLA Professor Emeritus of Fine Arts, Director of The Jessica Park Project at MCLA (www.mcla.edu/JessicaPark)

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW / CLASS PRESENTATION

This workshop invites us to consider how we look at the world and how our personal frame of reference impacts on what we think about something or someone and the way we react to what we see. We will consider this issue through an encounter with Outsider Art. Using a Power Point slide presentation we will share a journey through the work of several artists with developmental disabilities, consider their "outsider" status and examine our reactions as they relate to inclusion, diversity, equity and access. The discussion will build with each encounter (see excerpts outlined below). Ultimately it will help us to learn how we can overcome cultural and aesthetic

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stereotypes in order to expand our viewpoints and embrace more of the world.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS: WHAT IS OUTSIDER ART?

- A generic term to group artwork that has been considered at one time or another outside the mainstream of taste, beauty, and the art market
- An English synonym for art brut (i.e. raw art)
- Lacks official art training
- Art of people who are socially removed (due to location or disability) from the cultural mainstream
- A term created by historians, critics and collectors; everyone but the artists
- True “outsider artists” are who they are, idiosyncratic and unconnected to any particular art tradition.
- Art of different cultures, such as Native American or Latin American, that is often exhibited as outsider art

WHILE LOOKING AT EXAMPLES OF OUTSIDER ART...

As we view some selective examples of outsider art and learn about the artists who created them, keep the following questions in mind:

Is outsider art radically different from other contemporary art? How does outsider art compare to art that is created by mainstream artists, displayed by galleries and museums, collected and admired?

Does it matter under what circumstances a work of art is created? Is the artist’s backstory (biography) necessary to understand and appreciate a work of art?

How do the values of diversity, equity and access play a role in our understanding and acceptance of outsider art and artists?

How might the inclusion of outsider art make our culture more diverse and humane? Might the acceptance of outsider art and artists help to change attitudes toward other “outsiders”? Where does the word *respect* fit into the IDEA value scale?

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EXAMPLES FROM “VISIONS FROM THE EDGE”

A few years ago, Tony Gengarely curated the show “Visions from the Edge,” at the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center. The exhibition text relates:

Sponsored by the New York based studio/gallery Pure Vision Arts, this exhibition is a testament to the success of open studio programs to nurture and promote the latent talents and visionary sensibilities of artists with developmental disabilities. Their art represents the variety and individuality of artists on the edge, who work mostly from their need to create but also include forms and strategies they imbibe from the studio setting and world they know. ... Progressive studio programs such as PVA facilitate the artists’ work by treating them as individuals and providing what they need to create.

ALBA SOMOZA



Alba Somoza: Untitled (greens), 2010

How important is it to know the artist’s intentions? How might they enhance our understanding of the artworks?

Somoza, who uses a wheelchair, said, “When I am painting, I can express myself and not feel limited by my body. Through my painting,

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I feel like I connect directly with others on a deeper level that doesn't leave room for judgments based on disability... I first got interested in painting in ninth grade. My art teacher was not intimidated by my disability and was the first person to really encourage me. She also saw my potential as an artist. She started my love for painting and I have loved it ever since."

WILLIAM BRITT



William Britt: Untitled, 2008

How might others' comments about an artist's life or artwork affect our interpretations? And does mainstream acceptance (accolades, articles, commentaries, shows) impact our view of the artworks?

In 1986, when Britt won a Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., Foundation Award for Outstanding Artistic Achievement, the famous poet Maya Angelou read her poem about his life and art (excerpted) "Fancy a distressed solitude, beyond the grasp of human reason. . . An artist. He drew on paper, on wooden boards and finally on canvas... He is telling us our individual stories; despite the ignorance which imprisons us, and the loneliness of our lives, each of us can be reached and liberated by Divine imagination and human concern."

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SUSAN BROWN



Susan Brown: Mixed Grids, 2009

Brown has been featured on a CBS Sunday Morning show segment on Outsider Art, and in publications such as *Envision*, *Folk Art Magazine* and *Out of Art*. She has been attending the Pure Vision Arts studio since its inception in 2002. Always a popular artist at outsider exhibitions in the United States and abroad, her work is included in numerous corporate and private collections.

JESSICA PARK



Jessica Park: Radio City Music Hall, 2017



Jessica Park: The Great Stained Glass Doors #9, Summer Near Sunset, 1988

THE ARTIST'S CREATIVE MIX

- An artist with autism, whose disability plays a role in the creation of her art
- Largely self-taught, with some early training in drawing and color applications
- Known for her intricate detail and attraction to buildings
- Use of color and light to highlight features of her subjects
- Use of star patterns and unusual astronomical phenomena in the skies
- Manipulates color schemes to enhance an ordinary scene into another world
- Her rituals of straightening the lines; one color at a time.



Jessica Park: *The Great Stained Glass Doors, #13, Winter Late Afternoon, 2005*

How does Jessica Park's work display aspects that one might consider to be features of her autism?

- the creation of organizational systems with geometric precision and color grids (to stabilize her composition)
- extreme focus and precise applications (one color at a time)
- obsessions with certain details or oddities; stars and astronomical patterns, light switches and electrical outlets; loose shingles and broken windows, even shadows (as seen above on the far right door)

Is Jessica Park a person with a disability who makes art or is she an artist with an unusual ability?

- Because Park's artwork revolves around several autistic characteristics, it is easy to say she is an autistic person who makes art. But in reality she is an artist who utilizes her autistic traits to create even more imaginative artwork, the autistic qualities enhancing, not determining her pieces.
- Park utilizes her own creative inspiration throughout her works, choosing specific colors and adding or omitting objects to please the overall aesthetic of the piece
- Instead of using her disability as an excuse to ostracize yet another artist, *it is important to respect Park as an artist with incredible, yet unusual abilities.*

MORE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Has this encounter with outsider art and outsider artists altered your perception of Outsider Art? Outsider Artists?

In general, what role can **Respect** play?

- in your desire to accept diversity,
- to include those outside your comfort zone,
- to allow access for everyone's work,
- to demand equity for each unique contribution?

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STUDENT EXPLORERS'
IDEAS AND ART

EXPLORATIONS: CYNTHIA BARROS

When I hear “Outsider Art”, I tend to think of art that is outside the normal, traditional art we may see in museums. Whether it be abstract, academic, or realistic, we tend to think of art to put a message across. Most would argue that art without a message or meaning behind it isn’t truly art. But what makes something art? Whose definition of art is the right one? Throughout my whole life, I’ve drawn in a very cartoonist art style, with some inspiration from anime and Japanese art. I was told that If I wanted to go to art college, I would need to learn to not draw in this style because professors don’t consider that to be art. To my surprise, this was not the case, and thanks to Greg and his art classes, I was able to draw in my style because he is also a cartoon artist.

With my project, I want to prove that cartoon styled art can and does have meaning behind it. Whether it is a deep meaning, or its purpose is to make someone laugh, there is still a purpose behind it. I was planning on adding some abstract concepts with my piece as well. Specifically, I want to play around with monochromatic colors. I planned to draw two girls hugging each other, one that is red and one that is blue. With them embracing, you would be able to see their colors come together and become purple. For me, this symbolizes that

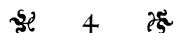
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people who are different or have different views on things can come together and become one with each other.



Cynthia Barros: watercolor painting

For me, outsider art is the kind of art one would not see in traditional museums. I would consider my art to be that because I tend to doodle and not take details too seriously. I still try to make a point with my art. This piece is supposed to represent how opposites can always attract. The blue and red are obviously very different, but when they come together they make a beautiful purple color. The main medium I used was watercolor because it has better blending abilities.



EXPLORATIONS: IAN MOSHER

Everywhere I look or go there have been and always will be labels.

As a species we label everything, and I realize it is necessary in order for us to differentiate between things. This year at MCLA my filing cabinet of labels has exploded in size when it comes to art to include Outsider Art. I have been around and know a little about a lot I suppose. I can change your oil, catch a fish, read a map, use a welder, coach you in basketball, and raise kids pretty well (not the goat kind). With all my life experiences I have always considered myself an artist. It is not until this year at MCLA I have learned how much I do not know. At least when it comes to labeling our concepts of art. Cubism, Baroque, Realism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism (to name a few) along with Outsider Art are all new labels for the filing cabinet in my brain. I am not sure knowing or having these labels makes me a better artist or person, but I have really enjoyed learning a little of the history of art and about different artists. To me art is art if the artist says it is art and doesn't really need to be labeled.

What I mean is art doesn't need a label to define its substance but we label it in order to provide an order to our perspective. A place to file it. Whether in our brains, libraries, museums, or classrooms. Outsider Art is one of those labels that has a great level of ambiguity

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to it. It can be applied to artists with no formal training. Artist that are on the autism spectrum. Mentally ill artists. Art created by people outside the 'mainstream' of the 'art world'. Some artists just want to be known as an 'Outsider'. It is a label that will probably develop further in the future but currently seems to be a catch-all term for what cannot or does not want to be labeled or categorized.

