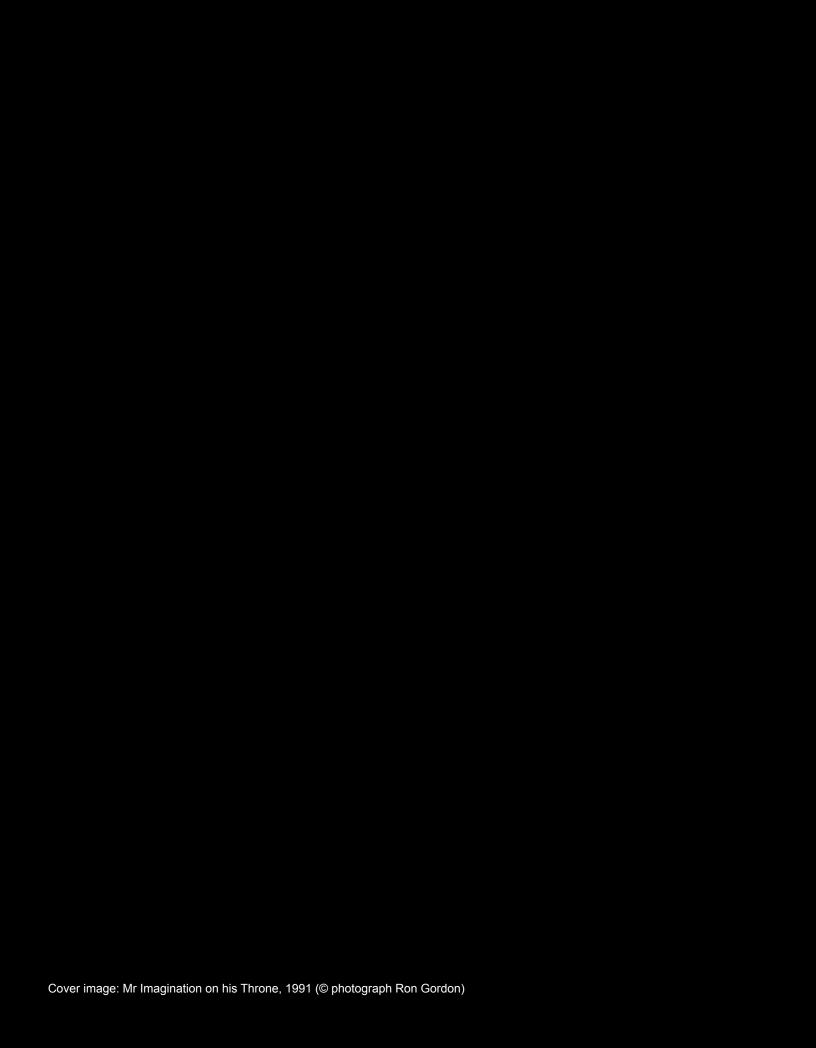


# ELSEWHERE THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SELF-TAUGHT AND OUTSIDER ART ISSUE 1, AUGUST 2013



# **Elsewhere**The International Journal of Self-Taught and Outsider Art

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#### **Elsewhere**

## The International Journal of Self-Taught and Outsider Art

Elsewhere, The International Journal of Self-Taught and Outsider Art is a refereed journal that publishes essays on all aspects of art, its histories, contexts, and debates, as they relate to the field. The journal provides a forum for serious, sustained writing on Outsider Art and its multiple manifestations from around the world: Art Brut, Self-Taught Art, Contemporary Folk Art, Fresh Invention, Art Singulier, Visionary Art. It takes a transdisciplinary standpoint, welcoming contributions from scholars in the humanities, arts, social sciences and medicine, and is crosscultural in approach.

#### **Editor**

#### **Colin Rhodes**

Colin Rhodes is Professor of Art History & Theory, The University of Sydney, Dean and Director of Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney, Australia, and Director of STOARC (the Self-Taught and Outsider Art Research Collection), based at The University of Sydney. Rhodes' research is primarily in the areas of 20th century and contemporary art history and theory. His books include the influential *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (2000) and *Primitivism and Modern Art* (1994). He is a regular contribitor to *Raw Vision* and *Création Franche*. Rhodes is currently completing an Encyclopedia of Outsider Art for Chicago University Press, and he is editor, with John Maizels of *Raw Erotica* (2013). Also, he is engaged in various curatorial and writing projects for exhibitions in Australia and the US.

#### **Editorial Board**

#### **Brooke Davis Anderson**

Brooke Davis Anderson is Executive Director of the U.S. Biennial (aka Prospect New Orleans). An author of four books and numerous essays, Anderson specializes in African American art and self-taught artists and their work. From 1992-1999 Anderson was Director of Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem State University. From 1999-2010 she was the founding director of The Contemporary Center at the American Folk Art Museum. She single-handedly oversaw the acquisition of The Henry Darger Archives. From 2010-2012 she was Deputy Director of Curatorial Planning at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. She has taught art history and museum studies classes at Columbia University, City College of New York, and Winston-Salem State University.

#### Jenifer P. Borum

Jennifer P. Borum is a Ph.D. candidate in art history at the City University of New York's Graduate Center. She is a lecturer at the Museum of American Folk Art's Folk Art Institute and has written for Artforum, The New Art Examiner and Raw Vision.

#### **Roger Cardinal**

Roger Cardinal wrote the pioneering Outsider Art in 1972, and has published widely on individual Outsiders, including Madge Gill, Michel Nedjar, Guillaume Pujolle, Ilija Bosilj, Karl Junker, Clarence Schmidt and Ted Gordon, as well as producing essays on such topics as Outsider Architecture, Prison Art, Autistic Art and Memory Painting. A contributing editor of *Raw Vision*, he has curated exhibitions in Britain, France, Slovakia and America.

#### Bernard L. Herman

Bernard L. Herman is George B. Tindall Distinguished Professor of American Studies and Folklore at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Three of his books received the Abbott Lowell Cummings Award as best work on North American vernacular architecture. Herman has published essays on quilts, self-taught and outsider arts, foodways, historical archaeology, vernacular photography, and theoretical approaches to the study and interpretation of objects. He edited *Thornton Dial: Thoughts on Paper* (2012) and is currently working on *Quilt Spaces*, an exploration of Gee's Bend, Alabama, quilts and quiltmakers, and Troublesome Things, for which he received a Guggenheim Fellowship.

#### Charles Russell

Charles Russell is Professor Emeritus of English and American Studies at Rutgers University, Newark. He is author of Groundwaters: A Century of Art by Self-Taught and Outsider Artists (Prestel, 2011) and has published Self-Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art (University Press of Mississippi, 2001) and co-edited with Carol Crown Sacred and Profane: Personal Voice and Vision in Southern Self-Taught (University Press of Mississippi, 2007).

#### **Assistant Editor**

#### **Nerida Olson**

#### **Submissions**

The International Journal of Self-Taught and Outsider Art encourages substantive inquiry on issues of Self-Taught and Outsider Art, in particular constructive approaches to the field that enrich and widen our critical awareness of it, whether of subject matter or cultural traditions. We also welcome the use of visual images to support the body of text. Articles should not exceed 10,000 words in length and shorter notices should be between 2,000 to 5,000 words in length.

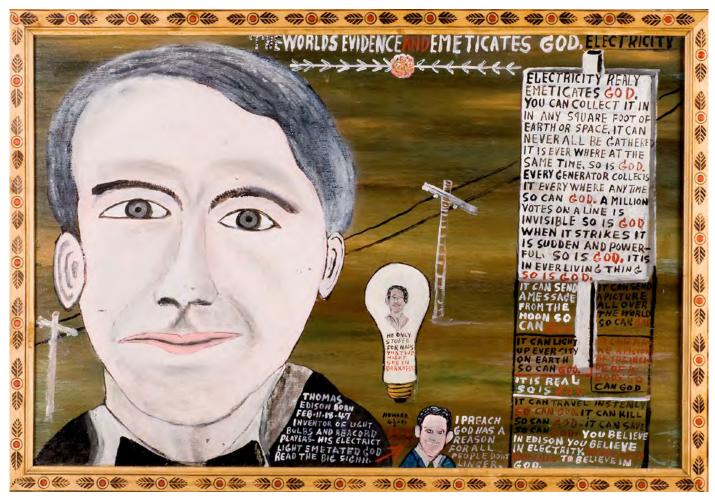
Full submission guidelines can be viewed online at: http://sydney.edu.au/sca/stoarcjournal

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Madge Gill, *Untitled*, c.1940, pen and ink on paper, 31.2 x 25.4 cm, Henry Boxer, London



Howard Finster, The Worlds Evidence, 1977, acrylic on board, 76 x 50 cm, © The Museum of Everything, London

# Introduction to 'Elsewhere' Colin Rhodes

Outsider Art is coming of age as a field of study. *Elsewhere* has been founded to provide a site for analysis, extended comment and debate in and about the field. The word 'elsewhere' was chosen because it signifies another place; a somewhere other than one's current location. It can be recognised, but is relative and ungraspable. It is that liminal space in between definitions. This is the territory of Outsider Art.

We can pinpoint Outsider Art's naming to a single source; it was the title of a book written by the British writer Roger Cardinal, published in 1972. Since that time, while its merits as a global descriptive term have been the subject of analytical discussion and many a heated argument, Outsider Art has passed into common usage as a denominative referring to a spectrum of artistic practices that cover a period from around the mid-Nineteenth Century to today, and which are loosely connected through their separateness from formalised, hegemonic art worlds – in the sense of the artists' modes of learning, the means of production of their art and, at least in their primary instances, their reception histories. As a result art so designated is most often identified through the psychological contexts of its makers and the social conditions of its production: from mediumism through mental health, and from geographic isolation in relation to culturally normative cities through to the politics of marginalization. In any case, it is identified not through any shared aesthetic or ideology, but through eccentricity and idiosyncrasy; through its alterity to dominant discourses. In a general sense this is both the strength and weakness of the Outsider Art concept. Its difference is the root of our interest – that is

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Henry Darger, *Untitled* (detail), c.1940s-1050s, carbon tracing, collage, pencil, watercolour on paper, 201.2 x 30.5 cm, © The Museum of Everything, London

the 'we' who inhabit art world and academic paradigms – precisely *because* it occupies a territory beyond those paradigms, though crucially we nevertheless intuit in it quality. Difference is what makes it visible in the first place; what makes it stand out from the crowd of normative contexts. The perception of difference, however, can also be the cause of art world pushback; the perception that it does not – should not – belong.<sup>1</sup>

Outsider Art implies a sort of making of the self through creative endeavour, which is usually autodidactic. The *Kunstwollen*, or impulse to art-making is inevitably a result of some individual need to form or re-form the world, often in the face of its presenting a hostile physical face. In part this is driven by a desire to understand or to know emphatically through the act of making, but it is also always about delivering a message. Outsider Art is always content-laden. Sometimes this content is manifest as outright preaching, as in the case of Howard Finster, or otherwise as attempts to advise and exhort, as with artists like Adolf Wölfli, Aloïse Corbaz, August Natterer and Henry Darger. Often the opus is a report of the quotidian, as re-envisioned through the artist's hands, from the gentle alternative world of James Castle to the hallucinatory realities of Roy Wenzel, Jungle Phillips or Malcolm McKesson. Often, again, the work is a report from another place, as in spiritualist images from the Beyond by Augustin Lesage and Madge Gill, or the paradisal visions of Minnie Evans. Others fashion their universes more physically, as with the figural sculpture and furniture of Mr Imagination, the combines of Thornton Dial, or the works of the great environment-builders of Outsider Art, such as Clarence Schmidt, Joe Minter, Ferdinand Cheval, or Nek Chand.

Ironically, Cardinal first employed the term 'Outsider Art' directly as an Anglophone equivalent for the French term 'Art brut', invented by the postsurrealist artist Jean Dubuffet to describe his collection of self-taught and marginal art, which was the subject of Cardinal's book.<sup>2</sup> The bulk of Dubuffet's early collecting activity in the 1940s was in the closed psychiatric hospitals of Switzerland and France, leading to an unfortunate common supposition that Art brut is synonymous with mental illness, which is not the case.<sup>3</sup> The connecting narrative of Art brut is one of freedom or liberation from cultural constraints, however that might have been achieved, and mid-Twentieth-Century thought saw acute mental illness as an exemplary mechanism for psychological and, through it, behavioural liberation. So Art brut signifies a kind of unaffected cultural and aesthetic libertinism.<sup>4</sup>

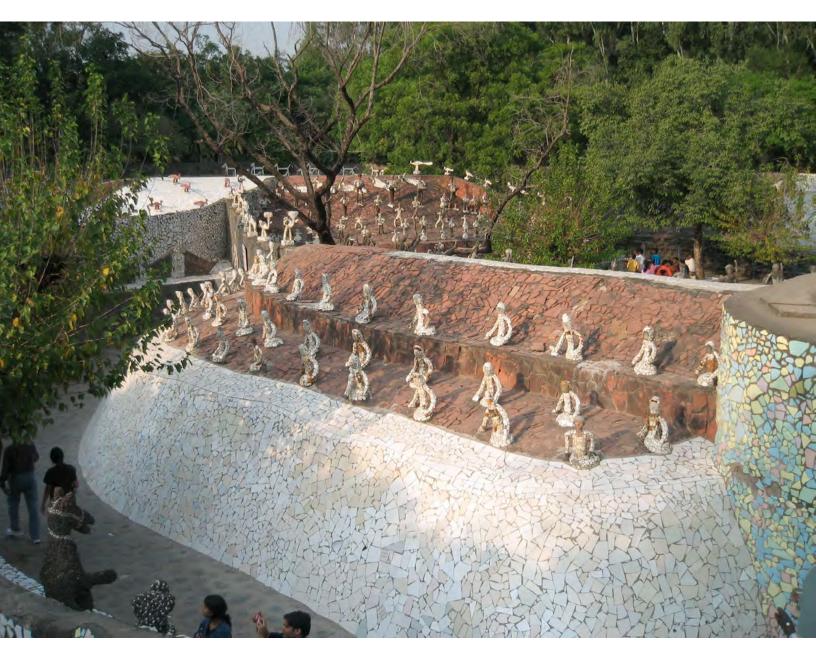
Dubuffet's (and subsequently Cardinal's) conception of an Art brut or Outsider Art grew out of a specifically



European Romantic-modernist tradition, traceable directly through Surrealism, Expressionism and Symbolism, to the Age of Revolution. It was suffused, therefore, with a questioning of monolithic culture and constructed against the turbulent background of Europe's shattering cultural and social changes and constant re-alignments in this period. In other words, there is a kind of barbed, 'anti-cultural' quality to *Art brut*. In America, Outsider Art's other foundational home, the narrative has been somewhat differently configured. While the *Art brut* notion was impactful in Chicago among a small number of artists and dealers from the 1950s, in general the history of Outsider Art in the United States derived from a search for a truly vernacular art that underpinned and epitomised the national character of the American nation. In this sense, American notions of Outsider Art are generally culturally constructive. And while Outsider Art is not centrally inscribed in dominant art world models of production, reception and exchange, it does underwrite (rather than challenge) the cultural 'authenticity' of a recognisably American art. First theorised by people like Holger Cahill in the 1920s as 'Folk Art', it was distinguished by an individualism and simple pioneering spirit that puts it at odds with European concepts of folk art, which are generally communal and driven by traditional rules of representation. Another phrase that came into common parlance for this specifically American 'Folk Art', and in particular for its 'contemporary' (that is, Twentieth-Century) manifestations, is 'Self-Taught Art'.

In view of the somewhat differently constructed notions of Outsider Art in Europe and America, and the somewhat different lists of canonical types they include, the subtitle of this journal contains the terms 'self-taught' and 'outsider'; imagine them, if you will, as a compound noun, 'self-taught-and-outsider-art'. The intention, of course, is to be inclusive so that scholars with interests in all aspects of the field might feel able to contribute. Debates concerning the naming of things will, no doubt, continue (and will be welcome in the pages of this journal). However, the vigour of the debate over the years in itself is indicative of the existence of a field. As the pages of this first issue demonstrate, *Elsewhere* is devoted both to the revelation of the new and the critical examination of the known; to debate broader topics and critique individual practices. Importantly, it is also a place in which the voices of artists themselves will be heard. Norman Girardot's interview with our late friend Mr Imagination is a fitting start to this aspect of the journal's mission.

The academic study of Outsider Art has only relatively recently began to become acceptable in the academy, with an increasing number of undergraduate courses offered around the world (still most often in the art schools and folk studies departments, rather than in art history departments) and a slowly growing number



Nek Chand, Rock Garden, Chandigarh, India (photograph C. Rhodes, November 2007)

of doctoral students. For many years, though, the field was sustained primarily by professional artists (like Dubuffet, Arnulf Rainer and Jim Nutt), dealers (like Victor Musgrave, Phyllis Kind, John Ollman, Randall Morris and Jane Kallir), and a tiny smattering of academics and psychiatrists. *Elsewhere* aims to provide a serious forum for all these voices. It is not, of course, the first journal or magazine devoted to Outsider Art. It is, however, the first in which full-length, peer-reviewed articles can be found. This will make it a key repository over time of considered texts on aspects of the field, its artists and their work, which afford appropriate space for discussion of their subjects. In this sense *Elsewhere* is unique, matched only by a handful of special issues of journals otherwise unconcerned with Outsider Art, which as one-offs function almost as edited books on the field.<sup>6</sup>

However, *Elsewhere* sees its mission as adding another opportunity to contribute to discourse on Outsider Art and not as displacing current periodicals. With its arrival, though, it is worth providing a summary here of the context of specialist serials in which it makes its appearance.

In France Dubuffet himself initiated a series devoted to monographic essays on artists in his collection. *L'Art Brut* (the so-called *fascicules*) first appeared in 1964 and has continued with two short breaks until the present. The twenty-four volumes published to date constitute a rich resource of information and image, especially, though not exclusively, of European artists who were or have become canonical Outsider Art figures, such as, Heinrich Anton Müller and Scottie Wilson, as well as others who have slipped quietly from general recognition such as, Benjamin Arneval, Jacqueline, and Simon Marye. In general, several artists are covered in each issue of *L'Art Brut* (Number 1 included eight, for example), though on occasion a single issue has been devoted to one artist (for example, Adolf Wölfli in Number 2 and Aloïse in Number 7).<sup>7</sup>

French language publications have included the ambitious *L'Oeuf sauvage*, which was launched in 1991 and ran for nine issues until 1994, and a tenth issue was published in 2011, and *Zon'Art*, a biannual, small format bulletin that covers the expanded range of the field. *Gazogène* (named for a 'poor' form of combustible fuel used especially in France during the Second World War in the absence of supplies of gasoline) also began publication in 1991, under the editorship of Jean-Francois Maurice. It describes itself as 'the review for *Art brut*, singular creations, popular art, and marginal and bizarre expression.' Its populist concern to cater for 'the excluded who reject exclusion' extends to what it describes as unclassifiable and marginal texts, from 'insane' to 'proletarian' literature. France's other main magazine is *Création Franche*. Founded by the artist Gérard Sendrey in 1989, it is published by the Musée de la Création Franche in Bègles, near Bordeaux. Devoted almost exclusively to current practitioners in the field, it has developed over time into a rich resource of contemporary self-taught and outsider artists, mostly in Europe, but also from America and Australia.

Out of Art, published in the Netherlands since 2006 essentially grew as a result of the emerging global importance of artists operating out of specialist supported studios for people with intellectual and learning disabilities, the group most recently (and, needless to say, contentiously) added to the field. However, while studio artists are at the core of the magazine, its field of interest ranges more broadly across contemporary Outsider Art. In Italy, until it ceased publication in 2002 after sixty-nine issues, L'Arte Naïve, Arte Marginale covered aspects of the field, although its purview was primarily 'naïve art', which sits somewhat separately to self-taught and outsider art. In 2010 the University of Palermo began publication of a biannual online Italian language magazine, Osservatorio Outsiderart. It embraces the breadth of the field and publishes a mixture of discussion, comment and book and exhibition reviews.

In the United States serials in the field have tended to appear as newsletters and journals published either in conjunction with museums or other membership organisations. Between 1971 and 2008, the leading American publication for the field was *Folk Art Magazine*, formerly *The Clarion*, which was sent out to members of the American Folk Art Museum, New York (formally the Museum of American Folk Art). Content was generally more heavily skewed to nineteenth and early twentieth-century folk art, though in later years 'contemporary' coverage increased markedly as the Museum itself added a Contemporary Center to its structures. In Chicago INTUIT: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art has since 1996 been producing a members' magazine, *The Outsider*, which contains some excellent writing in the field. Other American

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Roy Wenzel, Untitled (taxi cab), c.1999, oil pastel, 59.5 x 52 cm, Private Collection

publications worthy of note include *Folk Art Messenger*, the magazine of the Folk Art Society of America, first published in 1987, and *Envision*, the Missouri journal for folk, visionary and self-taught art, edited by John Foster from its inception in 1995 until it ceased publication in 2005.

Besides the *Art brut* fascicles, which are in any case closely aligned with the Collection de l'Art Brut, the most important magazine in the field is undoubtedly *Raw Vision*. First published in 1989 in the United Kingdom, and edited by John Maizels since that time, it can reasonably claim to be the only publication in the field up to now that has taken 'a fully international view'. It contains writing by international scholars, as well as amateurs, and mixes short articles about individual artists with broader discussion topics. Production is high quality and every issue is rich in images. An extensive 'Raw News' section at the front end of each issue gives a snapshot of current events in the field, and since so much of this is relatively ephemeral 'Raw News' has grown over more than two decades into an invaluable catalogue of past events. *Raw Vision's* commitment to bringing Outsider Art to global attention has been rewarded not only with a surge in interest in the field, but also with a number of significant prizes, including the UTNE Independent Press Award (2006) for best arts coverage, the Médaille de la Ville de Paris (2007) in recognition of its contribution to



international culture, and the UNESCO 'Camera' Award (1998) for the world's best art magazine.

In the company of these pioneering predecessors *Elsewhere* looks to provide a unique opportunity for readers to access serious, extended writing on Self-Taught and Outsider Art.

<sup>1</sup> A discussion along these lines was conducted recently by Adam Geczy and myself in *Contemporary Visual Art and Culture Broadsheet* (Vol. 39, No. 1, March 2010): A.Geczy, 'The Solid Fraud of Outsider Art' (pp.66-69) and C.Rhodes, 'A Much Maligned Monster: Why Outsider Art Doesn't Lock Horns with the Artworld' (pp.70-72).

<sup>2</sup>There are fairly extensive references to this, including from Cardinal himself in, for example: 'Toward an Outsider Aesthetic' (in M. Hall and E. Metcalf, ed., *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, Washington, 1994, pp.20-43) and 'An intercontinental perspective' in L. Danchin and M. Lusardy, *Art Outsider et Folk Art des collections de Chicago* (Paris, 1998, pp.18-29). I have discussed this in, for example, C Rhodes, 'Les fantômes qui nous hantent: en écrivant *Art brut* et Art Outsider', *Ligeia: Dossiers sur l'art* (nos. 53, 54, 55, 56, July - December 2004, 183-195).

<sup>3</sup>This is something Dubuffet was aware of and which he attempted to address early on in the foundational 1949 text, 'L'Art brut préféré aux arts culturels' (translated as: 'Art Brut in preference to the cultural arts', in A. Weiss, ed., Art Brut: Madness and Marginalia. Art & Text special issue, 27, 1988, pp.31-33). The most thoroughgoing history of the genesis and development of Dubuffet's Art Brut collection is L. Peiry, Art Brut: the origins of outsider art (Paris, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Michel Thévoz provides perhaps the most extreme claim for *Art brut* as actively antagonistic, for example in: 'An Anti-Museum' (in Hall and Metcalf, *op cit.*).

<sup>5</sup> For a critical introduction to the changes in terminology in the American context see, for example, Charles Russell, 'Finding a place for the self-taught in the art world(s)' (in C Russell, ed., *Self-Taught Art*, Jackson, MS, pp. 3-34). Also, C Rhodes, 'Les fantômes qui nous hantent' (op cit.) and Jane Kallir, '65th Anniversary Exhibition, Part II – *Self-Taught Artists*' (New York, 2005, n.p.), and 'Story Lines: tracing the narrative of "Outsider Art" (New York, 2013, n.p.)

<sup>6</sup> Examples include the Australian journal *Art & Text*, special issue *Art Brut: Madness and Marginalia* (1988, *op cit.*) and the French journal *Ligeia* (2004, *op cit.*).

<sup>7</sup> On the history and editorial policy of the fascicules see Peiry, *Art Brut* (*op cit.*).

<sup>8</sup> On this see, for example, C.Rhodes, 'An Other Academy: Creative Workshops for Artists with Intellectual Disabilities', *The International Journal of the Arts in Society*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2008, 129-134. One strong signal of the (Outsider) art world 'arrival' of art from supported studios was collector and art impresario James Brett's decision to devote the fourth incarnation of his Museum of Everything project to such work (see *Everything #4*, London, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> See http://outsiderart.unipa.it/index.php.

Jungle Phillips, *Minnellee and Friends Come out too Play*, 2002, oil on chipboard, 18.8 x 68.6 cm, Private Collection



# At Home Then and Now With Mr Imagination Norman Girardot

#### Bethlehem (2006)

What follows is an edited interview with Gregory Warmack (1948-2012), aka Mr Imagination or Mr I, conducted by Norman Girardot in December 2006, while sitting within the sacred chaos in the front room at the artist's 4th Street home on the south side of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Having spent the first part of his life in Chicago, he moved to the Bethlehem house during the winter of 2002. At the end of this interview, I have appended a postscript and, sadly also, a eulogy that brings the story up to date. Tragically as this interview was being edited for publication, Mr I was taken to the hospital in Atlanta. He died on May 30, 2012. Mr Imagination was an African-American self-taught artist who grew up on the streets of Chicago selling jewelry and, after a near death experience, discovered his destiny as someone who transformed the refuse of urban life into all sorts of magical artworks expressive of his love community and life. Especially well known for his amazingly inventive use of discarded bottle caps, he always experimented with all sorts of other cast-off materials, such as used paintbrushes, broom heads, feather dusters, bits and pieces of found wood, wire mesh, nails, tin from gutters, broken toys, embedded concrete, and industrial 'sandstone' (a byproduct of steelmaking). Throughout his early career in Chicago during the 1980s and '90s, and then in Bethlehem and from 2009, in Atlanta, Georgia, he continued to creatively expand on his use of these materials, while also constantly exploring the possibilities of new forms and techniques. In each of these locations, it was his home - and in Bethlehem and Atlanta also his yard - that was a collective artistic assemblage of memory and matter. As the primary locus of his life and labor, these homes were his most important artworks.

Norman Girardot (NJG): As you know, Mr I, we want to give people a sense of your life as an artist in the special environment you call 'home' – a place that houses your own art as well as all of the amazing things you've collected over the years, the artwork you've traded with other artists, your animals, your memories of family, ancestors, and friends. So let me

begin by asking you what it means to be at home?

Mr Imagination (Mr I): Well what makes me feel at home is to be here with all my things. Also, to have a place where I can be around my plants and have a nice front porch. I never had anything like that in Chicago. And now in the summertime I'm able to go in my yard and work, work at my art. I guess my home is a place where I can work anywhere. So sometimes I can't even get to my stove. I feel at peace here at home with all my art work and all the other art work by so many other artists - both self-taught and those who went to school. They come here to visit and to work on their own art. To me we are all artists, whether someone went to school or not. And at home I feel the spirits of all artists, even those who are no longer on this earth – like my friends Simon Sparrow, Lee Godie, Leroy Almond and many, many others. I feel even the spirit of the great Bill Traylor here. That's why when people walk into my house they feel great and full with these spirits. Sometimes I just sit in this room and look around. I look at all the art work that I have done and I can't believe that I made it all myself. I really feel that the big change I made four years ago, moving to Bethlehem, has helped me move in many new and different directions. Now I work with things like wire and tin.

**NJG:** People sometimes come to your house expecting to see your studio, the special place where you work. But it really isn't like that, is it?

**Mr I:** My whole house is my studio. I work everywhere, both inside and outside. Right now I like working on my front porch and in the summer in the back yard. And the plants are part of my work. Every day I go out and touch the plants. I don't say, "good morning, little friends, do you want some coffee." But I do go out and touch all of them. They are part of my work.

**NJG:** Please say some more about how you think your home here in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania has affected, and changed, your art.

