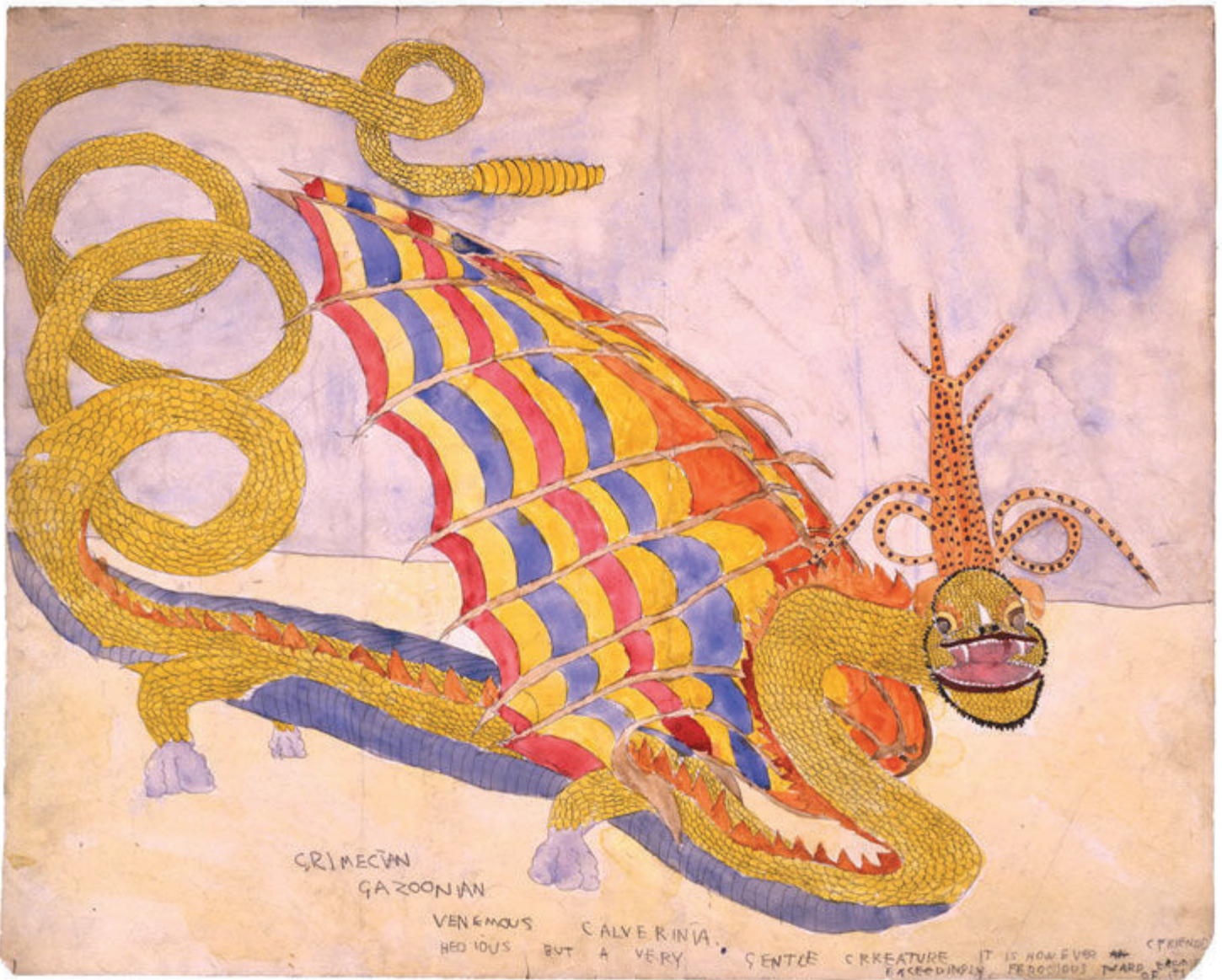


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whitehot | December 2012: Edlin At The Helm for the Outsider Art Fair

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Henry Darger, Grimecian. Courtesy of the Outsider Art Fair.

[Outsider Art Fair](#)

January 31 to February 3, 2013

548 West 22nd Street

When the work of Paul Klee was criticized for resembling scribbles of a mere child, he shot back high praise for the raw, uninhibited creativity youngsters could freely unleash. His greatest hope was that his art could be as good as that of children. Klee knew that most formally-trained artists had the wild, innate creativity schooled right out of them, and many, like himself, sought to rekindle that free flow expression of the kindergarten set, and redolent of primitive cave men and women. For several millennia art wasn't something you learned – rather a visual voice guided by an emotional inner palette – the very same impetus of visionary, outsider artists.

