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Architectural Digest Previews the Outsider Art Fair

Artworks by the untrained and the undiscovered take the stage in Manhattan this week for the Outsider Art Fair, opening Thursday at Chelsea's Center 548. Fifty exhibitors will be featured at the show, which runs through February 1. Matthew Kirk's five-foot painting on Sheetrock, *To Go Where He Went*, will be on display with Manhattan's Louis B. James gallery.

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Art for Art's Sake: Insider Picks at the Outsider Fair

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | JANUARY 29, 2015



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Anyone fed up with the art world's same old, same old will find a bracing antidote at this year's edition of the [Outsider Art Fair](#), which comes to Center 548 in New York from January 29 through February 1. Boasting 50 galleries from eight countries — the biggest edition yet — the fair isn't just for the deep-pocketed; I spotted plenty of covetable work for less than \$1,000, alongside big-ticket items from the likes of Henry Darger and Bill Traylor. And while so-called "outsider" hallmarks abound — plenty of astoundingly obsessive, meticulous markmaking is to be found — it's refreshingly impossible to pigeonhole

However one chooses to define the genre, the commonalities here tend toward the idiosyncratic and eccentrically personal: Art made for its own sake, often without an audience in mind, let alone a market. That sort of passion, in an increasingly careerist climate, is reason enough to spend an afternoon here.

In that spirit, a few idiosyncratic and highly personal favorites would include Eicchi Shibata's pen-on-paper and pen-on-canvas work on view at Yukiko Koide Presents's booth: abstract explosions of dotted and scribbled lines in black, magenta, orange, green, and red. (While the compositions have a quasi-microscopic feel, as if they're depicting life on the cellular level, the artist is evidently capturing the appearance of soap and soap bubbles.) Carl Hammer Gallery has awesome, shimmery paintings of fantastical castles by the late Milwaukee artist Eugene von Bruenchenhein, and a series of expressive landscapes — sinuous rivers, yearning trees — by Joseph Yoakum. Both Carl Hammer and New York's Ricco/Maresca Gallery have drawings by Martin Ramirez (1895-1963); a typical composition, as in a piece at the latter gallery's booth, features an oversized man on a diminutive horse blowing a bugle whose enormous horn emits a rainbow of noise.

New Haven's Fred Giampietro Gallery gives the lion's share of its presentation to experimental Xerox collagist Larry Lewis, who created elaborate artist's books not seen or celebrated until after his death. With their mixture of photocopying and hand-painting, they're equal parts Pop, Monty Python, and Hairy Who. More than 50 large-format books exist; smaller books assembled by the artist have been separated into individual, framed pieces. Fleisher/Ollman Gallery features pieces by another Xerox practitioner, John Patrick McKenzie, who combines photocopied images of accordion players or Neil Young with insistent, stream-of-consciousness poetics ("he is genius he likes Post Raisin Bran cereals in the forties he has light skin he thinks well too much pressure on him").

gowns. Chris Byrne (co-founder of the Dallas Art Fair) has his own solo-curated booth, mixing cartoon-inflected drawings by New Zealander Susan Te Kahurangi King with sketches and studies by the inimitable Peter Saul. Outsider powerhouse Andrew Edlin Gallery has a wealth of good stuff at the fair — my favorites include large-scale drawings by Charles Steffen, and a folded-and-painted-tin work (depicting an enormous deer caught in a net, looming in the foreground of a bucolic mountain scene) by Ronald Lockett.

Louis B. James has a two-person booth, combining marching-band drawings by New Orleans' Bruce Davenport, Jr. (who has a [solo](#) at the gallery's L.E.S. location through February 27) with paintings by Matthew Kirk, including a superb triptych on leaning sheetrock slabs. Shrine, of Brooklyn, has a focus on assemblage by Southern artists, many of whom originally showcased the work in their own front yards. That includes Reverend George Kornegay of Alabama (whose sculptures incorporate things like wooden crutches and Nintendo guns), and Hawkins Bolden, who made elaborate scarecrows out of soup cans, rubber, and other found materials. And Webb Gallery, of Waxahachie, Texas, has one of the fair's most delightfully jam-packed salon hangings (not to mention a functioning Tiki bar). The work on view includes ink paintings by Daniel Higgs, of the band Lungfish; an incredibly detailed, large-scale drawing of what might be a cave's interior, by Hector Alonzo Benavides; and several unexpected gems (including a feline-focused mixed-media piece) by the writer William S. Burroughs, who showed with this Lone Star gallery before his death in 1997.