Mr I: I think what made the work change is that life is all about change. Sometimes we're too afraid of change. Here I look out and see grass and trees. And in summer I see butterflies and flowers. I think it was a good move. Earlier I was doing pieces that were kind of stiff, but now they have movement. My figures are more alive. And I'm doing birds and they have wings, flight, and freedom. Now there's more nature here and it's in my work. I'm finding new kinds



Mr I, Bottlecap Mule, n.d. © Lehigh University Art Galleries





Mr I, Plaster Woman, 2007 (photograph Rick Gomez)

of material here too. So when my neighbor tore down his old tin roof he gave me some to make art. And I first thought of Jonah and the whale and made a large tin sea creature almost like a whale. Then I thought of fish and handbags and I made them. Then I did a cell phone bag out of tin. Tin books too. I was shown in a dream how to work with the tin, cut and bend it, and how to stitch the tin with wire. It's like sewing. When I was on the plane to Paris [invited by friends associated with the Halle Saint Pierre museum in Montmartre] a couple of days ago I thought about what to make next and I've got plans to do a turtle now. I did a drawing on the plane.

**NJG:** What about the wire dresses you've been doing the past year?

Mr I: I first had a vision to do three little girls, maybe life-sized, who were jumping rope. In the summertime around here I see all kinds of kids doing things, running and ripping around and playing. I wouldn't see that so much in Chicago. And it just came to my mind to do these little girls doing double Dutch. I had already worked with wire mesh before and I made a wire dress that I was going to put plaster on. But you know a friend (Diane LaBelle) saw it before I got a chance to put the plaster on and she said that she liked it. She said "why don't you leave it that way." And I did, and you said it was like a minimalist sculpture. I've done a lot of them now, big and small, and right now I'm doing a ball gown.

**NJG:** These dresses and some of your other new work shows that you don't always work with bottle caps and I'm wondering about that whole series of plaster figures that you built around found pieces of wood. Where did they come from?

Mr I: I did plaster ones back in Chicago and one of them using wood is in the Smithsonian [in Washington, DC]. It's the one made from old table legs. It looks real stiff. It stands tall and straight. Like that early plaster Elvis figure I did. A lot of my older plaster figures are like that. The new ones are different. They move and bend and walk. Here in Bethlehem I was at an antique store where I saw an artist using some wood and there were some pieces thrown out in the trash. I asked about it and a friend helped me get that wood. That gave me the idea to use wood in a different way. Then I started to look for wood and collect it to make my new plaster figures. You remember that the first pieces I collected came from the arch site [on the Lehigh University campus

in Bethlehem]. I love finding things to use and when I was in Pittsburgh [for a large solo show of his work at the Society for Contemporary Craft in 2002] I found an old waste basket near the Andy Warhol museum. I used that to make the large woman figure in the other room. All of these new figures have life and remind me of people I knew here, in Chicago, and in the past.

**NJG:** And what about the plaster- and bottle-cap masks?

**Mr I:** I can't remember any dream about the masks. The masks just happened. Most everything for me comes from dreams, but I don't remember the dream for the masks. I do remember dreams that showed me how to form a face and how to mount it.

**NJG:** Another kind of new work for you – in addition to all the dragonflies, bugs, and fish – are the plaster and concrete heads with nails that I call the "fetish heads." Where did they come from?

Mr I: I had done some early pieces with nails back in Chicago. The first one that I remember is this old wooden fish. That was way before the heads. I had never seen an African fetish piece back then. This fish was the first nail piece and I put nails in and then painted it. With the nail heads I've been doing here it's a meditation thing. It was also like when I started doing fish with bottle cap scales. I was cutting so many caps and laying them down as scales and it was a meditation thing. And the fish, and now the heads with nails, kept getting larger. Making the heads was also a meditation. I feel better doing it.

**NJG:** When I've watched you working with the bottle caps and the nails it seems to me that you get into a rhythm that really is a kind of meditation. Is that important for you?

Mr I: Yes I feel a rhythm with the caps and nails. Here in Bethlehem I wasn't doing the caps at all for a while, but then when I work with another kind of material there's another rhythm, a different rhythm. With the caps when I flatten them, when I put holes in them – that's a rhythm. Each thing has its rhythm. And when I'm hammering, or putting nails in, that's a rhythm too. It's relaxing. It's like therapy sometimes and when I work with other artists it's like therapy. Recently I've been working with other artists and we've been doing angels together. And I've recently started to do drawings and paintings again.



Mr I and 26 dolls, c. 2007 (photograph Norman Girardot)

NJG: You know, Mr I, we just put your incredible bottle-cap mule on display in your solo exhibition at the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts in Reading, Pennsylvania, and it's great to see how people, especially kids, respond to it. I suppose the best thing to say is that people are truly amazed by your work and when viewing the mule they often ask about how long it must take you to produce such an incredible work. What do you say when people ask you that?

MR I: The thing is that I just close out the outside world when I'm doing it. It goes pretty fast sometimes, but to finish a piece like that takes a lot of time. And you know that I always document how I do things. I have photos of the mule when I was making it. I worked very hard on it and after I finished the bottle caps I just worked some more to decorate it in a special way. And it became very regal. Somehow it became very elegant.

**NJG:** When people come to your house, they see many things – the divine jumble of all the stuff in your house – the vast quantity and diversity of your own artwork, all of your collected stuff, the animals, the artwork by other artists, materials, tools everywhere. Why is collecting so important for you?

Mr I: Well, collecting lets me be part of history. I have things here and I have history. What started me collecting was when I found an old tin rocking horse in the trash in Chicago. I really liked it and I started to find other old rocking horses, wooden ones. I like the way horses move and I like how these old rocking horses move. When I was a kid I collected stuff too. Mostly I collected rusted metal. Later I put it into the boxes I made. There was something about the metal and the way it rusts and the way nature tarnishes it. Then I started to spend money on collecting bird houses. I love birds. They are close to angels since they all have wings and fly. And the bird houses were homes like my home. But it started to get out of hand. There were too many.

**NJG:** What about your doll collection? When did that begin?

**Mr I:** I first started to collect dolls when a man by my house in Chicago had a moving sale and he had a doll from Biloxi, Mississippi. I still have that doll. And I've got black dolls and dolls of all nationalities. But you know I never had dolls when I was a kid. I did have a Lionel train. I just got into collecting dolls. I collected wherever I went. When I was in Amsterdam

I brought back some dolls from there. Now I look for them everywhere, all kinds. I see them in the trash when I'm walking down the street. One day I found a big bag of Mickey Mouse dolls in the garbage dump where I found the rocking horse. I've got a lot of old Barbie dolls. All kinds of dolls. And knock-down dolls, a whole rack of them. I've got African barber shop signs which my friend in Benin helped me get. And I've also got a collection of Avon bottles. I got my first ones from my mother and my grandmother. Now I have hundreds of Avon bottles. They're all collectibles.

**NJG:** And your photos?

**Mr I:** Yes I love to collect photos. I've got all kinds. I've got slave photos, World War II photos, black history photos. And I collect books too. I've got one autographed by Eleanor Roosevelt and a book that fell down and hit me on the head. It turned out it was autographed by Benny Goodman and Lionel Hampton.

**NJG:** Mr I, is there anything you haven't collected yet that you'd like to collect?

**Mr I:** Yes, yes I'd like a harp! Most of all it's nice to have part of history around you. These are all things I don't want to sell. Some day I'd like that my whole collection go to a museum. I'd like to show all my work together. My art and my collectable pieces shouldn't be separated.

**NJG:** Your house is close to the Lehigh University campus and students often come to visit you. What do they learn from you?

Mr I: What the students see are the things they throw away every day. They see all sorts of things, all kinds of things that they'd just throw away. But I use it all. And they see my work and it makes them think twice about things. They learn something here that they're not learning at school. Every university needs a course that shows students how to re-use the things that everyone throws away. I wonder why they're not doing it. I'm wondering now what colleges and universities there are in Reading [Pennsylvania]. It'd be great to have the students come to the show and my work would educate them about how to recycle things. It can make a difference. The students I've worked with here at Lehigh in your courses have really learned how to re-use the stuff that others throw away. And they will carry this lesson with them







for the rest of their lives.

**NJG:** People often say that life is art for you. It seems that you're not happy unless you're making art all the time.

**Mr I:** After getting back from Paris I've been tired and the last few days I haven't worked. But even when I'm traveling and when I'm at a hotel I put the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door because I'm making art. And I'm having dreams all the time about making things. Right now while we're talking I'm thinking that I want to make that tin turtle I mentioned. The one that I drew while on the plane to Paris.

**NJG:** Do you think everyone is potentially an artist?

Mr I: I think they can be artists if they put their mind to it. They've got to use their imagination. But most people are afraid. They're afraid because they think they will make a mistake. But mistakes are important. Everybody makes mistakes and they've been made for centuries and sometimes these mistakes turn out to be great. The whole world has been put together through mistakes. Architects come up with a sketch for a building and then make a mistake and it's that mistake that shows them something better. He has another idea. Mistakes help us to use our imaginations.

**NJG:** As I look around your living room I've often noticed that you have a kind of altar over against the wall, right next to the TV and all around the two glass cases. Is it an altar and can you talk about it?

Mr I: Yes, it's almost like a shrine, an altar. And I've always had it here. It's part of my home. You see that brush. It's got hair in it from my grandmother. That's there to remind me that I used to brush my grandmother's hair. And when she passed away I got her church made out of a milk carton. I've still got it. You've seen it. And over there is some of my mother's hair and in the glass case there's some of my hair. Right there is the first sandstone sculpture, the first face I made. And here I have all kinds of angels. Here's the first piece I did after my brother died and this is something another artist made for me. These are small things. This little robot was made by the artist Mark May when my cat died. It's an angel robot cat. And I have real old bottle caps here, and this is a piece of wood from the place where they marched in Birmingham for civil rights. There's an old piece of flag here, a torn piece blown by the wind. I've got all

kinds of things that people have given me.

**NJG:** There's so much here that it's hard to take it all in.

**Mr I:** I've got things from everywhere – things from my family, my brother Junior, friends, artists, people from all over. And there are lots of angels and those little Buddhas too. There are early pieces and lots of my small sandstones in the case and larger ones on the table and floor. A lot of my sculptures have a religious feel to them. And other things are spiritual. See that tiny nut there carved with Jesus's face? And here's a key chain made right after [Martin Luther] King's talk. Up there's a tiny wishbone and a glass eye and another Buddha and a little elephant. Old coins, shells, fossils. It really is a shrine, an altar. And look here at this: it's a Jesus 'Pez' dispenser. And this is my mother's old cologne bottle and it still has some cologne in it. You can still smell it. And there's something else that I never told you. See these little bells: they're bells from a Hindu man and I ring them three times every morning. I do it every day. And they're on my altar.

**NJG:** If you had a chance to create your perfect home, what would it be?

Mr I: It would be a house totally covered with things, like a grotto. It would be like a grotto and on the outside you could walk through a gazebo building where you could go in and meditate and there would be lots of angels. I'd have artists from all over the world come and stay and make angels. There would be a place where they could do their work. They could have a show of their work, but they'd have to make angels. There would be angels everywhere and inside it would be like a museum. Some day I'd like to have a little property where I can do this. Where I could make more angels and have a place for my friends to make their art. I'd invite everyone into my home to make art together.

#### Postscript (originally 2011)

Since the time of this interview, Mr I suffered through a devastating house fire in January 2008 at his Bethlehem home. Fortunately he was not present at the time of the fire, but much of his art work and memorabilia (including many of the dolls) were destroyed, as well as, most sadly, his pet cats and

his beloved dog, Pharaoh. For about a year and a half, Mr I lived on Bethlehem's north side, where he carefully preserved many of the burnt artifacts from the fire and again created a mesmerizing artenvironment in both the interior and yard of the new house.

This second Bethlehem house never really became Mr I's home in any emotional or spiritual sense. Indeed, it became more and more imperative for him to seek out a place that could fully become a new angel-blessed home, as well as his sanctuary, workshop, community center, and yard, and in the summer of 2009 he moved to Atlanta, Georgia. The move was no simple undertaking, but with the help of friends in both places, he reestablished himself in the Riverside section of Atlanta and acquired a new canine companion, a stray dog that he rescued and called Woof. Feeling confident and creative again, Mr I produced various kinds of art involving not only his signature bottle caps, but also innovative variations on his manipulation of wire mesh and perhaps most impressively, a whole new series of birds expressively carved out of found wood. It was also terribly important for him to let the world know that none of the fiery tragedies in his life (in Chicago and then in Bethlehem) would ever prevent him from performing the imaginative magic of his art. In fact, as he was careful to point out, he has always salvaged, preserved, and reincorporated the burnt remnants of his earlier homes into his new abodes and art. From fire came the blood of death, life, and creativity.

Out of the flames in Bethlehem came new life in Atlanta. And Mr I took delight in knowing that he must have been destined to end up in the city that, in the aftermath of the American Civil War inferno, arose phoenix-like from the ashes. At the time of writing in 2011 Mr I was living in a house owned by a friend while he awaited the refurbishment of a house and wooded property he owned over by the river. He looked forward to finally achieving his 'dream home' as recorded in the above interview. As he said, 'It would be like a grotto and . . . there would be lots of angels everywhere, and inside it would be like a museum.' This dream was never to be realized. and his life even then was not easy. Yet there was a strong sense that he had found a place that he might again call 'home'. The divine jumble of things had returned in all their chaotic glory. Moreover, a new altar was erected in the house, and the backyard had become a meeting place for other artists and friends.

In 2011 he acquired a major Atlanta dealer and was excited to learn that he had been invited, along with four other famous African American artists (Lonnie Holley, Charlie Lucas, and Kevin Sampson), to participate in a major art installation during the Venice Biennale that June 2011, sponsored by Benetton and the American Folk Art Museum, New York. Unexpectedly and sadly, he and the other artists discovered in May that the Benetton event in Italy had been abruptly canceled. The four artists did, however, make it to Venice. As Mr I said about disappointments such as these, there are certainly angels that hover over his new home and friends, but that does not mean that the flames of loss and sorrow entirely dimmed. He accepted the adversity and went on making, and remaking, his home and his art.

#### **Eulogy (2012)**

Gregory Warmack, fondly and respectfully known as Mr Imagination or Mr I, tragically died at the age of 64 in Atlanta Georgia on May 30, 2012. He was not at home at the time, but died while surrounded by friends and family at a hospice. He was suffering from a severe infection in his lower extremities. At the funeral on June 4th at the Willie Watkins Chapel, there was a hushed crowd of family, friends, and other artists from around the country. Mr I's friend and fellow self-taught artist from Alabama, Lonnie Holley, spoke for many in the audience by remembering their personal and artistic relationship and then emotionally bidding him farewell. The last I spoke with Mr I was by phone three weeks prior to his death right before I went to China with a student group. He had been in the hospital for an extended period of time and he sounded somewhat despondent since he would have to delay his trip to Paris to plan for a possible exhibition in the south of France. However, as always with Mr I, he looked forward to returning to his new home in Atlanta. This house and yard had been transformed into an artistic environment very much in the spirit of what he had done before in Chicago and in Bethlehem. In Atlanta his house and property was even larger than in Bethlehem and the front yard was especially resplendent with his handiwork - meandering walkways, stone embedded concrete borders, plants of all kinds and a massive cactus centerpiece, large found object sculptures (one of which seemed to be a self portrait figure guarding the entrance to the house), rusting

bottle cap constructions, smaller works nailed to the porch and façade, and all sorts of various decorative bric-a-brac. Framing the dramatic cactus plant was a concrete sign with stone lettering identifying the site as the "Garden of Peace." Mr I's last days were not always peaceful, but his spirit was undiminished. Most of all, his faith in the presence of angels associated with each of his homes was still strong. The fact is that Mr I was himself an angelic spirit with a mission to bring his imaginative magic to this earth. To know the truth of this, we need only contemplate one of his favorite iconic manifestations of his spirit and body. I refer to the multiple plaster casts, often painted bright gold, of his hands, those strong and supple implements which functioned like wings for flights of imagination and for transforming earthly refuse into transcendent art. He has gone now to his final home and we can be assured that there are angels everywhere with him busily making art out of bottle caps and clouds. No photos there, but we can certainly imagine the scene. It may come to pass that through the efforts of his friends and angels on earth, there may be a Mr I park and memorial created along the river in western Atlanta. There will also, no doubt, be tributes in Chicago and Bethlehem. Indeed, it is fitting that Mr I be memorialized since in many ways he helps "us to remember and imagine who we are and where we came from."

and remembered? How long will glass bottles be used? Everything is turning into plastic now and will disappear. My art helps to recycle the past. It helps us to remember and imagine who we are and where we came from.

#### A Final Remembrance

As an epithet that captures much of the spirit of Mr I's home, art, and life in Chicago, Bethlehem, Atlanta, and now interred in an earthly garden that looks to the sky, I offer this transcription of one of Mr I's nighttime meditations (December 14, 2006):

As I sit at home and create my art, I block out the outside world and put it out of mind. As I create my art I feel that I'm in my special world, the World of Mr Imagination. It seems like I travel back in the past and make connections with different kings and queens. They're not just my family or ancestors but people from all times, places, and races. Here at my home I take the everyday objects that were thrown away and turn them into art. These thrown-away things become regal. Yes I work a lot with bottle caps. I feel that I'm preserving them and giving them new life. I give them back to all mankind. They become part of history and will shine for hundreds of years. If I don't make them art then how long will they be known



### Mediumistic creation today: lessons from an encounter Laurent Danchin

'Psychic powers need to be loved in two different ways if you love concepts and images ... I have too late become aware of the difference between the effect of images and of concepts, two good ways of knowing, the one in the light of day and the other that accepts the nocturnal side of the soul' Gaston Bachelard, *Poétique de la Rêverie* 

'In the currently fashionable picture of the universe there is no place for valid transcendental experience.' Aldous Huxley, *Heaven and Hell* 

For those who are interested in Art Brut, 'outsider' or 'singular' art, the frequent intervention of the 'paranormal' in this type of creation is no surprise, and mediumistic art is a familiar notion.2 This brings to mind, especially in Europe, some well known anecdotes: the voices of Augustin Lesage at the bottom of his mine, the spirit guides of Madge Gill or of Fleury-Joseph Crépin and the healing gifts of these three artists, or again the spirit practices of Laure Pigeon or of Rapaël (Facteur) Lonné. But also, more indirectly, the second states, or automatisms, of creative people such as Anna Zemankova or Scottie Wilson, and in this regard also the premonitory dreams of Ferdinand Cheval, the strange muteness of Adolphe-Julien Fouré, the abbot of Rothéneuf, Brittany, France, or the psychosomatic blindness of Raymond Isidore, also called 'Picassiette'3, in Chartres, France.

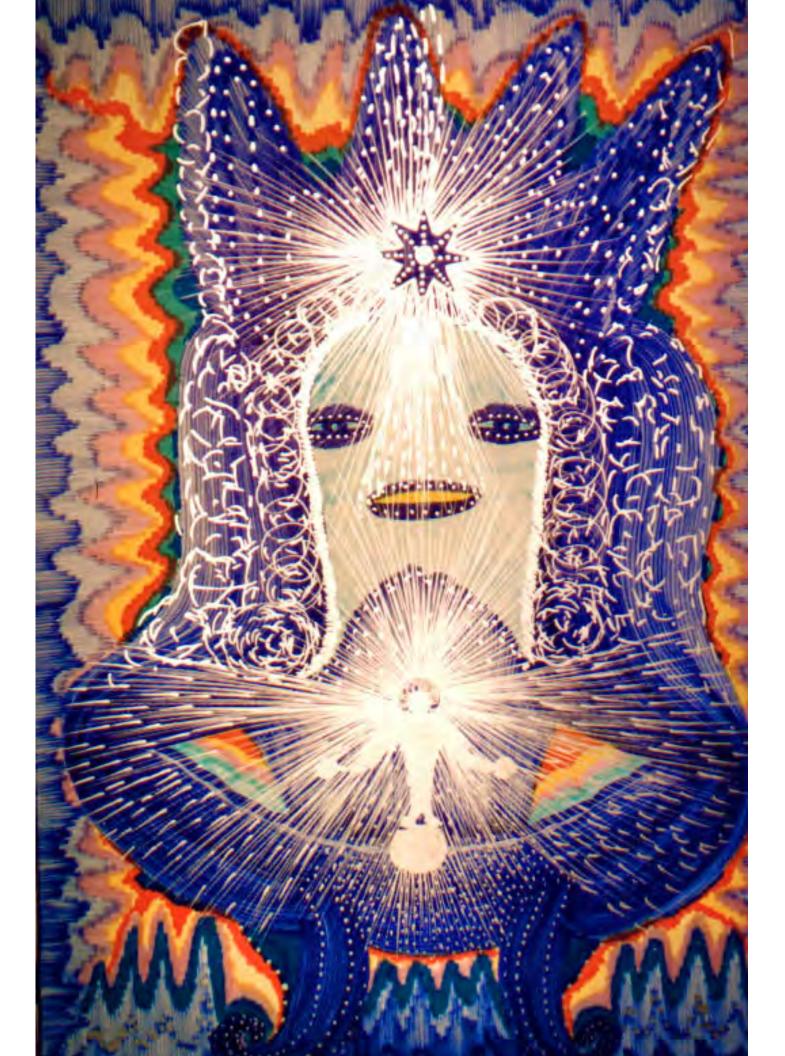
On the other side of the Atlantic, where visionary states appear to be somewhat more generally accepted, we should mention the biblical dreams and other hallucinatory experiences of Joseph Yoakum, Raymond Coins or Minnie Evans, the celestial voices of Sister Gertrude Morgan or the apparitions of Elvis experienced by the Reverend Howard Finster, not to mention the cosmic vision of Perley M. Wentworth, or the spontaneous animism of artists such as Simon Sparrow or Charlie Lucas.<sup>4</sup> In most cases this concerns artists who are either already 'classics', who have long since disappeared and

whom we know only through published descriptions, or contemporary artists who are still with us, but who are difficult to access, or who are nearing the end of their lives.

Not withstanding the number of artists 'outside the norm' that I have been able to meet, I have never in my life encountered more than one or two creative people who could be clearly attached to the category that has generally been agreed to be called 'mediumistic art'. At the occasion of shooting a film, in August 1987, I met for example Raphaël Lonné, whom I had the occasion to interview some time before his death. Considered as being a classic example of Art Brut by Jean Dubuffet, who had discovered him thanks to Dr Gaston Ferdière5 at the start of the 1960s, he was then physically much diminished after an operation. He no longer did any drawing, and had for a long time only spoken with great reticence about the 'spiritual' origin of his inspiration. Clearly, the meeting with 'Monsieur Dubuffet' had, for him in any case, been much more important than his meeting with the spirits.

Lonné was a hypersensitive man of many talents, at once a poet and a musician. As is so often the case, at first he had looked for his place in the world in more academic popular pathways - poetry in Alexandrian rhythms, amateur theatre, jazz, brass bands, and so on - only discovering his gift as a 'mediumistic drawer' completely against his will when he was expecting something else, namely written messages coming from the beyond, during a séance of table rapping - the detail is important by itself - conducted by a neighbour who came from northern France. This occurred in April 1950 when Lonné was forty years old, and therefore at the midpoint of his life; he died shortly after our meeting, on 12 November 1989.

Lonné never used the word 'spiritism', of which the hidden, even malevolent connotation disturbed his basically benevolent and generous nature, while his natural tolerance also prevented him no doubt from taking on board what could appear as being a preconceived body of doctrine. He preferred to talk about 'spiritualism'. He was willing to believe in reincarnation, but, through the blossoming and development of his gift, it was clear to see that he progressively changed from the culture and beliefs of his original environment to the more distant, but also more value-affirming theories of Jean Dubuffet, who would give him a pre-eminent place in his Art Brut Collection.



Lonné had, as he said, 'the ability to make contact' with his paper. He drew like a craftsman embroiderer, or a calligrapher, without second thoughts, creating something like 'a page of writing' filling the sheet in a sort of automatism that was never interfered with. from left to right and from top to bottom. In order to clarify the origin, now legendary, of his vocation, he went into detours and spoke of 'séances of research into the waves of communication'. 'I had nevertheless' he said, 'a certain sensitivity for remembering and a hyper sensitivity for capturing internal matters. ( ... ). We each had a pencil on one corner of the table and tried to have a relationship, a contact with these unknown forces'. A veritable Monsieur Jourdain<sup>6</sup> of culture, the proletarian of creative activity, he actually reinvented, amongst his friends, the surrealistic practices of a much earlier age.

For the sake of making our film, I had asked Raphaël what he thought of those who described his art as visionary or mediumistic. 'This is their point of view,' he answered, 'For me, it is a spontaneous, intuitive art. I am not looking for anything else that may come out of it'. As for the notion of 'Art Brut', that did not mean much to him either. 'It distorts thinking', he complained. 'I do not deny the origin of my things ... of my results. It certainly goes to an area very much outside of the normal run, but this is why I would not want people to read more into it'.7 And in the slightly moralising tone of someone who for years had derisively been called 'the Poet' by his colleagues at the post office where he worked, he added: 'I think of my drawings as graphic or painterly poetry, as the case may be'. Simply put, at the end of his life, Lonné had moved from 'medium' almost to artist, pure and simple. Or rather 'an amateur, a creator, but not an artist' and in addition 'a simple person', as he insisted on telling me.

Other painters or sculptors who I have known, practised their art at the borders of the paranormal. This is the case of Chomo, who died on 19 June 1999 at the age of 92, in his forest of high solitude and his complete liberty, amongst the thousands of works of his 'Village d'Art Préludien' (Village of Preludian Art) near Fontainebleau, France. In his youth he had been a regular fine artist, and if there was something of the visionary or hallucinatory in his approach, his technical ability and his vivid awareness of being an artist, prevent his work from being included in the domain of Art Brut. 'The illuminated person,' said Chomo, 'is the person who believes in the impossible'. And he liked to tell his stupefied visitors about 'the

star that appeared to Chomo,' and spoke as if it were evidence of his contact with 'the invisible', and of his respect for 'the forces that govern us'. Chomo was nevertheless not really a 'mediumistic' artist, unless the notion of 'medium' is to be extended to include all the creative people motivated by visions, dreams, and perceptions located at the borders of normality, or who have created their work while being in other states, induced by drugs, alcohol, hunger, solitude or states of extreme fatigue, which would include a great number of people.

The only mediumistic creative person, in the real sense, that I have come across was not a spiritual artist, but a clairvoyant from Versailles. I was told about her in 1996 by the artist Paul Duchein, an indefatigable discoverer. This was Marie-Jeanne Gil, whose work has already been presented in the pages of Raw Vision, as well as in the Cardin display space in Paris and at the Ingres Museum in Montauban. After having been established as a clairvoyant for thirteen years, she began to draw only in 1994, shortly after a very spectacular vision of the Prophet Elias, sometimes accompanied by a bust of Jesus: dozens of images bursting with colour, gold and silver, to begin with produced with the left hand (though she is right handed) and then in the normal manner. By now Gil, who always works with Stabilo felt tip pens on large pieces of Bristol paper, or on sheets of Canson paper, often on both sides, must have produced several hundred of these compositions in long series, if not more. And the source of her inspiration would appear to be far from being exhausted.

A meeting with someone like Marie-Jeanne Gil is full of information on the mechanisms of mediumistic creation, as well as on those for any creative act, as well as on certain aspects of the functioning of the brain, and on certain mystic bases of religious phenomena. The circumstances of the appearance or of the revelation of her gift, moreover, appear typical to me. As in most cases of mediums they take the form of a veritable conversion, prepared a long time beforehand through the existence of a particular environment. From her childhood onwards Marie-Jeanne manifested extraordinary capabilities and she was already credited with unusual powers at around the age of seven, following a miraculous healing. Having herself escaped from a sickness that was supposed to be deadly, and thus having prematurely experienced the limitation of death, she became in turn a healer, having acquired in this

manner the powers that place her beyond ordinary childhood experience. 'I have a favourable terrain' Marie-Jeanne says, 'I was born in the Sahara'. Or again, 'Where I am concerned, it is suffering that opened my eyes'. Like Howard Finster, who was also animated by a deep faith, it was also during childhood that she experienced her first vision.

