

Shannon Marie Robinson

## Outsider art

### Online sources for research

In 1922, German psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn published *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill*. The artwork of psychiatric patients published in the book was of great interest to experimental artists like Jean Dubuffet, Max Ernst, and Paul Klee, who had come to find the established art world banal. Dubuffet coined the term *Art Brut* to describe works of art produced by the mentally disabled.

Fifty years later, art scholar Roger Cardinal wrote the first English-language book on the topic of Art Brut. Cardinal's publisher thought the term *Art Brut* sounded too aggressive for a book title,<sup>1</sup> so Cardinal changed the title to *Outsider Art*, the first instance this term was used. Outsider art became a label for all artists creating outside the mainstream art world, including vernacular artists, children, self-taught artists, and mentally and/or physically disabled artists. Outsider artists work without the influence of modern culture, they create solely to fulfill a personal need, without intention to exhibit or sell.

Mental health and social conditions are often considered when identifying an artwork as *outsider*. Adolf Wölfi, one of the first artists to be considered an outsider, spent his adult years in a psychiatric hospital. The prolific artist and novelist Henry Darger was a janitor. Outsider artworks can be miniature, such as British artist Ben Wilson's chewing gum paintings, or large-scale environmental works like Ferdinand Cheval's Ideal Palace in France.

Entire galleries and museums are now dedicated to exhibiting outsider art, and various organizations provide studio space

for mentally or physically disabled artists. Art that was once hidden away in hospital files or seen only by the artist is now internationally bought and sold. In turn, outsider art is beginning to be taken seriously in academia. Scholarly books and journals are emerging, expanding the genre away from its Eurocentric history and offering more international perspectives.

This is not a comprehensive list of outsider art resources. While some galleries and institutions have strong international reputations, their websites lack information and images. Resources recommended here have an informative web presence and are available in English.

#### Publications

- ***Elsewhere-The International Journal of Self-Taught and Outsider Art***. This peer-reviewed journal is associated with the Self-Taught and Outsider Art Research Collection (STOARC) at Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney-Australia. The first issue was published in August 2013. The journal is open access and all issues are available as PDFs; print copies are available for purchase. Colin Rhodes, founding director of STOARC, is the editor, and the editorial board includes scholars such as Roger Cardinal and the Executive Director of SPACES (listed

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under Organizations) Jo Farb Hernández. Access: <http://stoarc.com/>.

• **Out of Art.** This is a Dutch magazine available by subscription. However, *Out of Art* offers English summations of its articles on the website. The summaries introduce readers to new outsider artists and organizations. A link to the artists' websites, galleries, or organizations is included with each summary. Access: <http://www.out-of-art.nl/index.php?pageid=english&catid=english>.

• **Raw Vision.** *Raw Vision* magazine has been publishing outsider art scholarship for 25 years. Though the magazine is only available through a subscription, the website offers a many free resources. An introductory essay and glossary help the novice understand the history and terminology of outsider art. A bibliography, though not updated for the 21st century, is in-depth and international in scope, and a blog roll keeps readers updated on exhibitions and related news. The videos page links to YouTube videos on outsider artists, including interviews and tours of visionary environments. There are also links to galleries and organizations. Access: <http://rawvision.com/home>.

## RAWVISION

### Museum and gallery collections

• **American Folk Art Museum.** This New York City museum has a collection of works by self-taught artists. The museum has four of Henry Darger's original manuscripts and thousands of his source material items. Images of dozens of Darger's paintings and hundreds of works by other outsider artists are available online.



Back issues of the museum's magazine, *Folk Art*, in publication from 1971 to 2008, are also available online. Access: <http://www.folkartmuseum.org/>.

• **American Visionary Art Museum.** This is the first museum in the United States to focus on collecting outsider art and the website is as eclectic as the collection. Each annual exhibition focuses on popular themes within self-taught art such as religion, technology, or storytelling. Search the website's Past Exhibitions pages for images and descriptions. The most useful section of the website is Our Visionaries, which provides brief biographies of the artists represented in the permanent collection. Access: <http://www.avam.org/>.

• **The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art.** In 2010, art collector Anthony Petullo donated much of his European outsider art collection to the Milwaukee Art Museum.<sup>2</sup> Through The Collection section of the website, visitors may view individual works and read artists biographies. The History of Self-Taught and Outsider Art is a lengthy bibliography with excerpts from the recommended books. There are two short videos about outsider art and a list of links to recommended galleries, web material on individual artists, and other resources. Access: <http://www.petulloartcollection.org/index.cfm>.

• **Collection de l'Art Brut.** Jean Dubuffet donated his Art Brut collection to the city of Lausanne, in Switzerland, in the early 1970s. It remains one of the world's most important collections of outsider art, with new work added regularly. The website provides ample information for readers new to outsider art. The collection may be searched by artist name (called authors). Each artist profile includes a sampling of artwork and a short biography. Current and past exhibitions include an overview of the exhibit and links to reviews and related news. The entire collection's digitized inventory, along with other Lausanne art collections, is available to search in French. There are also links to other outsider art collections and information

on current events in the field. *Access:* <http://www.artbrut.ch/en/21070/collection-art-brut-lausanne>.

- **Galerie Christian Berst.** This Paris gallery specializes in Art Brut. The website provides a history of the art movement, a bibliography, and links to other Art Brut organizations. Allowing viewers to find artists' profiles by country or time period is a helpful research tool. Each artist profile includes a biography, bibliography, and selected images. Web pages for exhibitions, past and present, include press statements and selected images from the show. The gallery's exhibition catalogs are bilingual and can be viewed online. *Access:* <http://www.christianberst.com/en/home.html>.

