

DARGER*ism*

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS AND HENRY DARGER

April 15 through September 21, 2008

Amy Cutler
Henry Darger
Jefferson Friedman
Anthony Goicolea
Trenton Doyle Hancock
Yun-Fei Ji
Justine Kurland
Justin Lieberman
Robyn O'Neil
Grayson Perry
Paula Rego
Michael St. John

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM, NEW YORK

THE AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM IS HOME TO THE

single largest repository of works by Henry Darger, one of the most significant artists of the twentieth century. Darger created nearly 300 watercolor and collage paintings to illustrate his 15,000-page masterpiece, *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*.

“Dargerism: Contemporary Artists and Henry Darger” examines the influence of Darger’s remarkable and cohesive oeuvre on eleven artists who are responding not only to the aesthetic beauty of Darger’s mythic work—with its tales of good versus evil, its epic scope and complexity, and even its subversive inventiveness—but to his unblinking work ethic and all-consuming devotion to artmaking. Many of these artists cite the 1997 exhibition “Henry Darger: The Unreality of Being” at the American Folk Art Museum and the museum’s 2001 permanent collection presentation as important moments of influence. There is a long history of academically trained artists drawing inspiration from self-taught artists and thus freeing themselves to think in unexpected ways and on their own idiosyncratic terms, almost in defiance of what they were taught. Jean Dubuffet, for example, used many of the devices of self-taught artist Gaston Chaissac, while Gregory Amenoff finds the aesthetic inventions of Martín Ramírez stimulating. Every artist finds camaraderie in other works of art; many of the artists presented here conjure up Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel, as well as graphic

novels. But it was Darger in particular who has inspired these artists in ways that are both overt and subtle. And Henry Darger, too, was absorbing the arts of his time, whether it was L. Frank Baum’s Oz series or the work of cartoonists, and evidence of these inheritances crowds each of his watercolor scrolls.

This exhibition demonstrates Darger’s pervasive influence on contemporary art discourse and how an examination of the work of self-taught artists is essential for a full understanding of the multiple strands of art history. It also winks at the authority of the art world and the rigid lines in the discipline of art history. By leaning into the borders of the Western canon, “Dargerism” illustrates how one self-taught master has spawned a new movement, a wholly new “ism.”

Brooke Davis Anderson
Director and Curator of The Contemporary Center
American Folk Art Museum

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AMY CUTLER

BORN IN 1974 IN POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK
LIVES AND WORKS IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Fairy tales, Persian miniatures, and snippets of overheard conversations are some of the things Amy Cutler finds influential—elements not unlike the children's books, religious ephemera, and fragments of images repurposed from newspapers and magazines that all played significant roles in Henry Darger's visual vocabulary. Both Cutler and Darger are entranced by the surreal magic of imaginative stories featuring hybrid creatures. Both artists are attracted to illustrative drawings, whether from a classic source, such as Persian miniatures, or a popular one, such as newspaper comics, and both seemingly delight in the unexpected narrative offered up on the street or in print. Cutler often develops her strange imagery by appropriating sections of anonymous conversations she overhears on the subway or in other public spheres. When she learned that Darger collected snippets of public interaction in another way—by clipping images from magazines and newspapers—she felt an affinity to his technique for gathering information.

Because Cutler works on paper with water-based paints and melds together figuration and landscape into a mysterious pictorial universe, many critics have noted her Darger-esque aesthetic. Additionally, the prominent players in both Cutler's and Darger's narrative oeuvres are tribes of women and gaggles of little girls. Cutler's females struggle against conflicts of domestic drudgery, while Darger's seven Vivian Girls fight a war to end slavery. Both artists engage their female characters in unworldly and slightly unnerving settings. Cutler's women are hunched over, carrying bundles on their backs and wearing black cocktail dresses; girls with extended braids woven to a Midwestern farmhouse pull the structure to somewhere—where?; and young girls in uniform fight on monkey bars connected by their tresses, all suggesting in their

solitary adventure Darger's blond-headed, best-dressed Vivian Girls, who constantly face frightening challenges from their male foes.