Then a long period of latency ensued, corresponding to her current active life: adolescence, marriage, home duties, learning about social life, educating children, followed by a first marriage breakup towards the age of forty. Pushed along by a feeling of urgency, of work to be done, Marie-Jeanne installed herself, alone, as a clairvoyant in Versailles. Her vocation appears to have been purely altruistic, but with hindsight appears to be a long prelude - thirteen years - to the following stage, necessary to somehow make a clean sweep and empty the spirit of all its prior habits. These encompass the full range of the visionary experience to come. Then the revelation proper; the vision of 13 November 1993, when the Prophet Elias appeared to her on the ceiling of her small dining room, emerging from a sort of cloud. There again, things happened in two time periods. First, over a period of three months, she took Polaroid photographs of cloudy skies above her house, in an attempt to find other signs that might give form to her new mission. Second, on 2 February 1994, she was given 'the power of creation', a spectacular start of her experience in drawing and colour. A scenario thus evoking a somewhat heretical version of Biblical history, but in tune with the here and now.

Marie-Jeanne now says, 'My life has changed. This has completely upturned my life.' Like the crystallisation of life as the result of love her whole existence was completely reorganised to make room for her new activity, finally allowing her to express what has always been bubbling away at the bottom of her personality. Her two gifts revealed themselves successively during two periods: first the gift of pure clairvoyance, as with all mediums, that is to say, a state of mental availability and of opening up, cultivated over a long period of time; and second, the gift of artistic creation, which is very much rarer. 'In order to reach this level', Gil says, 'you have to be very pure'.9 It is moreover remarkable that in her first series of works, where her graphic universe appears already fully-formed in a single step, she spontaneously had recourse to her left hand; as if, unconsciously, when she was still, in her own words, 'at the school of [her] guides', she had to reinvent the techniques of liberation which were fashionable in the 1970s, to disconnect the cerebral hemisphere dominated by the Word, and acquire new habits of perception and stimulate the non-verbal zones of the right hemisphere. After which, a return to the usual hand can be made much more easily, and on a different basis.

A twenty-minute video document shows Marie-Jeanne at work, which she does usually at night when she is at home. 10 We first see her tracing a large oval shape on the large white page, simply laid on the table, by turning her felt tip pen lengthwise on the page, a gesture through which she appears to put herself in a condition to wait for the coming of her inspiration. Then suddenly, without any hesitation, changing felt pens several times during her work, she begins to outline large sprays of lines that appear to spring from very precise points, forming part of a series of helixes, spirals, zigzags or undulations, composing her image from points or stars. This is done through a series of gestures that are at the same time sure and repetitive, similar to a series of gymnastic movements, or the arrangement of a well ordered choreography, as if the image, or rather its plan, already existed prior to its creation. Finally, in no more than twenty minutes, the drawing, sometimes quite complex, is completed.11

It is the author's state of concentration, her extreme absorption in her task, that first strikes the observer in these images; a degree of involvement that makes it impossible, for example, for her to hear the telephone ring, or to react to any other small disturbance. Is this the place to talk about a trance, somnambulism, or self hypnosis? 'Everything is done automatically,' says Marie-Jeanne, 'It is as if a mechanical force has invaded you: it is you and it is not you'. In reality, from the beginning, in the squealing of the felt tip on the paper, she is listening to something else, she hears voices talking to her, she enters into a process of disconnection, to branch out immediately to other sources, purely internal. She has entry to a domain of synaesthetic correspondences of pure creative perception, where images blossom spontaneously, liberated by the automatism of gesture, in a fluid manner, and without any impediment. She employs an instinctive technique of emptying the mind, a long preamble that has as its primary aim 'starting the engine', so to speak. Then, once in motion, the process maintains itself, with the image once under way, reactivating the mechanism that produces it.

Marie-Jeanne is very sure about distinguishing, two types of images in her work: 'visions' and 'catches'. 'Visions' reproduce scenes that she states as having in fact seen, a somewhat classic situation in which she places herself outside of what she wishes to represent. 'Catches' by contrast represent what she also calls 'self-propelled' images, that is to say, ones where the impulse comes from the gesture. That is, where pure automatism constitutes the only origin of the composition to the exclusion of anything else. We find here, in extreme form, the traditional image of inspiration, in which the creator is as if physically possessed by the forces that flow through her. 'Es schreibt', said Husserl when writing came easily: 'Writing is happening'. With this difference that here it is the whole body, more than just the hand, that appears to be taking part.

But what are we to make of the 'visions', to begin with the first ones, the most spectacular ones, those that are at the origin of her creative activity? First, are these just hallucinations? When asked, Marie-Jeanne, not at all put out, responds sensibly that these cannot be hallucinations because she 'does not take any substances to get them'. And indeed, the genuine medium does not require chemical assistance, since the particular characteristic of the medium is just that for reasons so far unknown, he or she is from the beginning gifted with a hypersensitivity or receptivity that sometimes borders on a hypnotic state or an interpretative delirium. Moreover, Gil claims that 'we are a chemical error,' in any case: '99% chemical error'. Nevertheless, as is the case for most artistic mediums, similarities could be found in the spontaneous psychedelic aspects of her work, and insights provoked by certain drugs, particularly the likes of mescaline or LSD. We might also add to this ancestral hypnotic techniques and the religious ecstasy of certain mystics, something of which Marie-Jeanne appears to be vaguely aware.

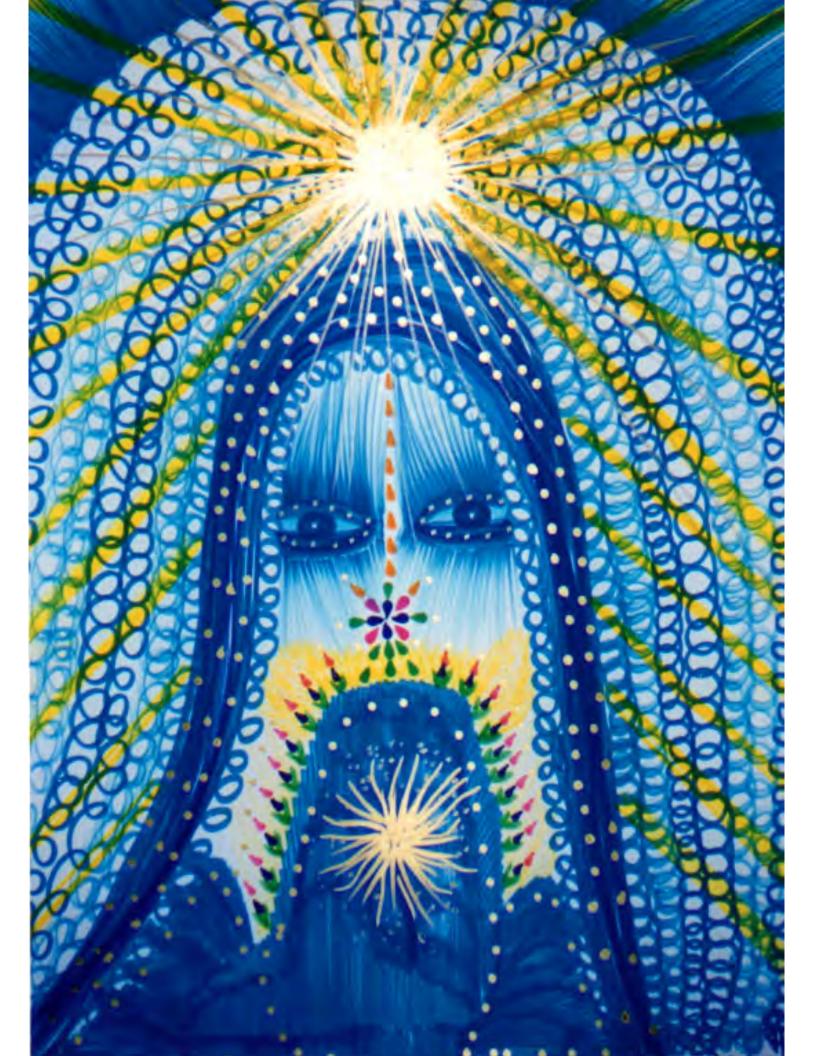
According to Aldous Huxley: 'There are certain mediums to whom the mescaline taker's brief revelation is a matter, during long periods, of daily and hourly experience.' Moreover, he tells us that in visionary experience the most important feature is 'the experience of light. Everything seen by those who visit the mind's antipodes is brilliantly illuminated and seems to shine from within. All colours are intensified to a pitch far beyond anything seen in the normal state, and at the same time the mind's capacity for recognizing fine distinctions of tone and hue is notably heightened.' And whilst his main concern is

the effects of chemically-induced experience, Huxley maintains that, 'praeternatural light and colour and light are common to all visionary experiences.' <sup>13</sup>

The visions of Marie-Jeanne Gil, such as they appear in her works, are not in any way due to drugs, but it is true that they are, before all, explosions of colour and light, attempts to render, more or less skilfully, with the technical means that are available to her, the splendor of cosmic perceptions she experiences but which are impossible to describe. This is why the gold and the silver, and why the aurora borealis and rainbow are rendered in the most vibrant of colours, in a limitless profusion, with the intention of rendering for those of us here on earth, the extraordinary luxuriousness of these phenomena from another world. 'I came across the silver felt pen by accident,' says Gil, who has made immoderate use of it ever since, and 'I have tried to trap the light in my drawings'. Mauve, yellow, orange, sea green and azure blue are favourite colours in Stabilo. This is because, she says, 'These are what look most like the colours of my visions'. At the beginning of the twentieth century visionaries expressed themselves in colours that are more dull, or in black and white. That visions at the end of the century were clearly more colourful, is an effect of the development taking place in the technical aspects of the tools available, rather than a change in the nature of visions.

expressly asked Marie-Jeanne, 'Are these dreams?' while looking at a series of her drawings. 'No, these are voyages, not dreams,' she answered, a bit annoyed. She provided further information in relation to particular images: 'This here, this is what happens in the cosmos, up there, which I have had the chance to visit'. Also: 'These are visions, voyages into the beyond'. And with a small sign of mischief she even manages to add: 'People would think that I was smoking weed.' 14 As Huxley says, colour rarely plays an important role in dreams, because without exception, it has little symbolic meaning. In visionary art on the other hand it is not rare to find the author having recourse to the hypnotic power of colour, since it is one of the most effective vectors in trance and illumination.

This is true to such an extent that one might almost be tempted to ask whether visionary states, as opposed to the erratic regression of dreams, which manipulate materials already engraved in memory according to their meaning, do not perhaps represent the high point of ecstatic opening up to the external world; a



paroxysm of extraversion that is necessarily doomed to fail since it is a desperate attempt to rise above oneself (ecstasy) to gain access to what Huxley calls, 'the non-human otherness of the universe.'15 Going outside the self in order to gain the final vision, forgetting oneself entirely and almost leaving the physical body, as in the traditional naïve story of the 'astral voyage', produces a sort of mental fireworks, an explosive bouquet of neurons suddenly all firing in unison. The visionary is not under the influence of drugs, and if he or she is 'stoned', this is a natural state. But what the visionary 'sees' has nothing in common with an ordinary dream either, and this is one of the reasons why in each vision, real spiritual events of a totally disinterested nature, appear to the visionary more real, of a higher kind, gifted with a sense of being more legitimate, than any creation of their own imagination.

'Panta rei': everything is in a state of flux.16 Most of the 'visions' of Marie-Jeanne Gil are images that are technically naïve, but alive, expressing the dance of Shiva for energy and for matter. But these also have another aspect that many mystic experiences have in common; a strong sexual connotation, which does not escape their author. 'These are drawings,' she says, 'that evoke the world of the stars and cosmic light. They all have a theme and a message in common: the heavens touch the earth'. 17 More explicitly, she even sometimes says: 'It is full of love and passion, and eroticism: the heavens penetrate the earth.' At the centre, splitting the heavens or the waves, a representation is often made of 'the opening towards the universe', given form by way of a heart, a triangle or a star, with sometimes also the old Christian motif of the fish, IXTUS. But in the works of Marie-Jeanne the theme of doors or passages also often comes up, and she likes to show, by way of a challenge, a Polaroid shot of the cloudy sky over her house, where, as if with an overlay, appeared a large and luminous rectangular opening. 'I am always standing in front of a door up there,' she says by way of explanation. And surprised that I could discern in her images her 'celestial penetrations', a sublimated expression of the immense love that she has for the mysterious powers that animate the world, she then said to me, as Sister Gertrude or Aloïse could have done, 'In some way I am the bride of heaven.'

And so we come to the last aspect of the personality of Marie-Jeanne Gil: her mission, the social role that she has assigned her work and her visions. Does it have to be explained any further? Like Raphaël Lonné, of whom the innocence was so total that he often needed to be protected, Gil is absolutely sincere in her convictions. She is not playacting when she says she believes in the reality of the 'Beings of light' who appeared to her, spoke to her and who now direct her: the 'Celestials', or the 'Builders of the universe', as she calls them. Being aware that she has 'the chance of being elected' she considers herself with some humour to be a bizarre case. To tease the visitor, she says, 'You seek phenomena of nature. Well, you have one in front of you.' <sup>18</sup>

Obliged therefore to assume the functions of a prophet - a 'spokesperson' according to Greek etymology - she insists especially on her role as witness (martyr?) and intermediary, or medium. If her works have any importance at all in her own eyes, it is not primarily for their own worth, for their intrinsic artistic values, but for being the traces and proofs of her visions and as such, of the reality of the beings who inspire them. 19 She says, 'I wish people knew that there really are invisible beings who talk to us. And we are their receiving sets'. Or again: 'You need a remote control to turn on your television. I am a bit like that'. And Marie-Jeanne therefore sees in her example and in her actions, both 'an advertisement for the Third Millennium' and 'a message of love for the future.' An intuition of which is articulated in a more considered version in the exercise books in which she writes down her best thoughts: 'The artist must be an instrument for revealing love on earth.' As to knowing what exactly the powers are that control us, this is a topic on which she remains extremely evasive, and she prefers to make the following suggestions: 'there is something around, that guides us', or 'I continue to see things even now, and I am given messages'. But in any case, she insists that it is not for her: 'Personally, I am not looking for anything. This is bearing witness, as a present that I would like to give to the people, to humanity.'

There is much that could be said regarding the link between creation and generosity, on the gift of oneself in the act of real creation, and on the driving role of faith, whatever faith it may be, to give individuals the force to surpass themselves. It is this indispensable function of transcendence that here takes the form, in a naïve fashion perhaps, or in any case in an elementary way, of the belief of Marie-Jeanne in the beyond. As is the case with most artistic mediums, Marie-Jeanne Gil has a basically altruistic nature, and she can not see the exercise of her 'gift' otherwise than as a means of relieving,





in her fashion, human suffering. No doubt she feels that she can in this way repay her debt for not being like the rest of us. Her most trusted guide consists in her blind faith in the hidden order of things, and thus also in the inexplicable singularity of her nature. 'I have kept my faith in what has happened to me.' Talking about her childhood, when the people around her made fun of her Marie-Jeanne says today, with some indulgence, 'Deep down inside myself I knew!'

So here are some facts, closer to us than what we read in books, and they are even contemporary with us. But what can these facts bring to the area that concerns us? What should we take away from the lessons of Marie-Jeanne Gil? Of course the freethinker can smile about a history that is apparently so simple and so naïve, and I am well aware of all the things that can be said about it: how we can, for instance, see in this nothing more than a form of inspired myth mania, a process of poetic sublimation of the irreversible frustrations of existence. Or we could attribute it to hormones, visions of the menopause - and in fact most visionary artists did not discover their vocation until around the 'midlife crisis'. I can also imagine that the unconscious in certain extreme cases pushes the individuals to project themselves to the outside, in order to instruct and authorize themselves to follow. All this perhaps partly explains the visionary phenomenon, but for me this is not the most important aspect.

We must first establish that, in contrast to what is affirmed by current opinion, 'mediumistic' creation still exists, as it has existed in all societies at all times. The only difference lies in the treatment that is given to it, depending on the epoch or the culture. In the past Joan of Arc was made a saint, now she would have been placed in an institution, while the Greeks, the inventors of science and philosophy, nevertheless also provided a place for the prophecies of the Pythia.<sup>20</sup> Visionary artists are rare, but they are found even today, and even in a country theoretically as rational as France. My sympathy for Marie-Jeanne Gil would even lead me to add that one should always treat these artists with the greatest of respect. Because whatever one may think of the origin of their visions, visionary artists are not 'crazy' in the normal sense, and they belong to a separate category.<sup>21</sup> Even if they commonly have discussions with the heavens, they also know how to keep their feet on the ground, and their hyper-receptive or clairvoyant nature does not prevent them from being also strong on one level, even if they seem weak on another.

From the straightforward scientific point of view, observing them with some attention could therefore provide us with keys to better understanding, amongst other things, the mechanisms of the gift, and certain laws of the spirit, but also the essential place that the paranormal occupies in the history of society.

It is however on another level, and for another reason, that the visionary creator appears to me to be especially fascinating and exemplary today. With trance ritual, the willing submission to the reality beyond oneself, and the unbreakable faith in something that is beyond oneself and guides the person, the visionary artist presents to our eyes the perfect metaphor of the real artist, of inspiration and genius, thus contributing to our approach to a concept of art and social life that was more current in 'primitive' societies than in our own, where art making has become a technical game, and has lost the essence of its magic. 'Blessed are the pure of heart,' proclaims the Gospel, 'for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.' To which Marie-Jeanne Gil responds as an echo, 'All the learned people crush our spirituality.' Let us hope that the twenty-first century will be, after decades of sectarian and reductionist scientism, the century of an open rationality, sensitive and tolerant, while at the same time more complex and more generous.

Translated from French by Jan de Zwaan and Colin Rhodes

<sup>1</sup>This article appeared in French as; 'Création médiumnique aujourd'hui', in L. Danchin, *Le dessin à l'ère des nouveaux medias* (Lelivredart, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>See the text that appeared in the catalog, *Art spirite, mediumnique, visionnaire : messages d'outre-monde* Paris: Editions Hoebeke/Halle Saint-Pierre, 1999.

<sup>3</sup>Translator's note: The word 'Picassiette' is thought to have been derived from the phrase 'pique-assiette' which also now describes a style of mosaic that incorporates pieces of broken ceramics - plates, dishes, cups, tiles - and other found objects into the design, as Raymond Isidore did. [some people say Isidore was called "Picassiette" as the "Picasso des assiettes", the Picasso of broken plates. The first article mentioning the nickname appeared in 1952: 'A Chartres, on l'a surnommé Picassiette', Radar, 17 August 1952.]

<sup>4</sup>See L. Danchin and M. Lusardy, *Art outsider et Folk Art des collections de Chicago (Outsider art and folk art in Chicago collections)* Paris: Halle Saint-Pierre, 1998.

<sup>5</sup>Gaston Ferdière (1907-1990) was aFrench psychiatrist and poet, most famous for his association with the surrealists, including Antonin Artaud and Unica Zürn, who were also his patients.



Marie-Jeanne Gil standing in front of a selection of her mediumistic works created at the end of the First Series with her left hand (photograph Patrick Sanchez)

<sup>6</sup>Translator's note: M. Jourdain is the lead character in Molière's 'The Bourgeois Gentleman'.

<sup>7</sup>Unpublished conversation with the author, Monday 3 August 1987.

<sup>8</sup>Unless stated otherwise, all the statements by Marie-Jeanne Gil originate from two conversations with the author on Wednesday 16 June and Tuesday 29 June 1999.

<sup>9</sup>Statement gathered during the first visit to Marie-Jeanne Gil on Thursday 7 March 1996.

<sup>10</sup>Patrick S. has followed the complete production of a drawing, and the camera does not appear to bother the artist at any time during the process.

<sup>11</sup>'It is done automatically,' says Marie-Jeanne, 'I do not choose the colours, they come to me spontaneously, well co-ordinated.' (Discussion with Caroline Lachowsky, RFI, Wednesday 20 October 1999.)

<sup>12</sup>Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell, London: Granada*, 1977, p.23.

<sup>13</sup>ibid., pp.73, 78.

<sup>14</sup>This was a light comment on a slide show of her works presented in the auditorium of the Halle Saint-Pierre, Paris, on Tuesday, 30 November 1999, during an evening devoted to mediumistic art. Translator's note: The term 'moquette' used by Gil in the original French refers to bits of cannabis dropped on the floor, that are gathered up by the desperate smoker who has run out of 'weed'.

<sup>15</sup>Huxley. Op cit., p.78

<sup>16</sup>Translator's note: 'Panta rei' stands for 'everything flows',

a saying by Heraclitus (535–475 B.C.), Greek philosopher of Ephesus. According to Heraclitus there was no permanent reality except the reality of change.

<sup>17</sup>Marie-Jeanne even spoke that day of 'celestial eroticism'.

<sup>18</sup>Comment made on 16 June 1999 to the gallery owner Pascal Saumade gallery.

<sup>19</sup>I am not there to convince, but to bear witness' (Tuesday 29 June 1999).

<sup>20</sup>Translator's note: The Pythia was a priestess at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, located on the slopes of Mount Parnassus in Greece.

<sup>21</sup>Marie-Jeanne often says, laughing: 'After all I am not crazy'. And she loves to quote the statement of a physician who is meant to have uttered this magnificent phrase: 'You are above the normal'.

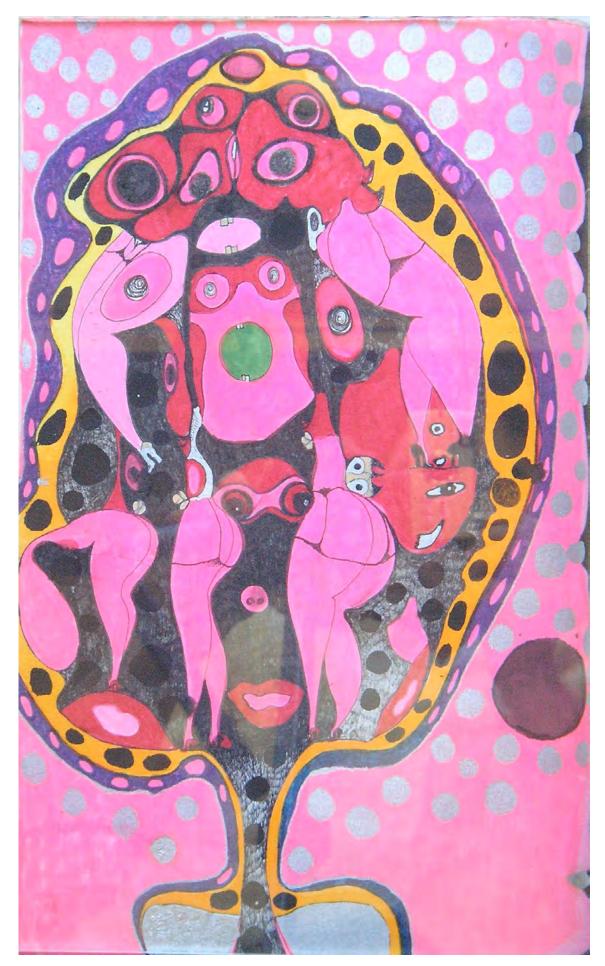


Figure 1. Anthony Mannix, *Journal of a Madman: Babylon (pg10*), 1996, acrylic and felt pen on paper (artist's book), 28 x 36 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

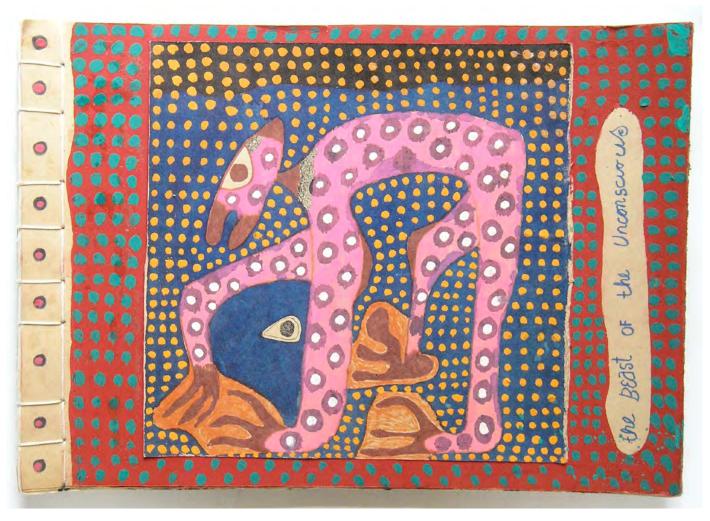


Figure 2. Anthony Mannix, *Beast of the Unconscious (pg 2)*, 1996-97, felt pen and acrylic on cardboard (artist's book), 34 x 46 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

# Erotomania: Eroticism in the work of Anthony Mannix Gareth Jenkins

Anthony Mannix (b. 1953) is one of Australia's best known Outsider Artists. Since the early 1980s he has created paintings, drawings, sculptures, sound recordings, artist's books and an eclectic range of Outsider writing.<sup>1</sup> Centrally his work is shaped and fuelled by his repeated experience of psychotic episodes<sup>2</sup>; a state that he believes affords him access to the 'places' of his unconscious. Mannix's psychotic episodes are often highly erotic in nature and the unconscious landscapes he explores are dominated by occult erotic happenings and images.

This article focuses primarily on works within his artist's books, discussing the manner in which they express textually and pictorially the artist's notions of the erotic.

For Mannix, erotic physicality, particularly during psychosis, is a conduit to mystical states of unconscious eroticism. In such a formulation metaphorical erotic states materialise for him, becoming places and landscapes through which he can travel. It is within these lived metaphorical landscapes (lived-metaphors)<sup>3</sup> that Mannix feels able to access shamanic, alchemical and occult powers:

Its a strange game Romance – you play and gamble with gold coin of the most valu able kind, and of magical nature. Its that love-making will eventually change and become the wildest shaminism.

The erotic is the place where things are done. If there is any such thing as alchemy then it

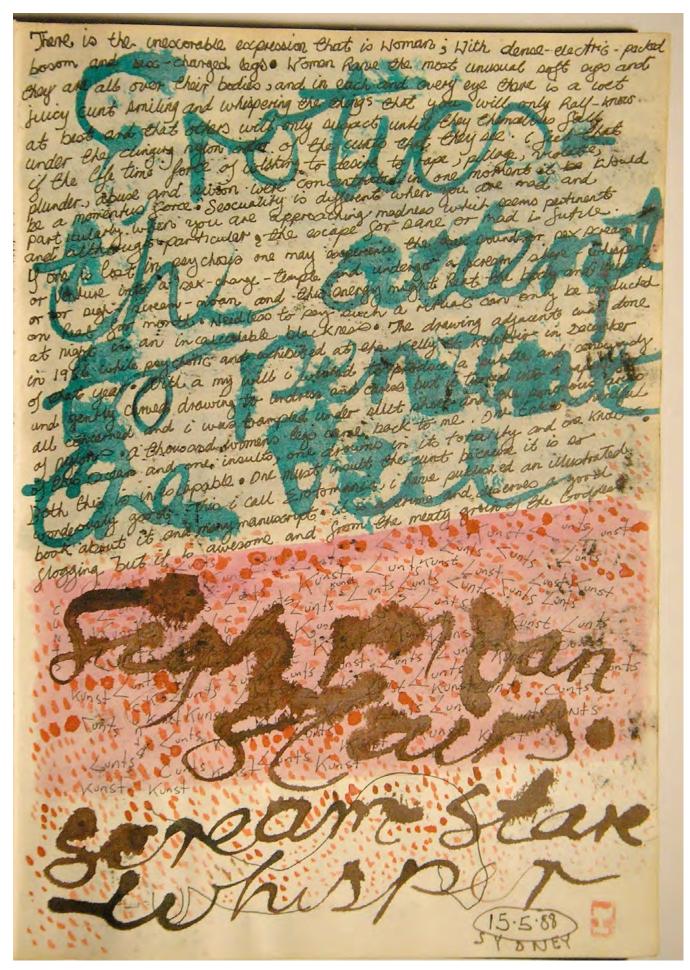


Figure 3. Anthony Mannix, *Journal of a Madman No.4 (pg 9),* 1988, felt pen, ink and acrylic on paper (artist's book), 25 x 36 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

lies here. Some places defy also description. I remember having the door to my room kicked in with an untoward violence; eroticism is like this with one thing, amidst the brokenness is an aura of pleasure that is solid and when one notices further a beast of every other colour made up of every other beast stands at the threshold with mercurial and sulphuresent eyes. The room SEEMS to be exploding with ignited phosphorus.<sup>4</sup>

In Mannix's worldview, eroticism offers power, but it is also a powerful autonomous force in its own right. For him, it conflates pleasure, violence and violation in an act that moves beyond the rational into an alchemical zone of unconscious construction. He describes this act of creating places in the unconscious as "the art of schizophrenia", or "mental sculpture", thus linking the practice to artistic creation.