Using this label to describe an artist does not take into account any deeper reflection of who they are and what their journey has been. For myself I have learned that the journey, the experience, the tools, the path taken in the creation of an art piece is just as important as the piece itself. I used to look at some art and think 'Why?' Why on earth do I need to see this 'art' and why is it in a museum and why did I pay an entrance fee to see this. I do not need to understand a piece to appreciate the journey. In fact, I believe sharing this journey in some form or another would help all art and it's understanding; overcoming how it has been labeled and perhaps perceived.

As I type this last statement, I am torn about how it applies to my own art. Now I feel a sense of obligation to tell my story with each piece of art I create. Not the story of the image. I would hope that tells a story itself, but the story behind the story. The inner workings of my brain that do not want to be labeled or exposed. It already seems very daunting and personal. I consider myself an 'Outsider Artist' but by no means want to be perceived as unusual. Maybe I will just stick to labels.

As an artistic response, I have created the remnants of a rotting corpse. Within the corpse lives a monster (art monster that represents me).



Ian Mosber: The Art Monster Within, mixed media sculpture

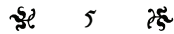
I sculpted the head/skull out of clay and then created a fiberglass mold. In this mold I casted latex which I backed with a urethane fast

set resin for support. The body of the corpse was created using foam, wire, plastic wrap, and some glue. This was all attached to a piece of 1/8 inch plywood and painted with acrylic paints. I inserted an acrylic eyeball into the skull for one eye and a brass number 3 into the other eye. Three and seven are my lucky numbers and I really enjoyed the '3 man' piece we saw at the Bennington Museum. Inside the body of the corpse resides a monster that is supposed to represent myself. It is made of faux fur and stuffed with plastic bags (recycle!). Attached is an arm I sculpted out of Super Sculpey clay and some acrylic teeth I created. The teeth are created from casting my own teeth in alginate. After casting my mouth in alginate, I let it sit overnight before creating a positive to mold. This enabled the alginate to shrink to approximately 1/3 original size. Just a cool trick I thought I would share.

Why is the artist the "monster within" the decaying body?

It represents my true self. I have always had to fight for my art. Parents thought art was/is trivial and society is always telling me my creations are too scary, morbid, gross, not appropriate, etc, etc.

Therefore, I feel I am always trying to contain what I want and should make, or at least dial it back. No one ever gets that it isn't about money or what they want to see but about what I want to make. Anyway I have worked long and hard enough doing other things so I can do what I want now artistically, but I think a part of me will always seek that parental approval.



EXPLORATIONS: TALA ROUSSEAU

Before this course, I had absolutely no idea what Outsider Art was, or that it even existed. If I had gone to the museums we went to, and saw art from artists we discussed, I would have thought these artists either had some sort of art training in their background, or used their art mostly as a form of expression. I think this goes to show how difficult and tedious coming up with a definition is for Outsider Art. On the surface, in comparison with today's Contemporary Art, I do not see much of a difference at all. With most art styles there is a difference to be seen between the periods of time and how the art presents itself; I find this to be lacking here between Contemporary and Outsider art. To me, it begs the question, are they really as different as we say they are? I do not mean for this to be offensive by any means. What I mean by saying this is that we should start holding Outsider Art in a much higher position, and have more of a respect for it like we do with established Contemporary Artists. Art is a skill, a form of expression, and I thoroughly believe that having "traditional training" shouldn't be considered a large part of what makes something part of one movement instead of the other.

It was really enlightening to meet Jessica Park when we had the opportunity to. I felt particularly drawn to her work, as she has such

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a great sense of color and composition; she definitely knows how to capture the viewer's eye in her work, and how to keep you sucked in. I wish I had more confidence on that day to speak up and ask some more questions, but I was also getting sucked into her work I sometimes forgot we were there! I walked away with something new that day, new in ideas, new in means of a composition, and even new color palette ideas. Ideas that I gained were more interesting settings I could place characters, studying from images of today's locations, and morphing them into something new. I took away new ways to frame a composition, try new angles, try new methods of framing the main subject. I've always loved brighter colors, and looking and what colors she has beside one another, inspired new things for me and I would want to replicate that color palette as closely as my memory allowed. You can truly learn from everyone, and I thank her for opening her home to us whether she intended us to learn from her or not.

First entering the project, I did not know what I wanted to create, as I wasn't too sure what people were looking for. I always set large goals for myself when creating art, and most of the time I do not reach them which is okay. After our investigations, the ideas of a more self-expression piece and character creation latched on to me. The character creation idea gave me very interesting images, but I seem to have the problem of not being able to translate what I see in my head on to the paper exactly. I did try my best when I started, and when I realized the amount of frustration I was experiencing I knew I had to move on from this idea. If I've learned anything from my college courses, some ideas are just not worth following in this moment of time, but it is always worth picking them back up after.

When the effects of COVID-19 hit MCLA, such as moving out of my dorm and moving completely online, my health definitely suffered, mentally and physically. In my situation, as someone who is chronically ill, this is a nasty cycle as they impact one another. The stress was a problem, the weather was a problem, and ultimately, some other personal issues outside of college was a problem. So, noticing that this was becoming a big issue where my flares were keeping me bedbound for the day, I decided that as soon as possible, I was going to create

that self-expression piece (without characters) to release and maybe educate a little.



Tala Rousseau: Spoonies, acrylic painting

This was the piece I ultimately created, it is acrylic paint on a canvas. The colors are teal, purple, black, and the white of the canvas. I created this piece outside as I didn't want clean lines for the most part, I wanted my emotions to really shine through. So, I went outside with my materials, and used water from the hose to dilute the paint on the brushes to make it runny, so I could drip it down the canvas. After dripping it and channeling my emotions, I began throwing, flicking, and tossing the paint on the canvas in every which way. It got everywhere, all over the grass, picnic table, and even me! I then cleaned up

outside and added the spoon line drawings after it had dried a bit. I chose my color palette and imagery for symbolism. For someone who is healthy, they are an outsider to these specific colors and imagery of what a spoon means to someone like me.

Teal is used as the ribbon color for Poly-Cystic Ovarian Syndrome, or PCOS. Despite the name, PCOS is an Endocrine Disorder that is caused by genetics. Some symptoms that someone can have are obesity, acne, male-patterned hair growth (like facial hair, excess body hair on the chest, back, and legs for example), male-patterned baldness, extreme mood swings/disorders, cysts in the ovaries, and missing/painful periods to name some. Diagnosis includes blood tests, imaging, and symptom evaluation. This disorder increases risk for life-threatening disorders, cancers, and infertility. I was diagnosed when I was around 14 or 15 years old. There is treatment through birth control and other medications, but no cure.

Purple is used as the ribbon color for Fibromyalgia. Fibromyalgia is a disorder in the brain, nervous system, and muscles that manifests in painful sensations on the body. Fibromyalgia also has a genetic component, but they are currently investigating other causes, like trauma to the body/mind. Some symptoms, as there are over 200, are tingling hands and feet, weight gain, fatigue, widespread pain all over the body for at least six months, swelling, tender points on the body, mood disorders, gastrointestinal problems, and muscle weakness. Fibromyalgia is extremely difficult to diagnose as there is no blood test or imaging for it. It is diagnosed by eliminating all other diseases that have similar symptoms, like autoimmune diseases. I was diagnosed my sophomore year in college, at 19 years old. There is no cure, but can be managed through medication, stretching, and other tools like heating pads and rest.

The spoons are due to what chronically ill people sometimes call themselves, Spoonies. This came about from doctors telling their chronically ill patients to visualize their energy in measurements of a spoon. For example, it takes me one spoon to get out of my room and make breakfast like cereal. It takes me two spoons to take a shower. That is my baseline. Sometimes if I am feeling worse, it may take more spoons to finish a task.

EXPLORATIONS: EMMA SNYDER

What makes an artist an artist? Is it their natural born talent to think in creative ways, their ability to verbalize and demonstrate their thought process behind their art, is it the message they can demonstrate through different mediums? Truth is, there is no definite qualifications or limitations to who can be an artist. One can be an artist who cannot speak, and one can be an artist who cannot walk. Art exists beyond one's physical abilities to create; the mind can form art unique to every artist and their audience. The mind's ability to translate experience and feelings into a piece of art through paint, sculpture, etc., is a power in all of us that can be unlocked.

Society tends to put everyone in a box and categorize people. But what lies outside the box is a whole world of talented people separate from the mainstream. Outsider Art highlights these artists from all types of backgrounds and life experiences apart from traditional art training and technique. Outsider Art includes artists with varying disabilities, mental illnesses, and other societal restrictions to create a safe and inclusive space for those who do not fit into a mainstream category. Personally, I feel as if the label "Outsider" doesn't provide enough credit to these artists; contrary to its negative connotation, it

is something to be proud of because these artists defy the odds set against them by the norms and standards chained upon them.

Diversity is something that must remain essential to the art world. Art is expression, so why prevent all voices/human experiences from being shared? Outsider artists provide us a new way of thinking and a deeper appreciation to the healing and comforting aspects of creating art. When we ourselves cannot express our feelings or thoughts into words, creating art do this for us. The beauty in this, is that disabilities, mental illness, and other restrictions cannot be detected within pieces of art. Solely the beauty of creativity exists through hard work and talent. Diversity within the artworld connects us all on a deeper understanding and respect for one another. In addition, inclusivity and access gives those who are often misunderstood/underrepresented creative freedom that the privileged mainstream takes advantage of so easily. As we celebrate and strive for diversity, we should also take into consideration equity among all different types of people regardless of age, race, gender, ability, and background. Outsider art and the Outsider Art Project study and honor all of these.