- **Galerie Gugging.** This Austrian gallery exhibits Art Brut artists, old and contemporary, as well as the artists referred to as Gugging Artists. These mentally ill artists live in a group home, the House of Artists, in the village of Gugging, near the Galerie. The gallery's website provides brief artist biographies and PDF versions of the exhibition catalogs, available in German and English. *Access:* [http://www.gugging.org/en/galerie\\_ausstellungen/exhibitions](http://www.gugging.org/en/galerie_ausstellungen/exhibitions).

- **The Prinzhorn Collection.** The collection is limited to works created by psychiatric patients, mostly German and many diagnosed schizophrenic. Though images of the artworks are not available on the site, the Overview and History sections provide an introduction to the work of psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn and this important historical collection. *Access:* [http://www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~gf7/index\\_eng.shtml](http://www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~gf7/index_eng.shtml).

- **Ricco Maresca Gallery.** This New York City gallery showcases self-taught artists and publishes books on outsider and vernacular artists. In the Artists section of the site,

each profile includes a biography, images, and links to related

news articles. The Media section also links to news and videos. Under the heading Vernacular Art, viewers will find images from the gallery collection and sales. The gallery also has a free quarterly online magazine, *fluence*, with image-heavy articles about artists and exhibitions. *Access:* <http://www.ricomaresca.com/>.

## Organizations

- **Creative Growth Art Center.** Located in San Francisco, the center includes a studio and gallery. The studio offers artists with disabilities programming and space to explore their creative practices. Their work is exhibited in the gallery as well as in international galleries and museums, including the Creative Growth gallery in Paris. Images of the artwork and brief biographies of the center's artists are available on the website. The News section of the site is helpful for keeping up to date on international outsider art exhibitions. More news and images of work are available through the center's Facebook and Flickr pages. *Access:* <http://creativegrowth.org/category/news/>.

- **Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art.** This Chicago-based institution provides education programming, events,



and exhibitions. Most significantly,

Intuit houses the Henry Darger Room, a collection of the materials from Chicago artist Henry Darger's apartment. Information about the Henry Darger Room and links to short biographies about Intuit's artists are found under Collection. Visitors can also view images from the permanent collection, though without any information about the artworks. The center's magazine, *The Outsider*, is published twice a year; some older issues are free online through the Publications & Store section. *Access:* <http://www.art.org/>.



• **Outsider Art Fair.** Starting in 1993, the Outsider Art Fair is an annual event of dozens of international galleries showcasing works from the outsider artists they represent. Now managed by gallery owner and art dealer Andrew Edlin, the fair is held in New York City and Paris. Two films on the website introduce the viewer to the fair and some of the prominent curators and scholars. The site also provides an historical overview of outsider art and hundreds of artist biographies with selected bibliographies. The News section is a Tumblr blog of current exhibitions and articles about outsider art. *Access:* <http://www.outsiderartfair.com/>.

• **Souls Grown Deep Foundation.** The foundation exhibits and preserves the work of African American self-taught artists from the American South. Each artist has a profile page with a biography and images of artwork. There is a separate section of the site for the Gee's Bend quilt makers, including an overview and biographies of each of the quilters. The News and Events section links to articles and videos about African American outsider artists and related issues. *Access:* <http://soulsgrowndeep.org/>.

• **SPACES.** SPACES (Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments) is dedicated to documenting and preserving visionary environments and self-taught art. The archive contains tens of thousands of photographs, videos, and artists' documents on more than 1,400 international sites, with an emphasis on American sites. About a third of the collection is available online, searchable by keyword or location. Viewers can also browse by environment types such as interior spaces, gardens, or monuments. *Access:* <http://spacesarchives.org/>.

## **Blogs and other websites**

• **Detour Art.** This is the website of Kelly Ludwig, a graphic designer who is passionate about outsider and folk art. The site is easy to navigate, and Ludwig blogs about self-taught artists, visionary environments, and other resources related to outsider art. Each post includes a brief biography of the

artist, plenty of images of their artworks, and a bibliography for further reading. *Access:* <http://www.detourart.com/>.

• **Fred Scruton Photography and Videography.** Fred Scruton is an artist and professor at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. He has written and photographed for *Raw Vision* magazine. Much of his photography documents the lives and artwork of outsider and folk artists. The Projects section of Scruton's website includes portraits of outsider artists and images of American visionary environments. Under the Artists/Messengers menu, viewers will find more detailed photo essays on select artists. There are also biographical videos documenting the creative process of three artists. Scruton connects to articles and websites about the artists he photographs through the Links and Blog sections. *Access:* <http://fredscruton.com/>.

• **Narrow Larry's World of the Outstanding.** Though the website is cumbersome, it's a treasure trove of links and documents related to outsider art. "Narrow" Larry Harris is a Houston-based architect dedicated to photographing and archiving American visionary environments.<sup>3</sup> The best material is under the heading Visionary Folk Art Environments. Interactive Google maps link viewers to either documentation of the environment on Harris' website or to a web page for the artwork. Links to individual works include images from his personal visits to the sites. *Access:* <http://www.narrowlarry.com/index.html>.

## **Notes**

1. Willem Volkersz, "Roger Cardinal on Outsider Art," *Raw Vision* 22 (1998): 24-25.

2. Mary Louise Schumacher, "Collector of Outside Art to Donate Pieces," *Journal Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), Sept. 29, 2010, [www.jsonline.com/entertainment/arts/104052428.html](http://www.jsonline.com/entertainment/arts/104052428.html).

3. Kelly Ludwig, "Happy Birthday 'Narrow' Larry Harris!," *Detour Art* (blog), March 4, 2013, [www.detourart.com/happy-birthday-narrow-larry-harris/](http://www.detourart.com/happy-birthday-narrow-larry-harris/). *ZZ*