Extending the analogy with art-making Mannix describes the unconscious as a medium with which to build, possessing its own inherent challenges, as would the artistic media of wood, oil paint or bronze. He writes:

Since 1989 i have been in a fanatical study of chaos, sexuality and the esoteric so much so that i colonised part of the unconscious and built there. it is a strange medium to work in this unconscious for changes there mean remarkable change and alteration in your day to day conscious your action and ultimately your being.<sup>6</sup>

The building that occurs within the unconscious also affects consciousness and the experience of daily life; so too the art-making conducted by Mannix can be harnessed to generate change within the psychic realm - the physical and mental becoming synonymous in lived-metaphor. The practice of Mannix's art, then, both documents and constructs the erotic landscapes of the unconscious through which he travels. The central link between documentary art making, the erotic and the unconscious is made explicit in the following: "After almost twenty years of exploring the Unconscious and ten documentating it in what is currently known as Art Brut, i have come to the conclusion that we live an erotic life in our unconscious" Mannix channels the energies of the body's eroticism into his artwork, in part, to actually access and construct those erotic realms of the unconscious that he is simultaneously exploring. In this way the erotic energy of the body impacts on the material of his craft to facilitate the birth of a libidinal lived-metaphor that the artist comes to inhabit.

#### **Erotomania**

Every book in Mannix's oeuvre contains artwork that is erotic in nature, however it is of such importance to Mannix's world-view that he has dedicated a series of artist's books more solely to the exploration of this theme, entitled *Erotomania*. The centrality of the erotic in his artistic output is suggested by the fact that the first artist's book he ever produced was entitled *Erotomania No.1*, a title which was then used for many subsequent works.

Mannix mentions this first publication and the inspiration for its title in a typed letter to an unknown Editor subsequently pasted into the journal called, *Journal of a Madman 1994-95: The Chasm, Other stories, Drawings and Other things...and there Reigns love and all love's loving part*:

# Dear Editor.

i've been with Erotomania since 1984 when i published a book of erotic work via Phillip Hammial<sup>8</sup> and Island Press. I was well interested before. "Erotomania", the word was a magistrate's pronouncement upon a woeful individual who had been caught for a romantic rampage; for a rampant three months of looking at women where he shouldn't, of touching them where he shouldn't and of indulging in the unbridled kissing of individuals who did not solicit the same. The magistrate called him an "invertrate erotomania", i imagine him continually blushing, perhaps smelling of sperm like William S. Burroughs Virus B23 victims. The good thing though was that he remained recalcitrant to the last and would not repent. He was sentanced to six years imprisonment. He took his chances like the rest of us.9

Here Mannix appropriates medico-legal terminology used to categorise and describe 'abnormal' behaviour, at once reclaiming and radicalising the original terms. The "Erotomania" that was so powerful that the individual in question could not control it, and which led to the infringement of the rights of others is, in Mannix's life, directed into his art-making and its rich metaphorical worlds. The unrepentant stance of the individual reflects Mannix's own experience of an unconscious eroticism that is so powerful and all encompassing that, within his world-view, it can only be deemed a truth.



Figure 4. Anthony Mannix, *Journal of a Madman 1996 (pg 10)* (detail), 1996, felt pen and acrylic on paper (artist's book), 44 x 47 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

Each page of *Erotomania No.1*, contains an erotic illustration indicative of Mannix's wider treatment of the body, which is depicted as an amorphic entity with missing or additional limbs, heads, breasts, vaginas, horns and eyes (figure 1).11 Numerous times the shape of the vagina is evoked by the replacement of the head with a single staring eye (figure 5). On this point Mannix suggests that the vagina's "similarity and total unalikeness to the eye can be noted."12 In this book all figures tend towards the female, and whilst this is characteristic of Mannix's work, his wider oeuvre also contains male and hermaphroditic depictions of the human form. Each erotic image in Erotomania No.1 is surrounded by handwritten text that details an intense environment in which "only the wet things are holy"13 - showing again the confluence of the erotic and the mystical or occult in Mannix's thinking.

The presence of male and female body distortions in his work (figure 4), and his own repeated assertions regarding the possibility of occult sex change,14 reflects that which B. Rosenbaum and H. Sonne call the schizophrenic "imaginary body": the body is depicted as "fragmented and can furthermore be described as being 'deterritorialized',15 that is, without stable local identity...The fragmented imaginary body has abolished the boundaries of the territory of speech. The speaker's own body can merge with any other body...the First-Person disappears from the space of speech [thus disregarding the "Second-Person" audience] precisely because the fantasmatic body appears in the form of fragmentation."16 Mannix's own psychotic or unconscious conception of his body (his "imaginary" or "fantasmatic" body) is thus cogenerated by (or at least reflected in) the instability of his "speech" or text. Erotomania No. 1 is unstable on a number of levels: the "First-Person" perspective from which the text is written is inconsistent; the linguistic construction of the text itself is unconventional and the bodies depicted in the images within this work are amorphous and incomplete. In the deterritorialization of these three aspects of Mannix's expression – point of view, textual semantics and pictorial body image madness finds its way into the book.

The instability of the "First-Person" perspective in this work is reflected in the unsignalled range of speakers within the text, which include: a depersonalised, unnamed narrator in the guise of a news reader who relays information such as the following (figure 7): "Fifty-five women are building a lovebox reports indicate gargantuan proportions are involved the thing is said to already be the size of a small postage-

stamp European Kingdom"17; the more intimate voice of "me" and "I" who observes and describes events first hand: "This building here in front of me now in the night, a small squatting structure seems to be a female thing forever pregnant with it self it seems composed of some creamy-pale substance, translucent and curved and smooth and rounded and humming as if filled with paper-lanterns and crickets. I seem to have caugt it performing some vast and intimate female act"18; the "you" and "yourself", which seems more to refer again to the narrator rather than an implied "Second-Person" audience: "You undress and dream yourself into her mouth, ears, cunt, ass, nostrils, nipples, there are moons: plural, and let loose with a live electric deluge and let loose with a spurting, spluttering fountain of demons and the tarnished golden rinds of your ancestors"19; (figures 5 and 6) One further (unacknowledged) voice that surfaces within the text is that of Trevor Ravenscroft, author of The Spear of Destiny (1973).20 In the following quotation Mannix has inserted the words of Ravenscroft into his own text with limited but revealing transformations:

The astonishing gifts of the medium, a simple and illiterate yet pretty peasant wench were discovered by Dr. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, a devious character. In deep trance this shapely and Raven-haired woman emanated from her vagina ectoplasmic heads and shrouds which manifested as in some ghostly birth from the nether world.<sup>21</sup>

In Mannix's 'quotation' Ravenscroft's "simple and illiterate peasant woman..."22 becomes both "pretty" and a "wench". Otherwise Mannix's sentence ending with "a devious character" is as Ravenscroft wrote it. However, Mannix has neglected to include the continuation of this passage, which reads: "a devious character who acted as 'Press Agent' for the large circle of White Russians who had settled in Bavaria."23 From here Mannix's text again mirrors Ravenscroft's. However, Ravenscroft's "simple hulk of a woman..."24 becomes "shapely" and "Raven-haired" in Mannix's formulation. Thus Mannix transforms the medium into someone who is more attractive ("Pretty" and "Raven-haired") than in the original work, and more sexually available ("wench"). The reference to "Raven" is perhaps also Mannix's oblique allusion to the author from which he has drawn this material - Ravenscroft.25 Erotomania No.1 departs from The Spear of Destiny at this point to further elaborate on the vaginal emanations, suggesting that:

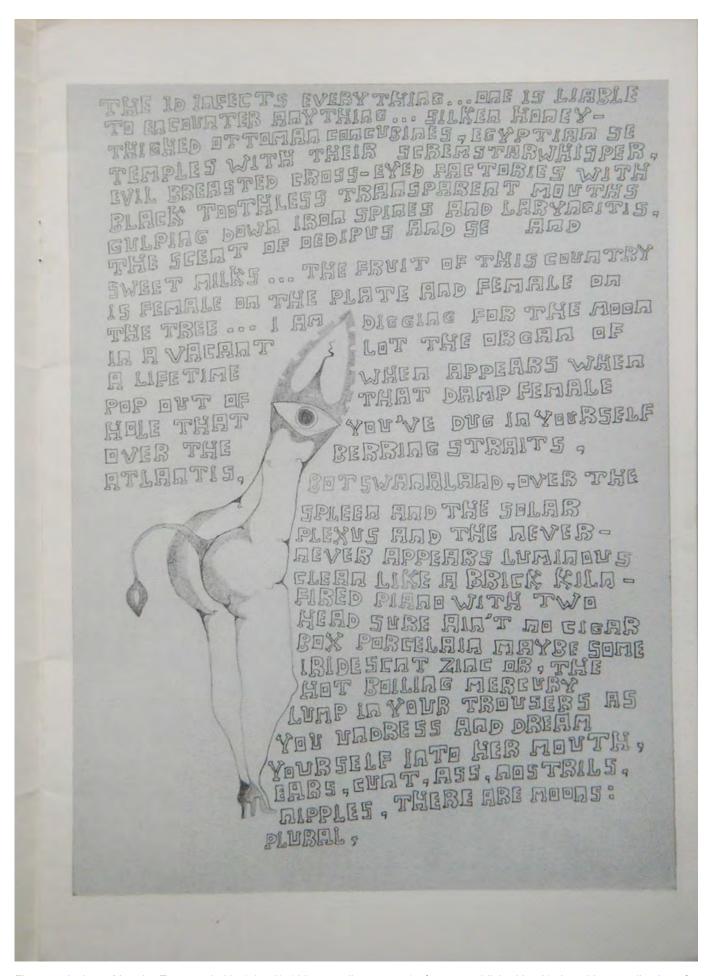


Figure 5. Anthony Mannix, *Erotomania No.1 (pg 6)*, 1984, pencil on paper (soft cover published book), 25 x 30 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

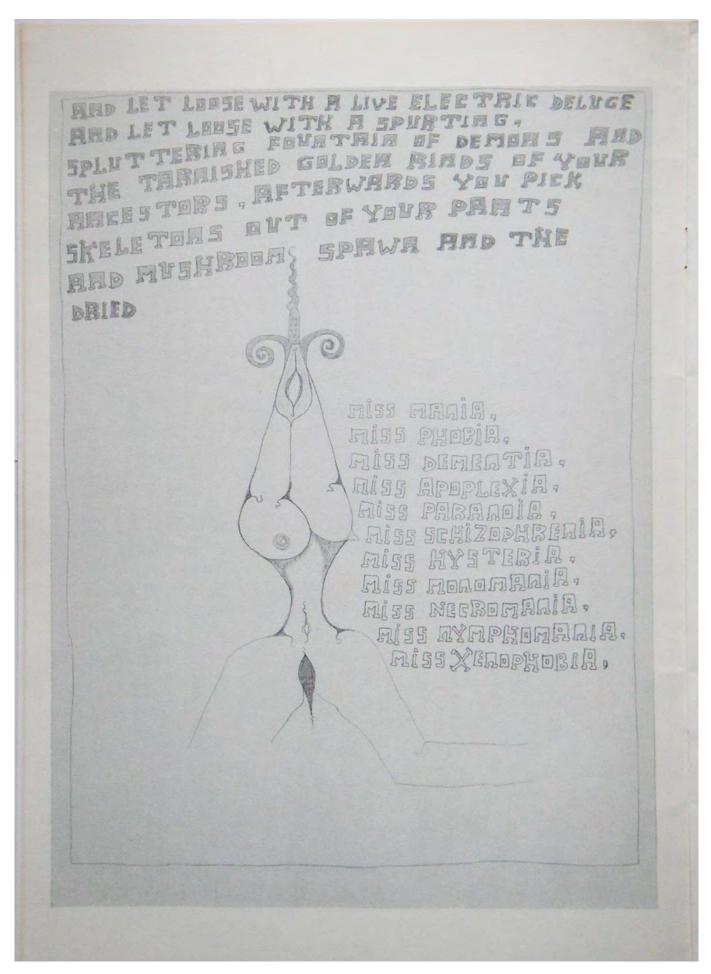


Figure 6. Anthony Mannix, *Erotomania No.1 (pg 7)*, 1984, pencil on paper (soft cover published book), 25 x 30 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

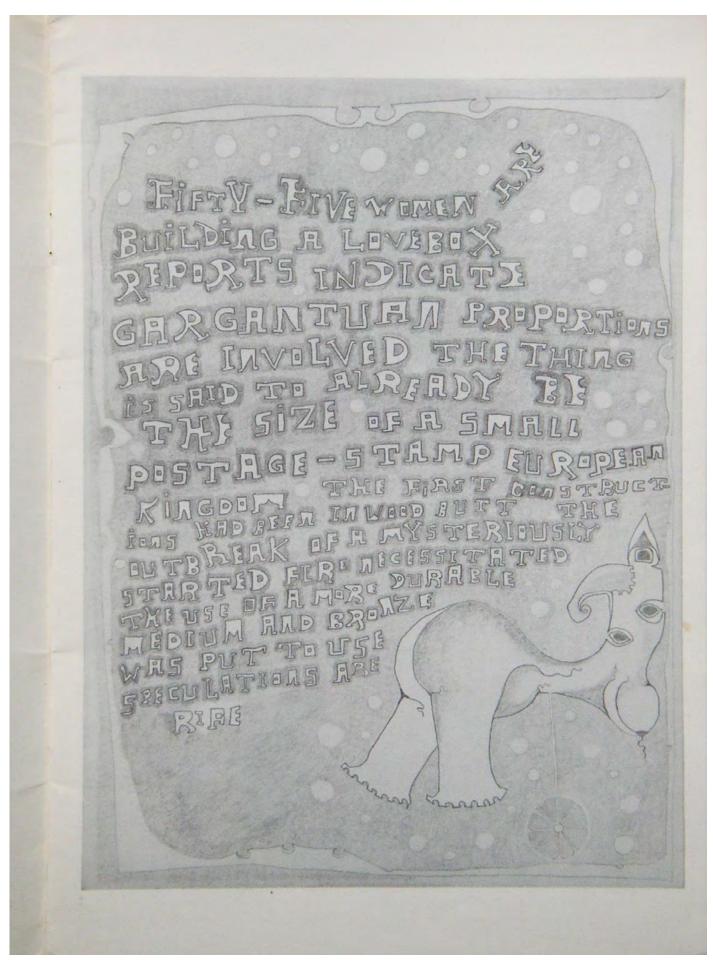


Figure 7. Anthony Mannix, *Erotomania No.1 (pg 4)*, 1984, pencil on paper (soft cover published book), 25 x 30 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

Jabbering idiots, imbeciles and morons made their appearance singly or in groups. So feverish and animated were some of these impromptu displays that the woman would break into an acute hysteria. So profound was this mystical gift considered to be, and so potentially enlightening that she was placed in the care of one Hercule Vaaaut, an adept at magic. This fellow, however, was of rather uncertain character with a diabolical and intriguing nature. He could not resist a fascination centred upon her unearthly organ and the aspect that it lent to her rather sensous form and appearance and for a period of several months made intensive and involved sexual use of her, including acts of penetration while occultic activity was occurring.<sup>26</sup>

The illusions emanating from the vagina are considered mystical in nature, and it seems that the penetration of this zone helps to affect the "occultic activity" that is being simultaneously conducted. Here Mannix refers to the notion that hysteria was originally linked with women and the womb<sup>27</sup>, a hysteria that results (in this instance) in the woman being put under the "care" of a male magician. The preceding passage (quoted earlier) mentions a Dr. Nemirevitch-Dantchenko who "discovered" the woman in question. Here then the references to mental illness and doctors suggest that this magical subjugation of the female is being conducted by a psychiatrist.<sup>28</sup>

This generative conception of the womb, the associations of a vagina with a mouth - as well as William S. Burroughs' creation of a talking anus in Naked Lunch – gives some context to the presence of the numerous talking vaginas in Mannix's texts.29 In this formulation, vaginas, whilst still physically connected to the body of a woman, develop a level of autonomy and an association with prophecy and madness, as "the vagina talk can be, on occasions, be so intense that one becomes both blinded and deafened in the manner of biblical revelation. Occassionally, a womb will go crazy and start uttering absolute gibberish. In this situation the women usually adopt an embarrassed and aloof look and quickly disperse."30 Thus, vaginas themselves can be seen as yet another narrative voice within the work. This is not uncommon in erotic fiction, as noted by Rosenbaum and Sonne, who suggest that "in pornographic fiction the sexual organs can think and speak."31

Another voice within the work tells, from a third-

person perspective, a series of mini-narratives regarding the characters Rosey Spite and Tony Terror: Rosey Spite first surfaces in *Erotomania No.1* in the following fashion: "Rosey Spite came skipping along the cobbled path thru the gardens the short pleated apple-red skirt rising with each upward motion thinking himself safe from observation and disturbance, Tony Terror was intently engaged in auto-sexual-stimulation..." Rosey goes on to reprimand the masturbating Tony Terror by giving "him a good hard lick across the chops don't you know that every time you masturbate you kill an angel she yelled, Meanwhile, in heaven an angel that had lapsed into delirium thinking himself a goner, was being revived."

Erotomania No.1 ends with Tony Terror chasing Rosey Spite, who evades him as she has an orgasm and falls to the ground (figure 8). As in much of Mannix's work, whilst women are the focus of sexual advances they are very often powerful figures who come to control the situation: of this Rosey Spite is emblematic. Rosey Spite is mentioned in many of Mannix's works and can be seen as a metaphor that becomes lived; she is, for Mannix, a 'real' companion with whom he has had a relationship for over ten years. In the above examples Rosey Spite has erotic connotations, at other times she is a more platonic confidante. In a passage from *The Light Bulb Eaters*, that ultimately describes their first meeting, Mannix introduces her in the following manner:

Whether buying a shipment of the fine cigars she smokes in Havana and being personally hosted by Fidel or off on a secret journey to Seville, Spain with a confidential plan to uncover a lost cash of Edward VII whisky and motoring the backroad there in her 1929 jalopy, Rosey Spite is indubitably herself.<sup>34</sup>

Mannix goes on to write: "I never met Rosey Spite, it was just that she was spontaneously there...I looked out the window and there was myself walking down the street with Rosey Spite beside...Rosey wore a pin-stripped black suit with cravat with diamond pin and black, short hair slicked back and she had a prominent short bird's beak..." From this time on Rosey becomes a regular companion for Mannix.

In *Journal of a Madman* 1991 he describes her as "Rosey Spite – Master of the illusion", suggesting that "it is now over a decade that Rosey and i have been with one another. We have seen a great many places and have had trials and tribulations. We have

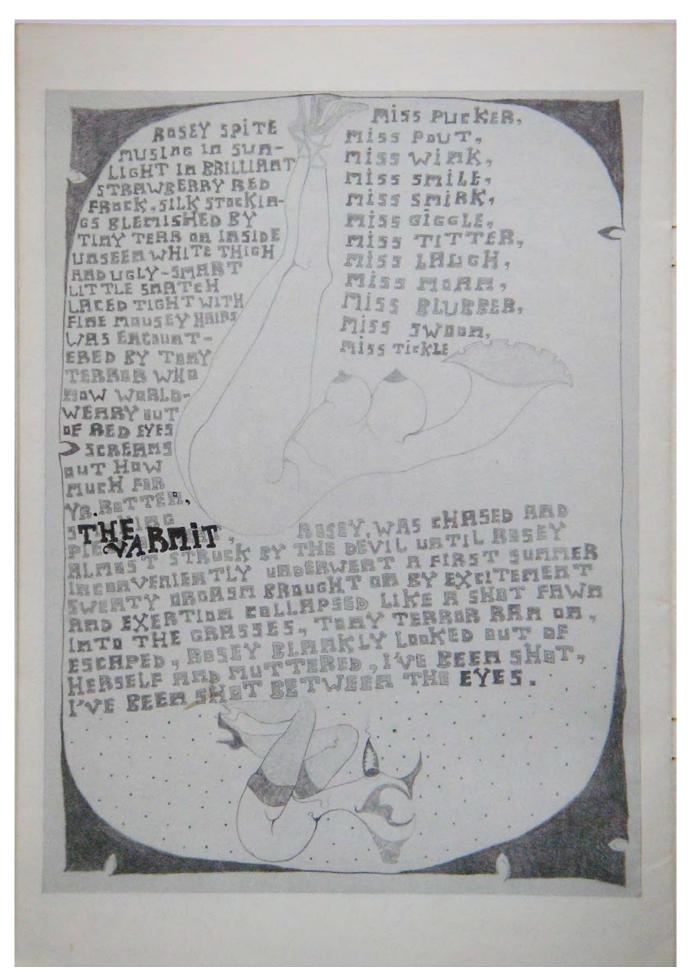


Figure 8. Anthony Mannix, *Erotomania No.1 (pg 15)*, 1984, pencil on paper (soft cover published book), 25 x 30 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

no secrets. Or rather i have no secrets; i think Rosey is still keeping a couple. There is not much i would have done without her"36 (figure 9). Rosey is then a powerful and enduring multi-faceted companion to Mannix, but one that often retains the balance of power in their relationship.

Adhering to the "Master of the illusion" title, Rosey appears in Mannix's work in many guises - one final erotic quise contextualises her as the "remains" of Mannix's own "feminine eroticism". In this respect Rosey can be seen as Mannix's "anima": a term used by Carl Jung (and by Mannix himself in text37 and images) to describe the feminine aspects of the male personality. Mannix suggests he "would whisper and chatter" to the entity Rosey Spite during sex, asking her "if she was going to take forever to do the job."38 The "she" in this passage is not Rosey, but rather the woman Mannix is actually having sex with. Rosey can here be seen as an imagined entity that Rosenbaum & Sonne term the "Other"39, a being who comes between the "First-Person" schizophrenic speaker and "Second-Person" receiver in the 'conversation'. Mannix goes on to characterise the sexual contact between himself and this unnamed woman as follows:

thru. force of will "successful" sex – the action of maintaining a rigidity long enough to the point that ejaculation could occur and did occur in a vagina occurred...the long, long, grinding lathe process of cutting masculinity down to nothing seemed to interest her and here she was uninformed for if she had sought its death i would have been trapped forever, inside the delirium...<sup>40</sup> (figure 10)

This suggests that Mannix believes actual sex has the capacity to strip away masculinity, a process that in this instance, allows him contact with his residual erotic femininity – in the guise of Rosey Spite.

One final mode of address present within *Erotomania No.1* engages with Mannix's interest in list-making. In this particular book such a device utilises individual words, which Mannix uses to describe women; in the following example psychiatric categorisations are preceded by the word "Miss" and located in direct relation to the female bodies drawn on the same page: (figure 6) "Miss Mania, /Miss Phobia, /Miss Dementia, /Miss Apoplexia, /Miss Paranoia, /Miss Schizophrenia, /Miss Hysteria, /Miss Monomania, /Miss Necromania, /Miss Nymphomania, /Miss Xenophobia,/" 41

The second list contains diseases or conditions of the body rather than mind. Other lists relate to the commodification of sex: "Miss Bargain, /Miss Barter, /Miss Purchase, /Miss Exchange, /Miss Acquire, /Miss Bribe, /Miss Swindle," Still others contain words associated with the physical sex act: "Miss Spank, /Miss Lick, /Miss Thrust, /Miss Suck, /Miss Swallow, /Miss Pinch, /Miss Probe, /Miss Nibble, /Miss Bite, /Miss Tease, /"43

Such a fracturing of language within *Erotomania No.1*, mirrors the multiple, amorphous bodies depicted beside each list in the numerous illustrations within the work. This close relationship between the writing and the figure creates an association recognised by Michel Thévoz, at that time Director of the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, who had the following to say about the work:

I'm very grateful to you for the gift of your publication "Erotomania" to the Collection of I'art brut. The treatment of the body of the woman, as well as the one of the letter, by Tony Mannix, is striking. It's a new alliance between the writing and the figure, under the sign of eroticism.<sup>44</sup>

Mannix therefore began and continues to develop and expand his oeuvre with "a new alliance between the writing and the figure, under the sign of eroticism".

The fragmentation of the authorial voice within *Erotomania No.1* is compounded by the fragmentary nature of the linguistic text itself. There are many instances within this text where syntax and semantics are undermined, including the examples of glossolalia where the semantic function of language breaks down entirely to emphasise the underlying sound construction of words.

The musical, sound value of words, devoid of semantic meaning, is emphasised in the middle section of this passage. The passage ending with 'Allah' is suggestive of a devotional chant, and is perhaps a form of worship dedicated to the holy "wet things" mentioned at the end of the quotation. In such glossolalia, *Erotomania No.1*, which Mannix has suggested was created whilst experiencing psychosis, <sup>46</sup> once again displays its associative, linguistic and narrative looseness. <sup>47</sup> *Erotomania No.1* is, however, unified by its erotic drive in much the same way that Roland Barthes suggests Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye* functions: "The narrative is simply the flow of matter enshrining the precious



Figure 9. Anthony Mannix, *Journal of a Madman 1991* (pg 7), 1991, felt pen, photographic paper on paper (artist's book), 25 x 36 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

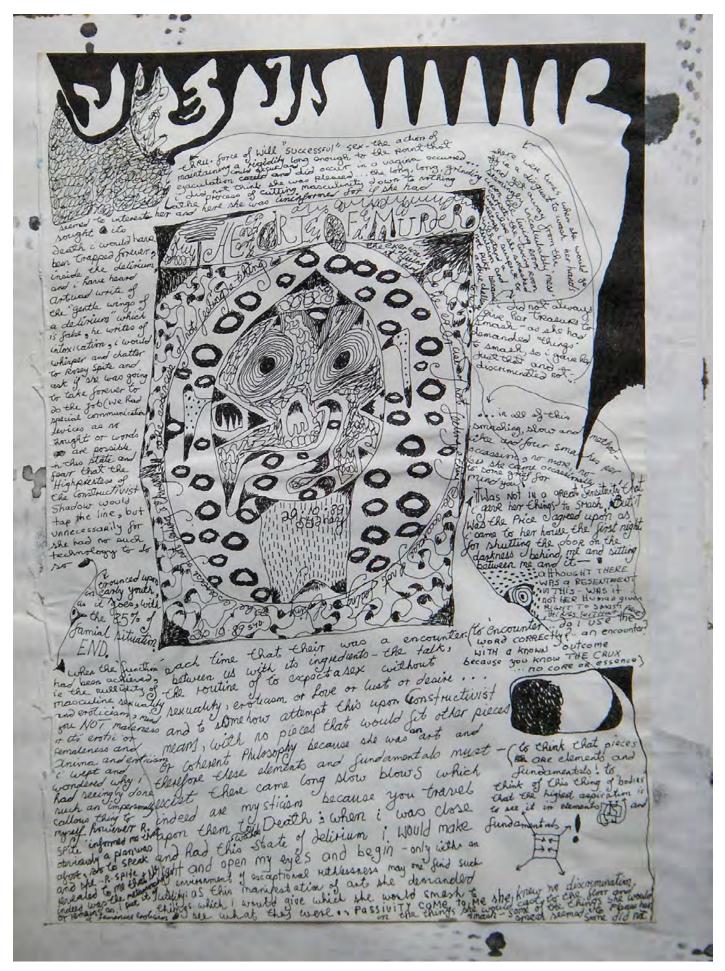


Figure 10. Anthony Mannix, *Journal of a Madman 1991* (pg 70), 1991, felt pen on paper (artist's book), 25 x 36 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

metaphorical substance..."<sup>48</sup> The substance, in Mannix's case, is the female form itself as it mutates, in metonymic fashion, with the various fractured environments and narratives depicted within Mannix's text. Barthes highlights the essential eroticism of such metonymic shifts:

the transgression of values that is the avowed principle of eroticism is matched by—if not based on—a technical transgression of the forms of language, for the metonymy is nothing but a forced syntagma, the violation of a limit to the signifying space. It makes possible, at the very level of speech, a counter-division of objects, usages, meanings, spaces, and properties that is eroticism itself.<sup>49</sup>

In this way, then, the eroticism that goes to the core of Mannix's experience of madness can also be seen to be at work in the drive towards the loosening of denotative language. In *Erotomania No 1*, transgressive erotic content is reflected in a metonymic treatment of language and body. Mannix writes:

The Id infects everything...one is liable to encounter anything...silken honey-thighed ottoman concubines, Egyptian Se temples with their screamstarwhispers, evil breasted crosseyed factories with black toothless transparent mouths gulping down iron spines and laryngitis, the scent of Oedipus and Se and sweet milks... The fruit of this country is female on the plate and female on the tree...<sup>50</sup>

Mannix presents a series of surreal images composed of the amorphous erotic female figure, a figure that becomes the metonymic substructure that underpins every observation and experience within the book. Here the use of language itself is amorphous, typified by the "screamstarwhispers", displaying an associative confluence that emphasises the capacity for the limits of all objects and entities to become permeable when drawn into the unconscious libidinal drive of Mannix's eroticism.

