

# APPROACHING ABSTRACTION





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From the beginning of the 20th century, artists have been exploring the boundaries of abstraction. This section of the exhibition focuses on the work of artists who have pushed the limits of representation, creating works that challenge our perception of reality and form.

The artist's journey towards abstraction is often a process of discovery and experimentation. It involves a deep engagement with the materials and techniques used, as well as a willingness to embrace uncertainty and risk. The resulting works are often characterized by bold, expressive gestures and a sense of dynamic movement.

As we approach abstraction, we are invited to look at the world through a new lens, one that emphasizes the essential forms and colors that underlie our everyday experience. This is not a rejection of the real, but a way of seeing it more clearly, more deeply.

The artist's role is to create a bridge between the visible and the invisible, to reveal the hidden structures of the world and to invite us to see them for ourselves. In doing so, they help us to understand ourselves and our place in the universe more fully.

Through their work, these artists have shown us that abstraction is not just a style or a technique, but a way of thinking and a way of seeing. It is a powerful tool for exploring the human condition and for creating a more meaningful and vibrant world.



# APPROACHING **ABSTRACTION**

October 6, 2009-September 5, 2010

American Folk Art Museum, New York

Brooke Davis Anderson, director and curator, The Contemporary Center

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**T**here are many assumptions about self-taught artists: they work in isolation, they live in rural settings, they have no connection to community or culture, and their artwork is representational, often based on storytelling and personal memories. The popularity of memory painters such as Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses, perhaps one of the best-known artists in this discourse, helped place the emphasis on narrative, leading many to believe that untrained artists do not experiment with a plurality of artistic outcomes. As the field of self-taught artists and their work matures and expands, however, scholarship is beginning to dispute these stereotypes. Many vernacular artists enjoy deep community ties and claim rich cultural influences in their artwork; some even seek out and appreciate an audience. Contemporary autodidacts are as likely to hail from New York City or Chicago as from Alabama or Mississippi. And while realistic renderings do dominate in the work of visionary artists, abstraction and expressionism are explored just as vigorously.

“Approaching Abstraction” is comprised of works from the American Folk Art Museum’s collection that illustrate the diversity of aesthetic choices made by artists with no formal art training, who display tendencies that range from highly expressionistic to fully nonobjective. For some of these artists, their ties to their political, cultural, religious, or occupational realities demand an immersive approach to artmaking that doesn’t deny the subject but subverts it. It is the making, the doing, that supplants the representing; a figure is masked by layers of yarn or splattered paint or jagged shards of form. While much of the work hints at figure, landscape, and architecture, the specifics are altered and remixed to suit the intentions of the artist or the material at hand. Shapes and motifs operate as codes and symbols for personal languages, the meanings of which are hidden from the viewer. Repetition, exaggeration, and distortion are put to work in these paintings, drawings, sculptures, and mixed-media objects and realistic renditions are sacrificed. By accepting the primacy of the material, the artist experiments, and unexpected results lead to a freewheeling approach toward abstraction.

–Brooke Davis Anderson

## OBLITERATING FORM

*She paused regularly to pat the object, checking with her hands for loose threads; confirming the subtle taper, the organic curvature, and the overall solidity of her form.*

–John M. MacGregor on Judith Scott

**A**t tending Creative Growth Art Center, a workshop in Oakland, California, that promotes artistic activity for people with disabilities, Judith Scott made carefully crafted large-scale sculpture by wrapping yarn around cast-off objects. Scott's physical and mental challenges (she had Down's syndrome and was deaf) did not prevent her from building formidable fiber arts with mysterious emotional and expressive power that are absolutely distinctive in form. Most of Scott's sculptures have an understructure composed of miscellaneous objects, such as electric fans, foam packaging, and yarn cones. She enlisted a wide range of binding techniques—wrapping, stitching, knitting, knotting, tying, lacing, and crocheting—to hide and disguise the core until it developed into an unreadable bundle.

Judith Scott's sculptures conjure up the body; however, her fondness for obliterating form rendered them abstract. The patterning that resulted from the layers of wrapping in Scott's artworks is similar to Sybil Gibson's tempera splatters, Janet Sobel's oil paint drips, and the shattered forms in the drawings and paintings of Aloïse Corbaz, Clementine Hunter, and Riet van Halder. The same methodical repetition explored by Scott, but utilizing a circular motif, can be seen in the highly organized drawings of Hiroyuki Doi and Consuelo "Chelo" González Amézcuca; the enormous rug of plastic bread wrappers woven by an unidentified maker; and the button-encrusted sculpture by Mr. Imagination. Crosshatching in the drawing of Scottie Wilson reveals a similar flirtation with labor-intensive patterning. This reliance on a recurring mark or motif aids all of this rhythmic work in its move away from representation and narrative elements.

–B.D.A.



**Judith Scott (1943-2005)**  
Oakland, California

Left to right:  
UNTITLED (Pink Standing Figure)  
Before 1991  
Yarn and fabric with unknown armature  
51 1/2 x 10 x 6 1/2"  
Gift of Creative Growth Art Center,  
Oakland, California, 2002.21.3

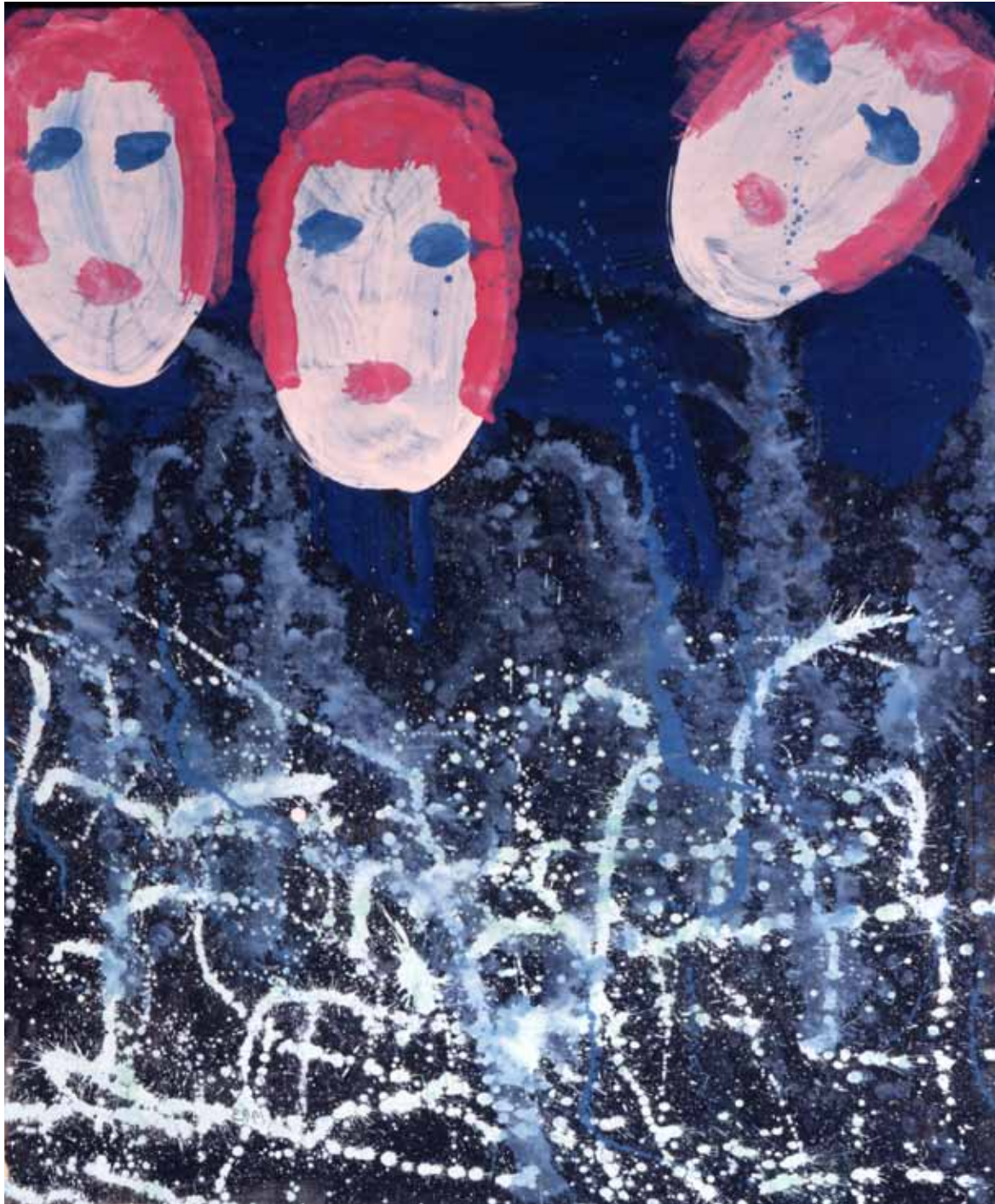
UNTITLED (White Nest)  
1992  
Yarn and fabric with unknown armature  
28 x 12 x 18"  
Gift of Creative Growth Art Center,  
Oakland, California, 2002.21.1

UNTITLED (Long Pole)  
1995  
Yarn and fabric with unknown armature  
101 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"  
Gift of Creative Growth Art Center,  
Oakland, California, 2002.21.4

UNTITLED (Yellow Standing Figure)  
Before 1991  
Yarn and fabric with unknown armature  
62 x 6 1/2 x 11"  
Gift of Creative Growth Art Center,  
Oakland, California, 2002.21.5



UNTITLED (Multicolored Nest)  
1988-1989 • yarn and twine with unknown armature • 8 x 36 x 25"  
Gift of Creative Growth Art Center, Oakland, California, 2002.21.2



Sybil Gibson (1908-1993)  
Dunedin, Florida

ABSTRACT WITH THREE FACES  
1993

Tempera on newspaper  
27 x 21"

Gift of Theresa Buchanan, Mother's Day gift from  
Sybil Gibson to her daughter, Theresa, 1993.8.1