In the past century, the work of self-taught, outsider artists has seen a slow trajectory of recognition. But in recent decades, this multifaceted genre also known as art brut, folk art, intuitive, raw or visionary art, has broken the traditional art barriers and is increasingly sought by museums, collectors, gallery entrepreneurs and many artists themselves. Twenty-one years ago the first Outsider Art Fair in New York City was founded by Sanford Smith. Today, this seminal fair draws a growing number of exhibitors and attendees who appreciate and promote an impressive and diverse base of outsider artists. The fair was recently purchased by Chelsea art dealer Andrew Edlin and his new company Wide Open Arts. Edlin, who was originally turned away from the fair years ago, spoke to Whitehot about his entrée into the edgy world of outsider art and the upcoming fair.

"I started exhibiting at the outsider art fair in 2003. I was a new art dealer and the first time I applied I couldn't get in. That was the way it was. Today, the outsider art fair is the pre-eminent event in this field and it gives everybody a look at what the work is all about. We have the largest cross section of major dealers and it has grown exponentially."

The 2013 fair, which runs January 31 to February 3, will showcase about 40 exhibitors from galleries in London, Switzerland, Tokyo, and across the United States. Of these, ten will be exhibiting for the first time. Exhibitors include former SITE Santa Fe director Laura Steward, New York's Laurel Gitlen, Guided By Invoices, Kinz + Tillou and Vito Schnabel. Rob Tufnell (London), Galerie du Marché (Lausanne) and Pan American Art Projects (Miami). Edlin has put another spin on the fair by introducing guest-curated booths featuring solo exhibitions of the renowned Swiss photographer Mario Del Curto and the North Carolina-based artist and creator of the fictitious country, Rocaterrania, Renaldo Kuhler. Among the guest panelists are Massimiliano Gioni (Chief Curator, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York and Director, 2013 Venice Biennale), Ralph Rugoff (Director, Hayward Gallery, London), Daniel Baumann (Co-Curator, 56th Carnegie International and Curator Adolf Wölfli Foundation, Kunstmuseum Bern). Program director and moderator will be Valérie Rousseau.

"Every year there is something new, whether its work by posthumous artists or new artists we've never heard about. You see things at the Outsider Art Fair you won't see anywhere else, or at any other fair."

Edlin was originally introduced to the genre by his uncle, Paul Edlin (1931-2008), an outsider artist in New York City known for his intricately detailed mosaic work created with tiny fragments of postage stamps. Completely deaf, Paul Edlin was unable to promote his own work and Andrew tried the art rep role on for size. When he showed his uncle's collages to the American Primitive Gallery, they embraced the work with a prominent show, solidifying Paul Edlin's status as a major outsider artist.

"When I saw Uncle Paul's work it was a revelatory experience," says Edlin. "I helped him in 1994, but then, the chances of me becoming an art dealer were about the same as my becoming an astronaut. At the time I was a musician and song writer, and most of my esthetic values were based around music."



Adolf Wölfli. Courtesy of the Outsider Art

Fair.

But after placing Paul Edlin's stamp collages in the American Primitive Gallery, Edlin was hooked. He was able to get his uncle exposure in other venues, including the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore and the Toronto International Art Fair, among others. He checked out other outsider artists and was deeply drawn to the very nature of raw art. "The best outsider art has visceral power and incredible energy, and there tends to be less distance between the art and the artist. There's also a more personal, oral component, a desperate need to communicate. Many outsider artists don't rely on codes or historical reference. Their work springs from a raw state."

Outsider art holds a great mystique that lures those seeking undiscovered work. Originally in the mid to late nineteenth century work was found by patients in asylums, such as Adolf Wölfli. Folk crafts, vernacular art and sculptural earth works (Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Chandigarh) are vibrant examples of the genre where no one expression is stereotypical. As the field exploded, Edlin discovered more outsider art. Sometimes the art found him.

"It's an adventure," says Edlin. "You get sensitized to certain leads. Like the artist John Byam - his art found me. Byam was living in an assisted facility for many years and his work was found and left somewhere in a podunk antique auction house where it knocked the socks off one antique dealer. There's no one story in finding outsider art."

The 2013 Outsider Art Fair promises to be chocked full of goodies. One can expect to see such works of Henry Darger and his *Grimecian Gazonian*: a snickering reptilian undulating under plumed, multicolored parachute wings, the unfurling tail rendering him weightless. Or the art of Adolf Volfli whose surreal and shadowy Nosferatu-

type figures parade with the cross is both scary and fascinating. Also the slathery, luminous work of Thornton Dial is a reverberating commotion on canvas or plywood, or the vibrant tracts of color buzzing with squiggly staccato swirls of J.B Murray.

Not only is the fair's owner new, but it will be held at a new location: 548 West 22nd Street in Chelsea, the former home of the Dia Art Foundation. "I like the name 'Wide Open Arts'" says Edlin. "It's like a new brand identity. The work at this year's fair will reveal seismic shifts in the genre."



J.B. Murray. Courtesy of the Outsider Art

Fair.



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