For my Outsider Art Project, I have decided to tackle the issue of Equity based upon a personal level. When asking myself, "What makes me feel like an outsider?" my answer is being a young woman within a male dominated world. Whether people admit it or not, the deep root of the patriarchal system stems throughout our modern world today despite progress among gender equality. I have found that there are experiences of the female gender that men cannot relate to, like the pure fear of walking alone down a sidewalk or the sexualization/exploitation of the human body.

I have created a physical sculpture representation of the patriarchal system. I am playing on the demeaning phrase of seeing women as "just an object" I have assembled household items such as cartons, buttons, string, ad recyclables...all things that can be commonly disposed of in order to show this relationship between some (straight, bisexual, and those who have an interest in women) men and females. I painted my sculpture all black, so that the women's physique really stands out and the hair made of multi-colored string for a pop of color.

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Only when looking up closely can you realize it is constructed out of individual objects glued together.

Many women can relate to the experience of being used for one purpose and then being tossed away. My goal is not to bash the male gender, but to call out those who view women this way. I want my art to make people to think about how they make others feel. Yet, I would like to take this space to acknowledge that I am aware that not only women are sexualized. Everyone's story or experience with being seen as an object and or sexualized is very real and valid. However, because I myself am a woman feeling the pressures of (straight, bi, those who have an interest in women) men within a patriarchal system, this is the experience I am going to demonstrate within my personal project. I know that I am only one of many who feel this way. I am hoping that my project will serve as a voice for those who may not feel comfortable speaking up.



Emma Snyder: Objects, mixed media sculpture

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EXPLORATIONS: ELLA SUTERS

Inside the Outsider's Mind : a series of abstract paintings by Ella Suters looking into the complex topic of mental illness & outsider art

To be an outsider artist does not require a psychiatric diagnosis. In fact, the label outsider artist has no solid definition. I have attempted to define it in my own way: a talented artist who may not be accepted by the mainstream artworld, but has the potential to be for their outstanding work. They may have some formal or informal art training, but this does not exclude them from being an outsider artist. An example would be Jessica Park who did receive training in high school. She has created the most intricate and colorful painting that leave a person in awe. If a person were to view her artwork with no context, they would have no idea that she has lived her life with autism and that influences her repetition, patterns, and color choices. We may ask ourselves does it make a difference if we know that an artist has a disability, disorder, or illness and why does this sometimes qualify them as an outsider artist?

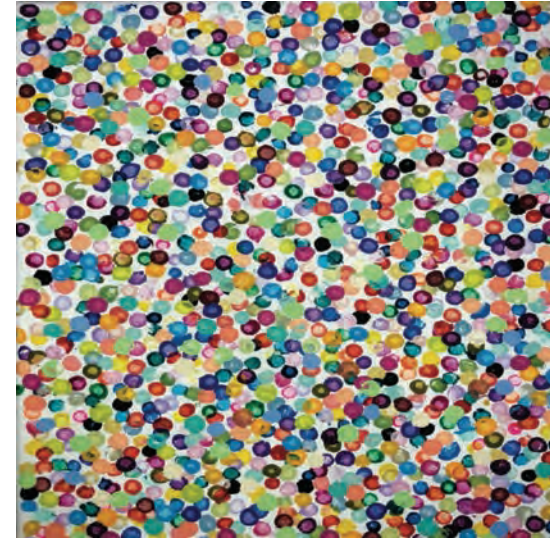
I think knowing an artist's background, especially an outsider artist, can help one to see their artwork in a new perspective. What truly makes someone an outsider artist is that they can create something that is completely outside of what contemporary art has set its

limits to. The first outsider artist I researched was Yayoi Kusama who is considered both a contemporary artist and an outsider artist. Her art is widely recognized, but she has spent many years of her life in a psychiatric hospital due to childhood trauma, hallucinations, and obsessions/compulsions. (Adams, 2018) Art in itself is a therapeutic outlet, for many people not just those who have a mental illness.

My approach to this project was to become inspired by outsider artists who may have been influenced by their mental illness. I wanted to have their apparent creative sense of uninterrupted flow, where once I had an idea, I built it. Another artist that I have researched, Henry Darger, has shown intense obsessions with painting little-girls, sometimes naked, which can be seen as dark in nature. Darger spent a part of his life institutionalized since both of his parents passed away. Above all he experienced sexual abuse and dysfunction throughout his childhood. (Gómez, 2017) Is his skilled artwork accepted because of his trauma? If someone did not know his story, would they try to exclude him from the art world due to the strange scenes depicted in his work?

My direction in my paintings was to explore complex feelings and emotions that may be experienced by the outsider, whomever that may be. Even within this project I have felt like an outsider since I do not fall under the MCLA art community and most of my art work is done in personal free time. An interesting study I found was done by a psychotherapist, Terry Rustin, who painted for her patients to try to express how their illness or trauma had made them feel.

Rustin based her study of her research in outsider art. She was inspired because she had no experience in the discipline of art, yet she was still able to create amazing pieces that could potentially evoke an emotional response from her clients. Since I cannot re-create her study I attempted to get into the outsider's mind. I think we can all recall a time where we felt like an outsider.



Ella Suters: Who is the Outsider?, acrylic painting

My first piece I was inspired by Kusama's work. I wanted to recreate her feelings of being overwhelmed. She said her hallucinations have consisted of being engulfed by endless amounts of flowers or dots. (Adams, 2018) In this painting I see the polka dots as individuals, but could you tell who the outsider was? Outsider artists have been described as those who may not be influenced by media or culture. Personally, I think that is rare in outsider art. We are all influenced in some way unless we are in complete isolation. Kusama attended art school and spent most of her life in the art scene. Yet is she considered an outsider artist because of psychiatric troubles? It seems so. For this painting I used Q-tips and all the different colors of paint I had at my disposal. I wanted as little of white background to show through to create a chaotic scene.



Ella Suters: Disruption

I wanted to include something that relates to the current COVID-19 pandemic as we are all dealing with it in different ways. One emotion that is rampant is panic and this can bring out the worst in us, but what I have seen come out of this situation is that people are getting into their creative sides. Maybe new outsider artists will emerge. For this painting I used a thin paint brush to do the black lettering and a larger brush for the red lettering. If this goes on any longer I see the panic turning into hostile feelings as it already has for some. Those who are already struggling with mental illness are taking a huge hit right now.



Ella Suters: The Shadows

This last painting is a representation of outsiders together. They're like shadows. The people left behind. The people who were told they weren't allowed to be an artist, like Kusama. The people who have a dark past. With the category of outsider art they have a chance to be recognized. The term is controversial, but I think it includes people from all walks of life and it's okay to be an outsider. For this painting, I started with splattering a variety of colors onto the canvas, mixing them and then scraping off excess paint to then drag a palette knife across to create the jagged lines. I then cut out pieces of paper as figures, painted them black and stamped them around the perimeter.

Outsider art is a unique topic within the discipline of art because you may not find it in the mainstream art world. It's something one might stumble upon one day, as I had never heard of it before diving into this project. Mental illness is just one facet of the field. Yet we still see mental illness playing a role in mainstream art or even ordinary people who use art as a mode of therapy. I think it becomes outsider art once it catches someone's attention. It begins to become recognized in a different way than a student who is aspiring to become an artist. Outsider art includes artists from diverse backgrounds and it is celebrated and appreciated through art fairs, collections, and muse-

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ums. I wonder how many times I've encountered an outsider artist's work without even realizing it.

I want to end with this quote that sparked my interest.

"The art created by outsiders reveals illuminating truths about what it is to be human. The work is real and pure – and has a depth that contrasts with the often contrived offerings of conventionally trained artists. It shows us what we dare not think, let alone speak. The artists tell seemingly bizarre stories, translate hallucinatory experiences, or depict imaginary and fantastical worlds which trace painful personal trajectories. They reveal the psyche; our dreams, our nightmares, the afterlife. The art is unknowing yet visionary." (Tischler, 2015)

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❧ III ❧

SOURCES AND READINGS

INSIDE THE OUTSIDE:
RECONSIDERING OUR VIEWS
ABOUT ART

By Tony Gengarelly, for *Folk Art Messenger* 2015

During the month of March 2014, artists and educators gathered at Gallery51 on Main Street in North Adams, Mass., to consider how outsider and self-taught art can alter our notions of creativity and to explore the value of biography and art education as vehicles for appreciating and understanding a work of art. The background for these discussions was the exhibition *Inside the Outside: Reconsidering Our Views about Art*, sponsored by the Fine and Performing Arts Department and the Jessica Park Project at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA).