The tension between Mannix and the feminine is, in fact, one between his existence as an individual physical entity and the entire erosion of his sense of self, as "the ld infects everything". In *Erotomania No.1* the authorial voice, language and the human form become porous, bleeding into one another as madness creates a disorientating erotic ocean within

which a reader, like Mannix himself, is prone to drown:

a thousand womens legs come back to me. One takes a handful of this Ocean and one insults, one drowns in its totality and one knows. Both this is inescapable. One must insult the cunt because it is so wonderously good. This i call Erotomania, i have published an illustrated book about it and many manuscript. it is a crime and deserves a good flogging but it is awesome and from the meaty groin of the Goddess.<sup>51</sup>

#### The Sex-Feel Machine

For Mannix drowning is a potent expression of his overwhelming experience of eroticism. The following text shows how all-encompassing the sexualised female form can become during times of psychosis. Here Mannix reaches the point where he feels dehumanised and lacks any coherent sense of self; the Ego has been subsumed by the ld:

I would see female flesh, eventually as a silken river with no difference from the internal to the external. There were times coming like lightening or the gasps of beast when i would go into shock and not be able to differential between the sensation of seeing a stocking'd calf and the dolorous slippery feel of a tight cunt...i would walk at great pace thru. central train tunnel with The Cunt on one side of me, The Anus on the other and lipsticked lips made monsterous by the imagination would be sucking me off, as this, integrating, merging, becoming a component in a Sex-Feel Machine lost to all hope of stability or coherence i would have wonderous visions of a realistic nature in my mind. With an unparrelled graphic quality, a hundred nubile nude women would finger themselves to orgasm in my sight in every contrived submissive pose and then press their cunt into my face. With this image predominate and indelible it became that i was eating, drinking, sleeping nothing but female cum. it was a good deal of time later that i realized that without any reference i had drowned.52

As Mannix himself observes, this incident occurs when all the references of reality have been subsumed within the imaginative, hallucinatory world of psychosis. His understanding of the internal and external becomes fluid, and the experience is one of "integrating" and "merging" with a larger entity he calls a "Sex-Feel Machine". Mannix becomes a "component" of this machine – thus it is the machine

that controls what is occurring, and Mannix is merely a part, caught up in its workings. The machine seems solely aimed at eliciting the sensation of sex, creating hallucinations that Mannix perceives as entirely real and enveloping. Machine imagery (particularly that of the "influencing machines" has been known to feature often in the hallucinatory expressions of the schizophrenic, and is frequently linked (as in this case) to a perceived lack of control on the part of the individual. 54

Mannix's reference to a lack of "stability and coherence" seems a retrospective statement regarding the great deviation this hallucination has made from the stable, coherent reality of 'normalcy'. The experience itself, while it may have felt unstable and shifting, seems to have had some sense of internal coherence as Mannix's concrete descriptions of the events suggest. The fact that visions of "The Cunt" and "The Anus" appear to Mannix whilst he is passing through a tunnel, reflect some associative connection between his 'actual' physical surroundings and the physiology of his lived metaphoric hallucinations. It can be supposed that Mannix has projected his fantasies of submissive, masturbating women with such imaginative force that he has created visions of them, which he perceives as autonomous entities. Their autonomy is, however, tenuous, as he is constantly imbibing their fluids, thus drawing them back into his own self in a form of psychic dialogue. Mannix expresses no sense of discomfort or panic in what could potentially be a smothering, claustrophobic situation - it is less the experience of an individual drowning and more that of someone who has, as he suggests, already "drowned".

This hallucination also reflects the compartmentalised fashion in which Mannix depicts the female body in many works within his oeuvre, including *Erotomania No.1*. The female form is the predominant figurative erotic image in Mannix's illustrations. The torso and legs of the figures are often rendered relatively realistically (figure 5). It is the head and arms that become amorphous and shifting in Mannix's work. Heads at times become breasts or vaginas or animals, or are horned or missing from the bodies altogether. Often the arms of the figure are entirely absent – such an absence is the single most common alteration Mannix makes to the female form (figures 11 and 12).

It is clear from Mannix's descriptions of hallucinations,

previously discussed, that such visions often entail an isolation of, or emphasis upon, the sexual regions of the body, to the extent that it is just an anus or vagina that he sees. In this way such regions are conceived of as autonomous. These depictions are often the primary focus of the drawings, with faces - and particularly arms and hands - relegated to a more minor position. Thus objectification and depersonalisation are certainly present in such illustrations. The lack of arms and hands reflects the secondary nature of these areas as far as the sexual act is concerned. The images also suggest a vulnerability and powerlessness in the female form. In his written work, women are often depicted as powerful, dominant figures capable of enslaving Mannix, and his drawings could be an effort to restore balance to this power relation:

Essay on Slavery: The creation of a state of erotic slavery is based on sexual possession. One partner has that content in being, and is allowed the space and lack of inhibitions needed to assume to this aspiration. A penalty is inherent in this practice. As the slave becomes more and more bound and obedient because of the erotic fervour then so the slaver falls into HER own garden of Eden.<sup>55</sup>

Here it is the woman who ascends into the powerful role of "slaver", and in so doing returns to a mythical state of primacy and innocence. In another passage Mannix singles out the face, and particularly the eyes, as sites related to possible enslavement: "Meanwhile, slow footsteps are heard in a moisanded dark passageway and where the earth is tapped emerges the idea of enslavement like a fountain of the most outlandish and erotically-clad woman and I cannot bear to look into their black eyes." 56

Perhaps it is the great power associated with the eyes, and indeed the face as a whole, as a site for possible enslavement, that precludes Mannix from rendering them pictorially. Mannix's tendency to isolate various parts of the female anatomy is also, however, a feature of the complexity he feels is inherent in the female form, as the following passage suggests:

Amalina comes in and complains that i have been looking at ladies legs. it is true. Amanda thinks for a while and then says that it is alright if the totality of the woman is taken into account...What she says is ridiculous, it would take ten lifetimes, one hundred lifetimes to know the totality of this one

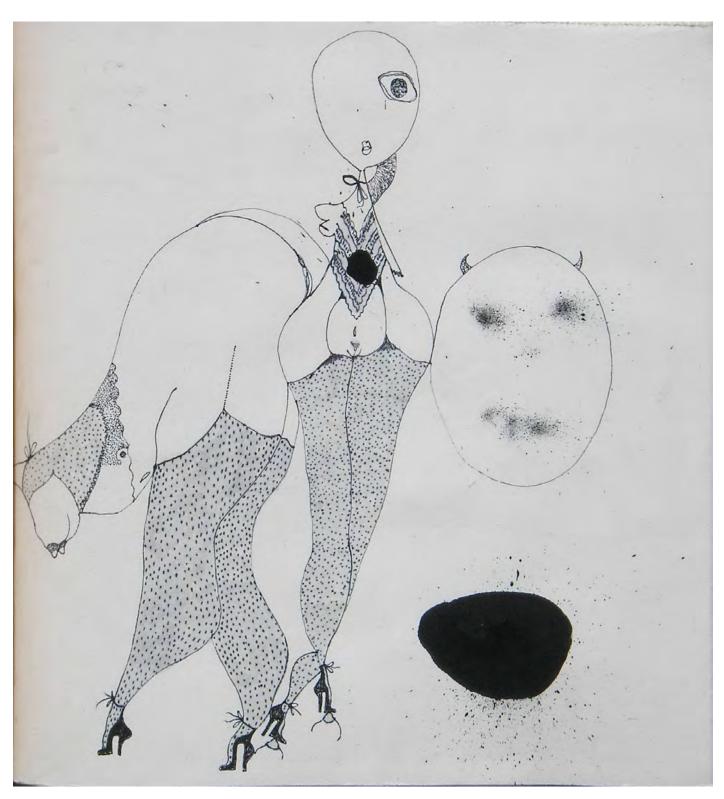


Figure 11. Anthony Mannix, *Erotomania 1996 (pg 19)*, 1996, ink and felt pen on paper (artist's book), 35 x 35 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

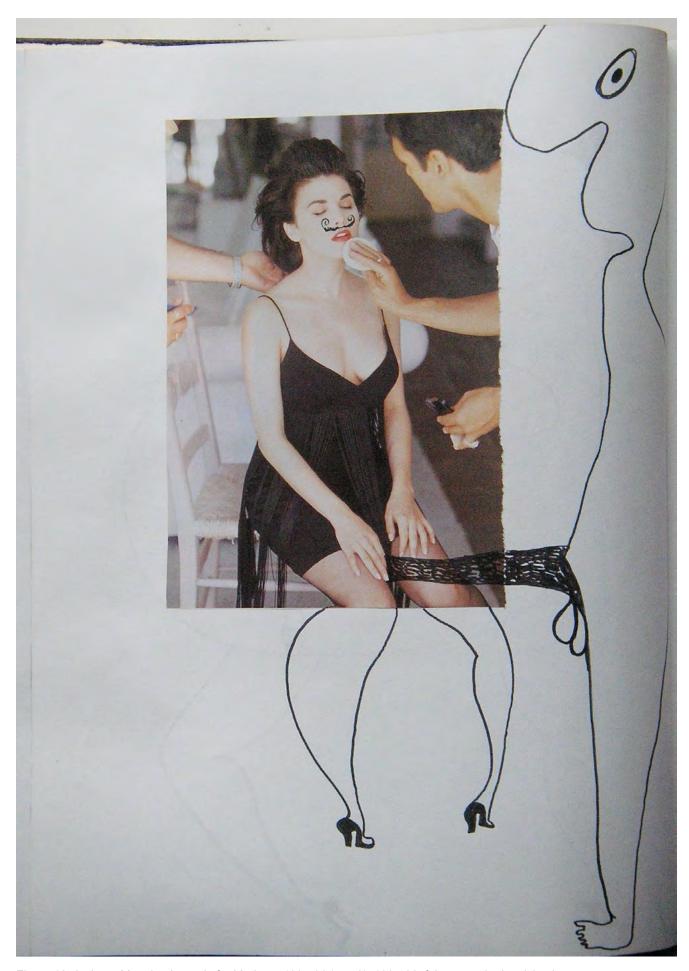


Figure 12. Anthony Mannix, *Journal of a Madman 1995-96* (pg 48), 1995-96, felt pen and advertising images on paper (artist's book), 28 x 35 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

woman, but i get what she means.57

Perhaps, then, it is Mannix's notion regarding the impossibility of capturing the "totality" of a woman that contributes to his observation and depiction of her isolated parts. His statement "but i get what she means" also, however, suggests he understands that the concern of Amalina is based on his compartmentalisation of the female form. Art-making becomes a method through which to explore the female form, and his depictions are always, Mannix suggests, prefaced by a love of the figure. Mannix explains: "one of my inner loves is the figure the always varied dance that it is: the splendid expression that they possess has been made possible by a type of looking where you absorb everything as the seancé medium does." 58

Mannix explores the varied dance of the figure through his own illustrations, and in images inserted into his artist's books from the advertisements and "girlie magazines" from which he often draws. In contextualising his use of such images he shows himself to be aware of the capacity for such material to objectify women. Mannix's awareness of female objectification and commodification is made explicit in a caption that accompanies two images cut from a lingerie advertisement from the department store 'Target'.

The culture of the object...why buy penthouse and playboy when the daily advertisements in the letterbox are sexier? or rather they are a different genré of eroticism. These mailbox advertisements were my first models for erotic drawing...i knew them intimately before i had any money for girlie magazines...but when you take a look here you find a very alluring eroticism for "mature audiences". 59

The title, "culture of the object", alludes to the fact that these images include price tags suggesting the savings that can be made on each garment being advertised; as a result, monetary values become associated with the body parts located in these areas. There is also, however, an appreciation of the eroticism within such images. Mannix often highlights the inherent eroticism in advertisements for material goods that feature women who are scantily clad, or whose poses can be seen as alluring. Here Mannix emphasises the pervasive nature of the sexual in Western culture. The sometimes crude, explicit illustrations Mannix adds to such magazine pictures, whilst designed to titillate, also expose both Mannix's

own thoughts and the implied or unconscious messages Mannix believes are existent within the images (figure 12). This duality between the power of the erotically charged image to pleasurably titillate, and the aspects of exploitation that can accompany it, inform much of Mannix's work. Beneath such ideas exists his belief that human beings are centrally erotic entities. Mannix writes:

I was once told by an instructor of drawing at one of the city technical colleges that everything is erotic...i disagree...however since then my exploration has told was is Definitely is! It is this immediate, before any decision can be or will be made titillation with the erotic display of the C20th that i find myself compelled to use, enjoin and augment...there is nothing else like it...and that momentum and velocity that immediately inhabits even the most hardened business man's steps as he walks by the girlie magazine stand is what i wish to see about in the Sex Book...it never flags this immediate tittulation and as well possesses all the darknesses of the neurotic, psychotic and psychopathic...the greatest lie i have come across is that it is a shallow, facile thing...Other than this its exploitive issue is horrorendous...but there indeed is the special duality...a book like this can not help but parody that artiface and omni-present exploitation of both sexes simply by being what it is: and there you have the Duality i and a great manys others are fascinated and obsessed by...<sup>60</sup>

The central place of eroticism in human experience ensures that material engaging in such ideas cannot be shallow or facile, but instead goes to the heart of the "neurotic, psychotic and psychopathic" tendencies within humanity. Mannix here mentions the exploitation of both sexes, yet all his examples of advertising depict women. It is the calculating way that eroticism is used in such advertising that has the potential to exploit all those who look at them. This point is made more clearly in the following quotation:

i am much given over to the erotic picture and to this end have collected hundreds of pages of erotic "girlie" magazine poses: studying their: the pictures language of artifice is something which has occupied me since university days. it is as if it is a language of hieroglyphics: the leg here demands suggestion of a certain kind of sex act: there a look in the eyes dictate a vulnerability of the soul made by the exposed body, endlessly as the camera slices the dance into microsecond

in this matter in reality amid a sea of artiface all artificiality evaporates and we are left with a raw punnet of language and accidents i think the poses are absolutely hopeless from model to camera and back again but therein lies an overlap which may and does instruct about the body that everyone excluding the artist or those without passion are being exploited is painfully obvious.<sup>61</sup>

This text inhabits the frame of an illustration depicting a naked woman. In this way, ideas regarding a "language" or "hieroglyphics" of the body are further reflected in the pictorial elements on the page. The contrived poses of the models offer narratives of possible sexual acts in a "language of artifice". Whilst the "look in the eyes dictate a vulnerability of the soul", that is perhaps an aspect of the initial artifice, the fracturing of reality into microseconds, via the camera, is able to capture a latent spontaneity or accident in the eyes and body which reveals a truth. There is a sense of hopelessness in the woman's poses before the camera, but in the overlap between the two (which constitutes the produced image) the painful exploitation of the body is captured. Mannix suggests that only those without passion and the artist escape such exploitation. The passionless are immune to the erotically charged image and the artist, in this case Mannix himself, eludes the exploitation as he redraws or reinterprets the image via an engagement with the imagination. In drawing and redrawing the figures Mannix suggests he is attempting to negate the image's "exploitation" of women through a reengagement with the imagination - thus attempting to effect a transition from "ugly depictions" to "beauty", wherein the original image is translated into an artistic work. For Mannix this process of drawing and redrawing such images directly accesses the libidinal drive; of this he writes: "The erotic drawing to me now is first hand; takes no thought. Comes directly from the wrist and the crotch and the innard"; here form and content reflects the erotic impulse.62

## **Sex Scribble**

Mannix's erotic art-making is an attempt to access and express this primary libidinal drive. The process of drawing and writing in Mannix's world-view directly links with this erotic force. Within this practice no activity is more primary than that which he calls "sex scribble": here form and content become entirely unified in a signifier which brings into dialogue the body's action and passion. On

this matter Gilles Deleuze writes: "In the primary order of schizophrenia...there is no duality except that between the actions and passions of the body; language is both of these at the same time and is entirely resorbed into the body's gaping depths." "Sex scribble" is language reabsorbed into the body: a physical activity that facilitates a direct dialogue with Mannix's unconscious libidinal drive. In the following passage Mannix describes its discovery:

Sex Scribbles derived from my first work in sexuality, "Erotomania" a very finely illustrated and hand-written pencil world of 16 pp. I found after doing this work my attitude to erotic drawing became more dimensions and although i like to work patiently for hour after hour on an erotic illustration that i also have a *need* to create the immediate work: one that can be dashed off in seconds with the Libido hot on the paper.<sup>64</sup>

The tight, rapid circular movements that generate "Sex Scribbles" create an immediate, spontaneous link between the libido and the page. Mannix contextualises this physical, repetitive gesture as a form of libidinal expression in *Journal of a Madman No. 4*:

I first began experimenting with what i call "sex scribble" in my second journal. My early works in sexuality and eroticism were all to précis and not always was i able to express the erotic in a patience, detailed drawing. all too often i would destroy the effect by being forced by the energies i was utilizing to make a 'hasty' drawing. I decide that what was right for the situation was just that and made up 'Sex Scribble' for the times when the expression had to be alacritous.<sup>65</sup>

Mannix returns to, rather than evolves from scribbling. The primary nature of the scribble is part of its appeal. Allen S. Weiss suggests that the scribble constitutes, "a primal moment of creativity at which we still cannot quite speak through it. Here, it is the body that 'speaks'; here the troubled, awkward, undexterous paradoxically gesture manifests an adequate expression of the spirit."66 Through Mannix's commentary regarding the inspiration and meaning of "sex scribble", the audience becomes aware that rather than a form of creativity that "cannot quite speak", "sex scribble" is in fact a signifier whose signified (or meaning) is private. The explanation of this signified (by Mannix himself) ensures that the audience can semantically comprehend this form of libidinal expression. In this manner the expression gains semantic meaning through language however, "sex scribble" derives its initial impact from its connection with the libidinal unconscious at the exclusion of denotative language. Thus Mannix's scribbling becomes what Hans Prinzhorn, writer of the seminal Artistry of the Mentally III, describes as a symbol in which "an otherwise neutral 'sign' becomes the bearer of meaning..."67 Prinzhorn himself suggested that there may be significance to that which appears to be disordered scribbles, when he perceives "an expressive language in this apparently noncommunicative mess [scribbles] which disposes of a not inconsiderable scale of nuances. Even the smallest loop and even more the sweeping curve can be understood as an expressive gesture and interpreted, if only to a small extent."68

Through Mannix's "sex scribble" it is indeed the body that speaks. Weiss suggests that such a voice is capable of expressing what he calls the "spirit"; for Mannix such a "spirit" is a spontaneous unconscious eroticism akin to prelinguistic modes of signification such as the breath, sound, gesture, and the human mark. As with Mannix's glossolalia, "sex scribble" is an example of his preoccupation with exploring the outer realms of language – the cusp of rationality and irrationality – where madness finds its own speech, this time imbued with the unconscious eroticism Mannix suggests is inherent in his experience of psychosis.

This activity also exists at the cusp between the linguistic and the pictorial – a signifier that comes to inhabit the picture plane. On occasion it is used to fill in the body of entities associated with the sexual. In an example of this, Mannix writes of a "Vision – Creature" and the images this creature revealed to him: "Some of the visions it brought were sexual, but all were horrific. It swamped me with visions until my psyche felt raw and denuded." 69

At other times the "sex scribble" can enclose another drawing associated with the sexual, as in the case of a work (figure 13) Mannix describes as follows: "This small coloured drawing is about the poetical enchantment of Karleen and particularly the idea of her having a cunt." In another illustration "sex scribble" surrounds a number of figures, (figure 14) accompanied by writing which details the position of Art Brut practitioners as "outsiders", suggesting that, "[t]hey are writing things and drawing things and saying things, which somebody will-pick up on and

become very fearful of and so as if to put a frame around the picture or put familiar grammer in the writing they put the outsider in a frame of reference - The Hospital."71 The figure in question is depicted with breasts protruding from his skull and "sex scribble" flowing from his mouth. The combination of these two pictorial devices suggests the nature of the message spoken by such individuals. In the use of this motif to depict the speech of individuals society labels insane, Mannix positions "sex scribble" as a primal, mad, erotic language. "Sex scribble" is a primary expression of the erotic drive that dominates Mannix's psychotic experience, the most intimate expression of Mannix's dialogue with his erotic unconscious and the foundation on which his erotic drawings and writings are constructed.

## **Erotic Sentience**

For Anthony Mannix the erotic is a powerful force that, like the madness with which he links it, often eludes his attempts at control and containment; a force of multiplicity and metamorphosis that comes to inform and enrich his entire book-making practice.

Mannix's preoccupation with the erotic reflects his belief that he is thereby connecting with an essential psychic energy that resides at the core of the human experience, an unconscious energy that is always at play in the interactions between sentient bodies and their animated environments. He explains: "Eroticism is a fixed point in front of the eyes...by rights it should be possible to keep their always...it is in no way a performance least it dance: other: its something thats listened to with the sentience of the body."

To listen to such a "dance" is to become entranced, lured into the "outlandish, exotic and alien places" of an erotic unconscious. Here the body, language, narrative and creative production are brought into contact with madness, and are remade in the unstable image of Mannix's own "imaginary body": a fractious, erotic sentience which enlivens a metaphoric world-view to such an extent that creative production has the capacity to simultaneously document and construct realities.

<sup>1</sup>All Mannix quotations in this article reflect the spelling and grammar of his original works. Mannix's idiosyncratic spelling and grammar are important characteristics of his Outsider writing style, a fact Mannix himself recognises: "One still has this feel for

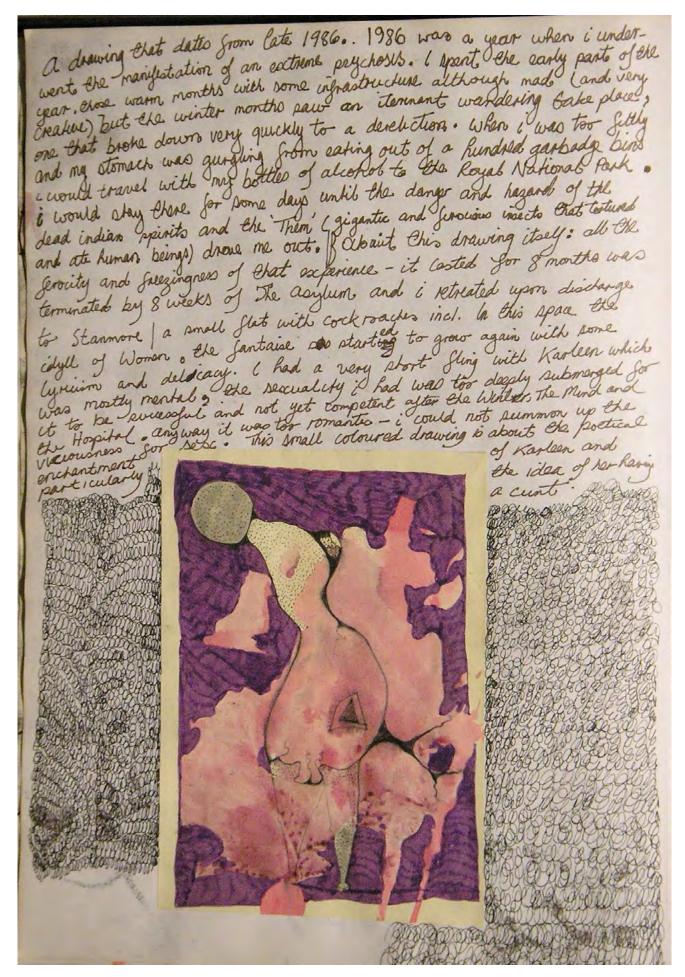


Figure 13. Anthony Mannix, *Journal of a Madman No.4 (pg 10)*, 1988, felt pen and acrylic on paper (artist's book), 25 x 36 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

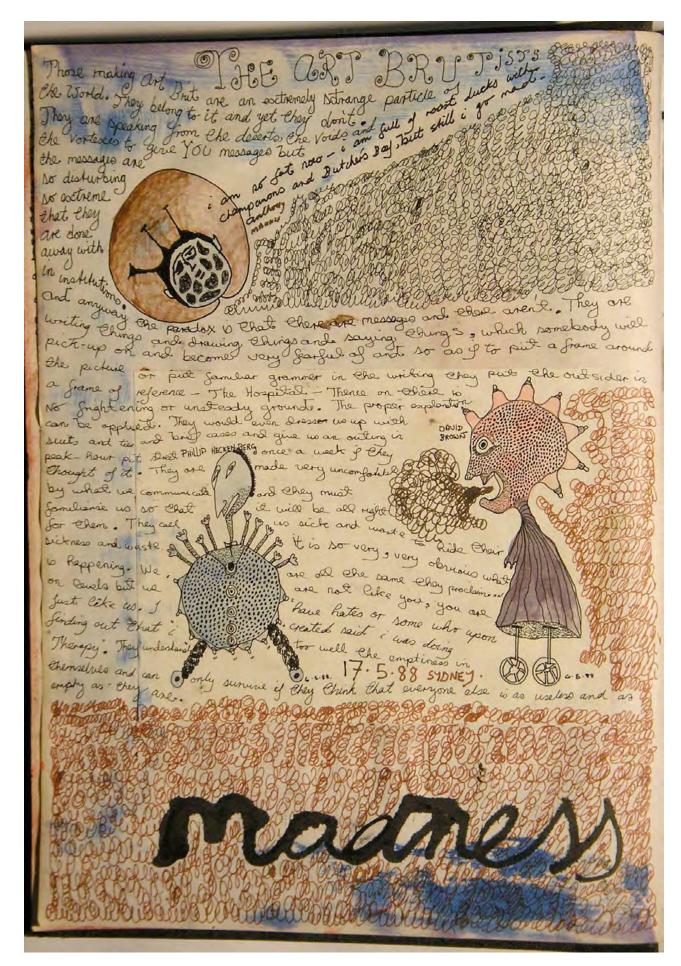


Figure 14. Anthony Mannix, *Journal of a Madman No.4* (pg 6), 1988, felt pen on paper (artist's book), 25 x 36 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

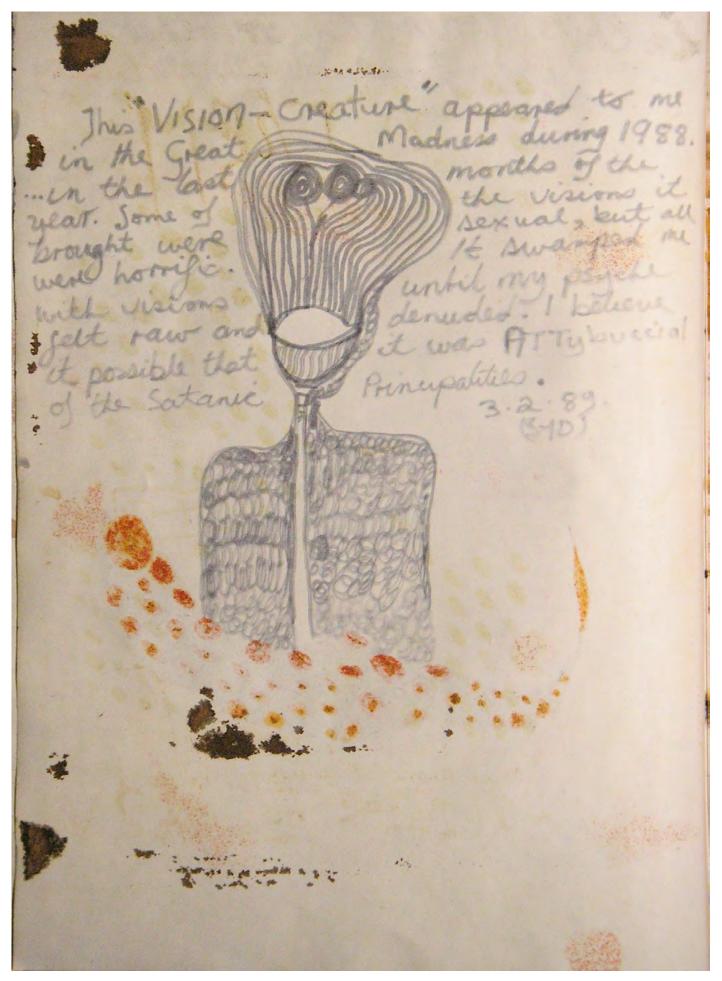


Figure 15. Anthony Mannix, *Journal of a Madman No.4 (pg 71)*, 1988, felt pen on paper (artist's book), 25 x 36 cm, collection of artist (photograph Dr Gareth S Jenkins)

the asthetic with this work but strangely so long ago I realized my grammer was my own, and decided not to change it, like wise spelling." Anthony Mannix, *Mo012: Journal of a Madman 1994-95* (Unpublished Manuscript: 'The Atomic Book' Digital Archive complied by G.S. Jenkins, 2005-2008), 89.