Janet Sobel (1894-1968)  
New York

UNTITLED  
Twentieth century  
Oil on canvas  
29 x 19"  
Promised gift of Lois and Richard Rosenthal,  
PI.2006.2



Riet van Halder (b. 1930)  
The Netherlands

UNTITLED  
1998  
Mixed media on paper  
16 1/2 x 11 1/2"  
Gift of George Jacobs, 2005.6.1



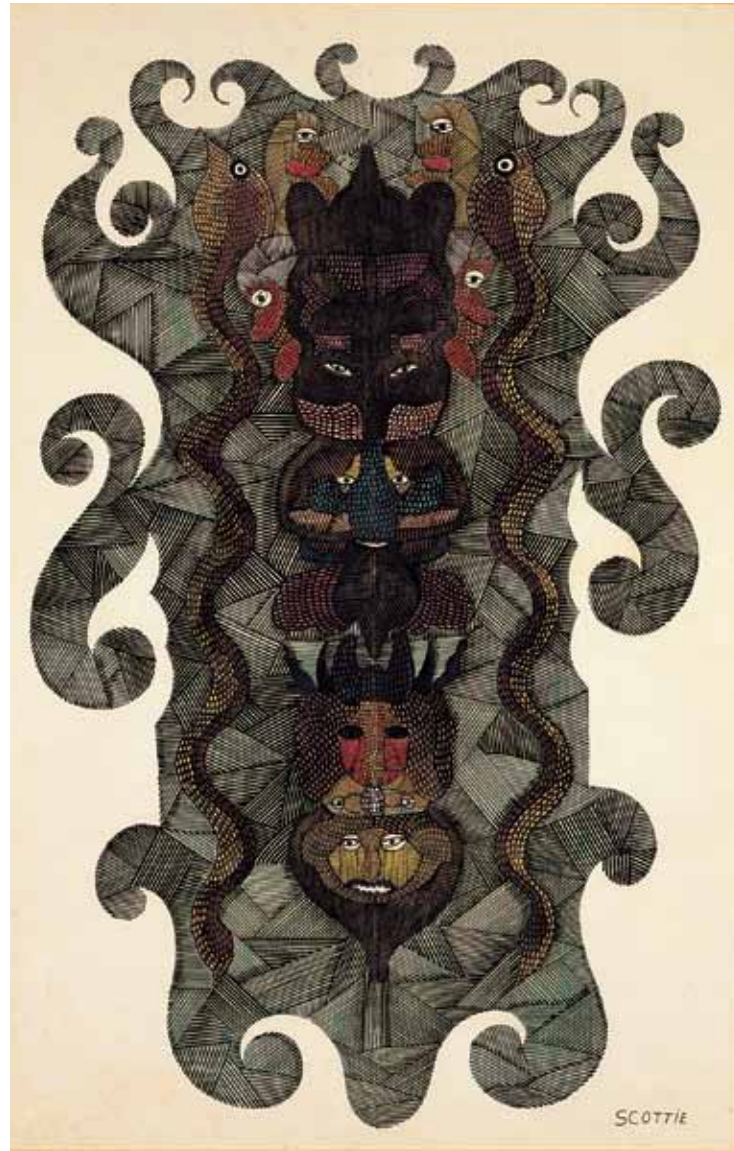
Rafaël Lonné (1910-1989)

France

UNTITLED

Mid-twentieth century • ink on paper • 21 1/2 x 27"

Gift of Jacqueline Loewe Fowler, 2009.3.2

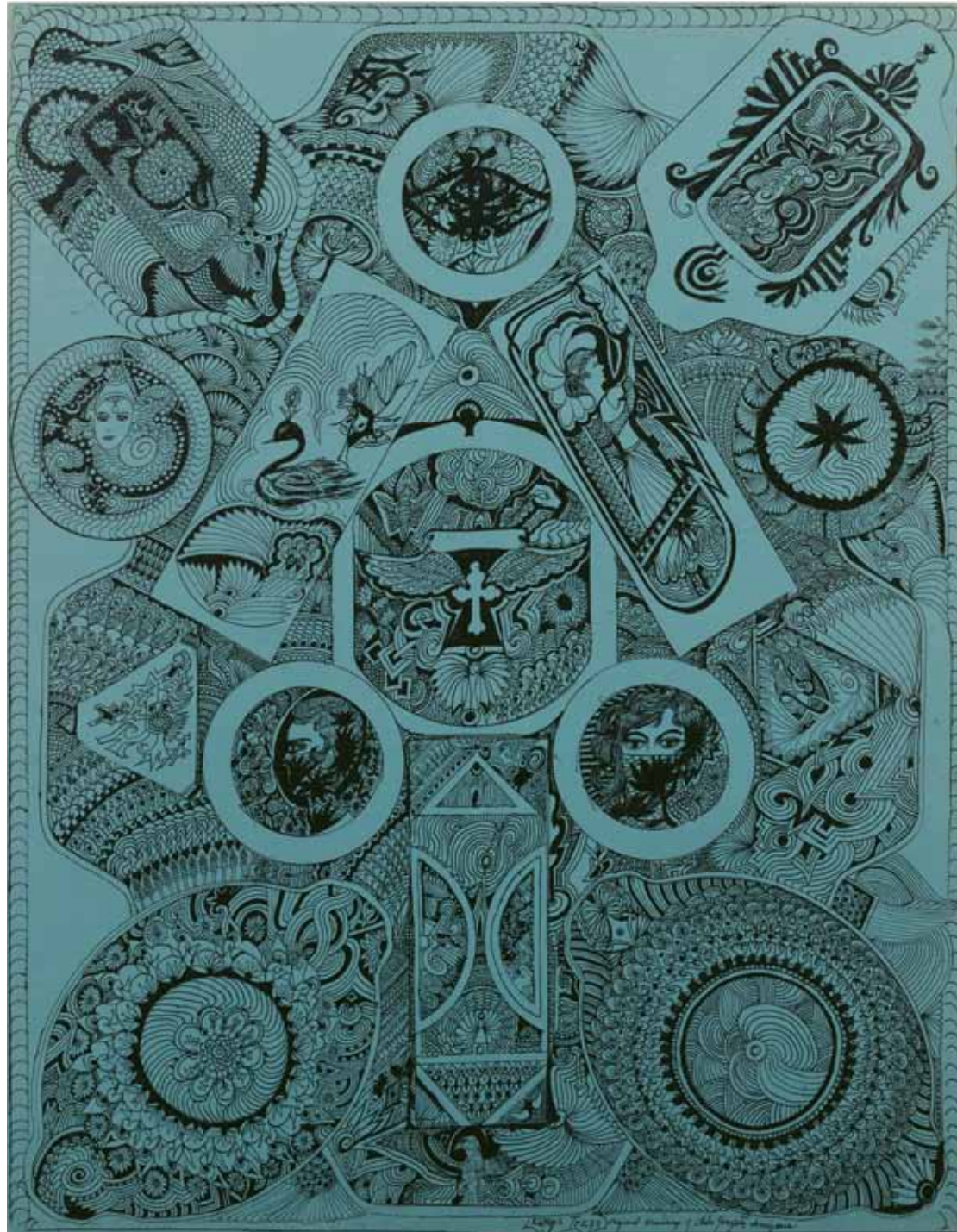


Scottie Wilson (Louis Freeman) (1888-1972)  
Canada or United Kingdom

TWO SNAKES  
1950-1970

Ink on paper  
28 x 19 1/4"

Gift of Sam and Betsey Farber, 2007.14.1



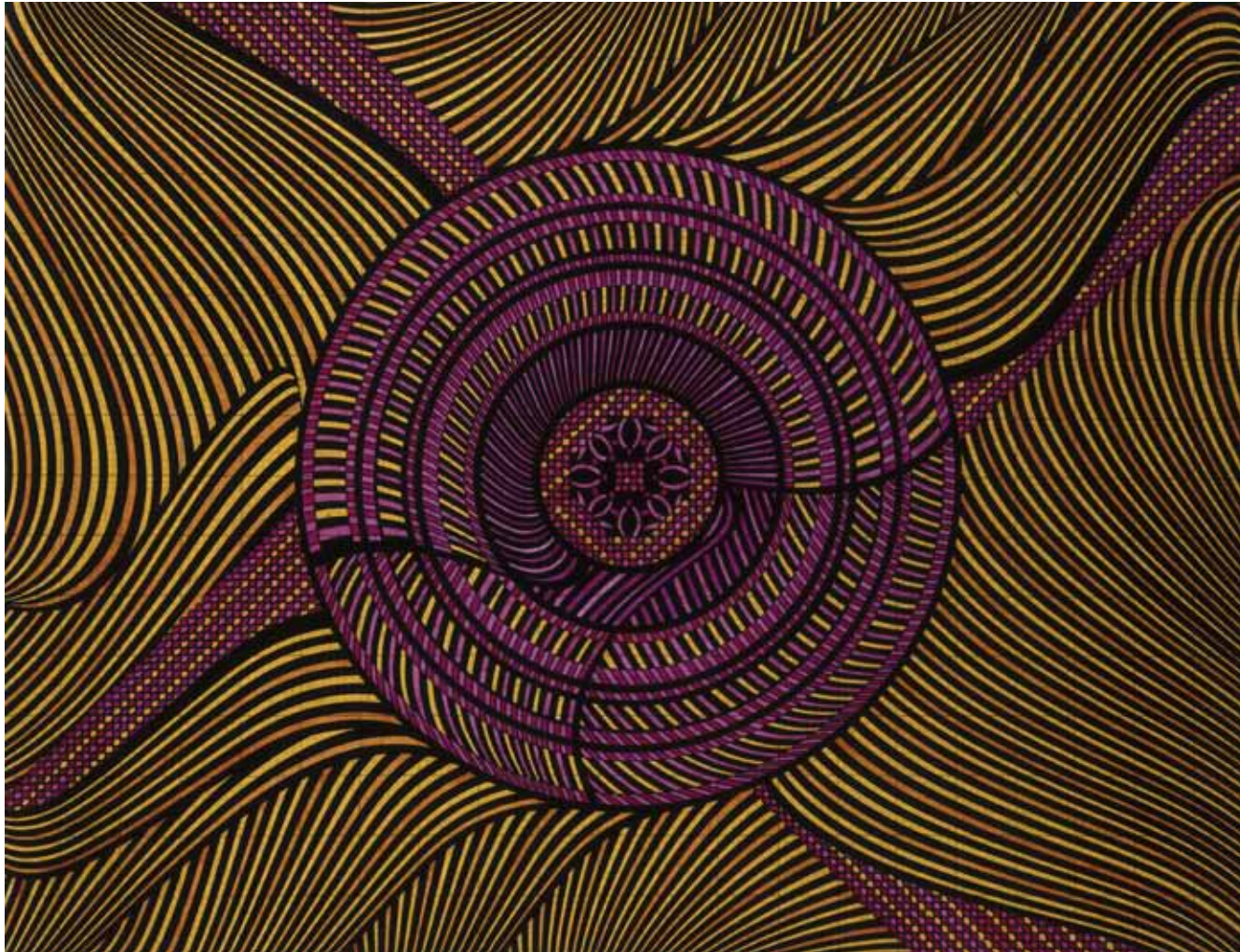
Consuelo "Chelo" González Amézcua  
(1903-1975)  
Del Rio, Texas