This exhibition of more than 50 works of art included outsider and self-taught artists, as well as contributions from patrons and art teachers who admired these artists' creative originality. Since the educators represented were also art therapists, questions about the therapeutic value of art-making and the legitimacy of art made in a therapeutic context surfaced as well. Opening night also occasioned the release of a new art biography on Jessica Park (See "Book

MCLA

Reviews," *Folk Art Messenger*, Summer/Fall, 2014), and the artist was present to sign purchased copies.

On the walls were artist biographies and wall texts from MCLA students who had helped organize the show. In the text near Park's paintings, one student asked: "How do imagination and creativity interact with the artist's unique perspective to create extraordinary works of art?" She concluded, "[Park] has combined order and attention to detail, both of which are autistic traits, with her wonderful sense of color and form and drawing skill to become a successful artist." Another posed this question: "If a work of art is therapeutic for the artist, is it still art?" Referring to those who make art in a therapeutic setting, she wrote: "They have the ability to change a negative experience or emotions into something beautiful and creative for them and their audience. They are [expressing] their voice through art."

Later in the month, two sessions at Gallery51 highlighted some more of the issues raised by the exhibition. First, the topic "Art and Biography" was explored and then "Art Education and the Education of the Artist." Art professionals, artists and arts educators participated. MCLA Professor emeritus Tony Gengarelly, Project Director for the exhibition, served as moderator.

The featured presenter for the "Art and Biography" discussion was Jamie Franklin, curator for the Bennington Museum in Bennington, Vt. Franklin has an abiding interest in self-taught art, both as curator of the largest public repository of paintings by legendary folk artist Grandma Moses and as a private collector of outsider and self-taught art. In this last pursuit he is joined by his wife Renee Bouchard, artist and art educator, whose own art, along with many pieces from their collection, was displayed in the gallery.

Franklin advocated a need for balance between information on the artist's life and a critical observation of the art. He cited many examples to demonstrate how biography can indeed enhance the understanding and appreciation of an artist's work, but cautioned that an excessive focus on the artist's story can overshadow the art and distort our perception of it.

Beginning with his current reinstallation of the Bennington Museum's Grandma Moses collection, Franklin explained that Moses's

paintings were typically thought to be autobiographical reminiscences of country life in rural New England. Focusing on a genre scene completed by Moses near the end of World War II, *In Harvest Time*, Franklin observed that a 1943 letter from Moses to her art dealer contained a reference that seemed to contradict assumptions that the artist's memory paintings had little to do with contemporary life. Aware of the devastation of the overseas war, Moses had expressed a hope for an eventual return to peace and tranquility. Could her picture be addressing a contemporary appreciation of the seasonal productivity exemplified by New England farm life? Franklin suggested that when one looks at Moses's picture with a sense of history in mind, a straightforward autobiographical image can take on a more allegorical tone. Moses's World War II painting thus represents the longing she shared with many at that time for a "promised land of peace and repose." When the viewer goes beyond the usual assumptions about Moses's art, the larger question surfaces about "how the artist was feeling and how was she trying to convey those feelings through her art," Franklin concluded.

After speaking about his investigations into the previously unknown backgrounds of artists in his own collection of self-taught art, Franklin indicated that self-taught and outsider artists may require biographical information to identify more accurately their outsider status and even to legitimize their work. However, an anecdote about a series of paintings by the artist Paul Humphrey revealed that the artist's comments about the creation of some of his own work were, upon investigation, proven to be false, opening a whole psychological dimension to a series of images called *Sleeping Beauties*. Humphrey had claimed that the "beauties" were originally inspired by a high school picture of his daughter Sandra — "re-imagined, copied and colored." He had, in fact, no daughter named Sandra, so this preoccupation with a fictitious person becomes a question mark about the motives of the artist. Assumptions about biography, Franklin emphasized, can sometimes be misleading and cloud our view of the art. One has to be cautious not to put too much emphasis on the life of the artist or use it as a substitute for a careful reading of the art.

Panelist Nancy Mathews, former Eugenie Prendergast Curator at

the Williams College Museum of Art and author of a book on Paul Gauguin, resonated with the Paul Humphrey story. According to Mathews, much of Gauguin's life in Tahiti, recorded in his travel journal, *Noa Noa*, was "simply made up." The artist had tried to "go native," to bring his vision of art into his own life experience. Mathews then asked: "Where does the artist's life end and the artist's work begin.?"

She also suggested that there are many "biographies" to consider when viewing a work of art: the artist, of course, but also those who have commented on the work and the viewer's own frame of reference, as well. Franklin agreed, indicating that a curator's observations about a work of art are never completely objective, "You are always going to be affected by your own life's story."

The discussion took on a more personal dimension with commentary from Anna Saldo Burke, expert in the field of special needs education and a lifelong friend of Jessica Park. Saldo-Burke, with her twin sister Diana Saldo, first met Jessica in a high school art class. The twins took the awkward student with autism under their wings and became her art teachers and support system at the school. In her memoir about their time with Jessica, *Green Mittens Covered Her Ears*, Saldo-Burke outlines her relationship as more inclusive, with Jessica's health and welfare foremost; thus regarding her art as a vehicle for a better hold on life.

In this context, the life of the artist supersedes the artist's work, which becomes a partner in a kind of coping and healing process. From this perspective the art carries a different weight of importance. When asked by Mathews how Jessica "identifies herself as a successful artist," Saldo-Burke responded, "She identifies herself as a successful person." According to Saldo-Burke, Park's day job in the Williams College Mail Room and her network of family and friends "sum up her life, not just her art." Her art is a complete reflection of a successful life — "Things that delight Jessica now delight others." The art is, in Saldo-Burke's experience, part of a larger story. But, considering the Humphrey and Gauguin accounts, what is the real story and *how* is it manifested in the art?

Artist/educator Michael McManmon followed Saldo-Burke with a personal witness to his own life and art. Founder and Director of the

College Internship Program (CIP), a college-level program for students on the autism spectrum, located in Lee, Mass., and five other campuses, McManmon holds advanced degrees in psychology (M.S., M.A) and education (Ed.D.). A late diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome freed him to accept his exceptional gifts intertwined with his so-called "crazy" behavior patterns and to make a leap in the creation of his art.

Moving around the gallery, McManmon commented on his paintings displayed in the show. He revealed his delight in nature, especially trees, and his love of materials for their tactile qualities. As if he were reliving the last few years of his life, the animated McManmon talked about his new experiments with color and shapes — more abstract and less carefully drawn than was the case with his earlier work. He openly shared the impact of his diagnosis on his life and art: "I can be who I want to be in my life; I am not dysfunctional; I am not defective — I just think differently; like Temple Grandin I have a visual process for everything." Art has become his way, along with another passion (organic farming) to refashion a life — the life of the artist. His life and his art are, for Michael McManmon, partners on an exciting journey.

Two nights later, the "Conversations" continued with a session on "Art Education and the Education of the Artist." The featured presenter was Ilene Spiewak who teaches art at the CIP campus in Lee where "the art teacher creates a warm, inviting and flexible classroom environment where each student feels valued; and where meaningful self-expression leads to improved self-esteem." Spiewak's own experience with art education was, in her words, "underwhelming." Only through studying art therapy and art education did she discover her own artistic voice as well as a way to help others. Spiewak's art and that of her students was displayed on the gallery walls.

Spiewak communicated her particular sensitivity to the need for an open approach to art education, which she developed during her time at the Mill Creek School in Philadelphia. Here, Spiewak had an ample budget to buy art supplies and a large space where she could set up art stations and invite students to drop in "and explore themselves with art materials." For Spiewak, art education is meant to inspire individual creativity and nurture self-worth.

Panelist Renee Bouchard picked up on the theme of open art

education. For years she has been inspired by artists outside the mainstream of established art schools, galleries and museums. A graduate of the Maine College of Art and a professional artist who exhibits regularly, Bouchard has chosen to go outside by going inside in order to find what she needs to say. Often her blend of colors and multiple layers of paint will reveal a thought or an inspiration only after the painting is completed — then she will title the work. Bouchard's *Monk*, 2011, a cauldron of flaming color with latent fear breaking through the painting's surface, is a reference, perhaps, to the self-immolation of Tibetan monks protesting political repression.

As an educator Bouchard has a keen interest in children's art. Most recently she has been "collaborating" with her two-year-old son, engaging with his marks on the canvas in a kind of duet. For her, the innocent eye of the child is a priceless gift that opens new worlds. In a recent article for the *Bennington Banner* she is quoted: "I'm very interested in intuitive mark making. It's helping me develop my vocabulary. I like the idea of somebody saying, 'Did Renee do that or did a child do that' and not knowing." How, then, a questioner wanted to know, does one preserve the child's innocent eye through years and layers of education? Bouchard offered a few observations and then concluded: "I do not know the answer."

Eileen Mahoney, art therapist and Spiewak's colleague at CIP, elaborated on the subject of creativity. According to Mahoney, creativity is inherent in everyone, "not only in art but in many aspects of our lives." Art, however, "is for all of us, whether we are talented or not, a way to tap into that creativity." She spoke about the need for art education to invite people into what she termed the "imaginal world that we experience less and less in our lives." Art education, according to Mahoney, is less about how to make art and more about tapping into one's creative center.

