

History of Art 192F
UC Berkeley

Outsider Art and Artists

Wednesdays, 2-5 pm. 425 Doe Library
Kevin R. Muller, Ph.D.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The term “outsider artist” evokes the image of a frenzied creative type working at the margins of society. And yet, there exists today a whole series of established, mainstream institutions devoted exclusively to these artists: traditional and online galleries, a study center, a regularly published journal, even a museum with 55,000 square feet of exhibition space. It would seem, then, that the outsiders have become insiders. This seminar focuses on the paradoxical status of these artists, examining Outsider Art as a cultural phenomena that embodies the contradictions and complexities of modernity and postmodernity. We will begin the semester by locating the phenomena of Outsider Art within the appropriate histories. Then, through a series of case-studies, each focused on a single artist, genre, or theme, we will work to understand the frameworks by which these artists and their artwork is most often interpreted. Along the way, we will problematize prevailing interpretative strategies in order to formulate alternative approaches. Students will be expected to implement the insights gained through class discussions in a final class presentation and research paper.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

David Maclagan, Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace, London: Reakton Books, 2009

Additional essays and articles, available on reserve in Art History Classics Library and electronically through JSTOR, Project Muse, etc. You will be (mostly) responsible for finding these articles on your own, which is another way of saying that they will not be posted on b-space. I do this because by the time you will be researching your paper, you will need to be proficient in these databases – and others perhaps.

We will watch a number of documentaries, many can be viewed online, others in the Media Center.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

The class is both a seminar and a workshop. Full participation and regular attendance is essential for the success of this class. I expect you to come to class prepared to discuss the week’s readings and having completed any assignments. You should come to class prepared to discuss readings and assignments.

In order to have healthy and fruitful class discussions, I propose the following two points as ground rules.

- Equal participation. Discussion has a purpose. First, talking openly is a way to come to a richer understanding about an issue or topic. Second, discussion is a way we can all learn from each other. Every one of you will have something significant to contribute to each class. Therefore, I want each of you to actively contribute so that you can enrich the experience of everyone else. Participation means telling us what you know or think, but also asking questions. If you are confused or do not fully understand someone’s statement, ask him or her for a clarification.

- Respect. At times the topic of a discussion might not be all that straightforward and thus it might be difficult for any one of us, myself included, to say exactly what we mean. When this happens, do not convey your impatience toward that person. Instead, ask for clarification. Along the same lines, give all speakers your full attention at all times. If I find you doodling, texting, or reading something other than your notes, I will ask you to leave the classroom immediately.
- Turn off your cell phone when in class. If you absolutely must take a call, let me know in advance, set your ringtone to vibrate, and quietly take the call in the hall.

Because this class is a seminar where we will all be participating, you may miss no more than two class sessions. If you miss more than two class sessions, I may, at my discretion, drop you from the class.

FIELDTRIPS

There will be formal and informal fieldtrips to places where we can see examples of Outsider Art first hand. The formal ones will take place during class time. Informal trips will be at other times (hence the designation “informal”). While I understand you may not be able to make all the informal trips, you should try to, as they will greatly help you appreciate and understand the material that is the focus of this class.

Formal fieldtrips: Berkeley Art Museum and Creative Growth (Oakland)

Informal fieldtrips might include (we will plan these together):

“Visionary Landscapes” exhibit, at The National Institute of Art & Disabilities (Richmond)

“Pablo Calderon” exhibit at Creativity Explored (San Francisco) [creativityexplored.org]

Ames Gallery (Berkeley)

Albany Bulb (Former landfill, Albany) [<http://youtu.be/3vcO93KBBuU>]

Forestiére Gardens (Fresno) [<http://www.undergroundgardens.com/index.html>]

And maybe:

Elmer Long’s Bottle Tree Ranch, (Barstow) [<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Elmers-Bottle-Tree-Ranch/91587058219>]

Tio’s Tacos (Riverside) [<http://unusuallife.com/riverside-folk-art-installation/>]

Salvation Mountain (near Slab City) [<http://youtu.be/znJ930TiBtY>]

Old Trapper’s Lodge (Los Angeles) [<http://abclocal.go.com/kabc/video?id=8411052>]

GRADING:

Assignments and Participation = 30%

Class Presentation and Final Research Paper = 70%.