<sup>2</sup>Anthony Mannix was diagnosed with schizophrenia in the mid-1980s.

<sup>3</sup>This notion of a metaphoric reality that becomes lived (livedmetaphor), is a central concept for many authors who have theorised about the schizophrenic experience. Sigmund Freud suggested the schizophrenic is an individual who "can no longer distinguish between the objects of reality and the objects of fantasy, that is, distinguish between what is perceived in reality and hallucinated in fantasy. The individual's inner world (Innenwelt) and outer world (Umwelt) merge in schizophrenics. which allows the things belonging to the inner world, what is fantasized or hallucinated, to appear in the world of reality as if it were real, as if they were reality" (Qtd in Rosenbaum, B. & Sonne, H. The Language of Psychosis. (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 46). Likewise, Carl Jung suggests that, "To say that insanity is a dream which has become real is no metaphor" ('Recent Thoughts on Schizophrenia'. The Psychogenesis of Mental Disease. Trans.: R.F.C. Hull. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 241). Johnston and Holzman label it "Concreteness" which entails "a loss of perspective in which ideas take on an apparent reality" (Assessing Schizophrenic Thinking: A Clinical and Research Instrument for Measuring Thought Disorder. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979), 75).

<sup>4</sup>Anthony Mannix, *Mo031: Erotomania* 1994-96. Unpublished Manuscript: 'The Atomic Book' op cit., 12.

<sup>5</sup>Anthony Mannix, *Mo006: Erotic Journal of a Madman*. Unpublished Manuscript: 'The Atomic Book' op cit., 23.

<sup>6</sup>Mannix, Mo015: Journal of a Madman 1995-96, 4.

<sup>7</sup>Mannix, *Mo012: Journal of a Madman* 1994-95, 149.

<sup>8</sup>Phillip Hammial is a poet, artist and art collector based in Australia. Together with Mannix, Hammial founded The Australian Collection of Outsider Art in 1985.

9Mannix, Mo012: Journal of a Madman 1994-95, 148.

¹ºMannix's attraction to the word 'erotomania' may also be related to Antonin Artaud's use of the term to characterise psychiatrists: "And I do not believe that the rule of the confirmed erotomania of psychiatrists admits of a single exception." Selected Writings. Ed. Susan Sontag. (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1976), 484. Mannix mentions reading Artaud in a number of his journals.

<sup>11</sup>Mannix's pictorial treatment of the body is echoed by that of the outsider artist William Fields who has created a series of illustrations dominated by figures that are "dense composites, with multiple, variously oriented heads, faces, phalluses and other body parts. These many-faceted figures suggest complex life-forms in states of perpetual change and transformation, seething and pulsating with superorganic energy" (Patterson 67). "Looking into the Workshop of Divine Providence". *Raw Vision* 57, (Winter 2006): 62-67.

<sup>12</sup>Mannix, *Erotomania No.1*, 11.

<sup>13</sup>Mannix, Erotomania No.1, 5.

<sup>14</sup>One manner in which sex change can occur for Mannix is through attendance at a "sex-change-temple". Mannix writes: "Sexuality is different when you are mad and particularly when you are approaching madness which seems pertinent and although particular, the escape for sane or mad is futile. If one is lost in psychosis one may experience the sex sounds or sex screams or venture into a sex-change-temple and undergo a scream—stare—whisper, or a sigh—scream—moan and this energy might heat the body and keep it on heat for months. Needless to say such a ritual can only be conducted at night in an incalculable

blackness." Anthony Mannix, *Mo001: Journal of a Madman No.4* (Unpublished Manuscript: 'The Atomic Book' Digital Archive complied by G.S. Jenkins, 2005-2008), 9.

<sup>15</sup>Here Rosenbaum and Sonne are deploying Deleuze and Guattari's notion of deterritorialization in relation to the schizophrenic conception of the body. Deleuze and Guattari conceived of this in relation to Artaud's formulation of the "body without organs", postulated in 'To Have Done With the Judgment of God'. Artaud sought to recreate the body of "Man" without the organs through which he felt controlled: "Man is sick because he is badly constructed. / We must decide to strip him in order to scratch out this animalcule / which makes his itch to death / god / and with god / his organs. / For tie me down if you want to, / but there is nothing more useless than an organ. / When you have given him a body without organs / then you will have delivered him from all his automations and restored / him to his true liberty." Watchfiends and Rack Screams: Works From the Final Period. Ed.& Trans. Clayton Eshleman with Bernard Bador. (Boston: Exact Change, 1995), 307.

The body without organs is the body returned to the crucible, where flow can be re-established. It is this impulse that is present within Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the "body without organs" ("BwO"): "Why not walk on your head, sing with your sinuses, see through your skin, breathe with your belly... 'Let's go further still, we haven't found our BwO yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self.' Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation. Find your body without organs." A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi. (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), 151. The "BwO" is fluid, eternal creation that never settles. It remains nomadic, and as such can never be reproduced: the BwO is active potential. Mannix's own deterritorializations of the body also seem designed to return the body to the crucible where it can be remade with a fluid, amorphous eroticism.

<sup>16</sup>Rosenbaum & Sonne, *The Language of Psychosis*, 76-77. Here the "First-Person" speaker disregards the presence of the "Second-Person" receiver or listener, primarily though a fracturing of a singular "First-Person" point of view. As a result, suggest Rosenbaum and Sonne, a text or "utterance lacks anchorage. It seems to presuppose the presence...of many different Second-Persons...The Second-Person varies from one phrase to the next. The implicit assumptions change. Therefore, the First-Person of the enunciation is also not the same throughout. It is not the same voice we hear speaking. The I of the speech has almost disappeared" *The Language of Psychosis*, 66-67.

<sup>17</sup>Mannix, Erotomania No.1, 4.

<sup>18</sup>Mannix, *Erotomania No.1*, 5.

<sup>19</sup>Mannix, *Erotomania No.1*, 6-7.

<sup>20</sup>Ravenscroft, T. *The Spear of Destiny: The Occult Power Behind The Spear Which Pierced The Side Of Christ.* Great Britain: Neville Spearman, Ltd., 1973

<sup>21</sup>Mannix, Erotomania No.1, 13-14.

<sup>22</sup>Ravenscroft, The Spear of Destiny, 104.

<sup>23</sup>Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny*, 104.

<sup>24</sup>Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny*, 104.

<sup>25</sup>Erotomania No. 1, with its wide range of authorial voices (and particularly the unsignalled inclusion of the work of another published author) epitomised Barthes' notion that the text is "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture." "The Death of the Author", *Image – Music – Text*, trans.: Stephen Heath. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146).

The 'cut-up' technique of William S. Burroughs (who Mannix mentions numerous times in his journals), involving the

combination of fragments of multiple texts also destabilises the notion of a singular author who produces unique works. One expression of this is in Burroughs' fictional creation, the "writing machine": "A writing machine that shifts one half one text and half the other through a page frame on conveyor belts – (The proportion of half one text half the other is important corresponding as it does to the two halves of the human organism) Shakespeare, Rimbaud, etc. permutating through page frames constantly changing juxtaposition the machine spits out books and plays and poems – *The Ticket That Exploded*. (London: Paladin, 1987), 53-54.

<sup>26</sup>Mannix, Erotomania No.1,14.

<sup>27</sup>On this matter Ilza Veith writes: "The term "hysteria" is obviously derived from the Greek word *hystera*, which means "uterus." Inherent in this simple etymological fact is the meaning of the earliest views on the nature and cause of the disease. It was formerly believed to be solely a disorder of women, caused by alterations of the womb." *Hysteria: The History of a Disease*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 1.

<sup>28</sup>Artaud also links psychiatry with (black) magic in "Artaud the Mômo": "Insane asylums are conscious and premeditated receptacles of black magic, / and it is not only that doctors encourage magic with their inopportune and hybrid therapies, / it is how they use it." *Watchfiends*, 161.

<sup>29</sup>In *Mo046:* The Light Bulb Eaters Mannix describes a conversation between himself and the woman's madness, which again takes the form of an ectoplasm exuding from her vagina – the vagina in which her madness actually lives. The desire of the madness to leave the vagina and become autonomous is reminiscent of the desire of the 'ass' in Burroughs' work: "the asshole would eat through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights." Naked Lunch. (London: Flamingo, 1993), 110.

<sup>30</sup>Mannix, Erotomania No.1, 11.

<sup>31</sup>Rosenbaum & Sonne, *The Language of Psychosis*, 76.

<sup>32</sup>Mannix, *Erotomania No.1*, 10.

<sup>33</sup>Mannix, Erotomania No.1, 10-11.

<sup>34</sup>Mannix. *Mo046: The Light Bulb Eaters*. 41.

35Mannix, Mo046: The Light Bulb Eaters, 46

<sup>36</sup>Mannix, *Mo008: Journal of a Madman* 1991, 7.

<sup>37</sup>Mannix explicitly signals his interest in Jung's concept when he writes: "What does one make of the Jungian concept of anima?" *Mo012: Journal of a Madman* 1994-95, 148.

38 Mannix, Mo008: Journal of a Madman 1991, 70.

<sup>39</sup>B. Rosenbaum & H. Sonne explain: "this third party, the Other, often virtually assumes control of the patient's speech. The Other interferes, interrupts, directs. Indeed, the Other structures the speech of the schizophrenic in such a way that often it is to the Other and no longer to the Second-Person receiver that the schizophrenic text is addressed." *The Language of Psychosis*, 56

40Mannix, Mo008: Journal of a Madman 1991, 70

<sup>41</sup>Mannix, *Erotomania No.1*, 7.

<sup>42</sup>Mannix, *Erotomania No.1*, 12.

<sup>43</sup>Mannix, *Erotomania No.1*, 13.

<sup>44</sup>M.Thévoz, *Mo083: Thévoz Letters*. (Original documents: 'The Atomic Book' op cit., 1. One copy of *Erotomania No.1* was sent to Michel Thévoz by the book's publisher, Philip Hammial. Thévoz accepted the work into the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, as confirmed by a letter in Mannix's possession.

<sup>45</sup>Mannix, Erotomania No.1, 5.

<sup>46</sup>Conversations with Mannix: Recollections of G.S. Jenkins 2005-2008 (This reference refers to the many informal conversations that have taken place between Jenkins and Mannix during the course of this study; no written records exist of such

conversations but they often yielded information that became useful in analysing Mannix's work).

<sup>47</sup>One of the criteria for the diagnosis of schizophrenia is, in fact, the presence of such associative "looseness": "If the associative train of thought is not controlled and is more free flowing, then it should be scored as looseness." Johnston and Holzman *Assessing Schizophrenic Thinking*, 75.

<sup>48</sup>Roland Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye" in *Story of the Eye by Lord Auch*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel. (Great Britain: Marion Boyars, 1979), 123.

<sup>49</sup>Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye", 123.

<sup>50</sup>Mannix, Erotomania No.1, 6.

<sup>51</sup>Mannix, *Mo001: Journal of a Madman No.4*, 9.

<sup>52</sup>Mannix, *Mo001: Journal of a Madman No.4*, 11. Carl Jung also uses the metaphor of drowning to express the force with which unconscious material can overwhelm the schizophrenic person: "He is not just overcome by a violent emotion, he is actually drowned in a flood of insurmountably strong forces and thoughtforms which go far beyond any ordinary emotion, no matter how violent. These unconscious forces and contents have long existed in him and he has wrestled with them successfully for years" *Psychogenesis*, 239.

<sup>53</sup>Victor Tausk writes: "The schizophrenic influencing machine is a machine of mystical nature. The patients are able to give only vague hints of its construction. It consists of boxes, cranks, levers, wheels, buttons, wires, batteries and the like. Patients endeaver to discover the construction of the apparatus by means of their technical knowledge...All the discoveries of mankind, however, are regarded as inadequate to explain the marvellous powers of this machine, by which the patients feel themselves persecuted." "On the Origin of the "Influencing Machine" in Schizophrenia." *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 2 (1933): 521.

<sup>54</sup>Mannix himself has produced a series of works that integrate the pictographic and the textual under the theme of the machine. Mannix has called these works, 'A Concise History of the Machines'.

<sup>55</sup>Anthony Mannix. *Mo007: Journal of a Madman 1991: The Hot War.* Unpublished Manuscript: 'The Atomic Book' op cit., 177.

<sup>56</sup>Mannix, *Mo031: Erotomania 1994-96*, 17.

<sup>57</sup>Mannix, *Mo008: Journal of a Madman 1991*, 138. (Ellipsis in the original)

58 Mannix, Mo012: Journal of a Madman 1994-95, 110.

<sup>59</sup>Mannix, *Mo015: Journal of a Madman 1995-96*, 33. (Ellipsis in the original)

<sup>60</sup>Mannix, *Mo015: Journal of a Madman 1995-96*, 49. (Ellipsis in the original)

61 Mannix, Mo012: Journal of a Madman 1994-95, 147.

62 Mannix, Mo012: Journal of a Madman 1994-95, 86.

<sup>63</sup>G. Deleuze. "The Schizophrenic and Language." *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism.* Ed. Josue V. Harari. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), 292.
 <sup>64</sup>Anthony Mannix, *Mo002: Journal of a Madman No. 5*. Unpublished Manuscript: 'The Atomic Book' op cit., 77.

65Mannix, Mo001: Journal of a Madman No. 4, 49.

<sup>66</sup>Allen S Weiss, *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism.* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) 21

<sup>67</sup>Hans Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally III: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*, trans: Eric von Brockdorff. (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1972) 15.

<sup>68</sup>Prinzhorn, Artistry of the Mentally III, 40.

69Mannix, Mo001: Journal of a Madman No. 4, 71.

<sup>70</sup>Mannix. *Mo001: Journal of a Madman No. 4*. 10.

<sup>71</sup>Mannix, *Mo001: Journal of a Madman No. 4*, 6.

<sup>72</sup>Mannix, *Mo015: Journal of a Madman 1995-96*, 25.

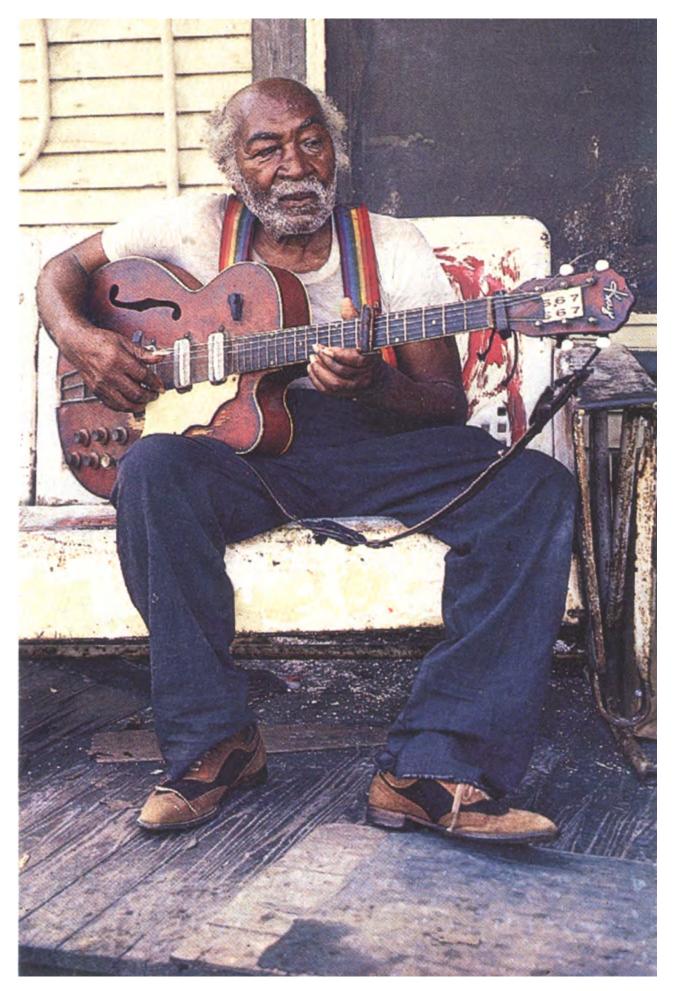


Figure 1. Henry Speller playing his guitar, 1987 (photograph William Arnett)

# Bodies of the Blues: Henry Speller, Howlin' Wolf and the Abject Edward Puchner

In 1989, an exhibition in Washington, DC presented a gathering of works that powerfully suggested the existence of an artistic stance within modern American art, described by Richard Powell as a blues aesthetic.1 As a cultural ethos, the blues were vividly evoked by photographs of musicians as well as paintings by artists, such as Romare Bearden, William H. Johnson and Jacob Lawrence, and were shown to have a widespread influence on a variety of art forms, like music, literature, visual arts, theatre and dance. The blues aesthetic was defined as an operative philosophy that was born as much from the improvisation and repetition of the music as it was from the environments and gestures which were manifested by it. Clarifying his ideas, Powell elaborated on this moniker, stating that he had named it a "blues aesthetic" because of the unique mutability of the blues when compared to the multitude of African American musical forms like jazz, boogie-woogie, gospel, doo-wop, soul and so on. In Powell's mind, the blues were not as singular as these other musical genres. This music had a breadth and presence that allowed it to persist underneath all these other musical forms.

Unique among African American artists of the twentieth century, Henry Speller (1900-1997) (figure 1) was both a visual artist and blues musician who grew up in the Delta region of Mississippi and was educated by its strong blues tradition.<sup>2</sup> With such a background, it is important to locate Speller's artistic process within the bounds of an aesthetic driven by the blues lyrics he knew and performed.

The limited scholarship addressing Speller's work focuses largely on the observational nature of his drawings. In the work *Untitled (Mississippi River Steam Boat)* (figure 2), we see a typical example of this side of Speller's oeuvre. The artist records the activity of sharecropping, depicting figures loading bales of cotton onto a river boat. Working in pencil, marker, crayon and watercolour on paper, he also drew images of trains speeding across the countryside, vast architectural complexes, as well as

figures within boats or houses as seen in *Queens of the Boat* (figure 3). In this last example, Speller deftly intermingles the organic, bodily form of the figures with the rigid, heavily outlined limits of the boat's structure.

Previous scholarship on Speller focuses mainly on how his drawings observe the world around him, because the artist himself denied any antecedents for his work. As he stated:

I just like to draw. Nobody ever showed me nothing about drawing - I just went on and took it up my own self. I started drawing houses - I looked at it and saw how it was made, then drew it. Finally I got so I didn't have to see it, I'd just get it in my mind and go on and draw it then.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars have instead drawn their conclusions from his experiences as an African American and from his life as a sharecropper. In turn, this has led them to link his imagery to African American cultural aesthetics, the rhythm and repetition of blues music, or the heavy patterning of quilting patchwork.<sup>4</sup> But by looking instead at drawings such as *Man with a Gun* (figure 4), we can see that Speller's testimony clearly belies a much greater number of portrait-like, figural works that seem to have come from a completely separate development within his art.

Speller's figural works often present both a fashionable and congenial personage, patterned clothing that playfully mingles with the background. In a large number of these however, the artist curiously focuses on women adding gridlike teeth and exposed breasts and genitalia, like the female figure in Man and Lady Talking (figure 5), revealing a simultaneously sexualized and menacing representation; one that has not sufficiently been accounted for in the literature to date. These female figures have been likened to "women [Speller] knew in the past, or sometimes a character type, such as a witch or prostitute," "sexual fantasies [that] kept him sane and functioning," or "white women," who stand as a metaphor for "the freedom he cannot experience."5 Such characterizations hint at a much larger theme that emerged in Speller's work and which remained a mystery at the time of his death in 1997. It is this theme that forms the central focus of this essay.

In these drawings of women, Speller makes a fetish of the human or - more specifically - the female



Figure 2. Henry Speller, *Untitled (Mississippi River Steam Boat)*, 1980, pencil and crayon on paper, 46 x 61 cm, Private Collection

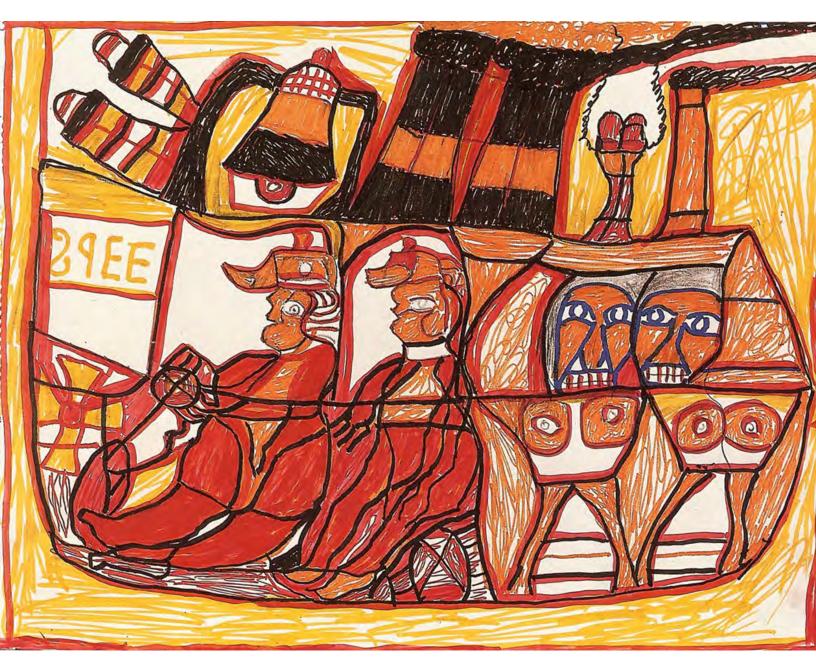


Figure 3. Henry Speller, *Queens of the Boat*, 1988, marker and pencil on paper, 46 x 61 cm, The William S. Arnett Collection (photograph Gamma One Conversions)



Figure 4. Henry Speller, *Man with a Gun*, 1988, marker on paper, 61 x 46 cm, The William S. Arnett Collection (photograph Gamma One Conversions)

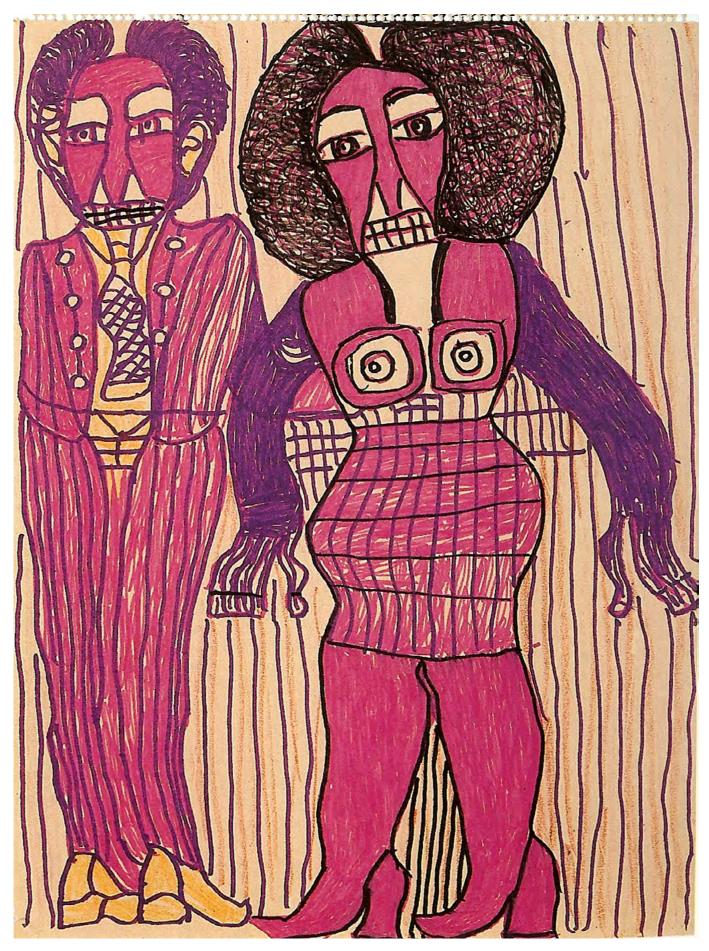


Figure 5. Henry Speller, *Man and Lady Talking*, 1988, marker, crayon, and pencil on paper, 61 x 46 cm, The William S. Arnett Collection (photograph Steve Pitkin/Pitkin Studio)

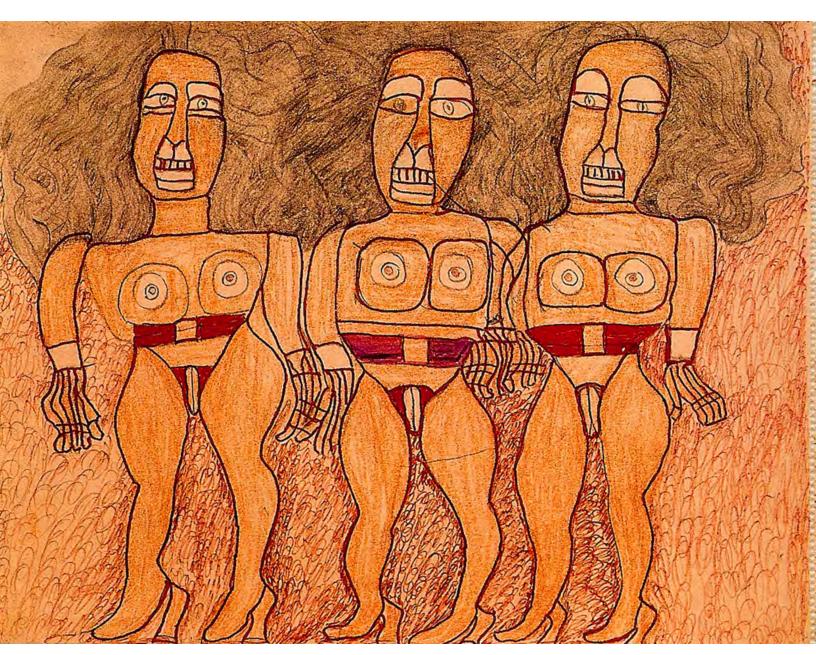


Figure 6. Henry Speller, *Betty Louis and Her Sisters*, 1987, marker, crayon, and pencil on paper, 46 x 61 cm, The William S. Arnett Collection (photograph Steve Pitkin/Pitkin Studio)

body. As this study will show, Speller's fascination with women, with its beginnings in his work as a sharecropper, should be viewed as a visualization of pain. The representations of his pain, seen within this essay, function much like blues music in general, serving to confront the "complexities inherent in the human situation." This fascination with women also exists within the realm of the grotesque and the abject, depicting a shifting, wavy body that threatens to exceed the confines of a symbolic body and, by extension, comments on societal order by visiting the margins of socially constructed categories where meaning is generated.