MCLA professors Greg Scheckler and Lisa Donovan rounded out the evening. Scheckler, MCLA Professor of Art, recounted his own learning curve through the maze of contemporary art. Scheckler, who comes from a traditional art background, described his growing awareness that art is "diverse, strange, full of graffiti, magical, jazzy." Under such circumstances lines blur and categories multiply to the point of

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irrelevance. To punctuate the point, Scheckler introduced art by some of our fellow animal species — especially winsome images by “Metro the horse” and “Simon the pig,” which provided a much appreciated levity. How does one teach art under such circumstances? “All we can do,” Scheckler concluded, “is provide some grouping to show some of the dimensions of the art world and then help the student jump into the unknown.”



Jessica Park: The Red Lion Inn

Picking up on the outsider theme, Lisa Donovan, Associate Professor of Arts Management, lamented the outsider status of arts education. Donovan recounted her experience at a recent conference where art education was barely mentioned. Yet, there was plenty of talk about creative economies and creative cities. “Where was that creativity going to come from,” she asked, “without arts education?” Here the evening seemed complete with the assertion that art is a multi-dimensional part of human life and ought to be central to the education of everyone.

Taking down the exhibition provided the chance to look more carefully at comments from gallery visitors who had participated in an interactive display, in which a question was posed and small cards were supplied for the visitors’ responses. The completed cards were then

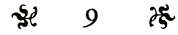
MCLA

hung on the wall, thus becoming part of the show. The question read: “What do you think art is, or can be?” The open-ended nature of the question invited a number of reflections. However, none of the 75 respondents thought art was the cultural property of the professional artist, the art historian, the gallery or the museum, nor was it necessarily learned. Neither did its quality of execution or the qualifications of its creator matter at all. Art was, for many, a manifestation of the mind, the human spirit, an expression of feelings and love — all the aspirations and attributes of being alive. Art is apparently everywhere, and “Inside the Outside” seemed to be a perfect place for it to thrive.

The questions raised during this month-long focus on the personal and creative context in the making of art far outpaced the answers, but the questions were well framed, both in the discussions and on the walls. The “answers,” ever illusive, will keep us searching, asking and creating art.



Michael McManmon: Venice Street Scene



CREATIVE COLLISIONS AT THE
BENNINGTON MUSEUM: “INWARD
ADORINGS OF THE MIND”

By Tony Gengarelly, for the *Folk Art Messenger* Spring/Summer 2016-17.
Some photos Courtesy of the Bennington Museum.

“A museum can’t just be about old art by dead artists. It’s got to be
about the present, and inspire the future.” – Robert Wolterstorff.

Nestled in the hills of Bennington, Vt., the Bennington Museum was
founded in 1852, originally as an historical association. In the 1920s, the
museum began acquiring portraits, pottery and landscape paintings
and became the largest public repository of the works of folk artist
Grandma Moses.



Ray Materson: Ski Vermont, embroidery painting, 2014



Gayleen Aiken: Some Raimbilli Cousins Dance Around a
Nickelodeon (Music Box), c. 1985

Through recent acquisitions of the works of Gayleen Aiken, Jessica
Park, Larry Bissonnette, Paul Humphrey and Ray Materson, the

museum is now actively collecting in the area of grassroots and self-taught art. It has initiated such innovative exhibitions as Alice Neel/Erastus Salisbury Field, which received recognition from the Wall Street Journal as one of the nine most memorable exhibitions of 2014. As a result, the museum has edged its history-based collection into the mainstream of contemporary, outsider and self-taught art.



Mose Tolliver: Flim-Flam Lady, c. 1995

According to Bennington Museum Director Robert Wolterstorff, “A museum can’t just be about old art by dead artists. It’s got to be about the present, and inspire the future. It’s that conviction that has been driving all the recent changes at the Bennington Museum and has led to its new energy and new vision.”

This vision includes a lively dialogue between past and present; between traditional craft and modern design; and among itinerant portrait painters, village craftsmen and self-taught outsiders whose originality and visionary imagination have inspired many insider artists and patrons.

Wolterstorff calls such disparate juxtapositions “creative collisions” where “a new, holistic sense of creativity emerges.” And he adds: “It’s

like rubbing two different materials together to see what will happen. Sometimes sparks fly, and it’s these sparks that inspire new creativity, ignite new invention. The mash-up is the quintessential new art form of our age. Out of the unruly jostling of different things, the new emerges.”

Museum Curator Jamie Franklin has taken this message into the museum’s recent exhibitions. From July 3 to November 1, 2015, the museum’s principal exhibition, *Inward Adornings of the Mind: Grassroots Art* from the Bennington Museum and Blasdel/Koch Collections, featured more than 150 pieces of folk, self-taught and outsider art arranged in four thematic clusters that highlighted the diversity and power of the creative process through different lenses and historical moments: History, Memory and Memorials; Signs and Symbols/Words and Images; Faces: Fact and Fiction; and Everyday Beauty: Whimsy and Utility.

According to Franklin, “Drawing on the Bennington Museum’s renowned collection of historic folk art, augmented by recent acquisitions of work by modern and contemporary self-taught artists from our region, and the private collection of grassroots art gathered together over the last 50 years by Gregg Blasdel and Jennifer Koch of Burlington, Vt., this exhibition highlighted thematic dialogues among extraordinary artworks created by everyday people from the 18th century to the present day.”

One wonders if we are ready to receive such creative diversity. Is there, as Franklin suggests, a dialogue among such original works of art from different times and circumstance? What “creative sparks” can we discern? Did the exhibition indeed realize some of Walt Whitman’s declaration that introduced the show: “I reject none, accept all, then reproduce all in my own forms.”

By citing just a few examples from the many objects that were shown, these questions, I believe, can be answered with a resounding “Yes!”

The section on History, Memory and Memorials juxtaposed paintings of Bennington historical subjects by Grandma Moses, traditional mourning pictures, a sampler depicting family history, Joseph Yoakum’s memory landscapes and an old farmhouse filled with recollections of

family life, rendered by Gayleen Aiken. Stephen Warren's imposing 1894 Memory Ware Tower was a powerful statement; its multitude of inlaid memorabilia spiraling upward suggested a classical victory column. What these varied artistic descriptions of the past might have been telling or not telling us is suggested by Emily Dickinson's words that introduced the section: "But are not all facts dreams as soon as we put them behind us."

This display considered the art as a meditation on the ephemeral nature of existence and what traces we leave behind. To recognize one piece in relation to the other also informed as to how the past was built from fragments and molded by time. The individual creations from ordinary life experience made a record for the future, and accordingly, each touched the viewer in a profound way.

Faces: Fact and Fiction introduced a tantalizing set of images ranging from the compressed energy of a Larry Bissonnette caricature to the itinerant artist's approximation of traditional portrait styles: combinations of fact with stylized props and attributes fashionable for the times. Gayleen Aiken's imaginary family (The Raimbilli Cousins) gathered around the nickelodeon or at home in joyous union played out a personal fantasy. Inez Nathaniel Walker's "Bad Girls" and the "Flim-Flam Lady" of Mose Tolliver explored with humor a shadowy side of the feminine mystique. Some, like Paul Humphrey's "Sleeping Beauties" diverged from the portrait tradition altogether. With their fabrication from a magazine original and repetition with variations in multiple sets, his series of somnolent women were reminiscent of the style of Andy Warhol. Outside the conventions of naturalistic rendering these artists were free to conceptualize, personalize, invent and dream.

By bringing artist/collectors and educators together with living artists and their works, the museum staff hoped to guide the community to an appreciation of how art inspires invention; how one artist affects another; and how the collector/patron influences the mix.

A major portion of the exhibition contained a variety of everyday objects transformed by the artful insertion of imaginative whimsy. Walking sticks sported elaborate hand grips (decorative impulses that defy the canes' utility), water jugs glared with mask-like faces, a row of

wooden carvings presented a number of fantasy figures based on everyday people and animals.

Here, the Blasdel/Koch collection was well represented. Both of these artist/patrons have a long history of acquiring grassroots art. Its originality and uniqueness inspire and inform their own creative processes. Blasdel, an Associate Professor of Art at Saint Michael's College in Colchester, Vt., coined the term "grassroots art" in a 1968 article for *Art in America* while introducing a number of then-unknown American artists — "self-taught makers who created sophisticated, all-encompassing environmental installations beyond the boundaries of . . . art schools, galleries and museums," Franklin added. [In 1992, Blasdel was one of the symposium speakers at the Folk Art Society's conference in Los Angeles.]

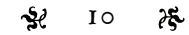
The transformation of objects continued with a display that included an early work (1986) of visionary artist Jessica Park as compared to Ray Materson's miniature tapestries. Park's enthusiasm for mechanical gadgetry was expressed with a rainbow-colored quartz heater. This early example of compatible hues has become a hallmark of Park's art. In contrast to Park's playful vision, Ray Materson's miniature woven tapestries (3 x 2 ½ inches in size) focused on drug addiction and the poverty on which it feeds. Materson's early life led to a prison sentence; he was convicted for stealing in order to support a cocaine addiction. In prison, he learned to weave small images using thread from unraveled socks. One of his miniatures in the show, *Ski VT*, resembled a poster where syringes form a V and a T for the lettering, thus drawing attention to the contrast between Vermont's popular public image and the realities of its drug problem.