KING'S TRAYS  
Mid-twentieth century  
Ballpoint pen on board  
38 1/8 x 30 1/16"  
Gift of the artist's family and  
Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York,  
1995.19.1



Eugene Andolsek (1921-2008)  
Crabtree, Pennsylvania

UNTITLED #14A  
1950-2003 • India ink on graph paper • 16 x 21"  
Gift of the artist, 2005.18.3



IN 1950, EUGENE ANDOLSEK STARTED a ritual of nightly drawing sessions at the kitchen table in the home he shared with his mother. Using graph paper, he would begin each composition by applying black outlines—what Andolsek called the “designs”—with a straightedge and a compass and then fill them in with color. The artist described his process as orderly

and methodical but also trancelike, in that the drawings just “came out” of him. He sometimes did not even remember putting stylus to paper. His recollection of “waking up sometimes and a drawing were there and I didn’t even know how it got there” points to the transcendent, meditative quality artmaking can be for the artist.

UNTITLED #9B

1950-2003 • India ink on graph paper • 16 1/2 x 22"

Gift of the artist, 2005.18.2



"NOW THAT WE ARE LIVING in the age of computerized society," writes the Japanese artist Hiroyuki Doi, "I believe human work using human hands has to be emphasized more. By drawing, I started to feel relief; at some point I started to feel that something other than myself allowed me to draw these works. Suppose every creature is a circle, how many of them can I draw? That is my life work and my challenge. I have to keep on working; otherwise nothing will be brought into existence. By drawing circles I feel I am alive and existing in the cosmos." Doi covers sheet after sheet of paper with highly organic clusters of tiny circles that evoke several images: a topographical map of the world, soaring galaxies, swirling comets, and enormous tsunamis.

**Hiroyuki Doi (b. 1946)**  
Tokyo, Japan

UNTITLED  
2003  
Ink on paper  
55 x 27"

Gift of the artist and Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York, 2005.20.1





THIS RUG WAS FOUND IN the Ledyard, Connecticut, attic of Desire Parker after her death. It was possibly created by Parker or an acquaintance. Made entirely of woven strands of plastic Wonderbread bags much like a nineteenth-century braided rag rug, it is a whimsical example of a common feature of folk art: the recycling of humble materials and the transformation from an original purpose to a new one. This is a timeless global phenomenon not tied to one culture or community. For example, used matchsticks may be glued together to make a jewelry box, discarded Popsicle sticks get reconstructed into a lamp, or empty soda cans are cut up and made into toy cars and airplanes. The “make something from nothing” aesthetic is very much at play here.

**Artist unidentified, possibly Desire Parker (dates unknown)**  
Ledyard, Connecticut

**WONDERBREAD BAG RUG WITH BALL OF TWINE**  
Twentieth century  
Plastic Wonderbread bags  
60" diam.  
Gift of Claudia Polsky, 2001.10.1



Maurice "Le Grand Le Sueur" Sullins (1911-1995)  
Joliet, Illinois

DANSE D'ESAGNE, BY EDGAR DEGAS—SPANISH MOON GLOW #9  
Late twentieth century • acrylic on canvas • 37 1/4 x 49 1/4"  
Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.52



ALOÏSE CORBAZ WAS INSTITUTIONALIZED in 1918 for schizophrenia; two years later, she made her first drawings. Corbaz utilized what was available to her in the confined setting and enriched her colorful works with an assortment of found materials, such as paper packaging, magazine pages, and yarn as well as toothpaste and the juice pressed from flower petals. With these humble materials she created a fanciful world inhabited by kings, queens, dukes, and duchesses.

The title of this work translates as "Waterlilies/Peace Christ." The double-sided painting is composed of three paper sheets stitched together to increase its scale. Lush and romantic flowers, leaves, and other decorative motifs crowd embracing couples. Figures and flowers are so closely intertwined they morph into one entity. On one side of this work, a woman is lifted off her feet to reach her joyous lover's lips and, while a substantial figure, appears to float upward off the page. Her décolleté of roses was applied with a stain of geranium-flower juice.

**Aloïse Corbaz (1886-1964)**  
Switzerland

**NENUPHARS/PAIX CHRISTI (double-sided)**  
Mid-twentieth century  
Crayon, colored pencil, geranium flower juice, and thread on paper  
61 x 31"  
Gift of Etienne Forel and Jacqueline Porret-Forel  
in honor of Sam and Betsey Farber, 2002.8.1



THE UNDERSTRUCTURE OF *Button Tree* is a tree limb that Gregory Warmack, also known as Mr. Imagination, rescued from the street and set in a base festooned with bottle caps. Dismayed that the tree had been uprooted for urban renewal and development, he resolved "to save part of it." Warmack worked on this sculpture a little at a time, nailing buttons into the wood one by one in a laborious process that took years to complete. Wire strands of buttons radiate from the branches, creating a lively, jubilant presence. Because each button is nailed to the tree, one cannot help but think of the Central African *nkisi* tradition of covering the surface of wooden sculptures with hundreds of nails, each representing a prayer, pounded in by a village full of believers. While the result may be different, the act is the same. Warmack has created an American *nkisi*, willing the dead tree to linger in life still, now as a work of art.

Gregory "Mr. Imagination" Warmack (b. 1948)  
Chicago

BUTTON TREE  
1990-1992

Wood and cement with buttons, bottle caps, and nails  
56 x 34 x 60"

Gift of the artist, 2000.13.1

## PRIVATE CODES AND LANGUAGES

*Jesus, I thank you for the knowledge you give me to go by. You gave me the mind to ask you questions with water.*

–John “J.B.” Murry

John “J.B.” Murry was a sharecropper and a preacher from Georgia who experienced visions and “wrote in the spirit”: the fervor of his technique and the abstract passages that only he could translate are like painted versions of the experience known as speaking in tongues. The artist would hold a water-filled glass bottle up to his artwork to interpret the meanings of his private alphabet, which is composed of squiggles, splashes, and dashes, and conduct a sermonlike reading. As Murry became more comfortable with his material, he modestly increased his scale—from cash-register tape to sheets of stationery to drawing paper—and expanded his medium from ink to paint, applied by brush and finger.

While figures can be detected within the abstract script, nearly all examples of Murry’s artwork embrace abstraction. His mysterious language echoes similar intentions in the work of Charles Benefiel and Martin Thompson, both of whom develop codes and symbols as a means of articulation—prayers of a nondenominational sort. While no one is able to decipher the scripts of Dwight Mackintosh or translate the hidden messages in the street-infused amulets made by the unidentified artist nicknamed the Philadelphia Wireman, their works also suggest solitary languages, further masked by the circumstances of their makers and their discoveries. Communication of another style can also be gleaned from the flattened forms and geometric structures found in the enticingly abstracted crayon works by Eddie Arning and the sublime drawing by James Castle in which a dark vertical band resembling a two-by-four bifurcates a figure’s head and torso. This bold gesture breaks down the body parts into reductive slices of shape and shadow, into muted tones of charcoal and soot, which cling to abstraction.

–B.D.A.



John "J.B." Murry (1908-1988)  
Sandersville, Georgia

UNTITLED

Late twentieth century • pen, ink, crayon, and watercolor on paper • 14 x 10 3/8"  
Gift of Thea Westrich and Ethan Wagner, 2006.20.1



UNTITLED

Late twentieth century • pen, ink, crayon, and watercolor on paper • 14 x 10 1/2"  
Gift of Thea Westrich and Ethan Wagner, 2006.20.2



UNTITLED

Late twentieth century • watercolor and felt-tip marker on paper • 13 3/4 x 11"  
Gift of Patricia Feiwei, 1994.3.5