As an effort to undermine both the marginalization of Henry Speller as an 'outsider' artist and the stereotypes of the past which label African Americans as sexually promiscuous, the present study offers an interpretation of this seldom discussed body of Speller's work. It complicates Speller's art and the blues aesthetic in terms of the layered meanings of blues music and African American vernacular culture. This essay also examines how both the grotesque and the blues aesthetic might be colliding within the blues lyrics that Speller may have known through his experiences as a musician. It looks at how this artist mediated between his musical and visual production to create an aesthetic which productively displayed his unconscious fantasies.<sup>7</sup>

Henry Speller was born and raised in Panther Burn, Mississippi, a few miles from Rolling Fork, to a family of sharecroppers. Living there until around 1940, he left school early to spend more time planting, chopping and picking cotton. During the Depression, Speller worked on nearby farms in Leland, growing cotton and corn, and on the rivers near Vicksburg, loading riverboats and putting down telegram posts. As he stated in 1996:

I used to put the telegram posts down, make the cups and find the wire, put it up. I worked on the river, too, over in Vicksburg, working on the levee. Tote sacks with sand in them, two hundred pounds, on your shoulders with two sticks. Loaded cotton bales. Stand out there in that cold water sometime up to your chin, thinking, 'Don't want to drown.' Then them boats come by, wheel rolling, music, ladies, things going on. It give you some ideas to think about, forget the other stuff.8

As Speller suggests, the contrast between such hard labour and the life passing by on the river boats

gave him 'ideas' for his observational drawings. The ladies on these boats may have also inspired his drawings. Speller expressed a need to forget, a need to find solace while enduring painful manual labor. The boats he describes carried a lifestyle that was the extreme opposite of his own. He indicates that this need to forget was appeased by drawing; a panacea with historical antecedents within the theories of psychoanalysis. As Sigmund Freud writes, "The substitutive satisfactions, as offered by art, are illusions in contrast with reality, but they are none the less psychically effective, thanks to the role which phantasy has assumed in mental life."9 The hardships of Speller's daily life pushed him toward such fantasy in his mental life. Submerged up to his chin. Speller tried to 'forget the other stuff' by substituting its memory with art and music. And while psychoanalysis offers many avenues of discussion on the topic, it is necessary to instead look to how blues music and African American vernacular culture deals with hardship; indeed, how it reorients and substitutes in a different manner.

What has historically set the blues apart from its precedents, as well perhaps from other contemporaneous musical genres, is its use of everyday language. Paul Oliver, writing on the symbolism found within blues lyrics, finds the root of blues symbols in the realities many musicians faced, stating, "many figures of speech used in such blues arise from the environmental or domestic circumstances in which the singer finds himself."10 Scholars have also historicized the application and development of this vernacular, asserting that it resulted as much from the history of slavery in the United States as it did from blatant racism within American social life. And these elements in American social history further indicate a much deeper, internal level of meaning for the use of language from the everyday.

The African American vernacular found in the blues has further been described by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. as a "parallel discursive universe", characterized by "an extended engagement between two separate and distinct yet profoundly—even inextricably—related orders of meaning dependent precisely as much for the confrontation or relations of identity, manifested in the signifier, as on their relations of difference, manifested at the level of the signified."11 Through an act of (re)doubling of terms, African Americans have a unique brand of Signifyin(g), an engagement in certain rhetorical games which are



Figure 7. Henry Speller, *Untitled (Woman in Purple Dress with Hat)*, c.1978-1982, pencil, crayon on paper, 61 x 49 cm, courtesy Luise Ross Gallery, New York

concerned with "'associative relations,' which we can represent as the playful puns on a word that occupy the paradigmatic axis of language and which a speaker draws on for figurative substitutions." As the semiotic implications of Gates' argument suggest, the African American vernacular, as it was represented in blues music, disrupted the normal semantic orientations of signification in Western, white society with an endless reorientation of terms.

Among the many themes of the blues, including labour, racism, politics, spiritualism and so forth, love and sexual relations were arenas in which this reorientation occurred on an exponential level. One finds the greatest and most varied number of songs with sexual or even pornographic subject matter within those found by early collectors of blues lyrics. For example, Oliver writes about Howard Odum and Guy Johnson, who published The Negro and His Songs in 1925, stating it was "impossible [for them] to print a great mass of the material that they collected in the first quarter of the century because of its 'vulgar and indecent' content. These songs...tell of every phase of immorality...and filth; they represent the superlative of the repulsive."13 Writing of the lack of restraint in expression, these collectors actually shortened many of the recorded songs omitting stanzas they considered "unfit for publication." 14 In addition to these publications being censored early on, it is also entirely possible that many subsequent collections of songs have omitted lyrics that were judged to be repulsive because of how they might also promulgate negative stereotypes, linking blues music to relaxed sexual mores that were unjustly assumed by whites to exist among African American communities.

For our purposes, it is possible to recreate some of the many "associative meanings" that stray into the pornographic and libidinous from a small number of texts that address such unprintable subject matter. Scholarship on the blues identifies many songs about sexual situations and these shed light on the women that Henry Speller drew. In order to do so, it is necessary to first identify which songs the artist may have known by recounting his contacts with the blues scene.

Around 1940, Henry Speller moved north. No longer interested in the heavy work of subsistence farming and coming out of two unsuccessful marriages, he established himself in Memphis and worked as a junker, a landscaper, a garbage collector and a

janitor. Memphis itself was a much larger city than any in Speller's native area and was positioned at the northern end of the Delta region. Offering jobs to many African Americans in need of an alternative to sharecropping, the city saw an influx of musicians coming out of the Delta along Highway 61 to play in "juke bands" on the street or to perform in the dance halls. Indeed, there was a steady circulation of blues musicians making their way through Memphis after Speller arrived there in the early 1940s.

In particular, two towering figures, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, crossed Speller's path. While scholars of Speller's work have, in the past, asserted that he "never had a drawing lesson. Neither had he ... ever visited an art museum or gallery, nor had extensive contact with other artists," there is in fact proof that he was often in contact with blues musicians in his early Memphis years. <sup>15</sup> Although these musicians were not visual artists, Speller's interaction with them evinces a more subtle connection with a blues aesthetic. William Speller, the artist's son, attested to his father's history with the blues scene around Memphis, saying:

Daddy was always easygoing. He never let anything get to him. The only time he let himself loose was for music. Muddy Waters, he was also from Rolling Fork and he lived over in West Memphis, in Arkansas. So did Howlin' Wolf. Daddy would meet them on Saturday night down in Walls, Mississippi, and play with their bands. When Howlin' Wolf moved to Chicago so he could make more money, he wanted Daddy to go play with him, but it was too cold up there for [him]. 16

Among the vast number of blues musicians and song lyrics discussed within blues history, this information allows us to pinpoint more accurately what lyrics Speller would have been exposed to, making the songs of Howlin' Wolf or Muddy Waters possible texts against which to compare the artist's imagery and to understand his aesthetic.

We need to look at how Speller's liminal status as a blues musician and a visual artist first informed his subject matter and then how it manifested an aesthetic that turned his fantasies into grotesque women. In order to do this, we must view Speller in terms of a blues aesthetic or, rather, as Houston Baker writes, we must understand the artist as "a properly trained critic—one versed in the vernacular and unconstrained by traditional historical determinants—[who] may well

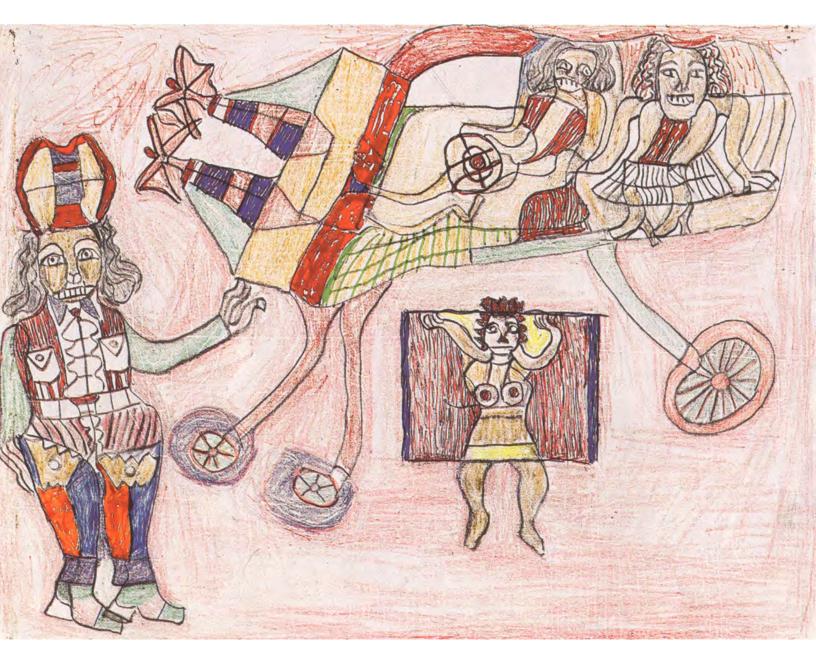


Figure 8. Henry Speller, *People Around a Plane*, 1986, marker, crayon and pencil on paper, 46 x 61 cm, The William S. Arnett Collection (photograph Gamma One Conversions)



Figure 9. Henry Speller, *Glory Jean and Her Friends*, 1987, marker, crayon, and pencil on paper, 46 x 61 cm, The William S. Arnett Collection (photograph Steve Pitkin/Pitkin Studio)

be able to discover blues inscriptions and liberating rhythms even in some familiarly neglected works of Afro-American expressive culture."<sup>17</sup> Speller's dual experiences translated into his visual art what Houston Baker describes as, "vibrant and inversive blues energies", which were born from a limitless freedom of myth and fictive discourse within music.<sup>18</sup>

Speller denies any contact with artistic instruction though. And, by doing so, he in fact obscures a line of African American precursors. Gates describes such a denial as common among African American writers and artists, when he writes:

Reacting to the questionable allegations made against their capacity to be original, black writers have often assumed a position of extreme negation, in which they claim for themselves no black literary antecedents whatsoever, or else claim for themselves an anonymity of origins... [This] position, curiously enough, often stresses the anonymous origins and influence of the Afro-American vernacular tradition, as figured in the spirituals, the blues, and vernacular secular folk poetry...as if group influence, unnamed, is more enabling than would be the claim of descent through a line of black precursors or even from one black precursor. This is originality at its extremes, a nameless progeniture...<sup>19</sup>

This brand of performing originality appears to reinforce the idea of Speller as an informed critic, listening to and playing blues songs and then visually interpreting the words and the slippage of meaning that occurs in blues lyrics.

Songs of women, heartbreak and loss are, of course, central themes within the blues. With titles like "Gypsy Woman," "Crazy About You Baby," "Don't Laugh at Me," "Smoke Stack Lightning," "I Asked for Water, She Gave Me Gasoline," "Sugar Sweet," and "Baby Please Don't Go," Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf are songwriters whose subject matter was no exception to the endless song titles that addressed male/female relations.

Taking a cue from these songs and their lyrics, the most direct correlation between Henry Speller's work and blues lyrics is the work *People Around a Plane* (1986) (figure 8), which merits comparison to the lyrics of Howlin' Wolf's song "Mr. Airplane Man." The lyrics include the lines:

Mr. Airplane Man, can you fly down to Jackson, Tennessee for me,

I want you to find my baby and give her this message for me,

If you don't find my baby, come on back to Chicago to me,

I'm just worried and lonesome, this cold is too dead for my clothes,

Well, if you don't find me in the heart of town, I'll leave word at where I'll be,

[Where ya' gonna be Wolf] I'll be in Chicago, way down on Lake, Fisherman's side.<sup>20</sup>

There are compelling connections to be made between these lyrics and Speller's drawing. In the drawing, there is a couple in an aeroplane, a woman lying on a blanket, peering up at the sky or out at us, and a sharply dressed man, either Speller himself or Howlin' Wolf, gesturing for us to witness the image. Speller creates a visual narrative, instructing Mr. Airplane Man on what exactly he must do. The pilot, Mr. Airplane Man, has the thought of the woman in his mind; a woman that Speller chooses to represent as a passenger. Further, we can see the woman again down below, waiting in Jackson, grinning up at the pilot in expectation of her lover's message. Evoking the ways in which lyrics are formed into visual representation, this work demonstrates how Howlin' Wolf's song informed Speller's subject matter. What remains to be seen is first, how the blues characterized women through 'associative meanings' and, second, how, as a result, the characterization of the female body in blues lyrics developed within Speller's drawings into a sexualized and grotesque form.

Reacting against what was considered too vulgar or indecent to be sung on a record, blues musicians came up with veiled metaphors for topics in their songs that clashed against taboos within white society. Over time, these metaphoric alternatives had become more numerous and involved. They became layered with multiple meanings in a manner not clearly evident to the blues audience. As Oliver writes, "it is evident ...that the singers were employing terms which may at one time have been somewhat obscure to white listeners but which were totally familiar and in general usage among Negroes. The distinction between metaphor, euphemism and sexual terminology is therefore not easily determined."21 Blues singers employed terms with 'associative meanings,' creating what Gates described earlier as a 'parallel discursive universe.' To white listeners, the

blues discourse was indeterminable and, as Oliver suggests, disruptive to normal semantic orientations of signification in white society. For an example of this discourse, sexual pleasure became 'jelly,' then 'jelly bean' became lover, intercourse became 'jelly roll,' 'dough-rolling,' 'biscuit-rolling,' 'bread-baking' and other related terms. Further metaphoric examples included a phallic-weapon symbolism of 'chopping meat,' oral gratification became 'flapjacks,' sexual intercourse was referred to as 'threading my needle,' and "my front lawn" indicated either female or male genitalia.

These last examples were loosely and inconsistently used however. Instead, the more compelling term "jelly roll' and its variations were used more regularly and, for our purposes, provide a good unifying example, again linking Howlin' Wolf's lyrics to Speller's drawings. We can once more connect lyrics to drawings by making a comparison between Howlin' Wolf's song "Shake For Me" and Speller's 1987 drawing entitled *Glory Jean and Her Friends* (figure 9). The lyrics to "Shake For Me" are:

Sure look good, but it don't mean a thing to me Sure look good, but it don't mean a thing to me I got a hip-shaking woman, shake like a willow tree

You better wait baby, you got back a little too late. You better wait baby, you got back a little too late. I got a cool-shaking baby, shake like jello on a plate

When my baby walk, you know she's fine and mellow

When my baby walk, you know she's fine and mellow

Every time she stops, her flesh it shake like jello

Shake it baby, shake it for me Shake lil' baby, shake it for me Oh, shake it little baby, shake like a willow tree.<sup>22</sup>

Howlin' Wolf's jello shaking flesh is directly manifested in Speller's drawing. These three women, Glory Jean and her friends, are placed on a purple ground which calls attention to the contours of their bodies, to the different colors of their hair and, most importantly, to the wavy edges of their legs as they each descend down to their high heel pumps. The sinuous lines that fall from their waists appear to jiggle and form smooth ripples, evoking both movement and stasis - a confused appearance echoed in Howlin' Wolf's

line: "Every time she stops, her flesh it shake like jello." And, with the double meanings of this jello shaking flesh alluding to sexual pleasure, lovers or any number of other, more libidinous variations on the theme of female bodies, the lyric serves as further evidence of a connection between Speller's drawings and the grotesque.

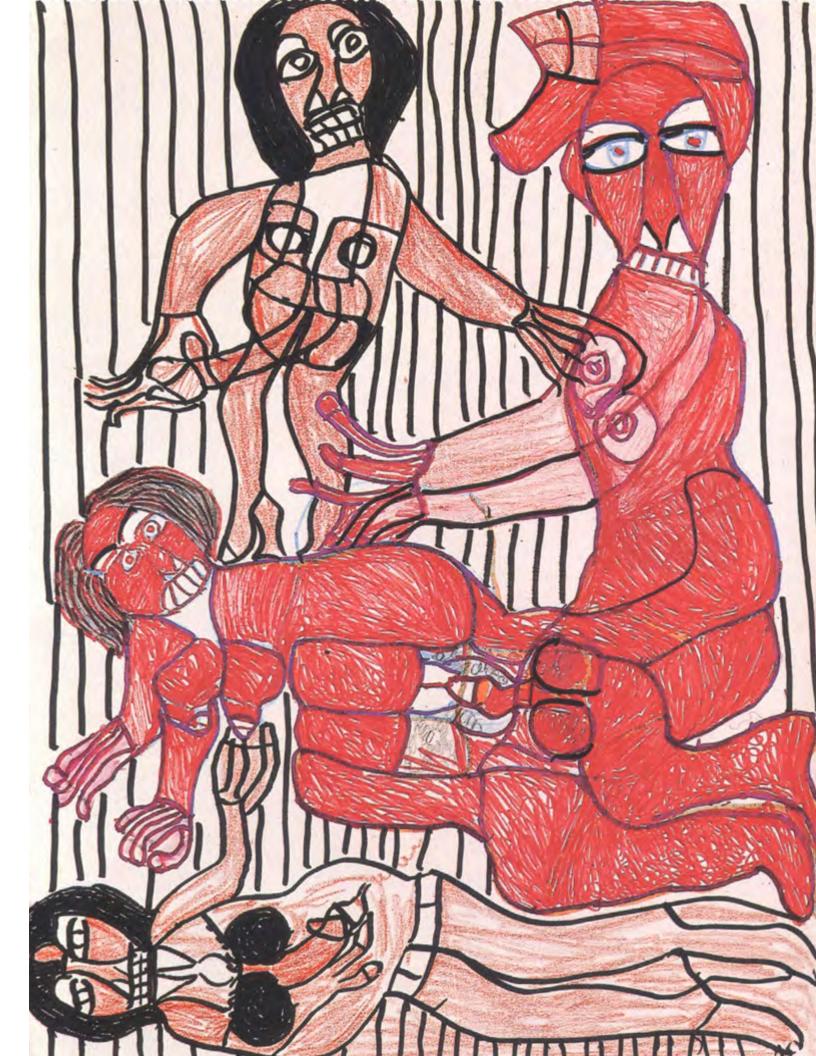
To return to recollections of Speller's life, working chin-deep along the Mississippi, thinking 'Don't want to drown,' drawings like *Betty Louis and Her Sisters* (figure 6) illustrate how Speller had devised a way to forget about his work and the misery it produced. According to Freud's idea of the pleasure principle, misery is located in the pains, disappointments and impossible tasks of life, the remedies for which are deflection, substitution or intoxication. Freud writes that, "we are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from the state of things." Seeing the riverboats paddle by, with their music and ladies, Speller very clearly used the life of the riverboats as a substitute in his mind because of the extreme contrast they presented.

Such an act of fending off suffering, placed within the sexual double-meaning described above, is indeed what Freud further described as a displacement of the libido. This displacement affects a shifting or sublimation of instinctual aims and prevents frustration from the external world. The benefit of such artistry serves to embody fantasies and, in Freud's view, to "heighten the yield of pleasure from the sources of psychical and intellectual work."24 The way in which Speller displaces his libido is moreover intensified by the extreme duress of his situation. To be sure, Speller found the reality of wading chindeep in the Mississippi River to be the source of all suffering, driving him to break off from it psychically ('forget the other stuff') once he saw the ladies riding along the river. Freud writes that, within such a separation from reality, "one can try to re-create the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its most unbearable features are eliminated and replaced by others that are in conformity with one's own wishes."25 And it is the process by which Speller did this that links his drawings with the grotesque.

Henry Speller's images, like *Cannon* (figure 10) from 1986, often teeter between the rigid, patterned lines, repeated in both his backgrounds and his figures, and the swirling, wavy lines of the figures' hair, legs, phalluses and arms. This visual tension, I think, plays evocative games with the idea of the jelly roll that



Above: Figure 10. Henry Speller, *Cannon*, 1986, marker, crayon, pencil on paper, 46 x 61 cm, The William S. Arnett Collection (photograph Gamma One Conversions) Opposite: Figure 11. Henry Speller, *Jimmy Reeve, Eddie Scott, Baby Rae, and W.T. Turner Courting*, 1988, marker and pencil on paper, 61 x 46 cm, The William S. Arnett Collection (photograph Gamma One Conversions)





Above: Figure 12. Henry Speller, *Untitled (Couple, Orange Bricks)*, 1982, pencil, marker on paper, 46 x 61 cm, courtesy Luise Ross Gallery, New York Opposite: Figure 13. Henry Speller, *Lisa Jean*, 1987, marker, crayon and pencil on paper, 61 x 46 cm, The William S. Arnett Collection (photograph Gamma One Conversions)





is certainly well accounted for in Freud's pleasure principle. However, the tension in Speller's drawings between backgrounds and figures, movement and stasis, and male and female figures is more accurately discussed in terms of Julia Kristeva's model for understanding the evasive presence of the grotesque and abject. Kristeva posits two types of bodies in her model; both of which are represented in Speller's art. The first is the symbolic. A whole, unified and complete entity, bounded rationally within a circle and square, catering to an ideal, codified body. The second is the semiotic. A more grotesque body in flux, evoking fluidity and excess, related to the anarchic and rhythmic vibration of the living body, "where the contents of the unconscious make their appearance."26 These two bodies interact and are always dependent on the other. They additionally have larger implications for how, through the artist's unconscious, a regulating, judgmentbased societal system is felt to be imposing order or is felt to be overthrown by the driving forces of the body. Comparing these definitional bodies to one of Speller's drawings from 1988 entitled Jimmy Reeve, Eddie Scott, Baby Rae, and W.T. Turner Courting (figure 11), we can see just how strongly Speller's images align with Kristeva's anarchic, semiotic, grotesque and subversive bodies and how they overthrow order with their overt sexuality and brutishness.

In this drawing, Speller is freely mingling male and female bodies. The orginstic scene is peopled by four figures, centered on two red male and female forms that are in the throes of sex. Both of these animated figures reach and grope with fingers which take on a tentacle or phallic form. As they stare out at the viewer, each is fondled by two additional, lighter skinned figures that touch themselves and grit their teeth. The phalluses of this second pair of lovers are curiously out of place, located upon the chest, and, in the figure at the top, form a square/ circle interplay that mimics both the grid of the teeth and the figure's eyes. The loops and lines that form legs, arms, buttocks, eyes, teeth, scrotums and nipples all seem to play a part in the shape-shifting, symbolic/semiotic interaction here. All existing within a space that is itself confined by heavy vertical lines (and, yet, devoid of a floor), these copulating figures are embodiments of Kristeva's semiotic, grotesque body. They seem to break free of the containment so central and so threatening to Speller's symbolic, ideal forms; forms that, in other drawings by Speller, comfortably adhere to established conventions of decorum (figure 7).

From the jello shaking flesh of *Queens of the Boat* to orgiastic scenes like *Jimmy Reeve*, *Eddie Scott*, *Baby Rae*, and *W.T. Turner Courting*, Speller's figural drawings contrast sharply with the fancy ladies Speller had described on the riverboats along the Mississippi.Indeed, each figural drawing is the embodiment of Kristeva's notion of the abject. An element which she defines as:

something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. ...[It is] what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. ...He who denies morality is not abject ...Abjection ...is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barrier instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to finding the abject in the art of Henry Speller, we find that all of these definitions of the abject make their way into the deep, cathartic experiences evoked in the lyrics of the blues - from rejection to a lack of protection, disruptions of order, treachery, lying, death and murder - with a smile.

For an example of the abject within the experiences of the blues, we look again to Howlin' Wolf. Among his songs of love, women and sex, he wrote songs entitled "Killing Floor," "Moaning for My Baby," "Don't Laugh at Me," and, most telling, "Commit a Crime." This last song bears a direct relation to the abject. It sings of a woman trying everything she can to effect the death of a spouse through menial everyday tasks. Its lyrics are:

I'm leaving you, woman, before I commit a crime, I'm leaving you, woman, before I commit a crime, You tried so hard to kill me, woman, it just was not my time.

You put poison in my coffee, instead of milk or cream.

You put poison in my coffee, instead of milk or cream.

You 'bout the evilest woman, that I ever seen.

You mix my drink, with a can of Red Devil Iye, You mix my drink, with a can of Red Devil Iye, Then you sit down, watch me, hoping that I might die.<sup>28</sup>

Howlin' Wolf sings of a wife hoping for her husband to die, watching him, supposedly with a smile on her face, grinning at him so as not to let on that anything out of the ordinary is occurring.

This smiling wife is the embodiment of Kristeva's abject and relates in many ways to many of Speller's drawings of men and women, such as Untitled (Couple, Orange Bricks) (figure 12). In this drawing, as in Howlin' Wolf's song, a wife presents a disingenuous appearance to her husband. She tilts her head and opens her mouth. She is either smiling or laughing, and yet has a threatening appearance. Her husband also smiles and glances over to her, trusting the woman who poisons his coffee. For him, she is - in both song and drawing - the abject, the something from which he does not part, from which he does not protect himself, the something that does not respect the rules of marriage, indeed 'a hatred that smiles.' Speller depicts this couple, smiling at each other, yet maniacally gritting their teeth, in order to hint at such cathartic experiences in real life and to comment on the blues inscriptions that point to the abject around us.

Alternatively, we can also understand the abject as a means to gain authority, visiting the boundaries between order and flux in order that one might question the very notion of order. For, as Leesa Fanning writes, "power lies at the margins of socially constructed categories because this is where meaning is questioned and challenged." The jelly roll and its repeated manifestation in Speller's drawings, like Lisa Jean (figure 13), can in fact be viewed as an indication of the artist's ability to break free of the symbolic, ordered body in his fantasies, ultimately helping him to assert a level of power.

Furthermore, in Speller's work entitled *William Henry Roscoe Cummingjoe is Ready* (figure 14), these boundaries between order and flux – between the symbolic body and the semiotic – move front and center. Speller depicts a body with an enlarged phallus. The orifice, the edge where bodies meet, forms part of this body's powerful stance. Speller has set aside the fantasies projected onto the outer world and instead finds solace where the body threatens to break free of containment. It is a unique example of

the artist isolating a male body to depict an abstract, powerful image that is capable of breaking free of the symbolic, ideal body of decorum. This example, separate from the fantasies generated from the pretty ladies dancing on the riverboats, shows the body held in this tension between order and flux. The wavy lines that form the figure's legs, fingers and hair seem to shake just like the jello shaking flesh of Howlin' Wolf's women and Speller's fantasy drawings.

We must understand that the continual catharsis of the blues is an everyday thing; a daily admission of pain that can only be overcome by visiting the margins, "where meaning is questioned and challenged." Speller, like Howlin' Wolf and innumerable other blues musicians, looks to "something rejected," "a smiling hatred," to find the limits of a regulating, judgment-based societal system, in order to more accurately keep this symbolic system in tension with the semiotic. These fantasy drawings remind Henry Speller of a greater suffering experienced in another, earlier time on the Mississippi; a catharsis which prevents the events in the more immediate present from frustrating him.

Blues music has rhythm, just as Speller's drawings have colour; elements that in both cases balance out suffering or grotesquery. The blues aesthetic, of which Speller had been an astute critic, provides an operative, discursive universe of associative meaning that endlessly reorients words and bodies within a framework of lighthearted color and form. Words and bodies become playful puns that are inserted into a never-ending rhetorical game. Even when put onto paper in finalized form, Speller's figures, like his houses, planes, and even his more congenial figures, all shake with the suffering of reality or wobble with a semiotic, subversive sexuality that indeed exists within everyone. These drawings are indexes that visualize pain. But it is a redemptive pain that, through suffering, offers meaning, power, and finally solace in better memories.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Richard Powell, *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism* (Washington, DC: The Washington Project for the Arts, 1989): 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>There are only a handful examples of other African American artists/musicians of the twentieth century. See, for example, the work of Sister Gertrude Morgan and James 'Son Ford' Thomas in Paul Arnett and William Arnett, eds., *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, vol. 1. (Atlanta:

Tinwood Books, 2000).

<sup>3</sup>Laurie Russell and Ray Allen, "The Art of Henry Speller," *The International Review of African American Art*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Winter 1993/1994): 56.

<sup>4</sup>See Arnett, *Souls Grown Deep*; and Russell and Allen, "Henry Speller."

<sup>5</sup>Russell and Allen, "Henry Speller:" 58, and Arnett, *Souls Grown Deep*: 384-385.

<sup>6</sup>Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "King of Cats," *The New Yorker*, vol. 72 (April 8, 1996): 78.

<sup>7</sup>Other African American artists, such as Mose Tolliver, Thornton Dial, Sr., and Jimmy Lee Sudduth, also created images which fetishized the human body and have similarities to Speller's figural drawings. While there are perhaps common themes at work among the work of these artists, as well as common sources, the present essay is confined to a study of Henry Speller and focuses on his specific context and is not a study of African retentions or the theories that evolved from them.