Inward Adorings illustrated yet another stated goal of the Bennington Museum, that of "connector." By bringing artist/collectors and educators together with living artists and their works, the museum staff hoped to guide the community to an appreciation of how art inspires invention; how one artist affects another; and how the collector/patron influences the mix. In this way, the public is invited to participate in the dissemination and direction of art.

In Wolterstorff's words: "Formerly, a museum's role was to watch the great current of life pass by, and occasionally pluck from the

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stream a significant object to collect, exhibit and preserve. Now we will take a more active role. We will divert the stream. What I am talking about is a new sense of responsibility — a responsibility not only to support our community, but to help mold it.”



KEY QUOTES FROM ASSORTED READINGS FOR THE OUTSIDER ART PROJECT

Compiled by Gregory Scheckler

For the Outsider Art project, students and facilitators read and reviewed several mass media articles from arts venues, on the topics of the history and presentation of outsider artworks. The readings echoed many themes we'd been investigating, flavored by the author's or interviewees' particular outlooks, location in history, and social contexts...

Summary of Art Brut and Outsider Art

From The Art Story

<https://www.theartstory.org/movement/art-brut-and-outsider-art/>

“These are primitive beginnings in art, such as one usually finds in ethnographic collections, or at home in the nursery. Do not laugh, reader! Children also have artistic ability and there is virtue in their having it! . . . Parallel phenomena are provided by the works of the mentally diseased; neither childish behavior nor madness are insulting words here, as they commonly are. All this is to be taken seriously,

more seriously than all the public galleries when it comes to reforming today's art.' - Paul Klee”

“There is a big question, perhaps even a problem, as to who should be termed an Outsider Artist, especially because many artists work very close to the edge of this definition; Niki de Saint Phalle, Hilma af Klint, Yayoi Kusama, and Joseph Cornell (with Kusama and Cornell interestingly having had a relationship) are all good examples. It seems that extreme rawness in art, and thus true Art Brut, can never become part of a convention, even if that convention starts to promote unconventionality. The artists mentioned above perhaps have the ability to shift in and out of the art world according to situation and need, whilst for an outsider this capacity to adapt is more painful and sometimes impossible.”

What is Outsider Art?

<https://rawvision.com/about/what-is-outsider-art>

“Dubuffet’s concept of Art Brut, or Raw Art, was of works that were in their “raw” state, uncooked by cultural and artistic influences. He built up a vast collection of thousands of works, works which bore no relation to developments in contemporary art and yet were the innovative and powerful expressions of a wide range individuals from a variety of backgrounds... The term 'Outsider Art' was introduced as the title of Roger Cardinal's book in 1972 and was originally intended to act as an exact English equivalent to Dubuffet's term, although from the outset it encompassed not only Art Brut but also works in the Neuve Invention category. Over the years it has been used increasingly loosely and can often now refer to any artist who is untrained or with disabilities or suffering social exclusion, whatever the nature of their work. ... Although Outsider Art has been used to describe the environments, some feel the label to be insulting to these particular creators, many of whom are integrated members of their local communities. Another popular term, especially in the US, is Grassroots Art, which can also cover the more humble expressions and constructions of ordinary folk in both town and country.”

. . .

Why ‘Outsider Art’ Is a Problematic but Helpful Label

By Scott Indrisek

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-outsider-art-problematic-helpful-label>

“One thing that’s clear is that outsider status is not something that can be borrowed or faked; it’s not a mantle that can be donned when it’s convenient, though that certainly doesn’t stop artists from trying. Outsiders are ‘making work that is an extension of who they are and what they’ve been through,’ Edlin said. ‘It’s not about trying to please their dealer, the press, the curator, or their classmates.’ That can get confusing, of course, because all artists make work reflecting their personal experiences, even the ones who received MFAs from Yale. Perhaps it ultimately comes down to artists’ outlooks and intentions—or, rather, a lack of intentions.”

The Rise of Self-Taught Artists: Out is the New In.

By Sarah Boxer

September 2013, The Atlantic

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/09/out-is-the-new-in/309428/>

“With outsiders so clearly on the inside, you have to wonder whether the concept of outsider art has lost all sense. But if that’s so, then why do some artists still carry the label? Why is there still an Outsider Art Fair (in New York)? An American Visionary Art Museum (in Baltimore)? A curator of art brut and self-taught art (at the American Folk Art Museum)? From the beginning, the term outsider art has been trouble. One of the contributors to the catalog for Great and Mighty Things, Lynne Cooke, writes, “From all quarters—theoretical, institutional, and museological—apologies regularly attend usage of the term.” Every so often, someone tries to change the name, playing up or down one quality or another—art of the insane, art brut, visionary art, self-taught art. But outsider art, coined in 1972 as a recasting of Jean Dubuffet’s term art brut, is the name that has stuck. ... Maybe it’s not such a bad thing. After all, outsider does have a nice little paradox embedded in it: for an artist to be considered an

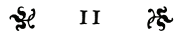
THE OUTSIDER ART PROJECT

outsider, he or she must first be brought inside the professional art world by an insider. In other words, everyone the art world considers an outsider is de facto an insider.”

“This was an attitude that was contemporary once upon a time—the idea that art can be ephemeral, funny, cheap, dirty, chancy, trashy. As Oldenburg once said, “I’d like to get away from the notion of a work of art as something outside of experience, something that is located in museums, something that is terribly precious.” Of course, he failed at that, spectacularly. It seems that everything called art, even some outsider art, is now precious, and pricey. ... There’s something about the outsider artist that still eludes insiders, still makes the outsider an ideal, a model, a stigma, a fate to be feared. Or envied. And that something, I think, is the outsider’s strange mix of compulsion and nonchalance.”

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NOTES FROM THE
FACILITATORS



GETTING TO KNOW THE PERSON

Comments from Dale Borman Fink.

I am neither an artist nor a historian of art. I joined the Outsider Art journey from two meaningful vantage points: (a) education; (b) children's book illustration.

In all of my courses related to teaching, I have tried to convey the importance of getting to know persons with disabilities by their personal interests, their individual attributes, and their capabilities—not defining them based on their diagnoses or limitations. This is in marked contrast to the practices of separation and institutionalization that were promoted in the recent past. Once we recognize all persons as individuals, we are unsurprised that they have important artistic contributions to make. Moreover, we anticipate that different ways of learning, thinking, and communicating might lead to different (and quite original) processes in “doing” art as well as distinctively different products from each individual's artistic endeavors.

In teaching Children's Literature as part of MCLA's Creative Arts Core for over ten years, I have placed great emphasis on the study of illustrations, especially in picture books for younger readers. Along

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with my students—many of whom have educated me with their deep insights—I have learned to notice important visual and design choices that have nothing to do with merely providing images to support a narrative. Some of these choices clearly are not sanctioned by the norms or customs of their times and yet represent great breakthroughs in the field of children's literature.

I have not heard Maurice Sendak labeled as an “outsider artist.” Yet the trajectory that propelled this celebrated author/illustrator (best known for his 1963 *Where the Wild Things Are*) toward artistic expression, had much in common with other Outsider Artists. It was his frequent confinement at home due to ill health as a school-age child that led to his intensive commitment to drawing. Furthermore, once he went beyond illustrating the manuscripts of others, his work was immediately tagged as “inappropriate” and “outside the bounds” of the children's picture book format in which he labored. He was blasted for the emotional honesty of showing a child angry at his mother (Max, in *Wild Things*), for revealing that his protagonist had a penis (Mickey, *In the Night Kitchen*, 1970) and for his portrayal of “mama in the arbor,” a mother staring listlessly and unable to be a nurturer, perhaps due to postpartum depression or more general mental health challenges (Ida's mother, *Outside Over There*, 1981).

I conclude that education and children's literature are two excellent vantage points from which to contemplate Outsider Art. I am quite excited about the art that our gathered band of five student/creators have generated over a period of a couple of months. Following are my responses to their art and to the commentary they wrote to accompany it.

EXTRAORDINARY VS. “ORDINARY” CHALLENGES

We are living in a time of pandemic that nearly everyone thinks of as extraordinary. This is represented well by Ms. Suters' screaming red capitalized letters spelling out “panic” over a sea of smaller, black letters alternating between “panic” and “pandemic.” I also get that—even if the artist didn't intend it so—from Mr. Mosher's presentation of a glaring skull with mismatching eyes, a mislaid limb nearby, and also

highlighting of the color red. This work cries out to me that we are creating corpses and the world has lost its order; nobody is in charge and people are dying.

Yet other among our artists remind us that it does not require a pandemic to unleash terrifying realities. Ms. Snyder confronts viewers with a woman made of disposable materials. The face isn't worth examining (it's void of individuality) but what a nice set of knees and thighs; what an interestingly sized pair of breasts! Oh, may we curl our fingers over your beautiful strands of multi-colored hair? Viewers are invited to notice the possibilities or even to participate in a ritual of objectification that is a condition of everyday painful experience for so many. Painful reality: no pandemic required.