NEW YORK OBSERVER

No MFA, No Problem: A Look Inside the Outsider Art Fair

By Brianna McGurran | 01/30/15 1:37pm

Hark, art lovers: get thee to the far reaches of Chelsea this weekend and immerse yourselves in the strange and sublime world of the **Outsider Art Fair**. The bright, winding exhibition space at Center548, located at West 22nd Street and Eleventh Avenue, features artwork by some names you already know (Grandma Moses, William S. Burroughs) and some you might not—but will definitely be glad to discover. The show, which runs through February 1, is chock-full of sculpture, drawing, painting, mugshots, flow charts, and beyond.

The artists on view are touted as a hodgepodge of untrained virtuosos who eschewed an MFA for training in the school of life. But looking around the fair at last night's Vernissage, Half Gallery's Bill Powers was spotted milling about the thick crowd chatting up dealers, Thursday's *New York Times* ran not **one**, but **two**, pieces on the fair, and Talking Heads rocker David Byrne Gorney told us. and exhibiting galleries like **Andrew Edlin** and **Hirschl & Adler** have also shown at Art Basel Miami Beach and the Armory Show. There's been a shift. The line between "outsider" and "insider" is getting fuzzy.

Nevertheless, the fair still offers unique finds. So what sets this bunch apart? Outsider artists' colorful backstories are what make them stand out—and what attracts collectors—Bruce Webb, co-owner of Webb Gallery in Waxahachie, Texas and an exhibitor at the fair, told the *Observer* when we dropped by his booth.

"It kind of separates them from the average successful artist," he said. "It just adds a whole other dimension, a sincerity to the work."

Mr. Webb and his wife and co-owner Julie founded their gallery in 1987. Since then, he said, they've seen more young people collecting outsider art, particularly from within their local community of tattoo artists.

Webb Gallery, booth 213, is tucked away in a back corner of the fair on the second floor, but it's one you can't miss. The Webbs have filled their space with vivid, offbeat pieces from primarily Texas-based artists, including **Hector Alonzo Benavides**. There are also standout paintings by visionary Beat writer **Burroughs** and drawings by **Daniel Higgs**, the **lead singer** of Baltimore punk legends Lungfish.

Across the way at **Louis B. James**, you'll find hunks of sheetrock that artist **Matthew Kirk** has covered in oil, spray paint, chalk, and tape to create vibrant abstractions. Mr. Kirk, of Navajo descent, doesn't have a college degree or formal artistic training, but 10 years as an art handler at New York museums has given him all the art education he needs, David Fierman, the gallery's co-founder, told the *Observer*.



Matthew Kirk's beautiful *To Go Where He Went* (2013). (Courtesy Louis B. James)

The special exhibit "**If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day**" is one of the first booths visitors will encounter at the fair. Artist and critic Anne Doran and dealer Jay Gorney have curated a tight selection of pieces by **Mark Lombardi**, who created flow charts that outline Mafia crime networks and explain geopolitical events, and **Adolf Wolfli**, a Swiss farmhand who lived much of his life in a mental institution. They're all in different media, but "there's a quality of line in all the works that really makes it come together," Mr.

Then there's **John Brill**, a self-taught photographer represented at the fair by Kent Fine Art who also happens to be a school bus driver in Madison, New Jersey. The artist spoke warmly with visitors to the booth about his photography process and his beloved day job, which he's had for 25 years. He pointed out a drawing one of the students on his bus route made for him when she was six. "It's one of many," he said. "You should see my refrigerator!"

Mr. Brill's **most stirring pieces** are silver prints of his photos reworked multiple times in the darkroom, or reprinted with bleach, inkjet, and other materials after being developed. His multi-step process creates a ghostly effect, and many of the images are barely recognizable self-portraits. For Mr. Brill, like many of the artists at the fair, the term "outsider" isn't an insult. He said it fits perfectly with his standing in the artistic community.

"It's absolutely natural. I'm like a square peg in a round art world."

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