

American Folk Art:

The Mennello Museum's permanent collection

Presentation Guidelines

Important topics to cover

Introduction: What is Folk Art?

- Folk art is created by self-taught, uneducated artists using local materials
- Also called "outsider" or "naïve" art
- Cultural and socioeconomic influence revealed in folk art ("cultural clues")
- Main themes/trends in folk art subject matter: self-exploration, personal life, religious beliefs, ethnicity/heritage, and working-class life

Southern Folk Art

- Large quantity of folk artists in the South
- *Howard Finster*: preacher, Paradise Garden, visions from God, numbered artworks
- *Minnie and Garland Adkins*: carvings of animals native to the Kentucky area, Garland's horses, Minnie's smaller works
- *Bessie Harvey*: impoverished, 11 children, mother's death, "spirit" debris, voodoo accusations, Africa in America sculpture series
- *Edgar Tolson*: carpenter, Biblical "Fall of Man" carved series, Grassroots Craftsmen
- *Nellie Mae Rowe*: born to former slave, drew portraits of employers, filled yard and home with artwork, tourists/visitors
- *Sister Gertrude Morgan*: visions from God, New Orleans, missionary, bride of Christ, religious artworks

Floridian Folk Art

- Offers glimpse into modern and indigenous Floridian life
- *Taft Richardson*: Tampa neighborhood, bone sculptures, art workshops for children
- *Ed Mumma*: retired to Gainesville, diabetes, 800 paintings, refused to sell
- *Purvis Young*: Miami, Urban Expressionism, murals, Goodbread Alley, documentary

Northern Folk Art

- Similar themes as Southern folk, some difference in subject matter and heritage
- *James Castle*: presumed retarded, may have been autistic, created books, drawings and cardboard figures, over 20,000 works
- *Lawrence Lebduska*: raised in Germany, studied stained-glass making, paintings of animals, murals in New York, Contemporary Gallery show

- *Elijah Pierce*: carved as a child, railroad work, barber, “Book of Wood”, did not gain recognition until the 1970s
- *Kevin Sampson*: sculptor, political themes, lost loved ones
- *Malcah Zeldis*: Jewish and social themes, life in kibbutz, flat/bold style, illustration

Conclusion: The Folk Art Legacy

- Contemporary art influence (related movements over last 40 years)
- Significance of folk art: inspirational, American storytelling, simplistically moving

Folk Art at the Mennello

- Brief history: location, Earl Cunningham, the Mennello’s
- Current exhibits: Floridian Folk and Southern Folk

References (where to find more information about Mennello folk artists)

Books:

- Outsider Art of the South. Kathy Moses.
- Ninety-Nine and a Half Won’t Do, the art of Nellie Mae Rowe.
- Howard Finster: Stranger from Another World. Tom Patterson.
- Testimony: Vernacular art of the African-American South. Kinshasha Conwill.
- Self-Taught Artists of the 20th century. Museum of American Folk Art Anthology.
- Self-Taught and Outsider art. Anthony Petullo.
- Elijah Pierce: Woodcarver. Columbus Museum of Art.

Websites:

- www.finstster.com (Howard Finster)
- www.folkart.org/mag/adkins/adkins.html (Minnie and Garland Adkins)
- www.sunsite.utk.edu/bessie/ (Bessie Harvey)
- www.tfaoi.com/aa/5aa/5aa94.htm (Sister Gertrude Morgan)
- www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1037 (Nellie Mae Rowe)
- www.detour.webdatabases.net (Edgar Tolson)
- www.barbaraarcher.com/artists/mumma/index.html (Ed Mumma)
- www.folkvine.org/richardson/ (Taft Richardson)
- www.purvisyoung.com (Purvis Young)
- www.icrist.com/jamescastle/ (James Castle)
- www.gseart.com/artists.asp?ArtistID=72 (Lawrence Lebduska)
- www.csc.edu/ElijahPierce/bio.htm (Elijah Pierce)
- www.folkart.org/mag/sampson/sampson.html (Kevin Sampson)
- www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/ (Malcah Zeldis)