Ms. Rousseau identifies herself in her catalogue description as living with chronic illness. She centers her imagery around the spoons that represent the amount of energy required to get through the tasks of daily survival. She identifies her color choices in reference to specific conditions. This work tells us, like Ms. Snyder's, of the barriers people face in daily life, barriers that may be invisible to those who aren't looking very closely but which required tremendous effort to get around or overcome. Barriers to be overcome, even when there is no pandemic.

BOUNDED, OR BLENDED?

Another theme I observed in some of what our student/artists created is that of whether people and forces can blend for the better good or whether they are better off bounded, separated within their own boundaries.

Ms. Barros captures the spirit of blending with her two seemingly sad or anxious individuals grasping onto one another for support. Although they are of two different color backgrounds, they are able to cross the color bar and bond—and even blend into purple from their original red and blue.

Ms. Rousseau's painting also seems to embrace color fusion rather than boundaries. The teal color that the artist explains represents PCOS blends in certain places with the purple that symbolizes

fibromyalgia. The artist's narrative explains that she has been diagnosed with both of these conditions, and describes each as having multiple possible symptoms, including one or two (e.g., weight gain) that overlap. It makes sense in this context that there will be blotchy areas where one is not sure if it is the purple of fibromyalgia or the teal of PCOS that is showing effects on one's functioning. This is a more sobering view of color blending than we see in the work of Ms. Barros.

In Ella Suters' work of polka dots that was inspired by Kusama, we see resistance to blending. Although the dots are small and crowded in together, it appears to me that they never lose their individual identities, even when some of them plop right on top of their neighbors. The dots do not appear vain or hostile, but they seem committed to keeping their original identities intact. Perhaps a reference to how Kusama and others had to work hard to stay true to themselves while interacting among many others with similarly labeled conditions within a psychiatric hospital?

“OUTSIDE WHAT, INSIDE WHERE?”
AND OTHER QUESTIONS

Comments from Gregory Scheckler

What are the borders of today’s art world? The issues surrounding Outsider Art cause us all to recognize that many classes of artists, historically, were left out of art history, art markets and art-making.

Watching students gain familiarity with Outsider Art reminded me of many similar moments, when art taught me to think beyond, through, and around some of its own labels and priorities. Here’s some of those issues:

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT ANYTHING GOES?

For the casual onlooker, it’s easy to believe that today’s visual arts have no limits. Thousands of galleries, museums, art fairs and endless websites demonstrate that the arts are more diverse, welcoming, and accessible than ever before.

Such intense variety is so large that sometimes it is frustrating, leading to an exasperated complaint that there are no rules or boundaries for the arts, and that maybe we shouldn’t need any labels at all:

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Anything Goes! This isn’t a new frustration, and is one of the markers of the innovation as it pushes against familiar traditions. Irritated by how anything he did was automatically assumed good, Picasso once quipped that “Anything an artist spits is art.” And before that, Ruskin attacked Whistler’s innovations, and before that... the Renaissance Trial of Paulo Veronese, under threat of the Inquisition’s artistic demands in contrast to Veronese’s brilliant experiments. It is, essentially, an ongoing version of the Quarrel of the Ancients versus the Moderns, attacking either the idea of progress or the idea of tradition.

A closer look shows that people not only have opinions about the arts, but that they fight for them, often viciously. Teachers and school boards wrestle each other as they build standardized curricula of what should be taught, artists fight for attention across market venues, and, well, it’s enough that to avoid the fights it might be better to become an outsider artist, if you can, because at least the outsider has the apparent freedom to make any art by any means necessary. But this isn’t true. The arts do have limits, definitions, categories and conversations which both accept and reject what cultures will accept as valid, expressive artistry.

WHAT ARE SOME OF ART’S MISSING GEOGRAPHIES?

After graduate school in the mid-90’s, one of my first doses of contemporary art’s boundaries struck hard when I began to work at a tiny, out-of-the-way tourist gallery. Here, we sold a lot of art every month, and crafts and jewelry, from a wide area of regional artists. Some were highly trained and informed artists, some would fit the more common groupings associated with Outsider Art, such as untrained artists, neurodiverse artists, or native artists whose innovations were always labeled folk art rather than fine art.

We sold artist’s paintings, drawings, photos, prints and books—many of the artists earned a few thousand dollars annually, some earned much higher, livable incomes from their work, some earned none even after favorable reviews in local papers. Not one of these artists was ever featured in any of the top-flight New York / L.A. / Tokyo art scene papers or magazines, reviews, or major museum

shows. Not one of them ever appeared in any of my college art history or contemporary art classes. For all that the well-published and publicized art world knew, these artists simply didn't exist.

And in reverse, most of the artists in our little tourist gallery had no idea who the celebrity artists were in the broader art world. The global art world was blind to the regionalist gallery, but the regionalists were equally as blind to larger, global trends. This, for me, meant that there's many good ways to survive as an artist, and, every large or small arts economy was, by default, including someone but also ruling out others, and often missing wide geographies of artists.

WHAT CONTENT ARE WE MISSING?

And all along, some of what's missing in contemporary art was humor - cartooning, comics, graphic novels and wide swaths of illustration were not welcome in fine art classes when I was a student. Commercial art, like illustration, was almost always taught by a different division of art programs than fine art, as if art always suffered some kind of bizarre sibling rivalry. (This has changed, and cartooning is often welcome in fine art circuits today.)

The real shock of goofball humor was recently parodied and skewered by artist-jokester Mauricio Cattelan, who duct-taped a banana to a gallery wall (Art Basel: Miami 2019) and then sold it for more than the cost of most college students' educations -- much to the chagrin of the fine art snobs and opinionators. Others made fun of it, and a performance artist raided the exhibit, grabbed the banana, and ate it. This makes me wonder: why does theater have stand-up comics who make fun of themselves, but, the fine art world just can't stand it's own satirists? What are we so serious for?

Meanwhile, where's the cute kitten photos? The Internet is full of evocative, hilarious photos of adorable pets -- is the art gallery or museum? Why is the adorable missing?

And here's the fun part: Outsider Art often includes this content -- paintings of kittens? You bet! Strange humor? Of course! Wild horrors and deep satire? Absolutely. Race and cultural and social issues that aren't normally present in contemporary art? Of course! It's no

wonder that artists are attracted to this rich, full range of imagery, as it provides expressive potential far beyond the confines of traditional and contemporary art.

CAN A TRADITION BE THE OUTSIDER?

In art college, I was taught the art-making formulas and theories of Modernism and Postmodernism, both incredibly creative and wonderful sets of art forms and art theories. At the schools I attended, a lot of figurative art traditions were missing. But I'd always kind of wanted to learn more, so I studied with some figurative artists in New York City in the early 1990's. Then, I studied more in a private atelier in Italy in 2005.

These artists taught traditional, academic modes of figurative art that simply had not been taught in the college setting. And oddly, though they would've have had thriving careers a hundred-fifty years ago, today this group of self-proclaimed traditionalists felt left out of the art world, and felt somewhat irritated about critics praising what the skilled academic painters felt was naive, unskilled productions.

In New York I attended a massive retrospective show of works by Jean-Michel Basquiat at the Whitney Museum, in 1992. I loved the intensity, the noise, the free-wheeling improvisations and the cultural critiques in his work, the brushstrokes -- it gave me a lot of hope and joy to learn of his work. The moment I mentioned this at school during a group critique: debate exploded, teachers fought each other, arguing that Basquiat's work should never have gained such status. And, basically, they were attacking Basquiat's work on the basis that it didn't conform to their idea of art (their favorite art skills and methods and concepts), rather than investigating it and experiencing it on its own terms. For some, the idea that Basquiat's art would gain fame and fortune, setting record auction prices, while their own carefully crafted works did not, was a painful art world reality that proved to them how the art world was crooked. This was a racist belief, of course, that Basquiat, the black son of Haitian and Puerto Rican immigrants, would somehow be required to make the colonialist white man's favorite art or art methods. It felt like the teachers couldn't figure out

that their beloved traditions didn't matter to anyone but themselves. The cognitive dissonance of this reversal was so great that they sometimes derided the big-city, blue-chip art world as if it was wrong, and wasn't even producing any real art. This seemed to me to be a case of traditionalists wishing for a return to a world that had never really existed.

In contrast, there's always been experimental artists, pushing the boundaries of what art can be -- and some of the great figurative innovators were radicals refuting earlier generations' artistry. In other words, there's always been multiple methods, styles, concepts, and wildly varying traditions of arts across hundreds of cultures. If global art history is right, then a few hundred years of illusionistic figuration borne out of European academy traditions is by no means the predominant form of art -- indeed, abstractions of forms are by far the more historically common across most cultures, across eons. But the fact remained that despite wanting to be part of the contemporary arts, these figurative artists were not often welcomed into arts venues. Instead, they earned their livings in the portrait circuit, in illustration venues, arts restoration and conservation, and other parts of the art world that fall outside the radar of the contemporary museums. One sure way to be an outsider: live in an imagination of the past.

BUT IS IT ART?

We see these divisions among art methods, styles, and histories coming to life when audiences encounter experimental works at MASSMoCA and exclaim 'But is it Art?' Or the ever-saddening 'But anyone could do that!' about which I always wonder "Why not? Isn't it something awesome about the arts today that we can all make art?" or "Don't you like that art can be universal, and isn't always an elitist arena available only to those who study it for twenty years?"