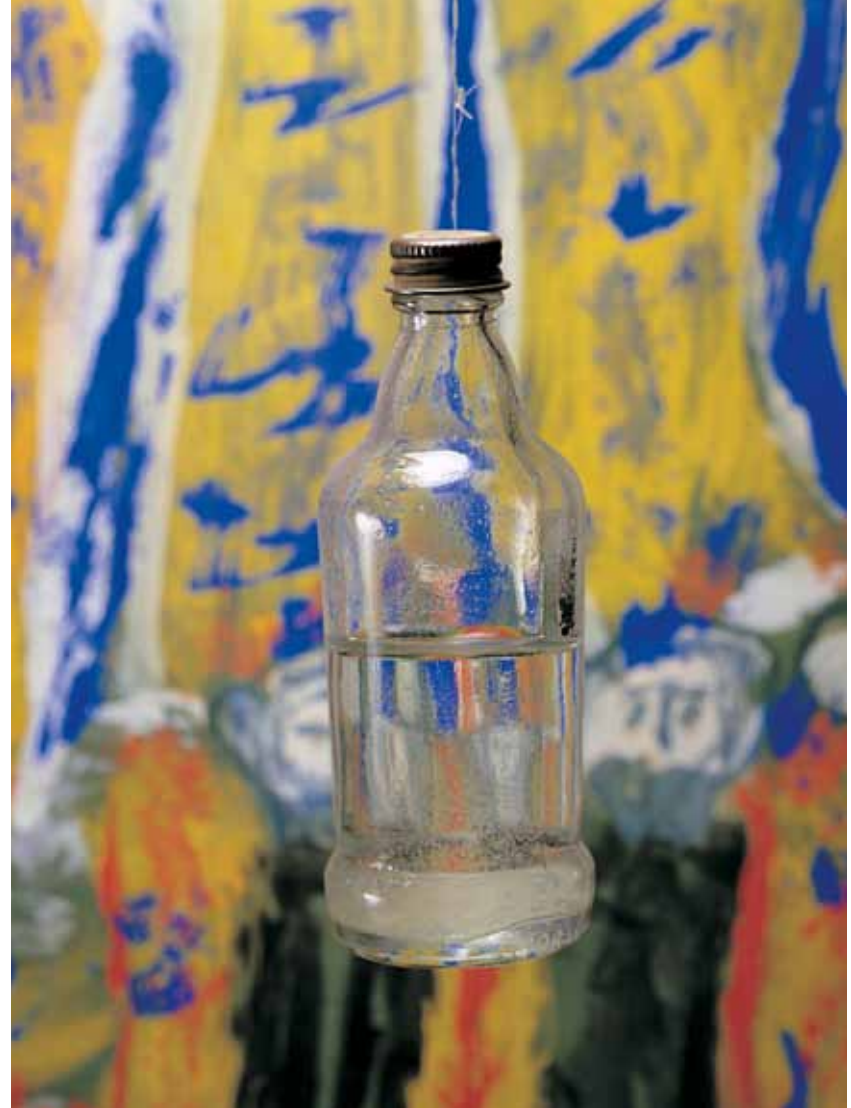
UNTITLED

Late twentieth century • watercolor and felt-tip marker on paper • 16 3/4 x 14"  
Gift of Patricia Feiwei, 1994.3.4



UNTITLED

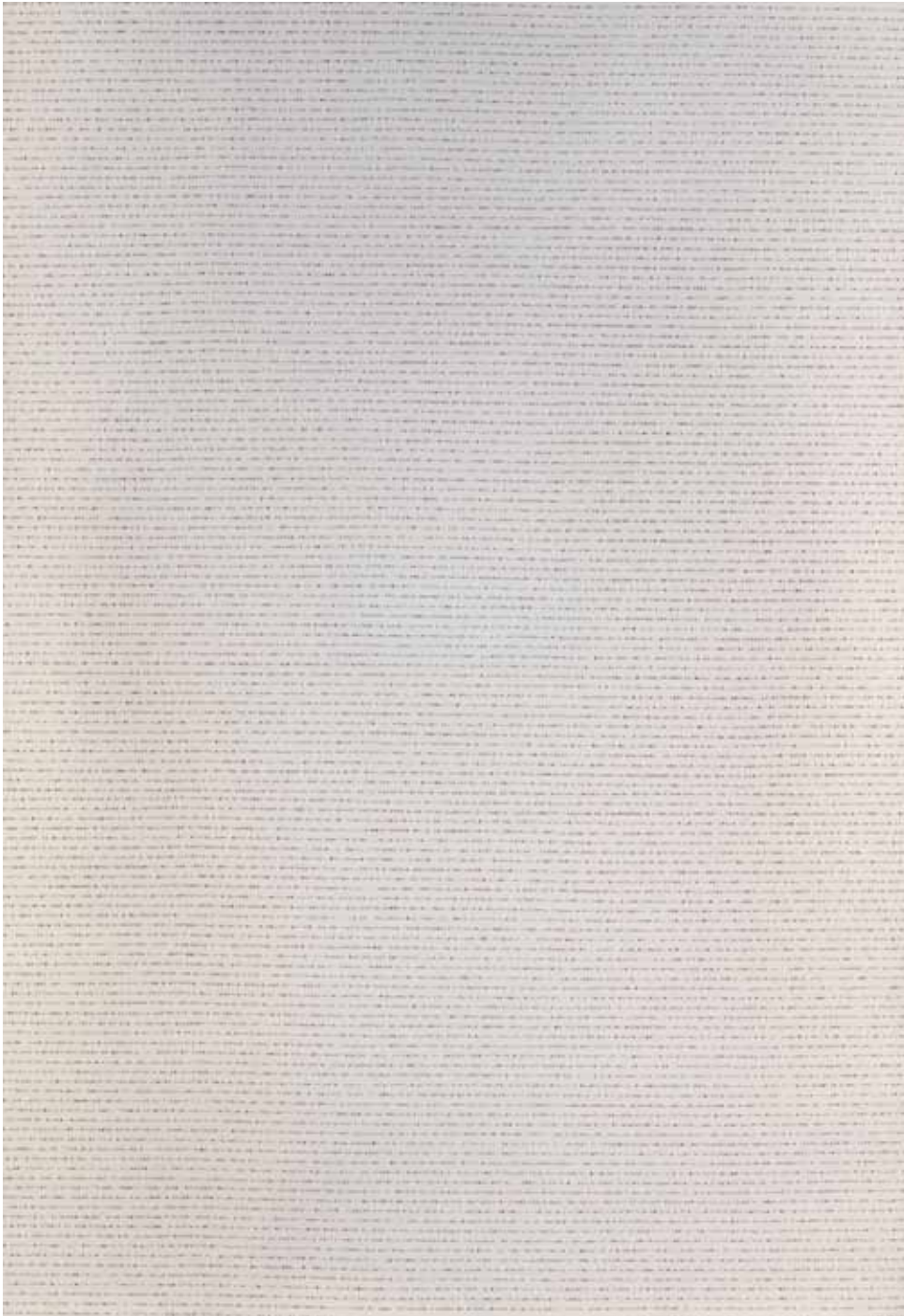
Late twentieth century • pen, ink, crayon, and watercolor on paper • 14 x 10 3/8"  
Gift of Thea Westrich and Ethan Wagner, 2006.20.5



SPIRIT WATER

Late twentieth century • glass bottle with metal lid and water • 5" high  
Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.34





URGED ON BY A SENSE of futility over the growing prevalence of numbers standing in for personal identity in modern society—on passports, Social Security cards, driver's licenses, utility bills, and credit card accounts—Charles Benefiel has designed his own language based on randomly repeated symbols. In this system, dots, circles, and dashes replace the numerals that serve as code in our technology-driven world. Taking the numerical sequence of zero through ten, Benefiel marries both a symbol and a sound to each digit. For example, zero equals a solid circle equals the sound *na*; one equals a dot equals the sound *ba*; four equals a circle equals the sound *da*. While drawing, he recites the corresponding sounds of his invented “dumb language,” thus making the process a mathematical, visual, and musical experience. Though this three-tiered artistic process is highly complex, the outcome appears overtly simple and minimalistic.



**Charles Benefiel (b. 1967)**

New Mexico

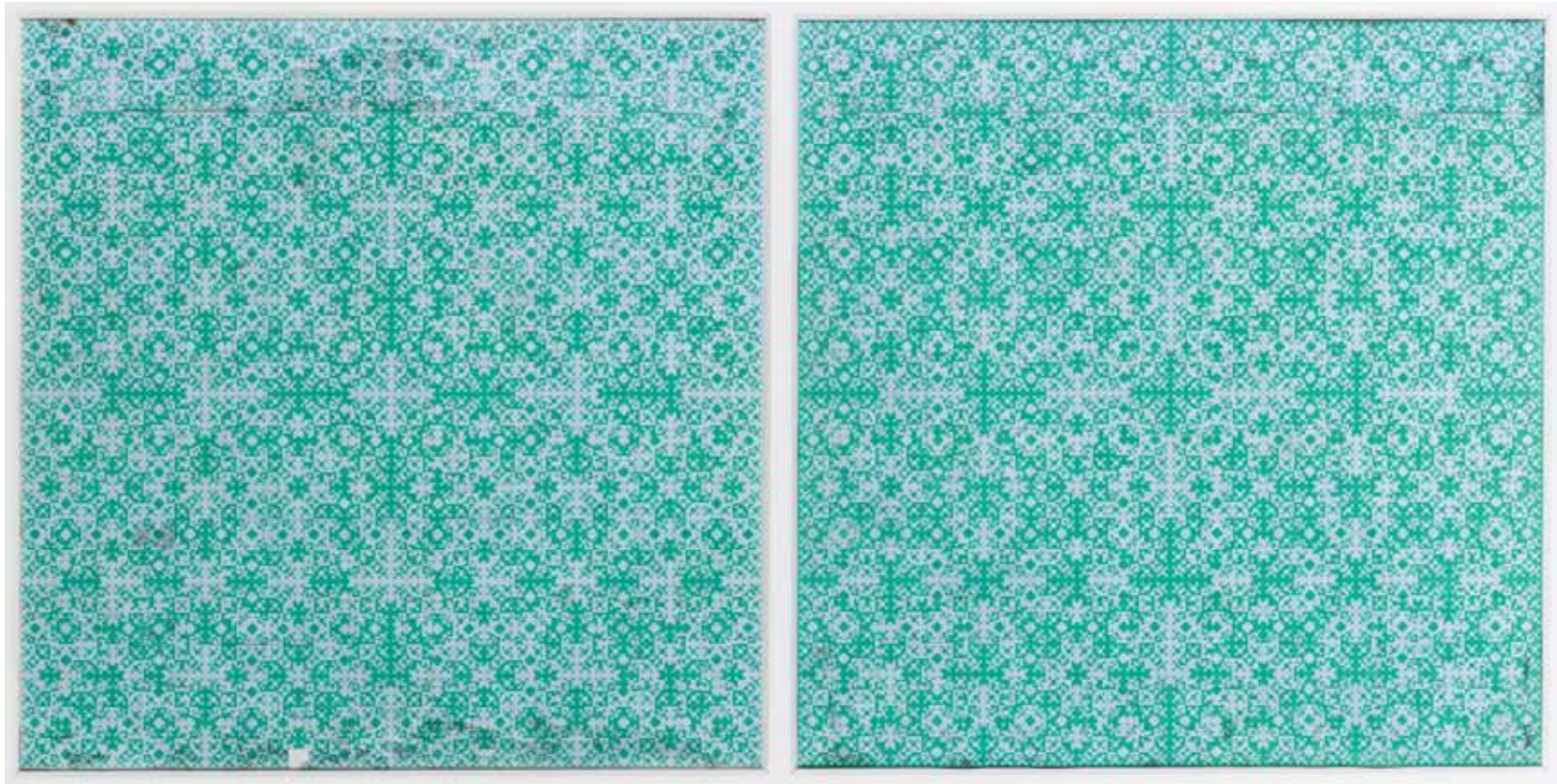
RANDOM NUMERIC REPEATER #7

2001

Ink on paper

54 x 39"