Amy Cutler first learned about Henry Darger in 1997, when the American Folk Art Museum presented the first comprehensive exhibition of Darger's work in New York City. At that time, Cutler was working into her imagery ideas about her grandmother, her mother, and herself, incorporating memories of attending an all-girls' school. She found a kinship with Darger's heroic feminine characters and personal metaphorical visual cues. Like Darger, Cutler develops detailed fantasy narratives that draw their inspiration from deeply felt personal experiences. So in awe is Cutler of Darger's works on paper she even appropriated one of his scenes, of Vivian Girls rolled up in a carpet hiding from their captors, reimagining it in her painting *Out in the Meadow*.

AMY CUTLER



OUT IN THE MEADOW

2000
Casein and Flashe on wood
15 x 12"
Collection of Roni and Ronald Casty
Photo courtesy Miller Block Gallery, Boston



VOYAGERS

2000
Casein and Flashe on wood
26 1/2 x 30"
Collection of Carolyn and Robin Wade
Photo courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects,
New York



MONKEY BARS

2001
Casein, Flashe, and aluminum leaf on wood
31 1/4 x 35"
Collection of Tom and Clay Tarica, courtesy Leslie Tonkonow
Artworks + Projects, New York
Photo courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects,
New York

AMY CUTLER



TRACTION

2002
Casein and Flashe on wood
32 x 60"
Collection of Francie Bishop Good and David Horvitz, courtesy
Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York
Photo courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects,
New York



PLOTLINE

2006
Gouache on paper
29 x 41 1/2"
Private collection, New York
Photo courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects,
New York

HENRY DARGER

1892-1973

LIVED AND WORKED IN CHICAGO

Henry Darger created and inhabited a vast imaginary world through his writing and painting. His work was discovered in 1972 by his Chicago landlord, the photographer Nathan Lerner, and was made public upon the artist's death in 1973. What Lerner found was a room full of unpublished manuscripts and bound piles of paintings. The magnitude of Darger's writing is mind boggling: his texts include a six-part weather journal kept daily from 1958 to 1967; several diaries; an autobiography, *History of My Life*, comprising more than 5,000 pages; *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, numbering more than 10,000 pages; and his masterful illustrated epic, the 15,000-page *Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion* (abbreviated as *In the Realms of the Unreal*). Darger created an astonishing body of artwork to accompany this manuscript; it is these fantastic mural-size watercolors, executed in lyrical seductive hues, that are celebrated today.

The artist began working on *In the Realms of the Unreal*, his best-known manuscript, when he was 19 years old. Written first in longhand and later typed, it is a fictional story of war and peace, good versus evil. The story follows the heroic efforts of a band of young sisters, the Vivian Girls, to free enslaved children held captive by an army of adults, the Glandelinians. The children's nudity reveals their mixed gender, a compelling aspect of Darger's imagery that is open to many interpretations. Throughout the tale, one confronts much death and destruction, and, as is often the case in the world of fiction, good usually triumphs over evil—but not without challenges along the way. *In the Realms of the Unreal*, however, has two endings: in one, concluding a series of harrowing trials and complex

adventures, the heroic Vivian Girls emerge triumphant, while in the other, they are defeated by the evil Glandelinians.

Darger taught himself drawing and painting techniques in the privacy of his home. But in order to fully realize his aesthetic vision, he devised a clever system to appropriate favored images (culled from coloring books, comic strips, and newspaper advertisements illustrating children's fashions), in which he had multiple photographic enlargements made to achieve his desired scales and traced elements onto his compositions using carbon paper. Darger freely and unapologetically commandeered images, and if all else failed, he simply cut and pasted reproductions directly onto his watercolor paintings, creating collages.

HENRY DARGER



AT 5 NORMA CATHERINE. BUT ARE RETAKEN.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

23 x 36 3/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, gift of Sam and Betsey Farber,
2003.8.1a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York



AFTER M WHURTER RUN GLANDELINIAN'S ATTACK AND
BLOW UP TRAIN CARRYING CHILDREN TO REFUGE.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper

23 x 36 3/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, gift of Sam and Betsey Farber,
2003.8.1b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

HENRY DARGER



TO ESCAPE FOREST FIRES THEY ENTER A VOLCANIC CAVERN. ARE HELPED OUT OF CAVE, TRAP BY BLENIGLOMENEAN CREATURES. / PERSUED BY FOREST FIRES, PROVING THE BIGNESS OF THE CONFLARRATION IT IS 40 MILES AWAY AND ADVANCING FAST. / HOW WHEN THEY WERE PUT IN A RAT INFESTED CELL, THEY BY USING THE RATS AND EVEN A FEW MICE THEY CAUGHT THEY MANAGED TO ESCAPE AFTER BEING PERSUED AND HOUNDED.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