<sup>8</sup>Arnett, *Souls Grown Deep*: 384.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961):

<sup>10</sup> Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960): 108.

<sup>11</sup>Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 45.

<sup>12</sup>Gates, Signifying Monkey: 49.

<sup>13</sup>Oliver, *Blues*: 114 <sup>14</sup>Oliver, *Blues*: 114.

<sup>15</sup>Russell and Allen, "Henry Speller:" 56.

<sup>16</sup>Arnett, Souls Grown Deep: 385.

<sup>17</sup>Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984): 115.

<sup>18</sup>Baker, *Blues, Ideology*: 121.

<sup>19</sup>Gates, Signifying Monkey: 114.

<sup>20</sup>Howlin' Wolf Blues Lyrics, "Mr. Airplane Man," The Online Blues, http://www.theonlineblues.com/howlin-wolf-mr-airplane-man-lyrics.html.

<sup>21</sup>Paul Oliver, *Screening the Blues: Aspects of the Blues Tradition* (London: Cassell, 1968): 208-209.

<sup>22</sup>Howlin' Wolf Blues Lyrics, "Shake For Me," The Online Blues, http://www.theonlineblues.com/howlin-wolf-shake-for-me-lyrics. html.

<sup>23</sup>Freud, Civilization: 25-26.

<sup>24</sup>Freud, *Civilization*: 29.

<sup>25</sup>Freud, Civilization: 31.

<sup>26</sup> Leesa Fanning, "Willem de Kooning's Women," in Frances S. Connelly, ed., *Modern Art and the Grotesque* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 244.

<sup>27</sup>Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 4.

<sup>28</sup>The words to this song were not listed under Howlin' Wolf's lyrics, but under that of Kenny Wayne Shepherd. See Kenny Wayne Shepherd, "I'm Leaving You (Commit a Crime)," Lyricsmania, http://www.lyricsmania.com/lyrics/kenny\_ wayne\_shepherd\_lyrics\_27830/other\_lyrics58353/im\_leaving\_you\_commit\_ a\_crime\_lyrics\_591449.html. Howlin' Wolf did however record the song. It appears on Howlin' Wolf, The Chess Box, MCA Records, CHD3-9332.

<sup>29</sup>Fanning, "de Kooning's Women:" 246.



## José María Garrido: A Sailor without the Sea

The waters around the Spanish coastal town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda are perilous for sailors and fishermen. Here the cold and treacherous waters of the Atlantic Ocean crash as they strike the warmer swells of the Mediterranean Sea, emboldened even further by the rushing fresh currents of the Guadalquivir River, as it finally reaches the sea after wending its way through some 660 km of Andalucían countryside. Conditions on February 13, 1959 were particularly hazardous, as the crew of a small fishing boat that included José María Garrido and his best friend José Sánchez Pérez, struggled once again to bring in the catch that would feed the village and their families. The men were not novice sailors; they had each worked for nearly two decades in these waters. Suddenly, the boat careened, and the anchor, dislodged by the storm, wrenched loose, catching Sánchez's pants leg and jerking him overboard. Dragged down by the waves and weighted by the layers of heavy woollen clothing that he was wearing to protect himself from the gnawing cold, he guickly sank into the roiling, freezing waters and disappeared forever.

After that tragic day, Garrido, son of fisherfolk, grandson of fisherfolk, never again touched the sea. It still holds his heart and tugs at his spirit; he walks beside it and collects its unwanted detritus from the shoreline, but he has neither ventured onto another boat nor swum in its waters. The disaster of his friend's abrupt disappearance and death, with a pregnant wife and five young children left behind, resulted in a trauma so immense that it changed his life completely.

Instead, he decided to dedicate his life to creating a museum, to pay homage to his friend and show respect for and deference to a sea whose essence was simultaneously life-sustaining and deadly. He chose for the purpose a derelict building constructed in 1503 as the *Alcaicería*, the import/export centre for the American trade, but which had most recently been a whorehouse renowned as the last stop for sailors leaving town. Garrido envisaged a museum replete with treasures, telling the stories of the sailors

who worked the sea, as well as those of people who had arrived and left via those waterways. The collections would bear witness to their tales, would memorialize their lives, and would help him to work through his grief. "El Mar lo ha sido todo en mi vida," he wrote; the sea has been everything in my life.

Garrido was born November 11, 1925 in Sanlúcar de Barrameda's Bajo de Guía neighbourhood, a beachside community frequented by those whose livelihood depended on the sea; a barrio pushed up against the waters where the smell of fish being hauled in, traded, sold, and prepared was omnipresent. Once renowned for its poverty, this area has in recent years been reborn as a seaside tourist destination—particularly for those with an interest in the local gastronomy-yet Garrido nostalgically remembers the sights and smells of the Bajo de Guía of his childhood. Son of boatman Antonio Garrido and his wife Manuela García, José María and his two brothers and four sisters grew up within the orbit of fishermen, learning the trade and helping out; not surprisingly, all of the boys became sailors.

The name of Sanlúcar de Barrameda conjoins the words of the two primary cultures of Andalucía: from the Arabic shaluga, the name of the east wind known as Scirocco, and from the cry of Spanish sailors plumbing the depths of the river with a bar, crying out "barra me da" (the bar gives me room) if the sea bottom was of sufficient depth to handle the ship (here the word barra also refers to the estuary itself). The city became one of Spain's most important ports during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a vital link connecting the ports of the Mediterranean with those of the Atlantic Coast of Europe and the Americas. Numerous explorers, conquistadores, and merchants departed from these shores. Perhaps most famously, Christopher Columbus and his crew set forth with six ships on their third voyage to the New World in 1498, and Ferdinand Magellan's five vessels sailed out in 1519 on their mission to circumnavigate the globe. Today, some 63,000 residents work primarily in fishing, tourism, and viniculture trades.

During Garrido's formative years Spain was enmeshed in Civil War and he never attended school, since children of the lower classes had to work in order to contribute whatever little financial support they could to their families. He taught himself to read and write and later became a prodigious



reader, particularly interested in the history of his city, his region, and his country. He received his sailing license in 1941, working the seas until that fateful day in 1959.

Garrido speaks of his missing friend as if he were a lover. Somehow he felt that he could have prevented his friend's death, and felt guilty that he himself survived. He prevailed upon his colleagues to sail up and down the coast looking for the body, but it was never found. So, trying to separate himself from the sea and everything that might remind him of his loss, he and his wife moved to France, where he worked low-paying construction jobs. The journey was undertaken without saying goodbye to anyone, including his mother, because he was afraid that one look at her face would prevent him from leaving. They stayed for eight years, during which time they were not allowed to have children as a result of their living situation and his work. Though they were careful, in 1968 his wife became pregnant and could no longer work, so they returned to Spain. Ultimately they had seven children, six of whom were boys.

Having saved a small amount of money in France, and returning to Sanlúcar with the idea of becoming a marinero en tierra [a sailor on dry land], Garrido purchased the old Alcaicería. This decrepit old building near the market, some 3.5 km inland, was long and narrow (14 meters long by only 4 meters wide), so with a bit of imagination the structure could be described as being shaped somewhat like a boat and, therefore, fitting for a maritime museum and homage to his lost friend. He made his living during this time working as an unskilled labourer and also as a sign-painter. Among his most important clients for the latter were the sherry producers Florial, Aurora, Manantial, and others, and some of his flowery lettering still graces local storefronts and businesses. His lettering skills are also brilliantly evident at all levels and in all areas of the Museum itself. The southern and, to an even greater extent, eastern façades of the building are covered with dozens of framed signs, colourfully hand-painted on cardboard or scavenged wood, each quoting a saying or proverb known to the local sailors and fisherfolk. Some are specifically referential to his fallen colleague, Sánchez, paying homage to his life and works. Others more generally treat the life of the sailor, often with deprecating humility and black humour. The phrases are beautifully inscribed in Garrido's trademark flowing calligraphic style, his selftaught literacy expressed in a script that looks more

drawn than written. They are also poetically fluid, and Garrido has been compared more than once to Andalucian poet Rafael Alberti<sup>1</sup> in looks, demeanour, and practice.2 The signs are punctuated with his museum's coat of arms. Painted and/or fabricated in a variety of different media, this emblem appears on several exterior and interior walls of the Museum. It reads Luci Feri Fanum, which he translates as Luz del lucero de la mañana (Light of the Shining Star of the Morning). This emblem is remarkably similar in design and dictum to the coat of arms of the city of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, which reads instead Luciferi Fanum Senatus, adding a reference to the governing body. Both sets of arms feature the Spanish royal crown over a brick tower that rises up behind a prone white-winged bull resting upon a slim book floating in undulating waves.

Entrance to the Museum used to be free, but in recent years Garrido instituted a €2 entrance fee. which he earmarked for maintenance of the building. The entrance door itself is covered in a variety of signs that serve both to entice ("Con Derecho a un Pequeño Regalo" - the entrance fee gives one the right to a small present) and caution ("El día que me muera no me venga a busca[r] no me encontrará en la tierra estaré en el fondo del mar" - The day that I die don't come looking for me, you won't find me on land, I will be at the bottom of the sea). This door is located halfway down the eastern façade, fronting the driveway separating the Museum from La Cigarrera, a producer of manzanilla (a chamomilebased sherry that is one of the principal products of the area). Crossing the threshold of the Museum entrance, the visitor is confronted with a steep staircase. The bottom third of the walls are overlaid with polychromatic ceramic tiles typical of Andalucía and much of southern Spain, but stretching above the tiles up to the ceiling the walls are completely covered with shells, signs, and numerous historical photographs, prints, and drawings of maritime subjects. Although Garrido says that he does not believe in God, there are also altars to the Virgin of Carmen, patron saint of the sea and protective of those who work her waters, all built upon and surrounded by a sheathing of shells.

Garrido discovered his passion for shells while gathering shellfish, and beginning the year following his return from France he went out daily to collect. The interior walls of the Museum are now encased with more than 80,000 sea snail and conch shells. This inspired the museum's nickname, the *Museo de* 



Garrido with the reconstruction of his ship Amparito, northernmost room, Museo del Mar by José María Garrido, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz), Spain, © Jo Farb Hernández, 2009

Mar 'Las Caracolas' – The Sea Snail Shell Museum of the Sea. The shells are primarily simbium, which he finds on the western shores, and cañailla, from the direction of Cádiz. He specifies the beaches around Malandar and Coto as excellent gathering areas, but he walks along the shore from Torre Jacinto to Carboneros, and is proud that—with the exception of a fossilized shell from around Jerez (around 27 km to the southeast) given to him by a friend, all of the shells in his museum are found in the immediate vicinity of Sanlúcar. He notes that they are now more difficult to find, and likens this to the fishing boats whose decks were once laden with piles of fish, but that now bring home small catches in little plastic boxes. "That says it all," he comments ruefully.<sup>3</sup>

Garrido's daily collecting expeditions, along with his avid reading, have turned him into a passionate historian of the sea, and he maintains a running commentary for visitors to the Museum, recounting the legends and stories that provide such a sense of place to the old-timers, and how they shaped his natal city. He dresses like a sailor, speaks in the sailor's idiom, and, to the extent possible, continues living like a sailor, albeit one who never touches the waters.

The Museum stairway circles up and opens out onto the narrow first floor, with a long hallway running the length of the building that jogs around the stairway door. This hallway, as well as the several rooms that open off from it, is likewise covered in shells and maritime objects. A narrow ledge fronting the eastern wall displays a quantity of small religious altars that he has fabricated: commercial saints' cards surrounded with an arched housing of shells, offered for sale from €5 - 10. There are also small wooden boat models that he has glued together from cast-off lumber, miniature ships mounted inside bottles, and the ubiquitous sharks' jaws, offered at €5 apiece. He used to bring these souvenirs out to the nearby plazas to sell, but sales have never been brisk.

Within the small rooms of this level, the shell-covered walls are layered with historical photographs of old ships, framed signs painted with maritime proverbs, fragments from shipwrecked vessels, dried sharks' jaws, tortoise shells, ship models, sailors' knots, and innumerable other objects that he has gathered from the beaches after storms. Some have significant value, such as crucibles used for melting gold and silver recovered from a German ship that sank in the

16th century, Roman and Spanish coins from the time of the discovery of America, antique pistols, and more.4 The reefs off of the Doñana coastline, where the Guadalquivir empties into the Atlantic, have beached or destroyed nearly fifty ships, and this has made for rich treasure hunting. Some days Garrido would return from his wanderings along the shore with a 40 kg sack of shells and marine detritus. If he found too many treasures in a given day, he might rebury them so as to protect them, returning on another occasion to dig them up and bring them back to his Museum.5 He also finds valuables in the castoff garbage of the fish market, bars, or restaurants; of special interest are fish heads, which he cleans out with tongs and a knife, props open with a stick, and dries in the sun in order to sell the menacing open jaws to tourists. Despite his care, they have wounded him as well, as the numerous scars on his hands attest.

With the exception of one room and a bathroom, which are used as an office by one of Garrido's sons, who is a dispatcher and court guard, not a single space in the house is left unadorned. In many instances he glued the shells onto square or rectangular boards that were then nailed to the interior walls. The effect is furry, pulsating, animated. Each room within the Museum has a unique feeling, yet is aesthetically and conceptually unified by the intense over-ornamentation of maritime abundance. Among the displayed materials are over 250 annotated historical photographs, most from the end of the nineteenth century featuring the city of Sanlúcar, including images of the old Fort, the sumptuous hotels and homes lining the beaches, the avenues and walkways, fish market scenes, old steamships and fishing vessels, local personalities, visiting celebrities, bathers 'taking the waters,' and more. His work also includes humour, such as a 'treasure chest' overflowing with (mostly plastic) 'jewels' as well as stones, shells, and swords. This rather amusing display is counterbalanced by a series of shelves on the opposite wall that exhibit some of the more truly valuable and historic finds, including coins, ceramic vessels, fossils, metal implements, and more. Many are annotated with captions or proverbs written out in his fluid script in the style of old-time history museums. Placards describing ships' voyages and listing the names of the crews (particularly those who perished at sea) plaintively recount the perils of the waters; one of these is a plague soberly listing the eighteen crew members













Top to bottom: Eastern wall, Garrido bedroom, *Museo del Mar* by José María Garrido, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz), Spain, © Jo Farb Hernández, 2009; Coats of arms and collected objects, antechamber, *Museo del Mar* by José María Garrido, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz), Spain, © Jo Farb Hernández, 2009

who returned to Sanlúcar from Magellan's voyage, the sole survivors of the original 265 sailors who left the port. Directly below this commemoration, Garrido has created a monument to the Jewish Holocaust. This is comprised of a pile of miniature plastic dolls and skulls mounted on top of a base of flat shells, with a caption that identifies the memorial and pleads for peace. He was moved to create this homage, he notes, because during the Franco period censorship was so extreme that people had not even heard about the Holocaust.

Garrido's bedroom is located in the front and southernmost room of the house, facing the street; wooden double doors close off the single window clad in ironwork, their interior faces painted with anchors and seagulls in flight (the exterior of the window is blocked by large boards on which various painted fish and sea creatures randomly float on a blue background, as well as with the coat of arms and a painted advertisement for the sale of sharks' jaws within the Museum). On the western side of this tight room, a narrow berth has been built into the wall. A sign above the bed proclaims this to be the berth of the ship's captain. The walls are adorned with more shells, ship models, shark jaws, paintings and photographs - particularly of sailing ships; a small mirror, tiny clock, and slim, tall chest of drawers seem to be the only standard bedroom furnishings. He has painted sections of the walls, floors, doors, and furniture in this room (as he has in others) with vivid, contrasting colours, primarily using strong abstract designs that look almost tribal in nature, further augmenting the intensity of the site's visual impact. Some of the paint he scavenged from the trash, but he also has figured out how to make paint on his own, by finding old cans of used oil from automobiles, stirring in pigments, and then adding a desiccant. He never had an art class or a class in mixing paints; he simply improvised a formula that works.

In one of the rooms towards the rear of the building, Garrido has constructed a small replica of the prow of the *Amparito*, the fishing boat on which he sailed with Sánchez. It juts out from the wall, a two-dimensional painted "sailor" navigating from behind a fabricated outlook. The prow is filled with shells. Asking permission of visitors, he turns out the light, then lifts and turns the shells with both hands, reproducing the sound of waves hitting the breakwater with astounding precision. The movements of his arms are graceful and fluid as he moves the shells; the

nostalgic dance of a man who viscerally understands the waxing and waning of the waves and is homesick for their swelling caress.

A rooftop terrace is reached from a narrow winding staircase at the end of the dark, cramped hallway towards the rear of the house. The roof affords a panoramic view of a large part of the city, a respite from the confined spaces of the Museum itself, as well as from the congested passageways and winding streets of the old market quarter in which it is located. Echoing the building's long, narrow floor plan, Garrido easily adapted the terrace to the shape of a boat, adorning the rooftop with masts, signs, and painted flags from many nations, in what is probably the most impressive part of the site. He describes the building as a boat of dreams, and on the rooftop terrace he has recreated sections of the Amparito yet again. Everything is built from recycled materials: discarded fish cans from sardines and mackerel, scavenged low-grade crate lumber, the ripped and cast-off tarpaulins and awnings from the carts of street vendors. Poking through the bottom of the eastern edge of the roof's parapets are twelve black plastic tubes reminiscent of a ship's cannons, pointed outward. Garrido stresses that the cannons are there not to attack, but only to defend, at least symbolically, against the city council and others who would assail his Museum and life's work.

This site is clearly significant to anyone interested in the maritime history of this important port, let alone to those drawn to the aesthetic value of the composite installations within and on its exterior. However, because the building is in an area the city council would like to renovate, they have offered to purchase it (to demolish), but Garrido, citing its historical and cultural value, has vehemently refused. In the face of his intransigence, the municipality has purchased the building next door—even more of a ruin, without even a roof. This corner house stands directly across the street from the main market, impeding the daily morning delivery of fish, meats, produce and other comestibles of all kinds. It is now official municipal policy to let this city-owned building rot, hoping that as it falls, it will take the Museo del Mar down with it, thus providing a more open space for the delivery and loading requirements of the market, as well as giving them the potential to create a new apartment building for residential use. Some demolition on that contiguous building has split open cracks in his own, and Garrido is fearful that should sufficient degradation occur, the municipality will simply declare



his Museum to be hazardous and uninhabitable and pull it down.<sup>6</sup> He is incensed by the duplicity of the municipal officers, who he describes as wealthy urban speculators, creating laws that others must follow, including the prohibition against abandoning and letting a building deteriorate such that it might become a danger and damage a nearby structure, but that they themselves ignore. He has spoken to an attorney in the city of Zaragoza, but to date they have been unable to force the city council to either rehabilitate or demolish the Museum's dangerous neighbour. Neither has the governing administrative body of Andalucía provided support in any way, although their representatives have visited his site.

Garrido does not understand this policy of undermining his museum. He points out that the Museo del Mar is recommended in several "offbeat" tourist guides to the area (although in none produced by the City), yet despite the visitors that he draws, he has never received any support, help, or even official recognition from the municipality.7 Locals rarely, if ever, visit, and most who live or work beyond the market quarter are not even aware of its existence. It is more an attraction for out-of-towners, many of who learn about it by word of mouth. The decades spent in development, added to the sentimental and emotional value the Museum holds for Garrido, are much more than any sum of money that the city would be willing to pay. "They have pressured me in many ways to sell but I cared for it and maintained it as if it were a child," he laments, "and one doesn't sell one's children for all of the money in the world."8 He would give his museum to the City, though, if they would agree to maintain it as a legacy for the local inhabitants, but apparently the city council has no interest in this. "If they want to knock it down," he says, "they'll have to kill me first."9 The painful burden he bears each day is a belief that they are simply waiting for him to die, at which time they will build modern apartments in the Museum's place.

Yet he will not passively accept this anticipated intervention. Drawing upon his sign-making skills, he has created oversized placards, painted in bright colours, that are posted around the top of the roof terrace and on the front of the building, protesting against urban speculation and "renewal". They include such proclamations as 'This too is Sanlúcar', 'Garrido's ship will not be moved', 'No to Demolition', 'Let's Save the Museum', as well as, plaintively, 'The Museum Begs for Justice'. He has pledged not to 'abandon ship', saying that if

one day you find out that the boat has fallen, you can be sure that Garrido is dead. 10 He is, however, discouraged enough to have, to all intent, closed his museum to the public. If cajoled he will sometimes allow a visit by appointment. For a time he tried to earn a living selling shells, shark jaws, ship models, maritime souvenirs, and the little saints' altarpieces in the nearby Plaza de la Ciudad, or the Plaza del Cabildo, drawing attention with an old music player that cranked out pasodobles and coplas, but when I first visited with him in early 2009 he had even discontinued that attempt to attract tourists and earn a few Euros; it was too hard for him to stand for so long, and the people that passed bought very little. Yet in past days when he was offered a 'blank cheque' to buy a specific precious object from his museum, he would always decline, despite having barely a penny to his name. Affable, gentle, and generous, with a prodigious memory, he has worked for more than forty years in order to show his love for his city, for his fellow sailors and fishermen, and for the sea. Unsurprisingly, in his waning years, he wants only to be able to live peacefully without fear that the city will destroy his life's labour. 'I am a slave to my museum,' he says, 'but I am the most liberated slave in the world.'11

The Museo del Mar is a result of an extraordinary tale transformed into an extraordinary presence; it is rare that art environment sites are birthed from such traumatic origins. Conceptualized early on as a monumental undertaking, the Museum grew through accretion and accumulation to become a powerful and compelling shrine, bearing witness to the life and creativity of its author, who opened his most personal and most private collection of objects, reflections, and principles to his family and friends, his city, and other visitors. And although the Museum may now be closed, José María Garrido himself will never forsake his project, for as one of his posted signs on the rooftop reads: 'El arte es un veneno que te oblige a seguir hasta la muerte' – Art is a poison that forces you to follow it until death.



Garrido demonstrates the use of the Captain's berth in his bedroom, Museo del Mar by José María Garrido, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz), Spain, © Jo Farb Hernández, 2009

¹1902 – 1999, Alberti was a member of the "Generation of 1927" along with such figures as Luis Buñuel and Federico García Lorca. A politically-involved leftist during the Civil War, he lived in exile for forty years during Franco's reign, returning to Spain to a hero's welcome only after the dictator's death. His first book, *Marinero en Tierra* [A Sailor on Land], was inspired by the Andalucian folksongs of his youth, and achieved successful renown both in Spain and abroad.

<sup>2</sup>Garrido himself has been working on writing a book that will include quotations from many famous people.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in J. Félix Machuca, "José María Garrido: 'La mar no quiere nada, tarde o temprano lo devuelve," *ABC*, August 30, 2007: 90.

<sup>4</sup>Garrido's finds have included objects of such historical or archeological significance that at least one scholarly document has been written based on the primary materials in his collection. See Fernando de Amores Carredano and Tomás Lloret Marín, "Un lote de Crisoles Triangulares Modernos en Sanlúcar de Barrameda," *SPAL-Revista de Prehistoria y Arqueología* 4 (1995): 265-272.

<sup>5</sup>Hector Garrido, "El Pescador sin Mar," http://www.bublegum. net/fotopectiva/10198/EL+Pescador+sin+mar.htm

Posted September 17, 2007. Downloaded March 20, 2009.

<sup>6</sup>Unfortunately, the demolition of unique residential, religious, and industrial buildings has both history and precedence in Sanlúcar. Among these are the first customs office, built in 1594; several important factories from the 17th century, the Casa Arizón monument from the 17th-18th centuries; and numerous

other important chapels, homes, gardens, and monuments. For further information on the urban demolition of Sanlúcar, despite legislation to protect its historical patrimony, see http://www.gerionsanlucar.com/llegalidades\_Sanlucar.htm

<sup>7</sup>In a striking development in November 2010, Garrido and his family were invited to meet with Sanlúcar's new mayor, who praised him as "a fisherman who is an authentic encyclopedia." With these fine words, and a reception attended by his wife, three of Garrido's children, and six grandchildren, it seemed that the hostile attitude of the municipality towards the Museo might be changing, although commentators were concerned that any changes be determined by Garrido himself, rather than by tourism "experts" who might emasculate it. But, by mid-2011, the concept of demolishing the *Museo* to build apartments was apparently still on the table (Rufino, "El viaje al pasado: El Museo del Mar." *El Correo Web.* August 1, 2011. http://www.elcorreoweb.es/sevilla/127747/viaje/pasado Downloaded January 30, 2012).

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in "Entrevistas con vecinos," n.d.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Rocío Alfaro, "Cuando dejé la mar, mi ilusión era navegar en tierra, y lo he conseguido," *Andalucía Información*, January 29 – February 4, 2005: 22.

<sup>10</sup>Hector Garrido, "El Pescador sin Mar," http://www.bublegum. net/fotopectiva/10198/EL+Pescador+sin+mar.htm.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Julio Bustillo, "Marinero en Tierra," *Trabajo de Fotoperiodismo*, 3º (June 2008): 11.



Seymour Rosen (American, 1935-2006), Watts Towers Interior, June 1976, Ectachrome transparency, 25.4 x 20.3 cm, © SPACES

## SPACES: Past Successes, Future Goals Jo Farb Hernández

"There is something out there."

With these words Seymour Rosen (1935-2006), Founding Director of the nonprofit organization SPACES – Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments — helped to introduce the world to the aesthetic genre of art environments<sup>1</sup> — a genre that now has become broadly recognized, respected, and the subject of numerous exhibitions, films, articles, books, and websites around the world. At a time when it may seem that this genre of work has always been accepted and documented — if not always appreciated or preserved — it is worth remembering some of the early pioneers that helped to establish what we now know as "the field."

While the need for an organization to document and mobilize support for art environments was identified in the U.S. as early as the late 1950s when a group of concerned citizens fought to save Sabato Rodia's Towers in the Watts section of Los Angeles, SPACES was not formally organized until 1969. It achieved its official nonprofit status in 1978.

Rosen noted that "extemporaneous individual acts of people declaring their existence" were universal, but, as so many of them were ephemeral, they were also almost universally unrecorded in a consistent manner.

SPACES was formed to fill that gap, and Rosen's tens of thousands of photographs of such artwork became the basis for the archives. He approached the world holistically, and the tremendous range of material included in SPACES's archives reflected this approach: although the bulk of the collection centers on art environments, it also includes significant sections on other widely diverse expressions of human artistic activity, including art cars, costumes, happenings, graffiti, murals, parades, tattoos, vernacular architecture, and more. Today, under the direction of curator, author, and professor Jo Farb Hernández, the organization continues to focus on its mission to:

- IDENTIFY large-scale art environments and other publicly-accessible self-taught artistic activities:
- DOCUMENT these artworks through a wide range of visual and audio records;
- COLLECT publications and ancillary information about these works;
- ADVOCATE for their preservation.

SPACES's national Board of Trustees has codified new infrastructural, organizational, and programmatic goals:

- RESEARCH: to fill gaps in the photo and document collections, as well as to identify, conduct primary research on, and document newly-identified sites;
- ARCHIVING: to upgrade maps and databases, digitize photographs and collection materials, and migrate antiquated resources to new formats;
- DISSEMINATION: to publish data and research via online and traditional media organs, curate exhibitions, and consult with individual researchers and community groups;
- ADVOCACY: to produce model guidelines, criteria, and field survey forms for comprehensive site documentation and preservation.

Perhaps SPACES's most vital service is the ability to provide vintage documentation of art environment sites which are no longer extant. As exclusive representative of the works and collections of Seymour Rosen and copyright holder of his images, SPACES is pleased to make these resources—some of them one-of-a-kind—available for inclusion in books, films, exhibitions, and other projects. Information on accessing these materials and visiting the archive is available by visiting our new website, www.spacesarchives.org

With this award-winning website, SPACES is able to provide an eye-dazzling, encyclopedic resource on the rich genre of art environments, continuing and expanding its founder's passion for discovering, documenting, saving, and preserving these sites—and making them available to all. The website will both facilitate scholarly investigation and delight casual explorers, all of whom are invited to contribute to this expanding resource. By continually adding to this rich online archive, SPACES is building what will become the largest digital library of this kind of material in the world.

<sup>1</sup>Rosen himself used the term "Folk Art Environments." However, this implies work linked to a collective heritage, reflective of shared standards and aesthetics, and transmitted across generations. In contrast, the work of builders of these monumental structures is more often based on a unique personal aesthetic; therefore, it is now standard to drop the word "folk" from the genre description.