Gift of Aarne Anton and American Primitive Gallery, New York, 2005.19.1



NEW ZEALAND ARTIST AND MATHEMATICIAN Martin Thompson uses graph paper and ballpoint pens to draw perfectly designed diptychs that are as mesmerizing as they are exacting in execution. With the aid of a handsaw (used as a straightedge), a small scalpel, and Scotch tape, he explores the visual patterns of mathematical rhythms and sequences;

each of the markings in his works relates to an equation, and each formula is based on multiples of ten. After memorizing a sequence, Thompson develops a hard-edged pattern on a line of squares on graph paper scaled in millimeters and then creates its mirror image on a second sheet of graph paper.

**Martin Thompson (b. 1956)**  
Wellington, New Zealand

UNTITLED #10  
2002-2005 • ink on graph paper • 11 1/4 x 22"  
Gift of Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand, 2005.22.1



WORKING AT FIRST WITH PENCIL and later with colored pencil and occasionally collage, Adolf Wölfli created remarkable drawings documenting an alternative reality and universe of his own awesome proportions. Each of Wölfli's drawings employ a set of emblematic icons and symbols, such as bird forms, masked men, musical notes, cruciform shapes, stars, sluglike creatures, and strings of beads. All of this

iconography can be found in *The Kander Valley in the Bernese Oberland*. Text regularly accompanies these motifs, although it is nonsensical; it reads more like freeform poetry or stream-of-consciousness writing. Musical notes also fill the drawing: Wölfli's musical compositions, while discordant and dirgelike, have been performed by several noteworthy modernist composers and musicians, such as Terry Riley.

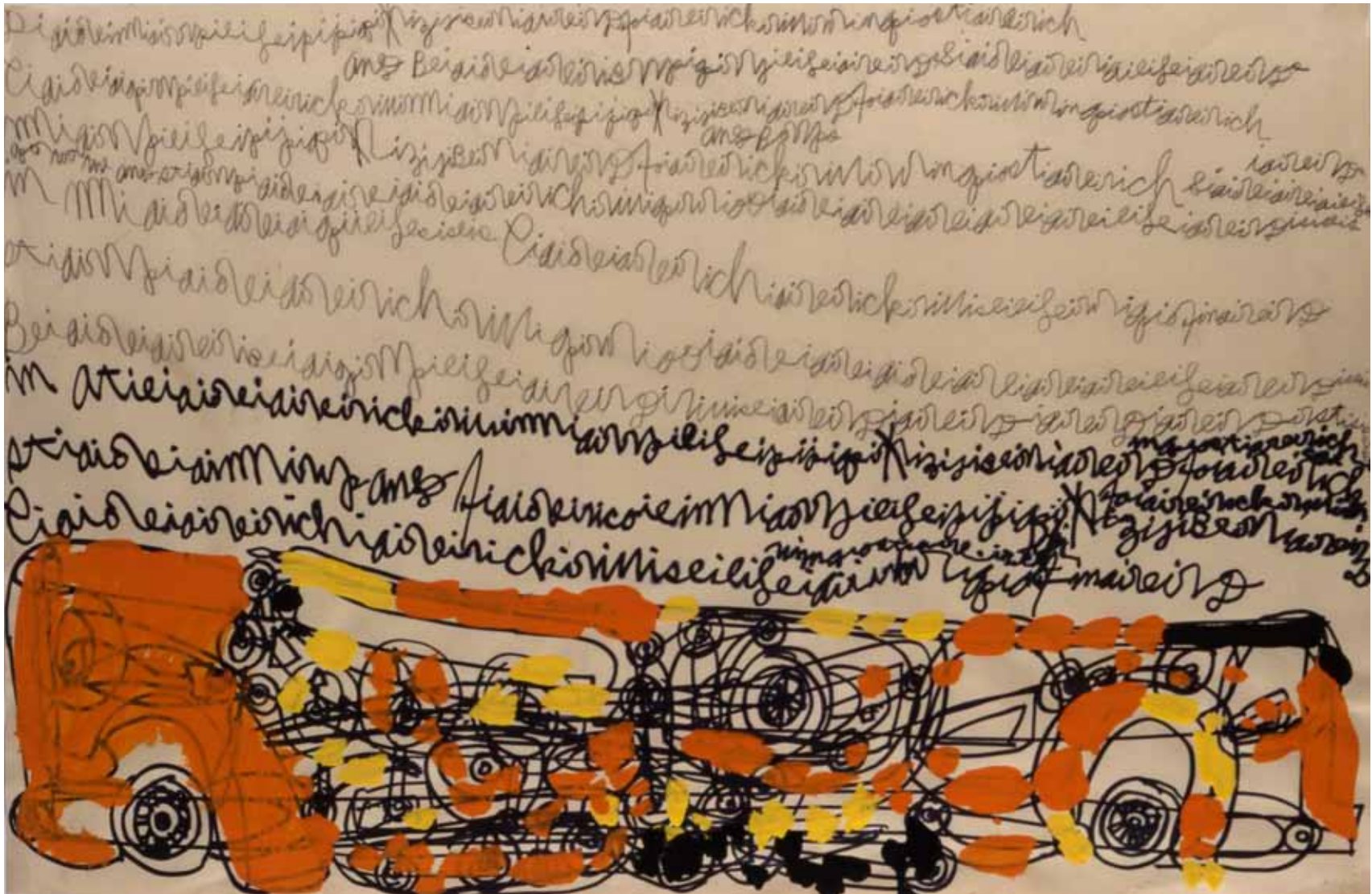
Adolf Wölfli (1864-1930)  
Bern, Switzerland

THE KANDER VALLEY IN THE BERNESE OBERLAND (DAS KANDER-THAL IM BERNER OBER-LAND)  
1926 • pencil and colored pencil on paper • 18 1/2 x 24 3/8"  
Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.64



Domenico Zindato (b. 1966)  
Mexico

UNTITLED (double-sided)  
Late twentieth century • colored pencil on paper • 8 1/4 x 10 1/8"  
Gift of Evelyn S. Meyer, 2005.10.7



Dwight Mackintosh (1906-1999)  
Oakland, California

UNTITLED (Vehicle 92/82)

1982 • pencil and paint on paper • 34 3/4 x 48 5/8"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.33



EDDIE ARNING IS WELL RESPECTED for his oil pastel works on paper, rich in color and complex in composition, which are typically crowded with figures as well as abstracted forms. The artist's process involved borrowing images from popular culture, such as magazine advertisements, and distilling elements to simple forms and flat shapes. Arning also transformed the palette from the original source, experimenting with the rich tonal variations possible with oil pastel and crayon.

**Eddie Arning (1898-1993)**  
Austin, Texas

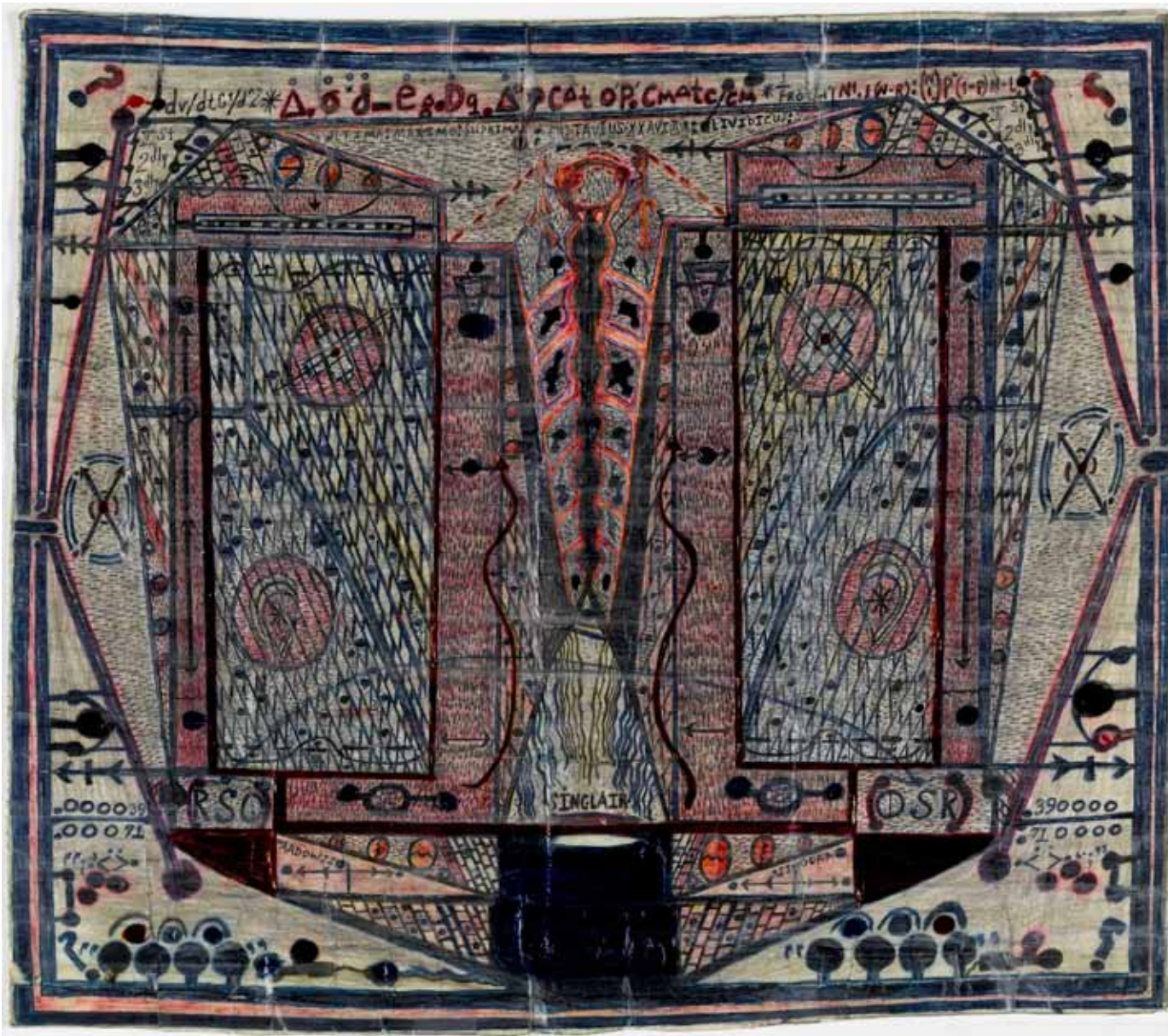
**DRUM AND DRUMSTICKS**  
1964-1965  
Crayon and pencil on paper  
31 x 24 1/2"  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Sackton, 1985.1.5