19 x 70"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2000.25.1a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz



LOOKING WEST DOWN ARONBURG RUN RIVER

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

19 x 70"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2000.25.1b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

HENRY DARGER



AT SUNBEAM CREEK. ARE WITH LITTLE GIRL REFUGEES AGAIN IN PERIL FROM FOREST FIRES. BUT ESCAPE THIS ALSO, BUT HALF NAKED AND IN BURNED RAGS / AT TORRINGTON. ARE PERSUED BY A STORM OF FIRE BUT SAVE THEMSELVES BY JUMPING INTO A STREAM AND SWIM ACROSS AS SEEN IN NEXT PICTURE / THEIR RED COLOR IS CAUSED BY GLARE OF FLAMES. AT TORRINGTON. THEY REACH THE RIVER JUST IN THE NICK OF TIME.

Mid-twentieth century
Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper
19 x 70 1/2"
American Folk Art Museum, New York, anonymous gift in recognition of Sam Farber, 2004.1.2a
© Kiyoko Lerner
Photo by James Prinz



73 AT JENNIE RICHEE ESCAPE BY THEIR HELP.

Mid-twentieth century
Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper
19 x 70 1/2"
American Folk Art Museum, New York, anonymous gift in recognition of Sam Farber, 2004.1.2b
© Kiyoko Lerner
Photo by James Prinz

HENRY DARGER



53 AT JENNIE RICHEL ASSUMING NUDED APPEARANCE BY COMPULSION
RACE AHEAD OF COMING STORM TO WARN THEIR FATHER.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

19 x 70 1/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, gift of Ralph Esmerian in memory of

Robert Bishop, 2000.25.3a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz



AT PHELANTONBURG. THEY RAID A GUARDHOUSE / AT CALMANRINA
ESCAPE THROUGH CITY TUNNEL. / LAST AT PHELANTONBERG. THEY
WITNESS A MASSACRE OF CHILDREN.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

19 x 70 1/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, gift of Ralph Esmerian in memory of

Robert Bishop, 2000.25.3b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

HENRY DARGER



UNTITLED (Blengins Capturing Glandelinian Soldiers)

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper

31 1/2 × 131"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, gift of Sam and Betsey Farber, 1999.7.1a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by Gavin Ashworth



PICTURE ONE. THIS SCENE HERE SHOWS THE MURDEROUS MASSACRE STILL GOING ON BEFORE THE WINGED BLENGINS ARRIVED FROM THE SKY. THEY CAME SO QUICK HOW HOWEVER THAT THOSE FASTENED TO THE TREES, OR BOARD, AND THOSE ON THE RUN ESCAPED THE MUDERERIST RASCALS OR WERE RESCUED, AND FLOWN TO PERMANENT SAFTY AND SECURITY.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper

31 1/2 × 131"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, gift of Sam and Betsey Farber, 1999.7.1b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by Gavin Ashworth

HENRY DARGER



175 AT JENNIE RICHEL. EVERYTHING IS ALLRIGHT THOUGH STORM CONTINUES.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper

24 × 108 1/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2001.16.2a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz



176 PART TWO. JENNIE RICHEL WAITING FOR THE RAIN TO STOP AS THEY CANNOT SEE MANLEYS HEADQUARTERS THROUGH THE RAIN SHROUD.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper

24 × 108 1/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2001.16.2b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

HENRY DARGER



AT JULLO CALLIO. AND AGAIN ESCAPE AND BEING PERSUED BY
WILD GLANDELINIAN SOLDIERY SUDDENLY DASH INTO A PARTY
OF CHRISTIAN SOLDIERY AND ARE RESCUED.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

19 x 47 3/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2002.22.1a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz



AT BATTLE OF DROSABELLAMAXIMILLAN. SEEING
GLANDELINIANS RETREATING VIVIAN GIRLS GRASP CHRISTIAN
BANNERS, AND LEAD CHARGE AGAINST FOE

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper

19 x 47 3/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2002.22.1b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

HENRY DARGER



18 AT NORMA CATHERINE. BUT WILD THUNDERSTORM WITH CYCLONE LIKE WIND SAVES THEM.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, colored pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

19 1/8 x 47 3/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2002.22.2a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz



AT CEDERNINE. JENNIE IS BRUTALLY TREATED. NO 1 AT CAINS FAIR THEY RETURN TO THE TAVERN SURPRISE THE SAME Foe GENERALS. TAKING THEM PRISONERS, BUT, -

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper

19 1/8 x 47 3/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2002.22.2b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

HENRY DARGER



6 AT JENNIE RICHELIEU HAVE THRILLING TIME WHILE WITH
BOMBSHELLS BURSTING ALL AROUND. BRANCH OF ARONBURG RUN.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

19 1/8 x 47 1/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2002.22.3a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz



1 AT CAINS FAIR. VIOLETS SISTERS AT HER COMMAND, ESCAPES, BUT SHE
REMAINS A PRISONER, AND SHE EVEN IN THE FACE OF GUNS, OBSTINATELY
REFUSES TO TELL WHERE THEY WENT. / 2 AT CAINS FAIR, HER SISTERS COMES
TO HE RESCUE AND ALL THE OFFICERS EXCEPT CANNON ARE CAPTURED NOTE
THE STRANGE PHENOMENA.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper

19 1/8 x 47 1/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase, 2002.22.3b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

HENRY DARGER



2 AT CEDERINE SHE WITNESSES A FRIGHTFUL
SLAUGHTER OF OFFICERS.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

24 x 76"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase,

2002.22.6a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz



3 PLACE NOT MENTIONED / ESPOSIDE 3 2 ESCAPE
WITH GREAT NUMBER OF KIDS STILL FIGHTING

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

24 x 76"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase,

2002.22.6b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

HENRY DARGER



144 AT JENNIE RICHEL. WAITING FOR THE BLINDING
RAIN TO STOP.

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

24 × 107 3/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase,

2003.10.1a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz



145 AT JENNIE RICHEL. HARD PRESSED AND
HARASSED BY THE STORM

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

24 × 107 3/4"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase,

2003.10.1b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

HENRY DARGER



UNTITLED (Campgrounds in Stormy Landscape with Soldiers and Vivian Girls)

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper

22 x 96"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase,

2003.10.3a

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz



UNTITLED (Ornate Interior with Multiple Figures of Girls and Blengins)

Mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper

22 x 96"

American Folk Art Museum, New York, museum purchase,

2003.10.3b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

JEFFERSON FRIEDMAN

BORN IN 1974 IN SWAMPSCOTT, MASSACHUSETTS
LIVES AND WORKS IN LONG ISLAND CITY, NEW YORK

I first saw Henry Darger's work at an exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum in 1997. One of the things about Darger that first drew me to him was the feeling that he created this amazing body of work not because he wanted to but rather because he felt compelled to. Just by looking at the paintings the viewer can feel a striving and know that this body of work needed to come out of him by any means necessary. In this sense, Darger is a great inspiration and role model for me. I can't ever hope to achieve the beautiful purity of his process, but in the musical compositions I've written that I care the most about (*Sacred Heart: Explosion* of course being one), I've had a fleeting glimpse of what I imagine Darger must have felt like when he was writing and painting. *Sacred Heart: Explosion* is directly based on Henry Darger's life and work, but on a deeper level, his story and his incredible creations have affected all of my music and have inspired me to be a better composer.

Jefferson Friedman's *Sacred Heart: Explosion* was composed in homage to a watercolor diptych by Henry Darger (illustrated on page 20). The piece is one section of a trilogy titled *In the Realms of the Unreal*, each movement of which is based on the life and work of a different American visionary artist. The second section, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly*, was piqued by the extraordinary tinfoil sculpture built by James Hampton in a Washington, D.C., garage in the mid-twentieth century. The third section is still a work in progress.

Friedman was initially drawn to Darger's work because, for the composer, much of the creative process is focused on grappling with inner conflicts. When Friedman composes, he is, like Darger, "trying to get something from the inside to the outside." Writing a piece of orchestral music is an extremely obsessive process, and the composer detected the social value and redemptive quality of Darger's paintings while also being attracted to the watercolors' sophisticated formal qualities. Influenced by what he sees as Darger's obsessive detail, Friedman copied Darger's approach by incorporating myriad details to every note in the musical score. Mirroring Darger's technique of tracing images from popular media, Friedman "traced" a hymn into *Sacred Heart: Explosion*. The composer explains, "I felt like I was channeling Darger's process in that way." The formal aspect of Friedman's orchestral composition mimics the formal aspect of Darger's diptych: organized in two parts like the painting, the hymn that is presented in the first half is exploded in the second half.