Throughout the term, I will include a number of workshops addressing issues related to your research, presentations, and final paper. These are intended to help you produce the best possible paper. With regards to the presentation, think of it as opportunity to opportunity to get a handle on the material, present your argument and evidence, and get constructive feedback. More details to follow.

All assignments and papers are due in class on the due date. No late papers will be accepted. However, if an emergency occurs that prevents you from completing an assignment on time or attending class notify me ASAP and be prepared to provide documentation of your emergency. I will need documentation in order to grant you an extension.

PLAGIARISM:

Absolutely no plagiarism will be tolerated. You must properly acknowledge all your sources for all written assignments and papers. Failure to do so will result in an automatic F for the assignment and the matter will be taken up with the Chair of the History of Art Department.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

1/18 Introduction

1/25 Overview of History, Artists, and Issues

READ FOR TODAY:

David Maclagan, Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace, 2009

[Copy on Reserve in AH/C, also can be read online through EBRARY; look up the book on Oskicat for link to electronic edition.)

2/1 Modernism and the Outsider

READ:

Gilman Sanders, "The Mad Man as Artist: Medicine, History, and Degenerate Art," Journal of Contemporary History, 20:4 (Oct., 1985), 575-97 [JSTOR]

Jean Dubuffet, "In Honor of Savage Values," trans. by Kent Minturn, RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics, 46 (Autumn 2004), 259-68 [JSTOR]

Sarah Wilson, "From the Asylum to the Museum: Marginal Art in Paris and New York, 1938-68," in Parallel Visions, 120-49 [AH/C Reserves]

Roger Cardinal, Outsider Art, New York: Praeger, 1972, 35-47. [AH/C Reserves]

See also this foundation text by Prinzhorn (not required):

Hans Prinzhorn, Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Pathology of Configuration, trans by Eric von Brockdorff, New York, Spring-Verlag, 1972, 11-95 [AH/C Reserves]

2/8 Postmodernism and the Outsider

READ:

Donald Kuspit, "The Appropriation of Marginal Art in the 1980s," American Art, 5:1/2 (Winter-Spring 1991), 132-41 [JSTOR]

Alex Farquharson, "Inside Out," Art Monthly, 242 (December 2000/January 2001), 1-6 [Art Full Text]

Edward M. Gómez, "On the Border," Art & Antiques, 34:2 (February 2011), 74-83. [Art Full Text]

Donald Preziosi, "Art History, Museology, and the Staging of Modernity," in Parallel Visions, 296-307 [AH/C Reserves]

Roger Cardinal, "Toward an Outsider Aesthetic," in The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture, eds. Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr., Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994, 20-43 [AH/C Reserves]

Charles G. Zug III, "Folk Art and Outsider Art: A Folklorists Perspective," in Hall and Metcalf, 124-43 [AH/C Reserves]

2/15 Deconstructing the Genre and Further Anxieties

READ:

Gary Alan Fine, "Crafting Authenticity: The Validation of Identity in Self-Taught Art," Theory and Society, 32:2 (April 2003), 152-180 [JSTOR]

Alexandra Schüssler, "Insanity as a Looking Glass," Etnofoor, 15: 1/2 (2002), 131-51 [JSTOR]

Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr., "From Domination to Desire: Insiders and Outside Art," in Hall and Metcalf, Jr., 212-227 [AH/C Reserves]

Kenneth L. Ames, "Outside Outsider Art," in Hall and Metcalf, 252-75 [AH/C Reserves]

2/22 Case Study I: The Art of James Castle

Fieldtrip to Berkeley Art Museum to see a selection of James Castleworks currently in storage.