ROOM INTERIOR

1965 • crayon and Cray-Pas on paper • 23 5/8 x 29 5/8"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.4

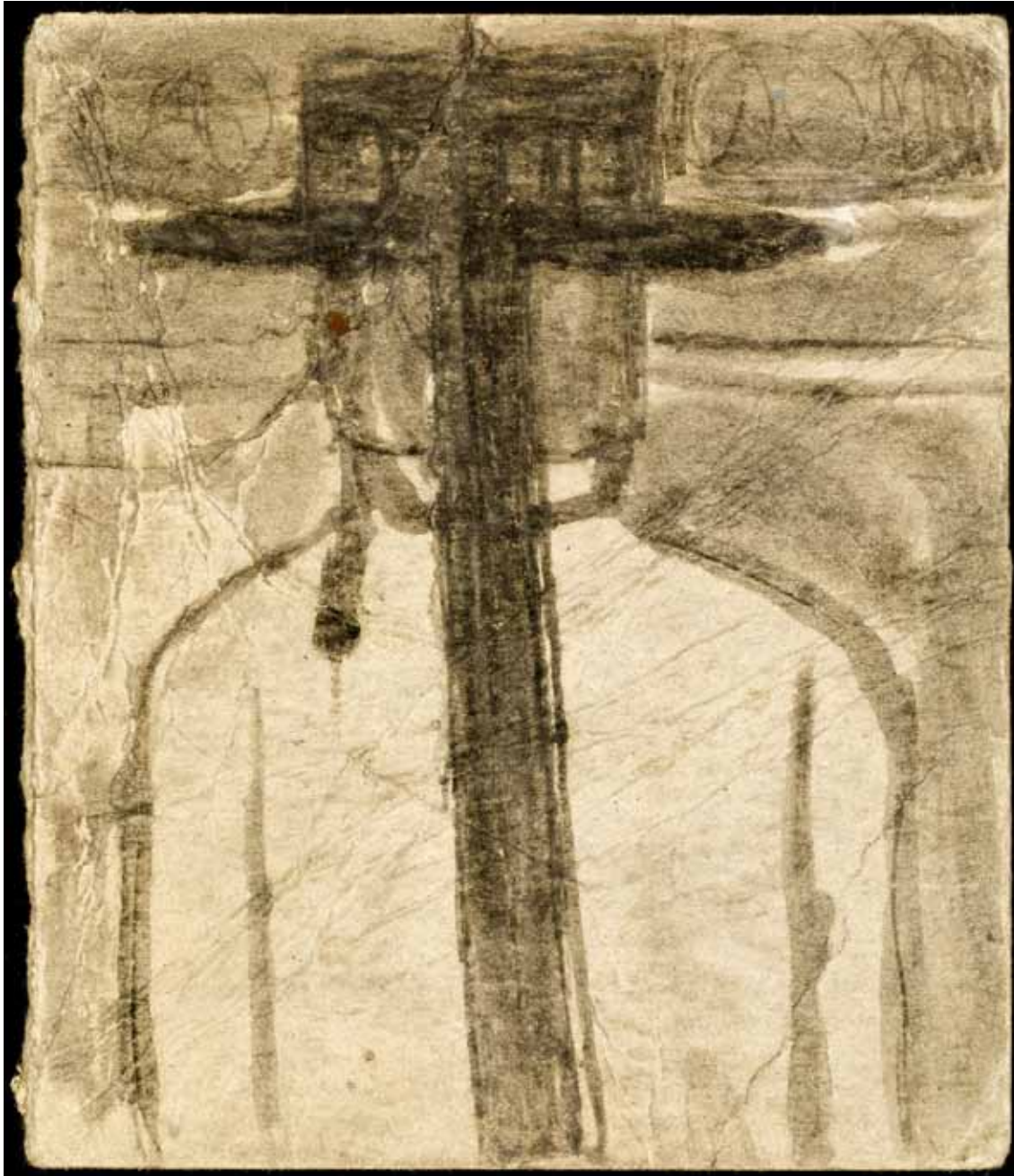


Melvin Way (b. 1954)  
New York

UNTITLED ("Singlair")

Late twentieth century • colored pencil, pencil, and ink on paper with Scotch tape • 19 1/2 x 22"  
Gift of Jacqueline Loewe Fowler, 2009.3.1





BECAUSE HIS PARENTS' HOME SERVED as the post office and general store for their small Idaho community, James Castle had a wealth of material for his artmaking. But while he recycled envelopes and other paper goods, he chose to use not pens or pencils but sharpened twigs and sticks for styluses and a homemade medium of stove soot mixed with spit. If paste was needed, Castle made his own with flour and water. With this assortment of materials, he set upon the task of documenting his life and community. Through practice and daily application, he understood the properties of perspective and mastered the rigors of sophisticated composition.

**James Castle (1899-1977)**  
Garden Valley, Idaho

UNTITLED (Figure with Hat)  
Early to mid-twentieth century  
Soot and saliva on found board  
5 1/4 x 4 1/2"  
Gift of Dorothy Trapper Goldman, 2005.17.2



Leroy Person (1907/08-1985)  
Occhineechee Neck, North Carolina

HENS AND CHICKS WITH ROOSTER

Mid-to-late twentieth century • crayon on wood • 10 x 16 x 9"  
Gift of Roger Cardinal in memory of Timothy Grutzius, 1995.14.1



THE MAKER, ORIGINS, AND PURPOSE of these small-scale sculptures are unknown. They were found in 1982 packed in garbage bags in an alley in an African American neighborhood in Philadelphia, along with around fifteen hundred similar objects. The artist, nicknamed the Philadelphia Wireman, relied on discarded materials such as tape, newspaper, ribbon,

glass, buttons, scrap metal, and other flotsam and jetsam to build up an interior armature that is tightly bundled with wire and cable. Scholars have suggested that the materials, technique, and intimate scale of the works recall charms, talismans, and other spiritual tools.

**Philadelphia Wireman (dates unknown)**  
Philadelphia

UNTITLED

c. 1970-1982 • mixed media (metal wire, plastic-wrapped metal wire, wire mesh, twine, rubber bands, tape, paper, gold and silver foil, wooden tape ruler, eyeglasses arm, plastic fragments, plastic buttons, earring mount, nails, bolts, and a screw) • 3-10" high  
Gift of Thea Westreich and Ethan Wagner, 2001.29.1-7



USING WATERCOLOR, PASTEL, COLORED PENCILS, and chalk, Joseph Yoakum worked on small-size paper, producing a work every few days. He seems to have particularly enjoyed drawing mountainscapes, declaring his great wanderlust to the viewer. It was assumed that Yoakum imagined the locales he depicted, even though he claimed to have traveled to all of them. Recent scholarship, however, takes into consideration the fact that

the artist maintained a nomadic lifestyle and had traveled extensively as an advance man for a circus—some of his landscapes conceivably could have been drawn and painted from memory. Yoakum's obvious admiration for voluptuous scenery comes through in his stylized lines and burnished shapes, which border on abstraction.

**Joseph Yoakum (1890-1972)**

Chicago

MT. DEMA VEND 18934 FT. NEAR MASHHAD IRAN

1966 • watercolor and ballpoint pen on paper • 18 3/4 x 24 3/4"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.65

## DISTORTION AND EXAGGERATION

*I like to touch every picture all over the surface of it. I like to work on that surface, rub it, scratch it, smear it. I beat on it sometimes, knock holes in it. I have even set fire to it. The piece going to have Mr. Dial in it, under it, and over it, and everybody can know it.*

–Thornton Dial Sr.

Thornton Dial Sr. attacks painting and his subjects—race, class, and oppression in the United States—with an ardent expressionism. While figural forms are cast centrally in Dial's ongoing narrative (the tiger often found in his work is a stand-in for the black man and his fight against racism), his brio and confidence as an artist can obscure them at any time, in any work. The muscularity of his technique—as seen in his vigorous brushstrokes, buckets of industrial material, and dense buildup of layers—dominates the aesthetic experience, reinforcing the fierce attitude and posture of his work. Justin McCarthy, Mary T. Smith, and Eugene Von Bruenchenhein exploited the properties of paint with similar confidence, whether with a house-paint brush, an artist's paint brush, a feather, or a fingertip. The viscous properties of paint were deftly pushed around to imply figure, cityscape, or outer world-scape. Adolf Wölfli, Joseph Yoakum, and Domenico Zindato similarly celebrated the properties of pen, pencil, and paper to render their dizzying mindscapes.