JEFFERSON FRIEDMAN



SACRED HEART: EXPLOSION (Score Detail)

2001–2007
Length: 15 minutes
Courtesy National Symphony Orchestra
Leonard Slatkin, Music Director
John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C.
With thanks to the musicians of the National Symphony, members of
Local 161-710 of the American Federation of Musicians



UNTITLED (The Sacred Heart of Jesus)

Henry Darger (1892–1973)
Chicago
Mid-twentieth century
Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper
19 × 48"
Collection of Kiyoko Lerner
© Kiyoko Lerner
Photo courtesy Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

ANTHONY GOICOLEA

BORN IN 1971 IN GEORGIA

LIVES AND WORKS IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Anthony Goicolea had already been exploring childhood and fairy tales in his photography and videos when he discovered Henry Darger. The self-taught artist's influence appeared in Goicolea's work shortly thereafter, when Goicolea began to incorporate Darger's artistic methods (he even traced his drawings into his own artwork) and aesthetic judgments into his photographs, drawings, and paintings. The photograph *Before Dawn* directly references Darger's watercolor paintings, indicating how both artists share a penchant for creating myths and provoking an audience into discomfort. Both artists create unsettling images through collage technique (low-tech with scissors and paste in Darger's case, high-tech with Photoshop in Goicolea's), building highly charged surreal narratives that are layered with alarm and humor. Darger and Goicolea share a prepubescent energy that pops off the wall when these works are paired.

Goicolea even adopted an installation technique used by the American Folk Art Museum in the 2001 Darger exhibition. In order to display Darger's double-sided work, the paintings were sandwiched between Mylar and Plexiglas and then placed in frames mounted atop freestanding armatures. Goicolea has created a series of "transparent" drawings designed to replicate this display strategy.

My first exposure to Henry Darger was at the American Folk Art Museum. I accidentally stumbled across it. At the time I was working on a series of multiple self-portraits in which I cloned my figure in the guise of adolescent schoolboys acting out against the constraints of strict institutional backdrops. I remember being struck by the fact that we both worked in long, cinematic, horizontal formats and we were working toward creating character-based mythologies. Hand-tracing duplicate images of schoolgirls, Darger used analog techniques to multiply his characters and create groups of seemingly identical figures working and fighting toward a common goal. Similarly, I was using modern technology to digitally duplicate my own image and create an army of identical boys playing out issues of group politics and identity. The similarities in subject, format, and technique led me to study his work more closely. Under his influence, I began to experiment with perspective and scale based on many of his drawings and exaggerated my elongated tableaux to help accentuate the idea of narrative in space. I also traced a tree from one of Darger's paintings (which incidentally Darger traced from another source), and it hangs on my studio wall.

When I began working with drawing and painting, it only seemed logical to reference Darger further. I turned the digital cloning and layering process used in constructing my photos into a hand-rendered technique similar to Darger's. Drawings were traced multiple times on Mylar and placed on top of each other to throw things out of focus and create a flattened sense of depth. Working on both the front and back of several sheets of Mylar, androgynous figures of indeterminate age float on top of and through each other in a layered composition separated by planes of Plexiglas and Mylar.

ANTHONY GOICOLEA



ASH WEDNESDAY

2001
Color photograph
40 x 80"
Collection of Stéphane Janssen, Arizona
Photo courtesy Postmasters Gallery, New York



BEFORE DAWN

2001
Color photograph
78 x 40"
Collection of Stéphane Janssen, Arizona
Photo courtesy Postmasters Gallery, New York

ANTHONY GOICOLEA



DECOMPOSITION

2004
Graphite, ink, and acrylic on Mylar and Plexiglas
22 x 25 1/2"
Collection of Philip Aarons and Shelley Fox Aarons
Photo courtesy Postmasters Gallery, New York



TAR BABY

2004
Graphite, ink, acrylic, and black pepper on Mylar and Plexiglas
43 1/4 x 37 1/4"
Collection of Stéphane Janssen, Arizona
Photo courtesy Postmasters Gallery, New York



FLEEING

2005
Acrylic, ink, graphite, and collage on Mylar
85 x 75"
Hort Family Collection
Photo courtesy Postmasters Gallery, New York

TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

BORN IN 1974 IN OKLAHOMA CITY
LIVES AND WORKS IN HOUSTON

About 50,000 years ago, an ape jacked off in a field of flowers giving birth to a legend, no, the legend. For years there have been reports of strange, furry, smelly heaps residing in wooded areas around the world. These reports are supposed sightings of the cryptid (creature not yet verified by science), simply known to cryptozoologists as mounds.