READ:

Christopher Mann, "Fringe Elements," Art & Antiques, 31:1 (January, 2008), 62-9 [Art Full Text]

READ OVER/SKIM in order to familiarize yourself with Castle's work: James Castle: A Retrospective, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2008 [AH/C Reserves]

2/29 Case Study II: Environments, Inside and Out

READ:

Deborah Carter Park, Paul Simpson-Housley, and Anton de Man, "To the 'Infinite Spaces of Creation': The Interior Landscape of a Schizophrenic Artist," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 84:2 (June 1994), 192-209

Bettina Brand-Claussen and Malcolm Green, "The Witch's Head Landscape: A Pictorial Illusion from the Prinzhorn Collection," American Imago, 58:1 (Spring 2001) 407-443. [Project Muse]

WATCH:

Grandma's Bottle Village: The Art of Tressa Primbrey, Produced by Allie Light and Irving Saraf, 1983. [<http://www.folkstreams.net/film,102>]

The Monument to Chief Rolling Mountain Thunder, Produced by Allie Light and Irving Saraf, 1983. [[link: http://www.folkstreams.net/film,107](http://www.folkstreams.net/film,107)]

Possum Trot: The Life and Work of Calvin Black, 1903-1972, Produced by Allie Light and Irving Saraf, 1977. [link: <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,105>]

Home of the Double Headed Eagle, Produced by Ali Colleen Neff, Brian Graves, 2006. [link: <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,142>]

Leonard Knight's Salvation Mountain (near Slab City, CA)
[<http://youtu.be/znJ930TiBtY>]

3/7 Case Study III: Alternative Creative Spaces and Practices Fieldtrip to Creative Growth (Oakland)

EXAMINE/READ all parts of: Creative Growth Website: creativegrowth.org

READ OVER/SKIM: Leon Borensztein, One is Adam One is Superman: The Outsider Artists of Creative Growth, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004.

READ:

Roger Cardinal, "Outsider Art and the Autistic Creator," Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of Britain, 364 (2009) 1459-66 (I will email you this text)

3/14 Case Study IV: The Problematic Role of Race

READ:

Judith M. McWillie, "African-American Vernacular Art and Contemporary Critical Practice," in Testimony: Vernacular Art of the African-American South: The Ronald and June Shelp Collection, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002, 11-29 [I'll e-mail you this text]

Kinshasha Holman Conwill, "In Search of the 'Authentic' Vision: Decoding the Appeal of the Self-Taught African American Artist," American Art, 5:4 (Autumn, 1991), 2-9 [JSTOR]

Grey Gundaker, "Tradition and Innovation in African-American Yards," African Arts, 26:2 (April 1993), 58-71+94-96 [JSTOR]

Edmund Barry Gaither, "Witnessing: Layered Meanings in Vernacular Art," in Testimony: Vernacular Art of the African-American South: The Ronald and June Shelp Collection, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 64-79, 2002 [I'll e-mail you this as a pdf]

WATCH:

The Angel that Stands by Me: Minnie Evans Painting, Allie Light and Irving Saraf producers, 1983. <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,71>

3/21 Case Study V: Questions of Gender and Children: Henry Darger

WATCH:

In the Realms of the Unreal: The Mystery of Henry Darger, New York, NY : Wellspring Media, 2005. [Media Center: DVD:4057]

READ:

Leisa Rundquist, "Little Ways: Girlhood According to Henry Darger," SECAC Review, 15:4 [Project Muse]

John M. MacGregor, "I See a World within the World: I Dream but I am Awake," in Parallel Visions, 246-79 [AH/C Reserves]

3/28 NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

4/4 Case Study VI: Prison Art

READ:

Matthew Collings, "Insider Art," Modern Painters, (February, 2011), 22-4
[I will email you this text]

Lynne Adele, Drawings from the Devil House: The Vision of Frank Jones, American Art, 7:2 (Spring 1993), 64-77 [JSTOR]

Melissa Schrift, "Angola Prison Art: Captivity, Creativity, and Consumerism," Journal of American Folklore, 119 (Summer 2006), 257-74 [JSTOR]

Phyllis Kornfeld, Cellblock Visions: Prison Art in America, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997 [AH/C Reserves]

4/11 Student Presentations

4/18 Student Presentations

4/25 Student Presentations

Final Research Paper will be due during Finals Week (TBA)