Sumptuous, curvilinear lines in a Nellie Mae Rowe drawing, a Louis Monza sculpture, and a Purvis Young painting assist in the distortion and exaggeration of the works' central figures and primary actions. Dial also uses distortion to create an exuberant moment in his artwork, a technique adopted by Miles Carpenter, Bessie Harvey, Mose Tolliver, and Carlo Zinelli as well. Carpenter and Harvey built anthropomorphic sculptures from tree trunks, roots, and branches, utilizing the natural gesture found in the forms to introduce the viewer to aggressive spirits and creatures. Biomorph shapes in the painting by Leonard Daley echo Dial's approach to ransacking subject matter, which in turn is a building block of abstraction.

–B.D.A.



Thornton Dial Sr. (b. 1928)  
Bessemer, Alabama

THE BLOOD: THEY DON'T LOOK FOR NOTHING TO STAY ALIVE  
1989 • mixed media on plywood • 48 x 96"  
Gift of William B. Arnett in memory of Robert Bishop, 1992.20.3



TIGER CATS COMING AND GOING

1989 • mixed media on plywood • 48 x 96"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.18



GIN HOUSE

1991 • watercolor and charcoal on paper • 25 3/8 x 32 7/8"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.19





Mary T. Smith (c. 1904-1995)  
Hazelhurst, Mississippi

HEAR  
c. 1980  
Enamel on metal  
54 x 14"  
Gift of Ruth and Robert Vogeles, 1999.4.1



Carlo Zinelli (1916-1974)  
Verona, Italy

UNTITLED (double-sided)

Mid-twentieth century • gouache on paper • 34 1/2 x 27"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.13



BESSIE HARVEY DECLARED HER PRIMARY motivation was to free African spirits she felt were trapped in trees. Harvey's artmaking also allowed her to free her own soul from personal anguish. She began her artistic endeavors in the 1970s, when she was struggling to raise eleven children as a single parent. Sculpting proved very therapeutic. Working



with tree branches and roots connected her to other African American artists—many of whom use tree forms as their primary medium—and to her African heritage. Roots have a transformative purpose in many African cultures, where they figure prominently in healing, medicine, and spiritual practice.

Bessie Harvey (1929-1994)

Alcoa, Tennessee

7 LEGS

Late twentieth century • paint on wood with beads • 17 3/4 x 7 x 9"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.23

THE WORLD

Late twentieth century • paint on wood with glass and plaster beads,  
hair, fabric, glitter, sequins, shells, and duct tape • 53 x 38 x 28"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.26



UNTITLED (Cobra)  
1985  
Paint on wood with beads  
23 1/2 x 18 x 19"  
Gift of Leo Rabkin in loving memory of  
Dorothea Rabkin, 2009.2.1



MILES CARPENTER ADVERTISED HIS ROADSIDE ice, soda pop, and vegetable stand in Waverly, Virginia, with a menagerie of idiosyncratic, funky, and humorous sculptures of animals and people. Both an additive and subtractive sculptor (he constructed as well as carved his work), Carpenter explored a variety of methods and modes of working for nearly thirty years. The result is a range of expressions, from realistic renderings of watermelons to wild and outlandish root sculptures. Taking the opposite approach of a stone carver, whose reductive chipping releases a figure from within a block of marble, Carpenter drew out and developed the figure suggested by the natural curves and bulges of a root to create *Beast*. He once recalled, "There's something in there, under the surface of every piece of wood. You don't need no design 'cause it's right there, you just take the bark off, and if you do it good, you can find something."

**Miles Carpenter (1889-1985)**

Waverly, Virginia

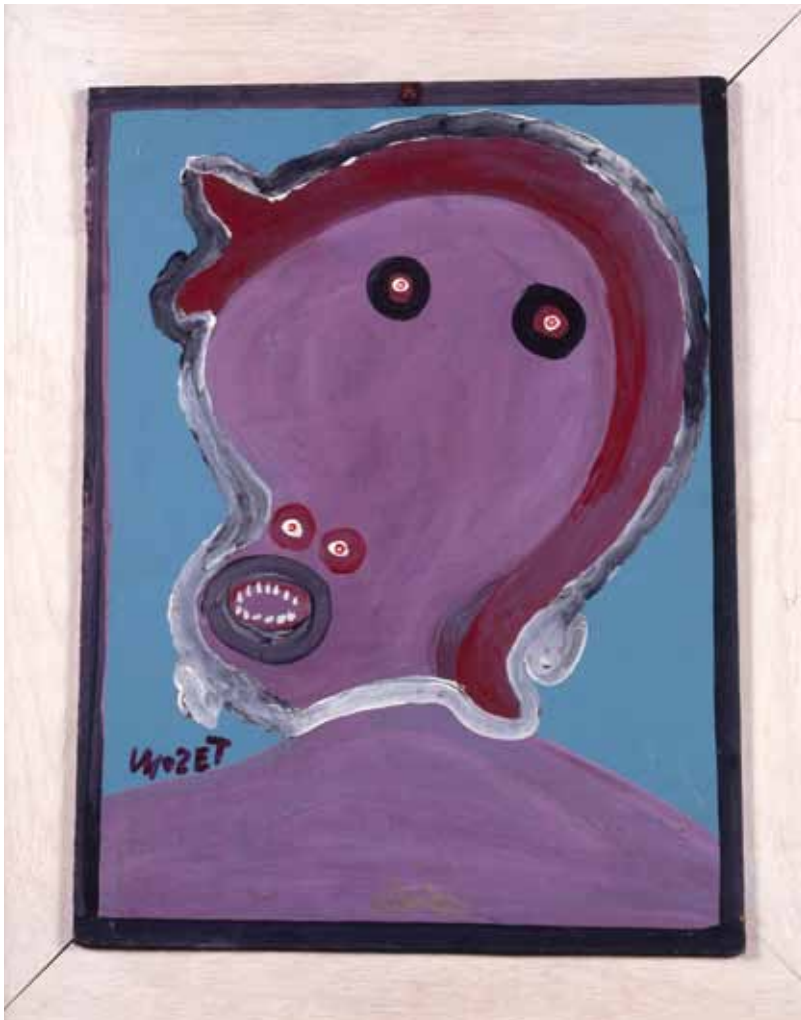
BEAST

After 1966

Paint on wood with rubber ears

26 x 39 1/2 x 33"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr.,  
1998.10.14



SELF-PORTRAIT  
1980 • house paint on Masonite • 24 1/4 x 20 1/4"  
Gift of Elizabeth Ross Johnson, 1985.35.29

Mose Tolliver (c. 1920-2006)  
Montgomery, Alabama



SELF-PORTRAIT  
1980 • house paint on Masonite • 23 3/4 x 20"  
Gift of Elizabeth Ross Johnson, 1985.35.29

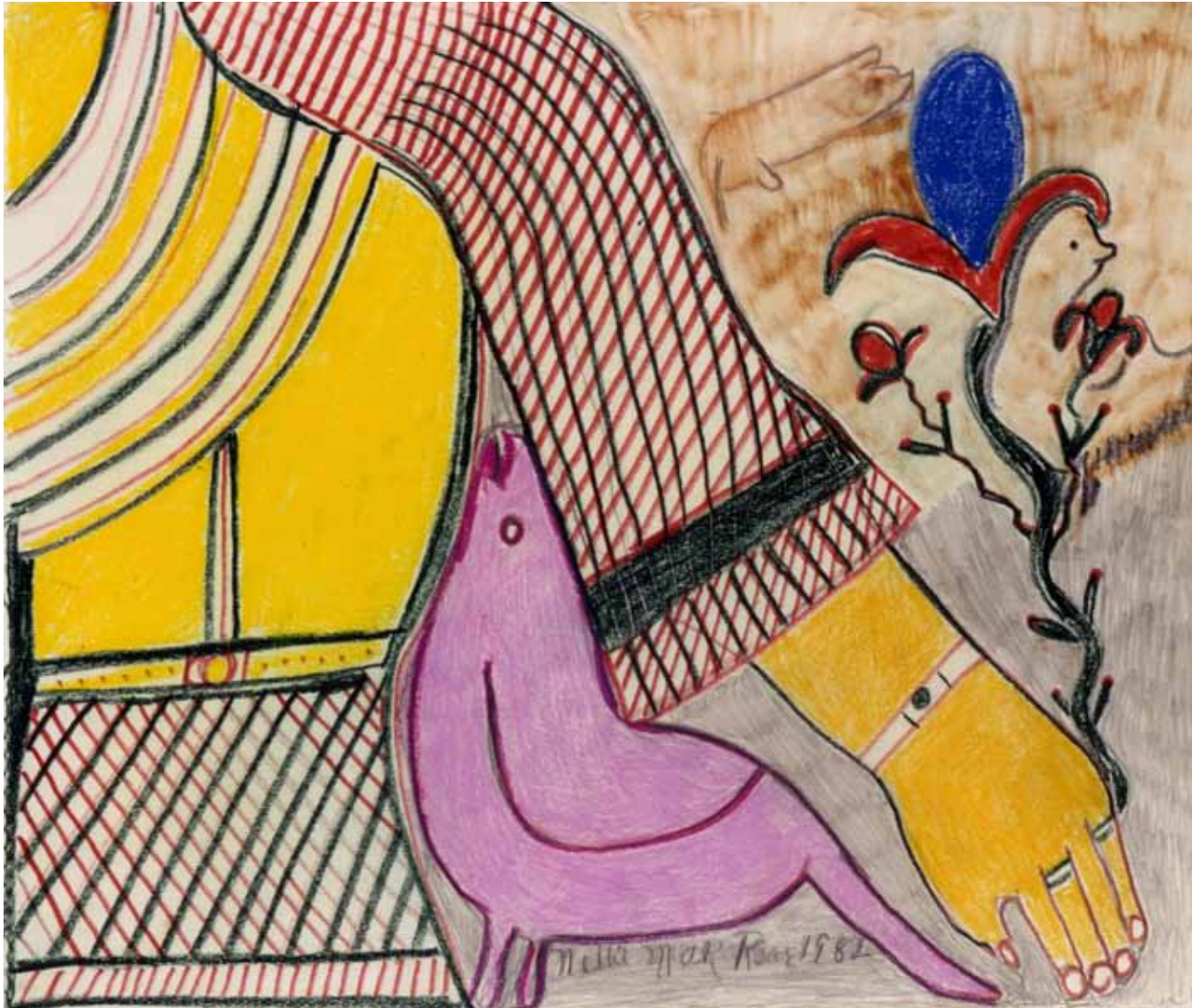


LEONARD DALEY, A SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST from Jamaica, masterfully masked any apparent narrative in his swirling, dense compositions, which reside solely in the foreground. This lack of obvious story line or dimensionality creates a mysterious effect. Called by critics a “trickster mystic,” Daley embodied the complexity of creativity and spirituality that can be found in Jamaica, where artistic expression tends to be more improvisational and free-form, allowing for highly personal works to flourish. Much of Daley’s art has a visionary quality to it, and this sense of a magic power and charged nature is also felt in the work of his island peers.