Conversely, when the same students encounter Impressionist and Academic paintings at the Clark Art Institute, sometimes they exclaim "Ah yes, this is art," often said in hushed, reverent tones. In both cases, it's not art because it's familiar (like at the Clark), and it's not non-art because it's unfamiliar (like at MASSMoCA). Lost in the

debate too easily are the reasons why it is art: the shifting aesthetics, the conversations, the intrigues, the artist's personal experiences paired with the public presentation of the imagery, plus the deep contexts of experience and making art today.

MUDDY BORDERS?

Outsider Art pulls several types of often-overlooked artists into a larger grouping, which helps us all understand how, at least, several classes of artists were routinely overlooked -- still often are overlooked. In general, these are the same groups of people who society often overlooks: the young, the old, the infirm, the insane, the eccentric, the black, the red, the yellow, the female, the naive or informally- rather than formally- educated, or the folk artist compared to the 'gallery artist'. But, wherever we investigate, the borders become muddier and muddier. We have to think about the person. How do these personal and cultural experiences act as lenses that help and/or hinder the artist's creations?

CAN YOU BE BOTH AN INSIDER AND AN OUTSIDER ARTIST?

Take, for example, the artist Yayoi Kusama, who is often considered an outsider artist, but whose work finds audiences in contemporary art museums. Or, Grandma Moses, a naive self-taught artist who rose to incredible commercial fortune. Both artists show us a simple logical revelation: whether you like their art or not, artists are complex human beings, overlapping and working across many borders, many categories, mixtures, remixtures, revisions and associations. The artist can be both outsider and insider, overlapping into many arenas. Contemporary theories of intersectionality can really help us here; for they articulate how we all fit and overlap into degrees of various categories -- getting over society's too-closely held labels, and recognizing instead the shifting terms and territories.

In other words, one can be all, some, or none of these groupings: a male gay black artist trained by the contemporary academy; a once-

homeless white Appalachian woman selling cartoon-paintings in New York City; a trans artist working theatric art and performance installations... everyone has a background, some set of privileges, varying and shifting identities, cultures, languages.

CAN YOU BE NEITHER?

At the same time, a great many Outsider artists show us also that artists don't always want to or need to engage today's art-world conversations. They make their imagery anyway, regardless of what the art-world is talking about. In some weird way, I find solace in that resilience and the refusal to care about what others think.

WHO INFLUENCES THE ARTISTS?

We artists look at and analyze art all the time. Outsider art sometimes amazes me -- the sheer patience and rigor of Jessica Park's colorful paintings is incredible, and her precision of edge and color is truly exceptional.

Other times, I feel non-plussed by some Outsider Art. Same with a lot of other types of art! What's really the difference, then, between experiencing Outsider Art versus 'Insider' Art? The contexts, the shifting meanings, the places of overlap -- what we share and don't share, how we all expand each other's imaginations? All of that's still present. And one's personal tastes? Unavoidable. Maybe that's the core understanding to be gained... outsider or insider art, to understand it, we must look at the individual contexts, cultures, associations, ideas, methods and materials -- the uniqueness of each artist's experience as foundational for their artistry. Doesn't doing so help us better identify some of the sources and forces that influence all of us?

EVERYONE.

Perhaps Outsider Art can remind us how art's not a high-stakes competition where only the talented survive. It's not a reality TV show

where only the special, sanctioned genius-artist gets to make art, courtesy of an exhibit in the hallowed halls of the famous gallery.

To the contrary, art is profoundly human, an act of visual communication, bringing media and thoughts together for everyone to see and consider, and create. In other words, art is for everyone, and we are all capable of being artists.

Do you realize this this assertion means that there's seven and a half billion or more artists on the planet, every human every where? And, that given the fundamental nature of evolution, that the human capacity for creativity stems from the physics, chemistry, and biology shared across our own and many species, who themselves must exhibit variations of their own basic forms of creativity? Creativity is us.

And, since life is more rare than non-life, a lack of creativity is the normal and most common state of the cosmos, of entropy pulling us apart, whereas creativity organizes, is negentropy, reversing the normal state into organized, conveyable patterns. In other words, art and cognition have a lot in common. The Great Outside is mostly the lack of thought, whereas the Great Commonality is the capacity to sense and think and feed and reproduce, and more importantly, to be creative enough to organize enough to be able to survive.

FUTURES?

At the end of this project, we encountered the COVID-19 pandemic, which shuttered college dorms and buildings, pushing all classes and communications online. The life and death permeating the pandemic — soon it will be more American deaths than World War I — is going to haunt us for generations. How will these events affect the arts?

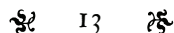
Are we now on the verge of a new kind of insider and outsider: those who have access to reliable Internet service and computers, and those who do not? Will digital delivery of the arts continue to intensify, becoming the new normal? Digital modes of production already dominate photography, graphic design, illustration, and many aspects of contemporary visual productions, but maybe in reaction against constant videoconference meetings, some artists will seek out slower, hand-crafted modes for their communications?

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What about giant, heroic, museum-sized experimental installation art... does such immense scale make any sense when audiences cannot or choose not to travel to the museums? Will the average painting become smaller, more easily used to enliven the home? What about wall murals? Why not paint more home's walls with murals?

These types of questions are going to play out in radical new ways - and though I cannot predict how -- if Outsider Artists are any proof of our core human desire to create and communicate anew, then I feel greatly optimistic that artists, insider and outsider alike, will find outstanding ways to innovate, create, and enliven the arts.

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CONTRIBUTORS



ALL IN THE JOURNEY TOGETHER

With thanks to all artists, from all walks of life...

Explorers:

- Cynthia Barros** Art Major '21
- Ian Mosher**, Art Major, '21
- Tala Rousseau**, Art Major, '21
- Emma Snyder**, Business Administration, '23
- Ella Suters**, Interdisciplinary Studies Major, '21

Additional Adventurers:

- Savanna Amaral**, English and Education, '23
- William Ames**, Art Major, '20
- Sierra LaMonde**, Art Major, '20
- Sienna Paulsen**, Environmental Science, '22



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Facilitators:

Tony Gengarelly, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of fine arts at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. He has written and published on a variety of subjects, including Political Justice, Early American Modernism, Native American painting and Outsider Art. Most noteworthy are articles for the *Mind's Eye* and *Folk Art Messenger*; publications on American poster art, Maurice Prendergast, and artists on the autism spectrum. He has edited and written two books on the art of Jessica Park (*Exploring Nirvana*, MCLA 2008; *A World Transformed*, MCLA 2014). Other books include Randy Trabold's *Northern Berkshire County* (Arcadia 2003); *Distinguished Dissenters and Opposition to the 1919-1920 Red Scare* (Edwin Mellen, 1996).

Dr. Gengarelly has curated individually or produced with his students over 40 exhibitions. Some of these have been featured at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williams College Museum of Art, MCLA Gallery 51, the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center, and currently at the FPA House 94 Porter Street Gallery. He has served as Chair for the Fine and Performing Arts department (2004-2012) and as Managing Editor for the *Mind's Eye* (1997-2003). For the past fifteen years he has been the Director of the Jessica Park Project, an educational and professional program at MCLA (www.mcla.edu/JessicaPark).

Dale Borman Fink, earned his B.A. from Harvard College, M.Ed. from Antioch University, and Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Dr. Fink came to MCLA in 2006 after a career in childcare, early childhood education, afterschool care, and support for children with disabilities and their families. Among his books are *Making a Place for Kids with Disabilities* (2000) *Control the Climate, Not the Children: Discipline in School Age Care* (1995), and a children's book, *Mr. Silver and Mrs. Gold* (1980). More recently, he has published research on both teachers' and children's perspectives on the value of recess in elementary school.

At MCLA, Fink has taught courses related to early childhood education, special education, and children's literature, and guided Master's students in their research and capstone projects. In addition to his faculty responsibilities, Fink has developed courses and work-

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shops for community-based early childhood educators, presented preschool science activities at a statewide STEM Summit, and edited a book by Art colleague Anthony Gengarely. He is retiring as faculty emeritus in 2020.

Gregory Scheckler crafts writing and art. His writings can be found at the Berkshire Review for the Arts, The Mind's Eye, and Thought & Action. Since the early 90's, his paintings, cartoons and photos were exhibited over a hundred times, including galleries and museums such as Ferrin Gallery, the One West Art Center, the Boyden Gallery at St. Mary's College of Maryland, the Bennington Museum, the Center for the Visual Arts Gallery at Illinois State University, and the National Science Foundation.

He began working at MCLA in the year 2000, and as Professor of Art he founded the art major program. He earned the MFA in Art from Utah State University with a thesis that combined art and poetry. He earned the BFA in Painting as an Eliot Honors Scholar at Washington University in St. Louis, and earned the BA in Art and Modern and Classical Languages / German with high honors from the University of Notre Dame. He is also a proud graduate of the Clarion West Writers Workshop. He envisions the arts as survival strategies, playgrounds, vivid storytelling, rich ways of thinking, and core functions of our humanity.