Leonard Daley (c. 1930-2006)  
Jamaica

UNTITLED  
c. 1990s  
Mixed media on board  
45 x 45"

Gift of Maurice C. and Patricia L. Thompson, 2003.20.11



Nellie Mae Rowe (1900-1982)  
Vining, Georgia

PROTECTION

1982 • crayon, pencil and felt-tip marker on paper • 18 3/4 x 21 1/2"  
Gift of Judith Alexander, 1997.1





**Louis Monza (1897-1984)**  
New York

LOVER'S TRIUMPH  
1965  
Ceramic  
15 x 9 3/4 x 5"

Gift of Susan Larsen Martin and Lauri Robert Martin, 2005.7.1



THE PROLIFIC ARTIST PURVIS YOUNG has filled his vast studio in a warehouse building with stacks of artworks, all covered with his trademark motifs—writhing crowds of people with arms upraised, powerful horses, commanding pregnant women, armies of trucks, and clusters of city buildings. A short stint in prison opened up the world of art to Young. While serving time for armed robbery, he studied the mural-painting

tradition, particularly urban murals from the 1960s and '70s, such as Chicago's *Wall of Respect*. He also admired canonized masters such as El Greco, Rembrandt, and van Gogh. The artist distills all of these influences into his paintings, assemblages, and books. His quick, gestural lines and washes of color show that Young works rapidly and in an assured manner.

Purvis Young (b. 1943)  
Miami, Florida

UNTITLED (Horses)

Twentieth century • paint on paper mounted on cardboard • 31 1/2 x 53"  
Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.67



Carlo Zinelli (1916-1974)  
Verona, Italy

UNTITLED (double-sided)  
Mid-twentieth century • gouache on paper • 27 1/2 x 19 3/4"  
Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.17

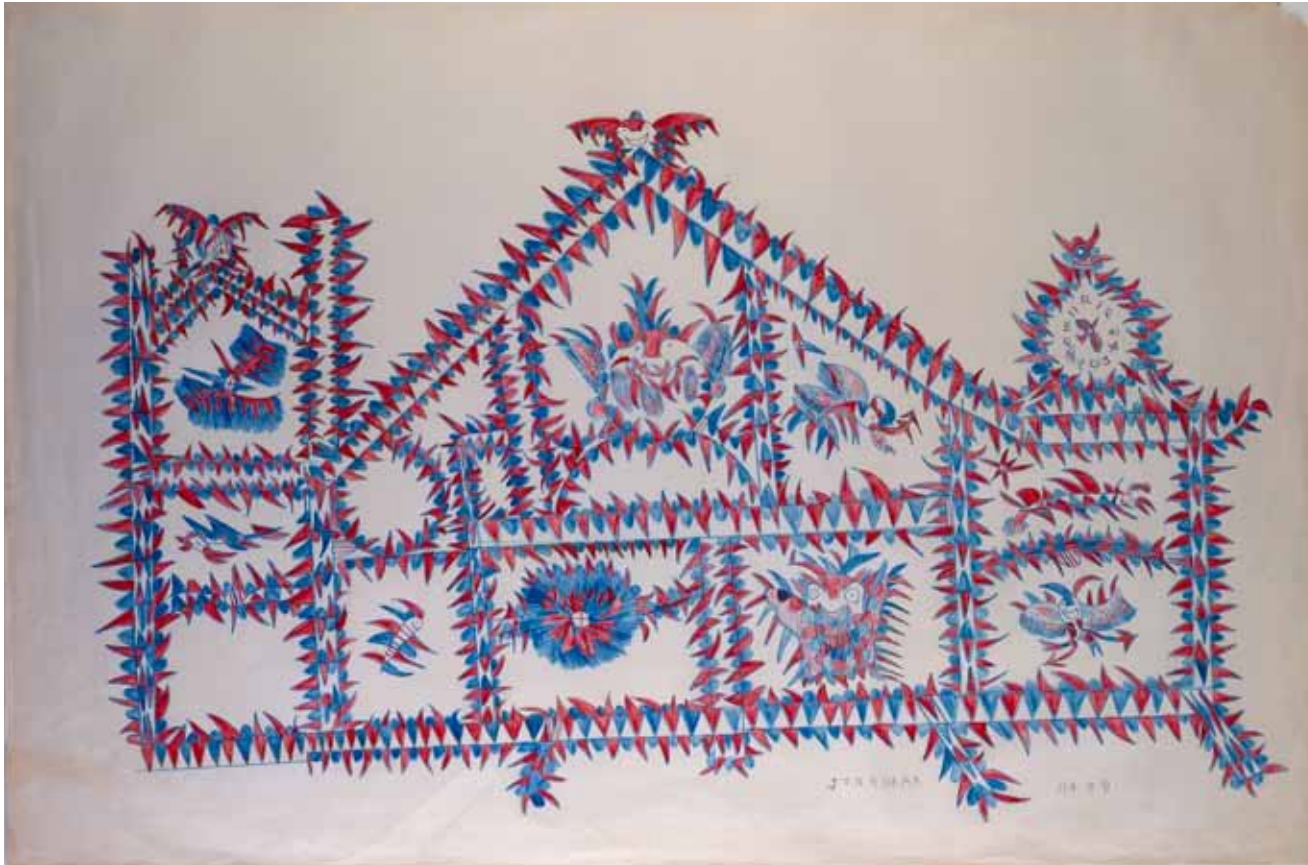


AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTIST WILLIAM HAWKINS started painting full-time in 1983, when he was in his 80s. He taught himself to draw by copying illustrations from magazines, horse-auction announcements, and calendars. His compositions are some of the most audacious of his peers—he liked them big and powerful. Hawkins packaged his paintings by

building frames for them (his early works have frames of painted scrap wood molding nailed directly onto the painting) and by boldly signing and dating his compositions. Hawkins's optimistic vision infused his oeuvre with immediacy and a rare communicative strength.

William L. Hawkins (1895-1990)  
Columbus, Ohio

BLACK AND WHITE BUILDING WITH COLLAGE  
1988 • enamel on Masonite with collage • 50 1/2 x 62 1/4"  
Gift of Frank Maresca and Roger Ricco, 2008.24.1



IN 1964, FRANK ALBERT JONES was serving a life sentence for murder in Huntsville, Texas, when he began to salvage discarded paper and red and blue accountants' pencil stubs from the prison office where he worked. With this limited palette, he quickly developed his singular barbed forms and the architectural structures he called "devil houses." He peopled them with "haints," or ghosts, who smile so as, in the artist's

words, "to get you to come closer . . . to drag you down and make you do bad things." Some of Jones's drawings recall the architecture of a penitentiary. The codes of communal prison life—the cell, the barbed wire, the clock—are evident everywhere. Jones signed many of his drawings with only his prison number, further marking the community and the culture from which this artwork was born.

Frank Albert Jones (1900-1969)  
Huntsville, Texas

DEVIL HOUSE

c. 1964-1969 • colored pencil and pencil on paper • 30 x 40"  
Gift of Chapman Kelley, 2003.21.1



John Culver (b. 1960)  
Sparta, Georgia

THE POWER OF GEOMETRIC  
2005-2006 • felt-tip marker, ink, and mixed media on paper • 22 x 28"  
Promised gift of Mary Koto, P3.2007.1



Justin McCarthy (1892-1977)  
Weatherly, Pennsylvania

QUEENS-MIDTOWN TUNNEL

Mid-twentieth century • oil on canvas board • 18 x 24"

Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard Jr., 1998.10.29



EUGENE VON BRUENCHENHEIN WORKED AS a florist and a baker before devoting the last forty years of his life to making art. The son of a sign painter and stepson of a Sunday painter who believed in reincarnation, Von Bruenchenhein was exposed to creative trades and nonconformist ideas from an early age. It was a fortunate foundation for an artist who eventually found his voice in a wide range of expressions: poetry, photography, painting, ceramics, and sculpture. "Create and be recognized" commanded a sign hanging in the artist's basement studio, and he attempted to do just that: Von Bruenchenhein's home was utterly transformed by his unrelenting outpouring of expression.

**Eugene Von Bruenchenhein (1910-1983)**  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

UNTITLED #700  
1958

Mixed media on Masonite  
24 x 24"

Gift of Edward Thorp and Susan Brundage, 2006.171



There is no abstract art. You must always start with something. Afterward you can remove all traces of reality. There is no danger then, anyway, because the idea of the object will have left an indelible mark.

–Pablo Picasso

Not illustrated:

**Clementine Hunter (1886/87-1988)**

Natchitoches, Louisiana

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

1962

Oil on canvas board

19 1/4 x 25 1/2"

Promised gift of Laura and Richard Parsons, P4.2006.1

All photography by Gavin Ashworth, New York, unless otherwise indicated:

Charles Bechtold, New York: page 12

John Parnell, New York: pages 20 & 41

Unidentified: pages 30, 38 & 52