Wow, that's me? I, Trenton Doyle, am, for reasons that I can't quite explain, connected to this mysterious creature known as the mound. I share a psychic bond with each mound on earth. I am ground control and they are my satellites. I see what they see. I remember things that they did and things that they saw even after they are dead. This information not only comes to me in dreams, but I am also gradually fed information sporadically throughout the day. I will be taking a dump and get a crystal clear image of tree bark.

Henry Darger's Blengiglomeneans, Glandelinians, Abbieannians, and Vivian Girls romp through his imaginary tale. Trenton Doyle Hancock builds adventures for Homerbuctas, Vegans, Mounds, Sesom, and Torpedo Boy. Darger and Hancock create rich, mysterious, and bizarre worlds featuring fictitious characters engaging in battles of good versus evil. Hancock credits Darger for empowering him with the confidence to explore narrative and mythmaking in his own body of work. Hancock was a student when he first saw Darger's artwork in *Raw* magazine in 1990. He was influenced by Darger's handling of visual information, use of collage, and incorporation of modest materials but most profoundly by his development of an alternative world. At that time, Hancock felt that "the door was closed" to storytelling in the art world. "He gave me permission to pursue my truth," the artist has said. "What I learned from Darger was completely the opposite of what we learned in grad school. Henry Darger's art wasn't about the Art World driving the Work. It was the Work driving the Work. I obviously took creating a narrative as a cue from Henry Darger." With their epic ongoing sagas (often featuring characters thinly veiled as Henry Darger and Trenton Doyle Hancock), these two aesthetic cousins track similar terrain in their artmaking. Hancock respects, as do many artists in this exhibition and beyond, Darger's sophisticated artistic practices and his innovative, homegrown techniques. Popular media sources, such as cartoons and comics, as well as the Bible, are foundational for the artistic vocabulary found in both imaginative narratives.

Referencing R. Crumb, graphic novels, Hieronymus Bosch, and a whole range of eclectic influences and traditions all informing his visual lexicon, Trenton Doyle Hancock's work forces the taut lines of art history into something more elastic. A critic once wrote, "A typical Hancock painting, if there is such a thing, draws on comic and fantasy art, borrows from surrealism, cubism, modernism—pretty much every 'ism' you can think of, in fact—and matches scatological humor with high theory." The critic could well have included *Dargerism*.

TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK



TORPEDO BOY TRIES HIS DARNEDEST TO
STOP AN OOZING MOUNDMEAT

2001
Mixed media on canvas
138 x 100"
The Lindemann Collection, Miami Beach
Photo courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York



AND THE BRANCHES BECAME AS STORM CLOUDS

2003
Mixed media on canvas
95 1/2 x 102"
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, museum purchase,
2004.4.P.P
Photo courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York



Trenton Doyle Hancock working on a site-specific installation for
“Dargerism: Contemporary Artists and Henry Darger” at the American
Folk Art Museum, April 2008
Photo by Jennifer Kalter, New York

YUN-FEI JI

BORN IN 1963 IN BEIJING
LIVES AND WORKS IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Yun-Fei Ji's work most obviously illustrates an influence of traditional Chinese scroll paintings (especially Song Dynasty landscape paintings), and critics have repeatedly conjured the work of Hieronymus Bosch, Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Philip Guston—as well as comic books—as inspiration. Ji cites a love of Chinese folk art along with these art-historical ancestors. “I consider myself more of a folk artist, actually,” says Ji, who also collects folk art. “I just love the Chinese folk paper cutouts, the folk paintings, everything. So I always use that as a beginning point. Whenever I go back to that [my work] is better.” Ji first read articles about Henry Darger in the New York press, then discovered several monographs published on Darger throughout the 1990s, and finally saw his first Darger paintings at MoMA's P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in 2001. Ji's artwork soon became inflected with Darger's passionate interest in disasters, war, weather, and, more pointedly, an aesthetic freedom. Ji explains, “At one point, I had a monkey on my back who was always telling me ‘this is too illustrational’ or ‘that it is too narrative.’ What Darger did for me was that he took that monkey off my back.”

Numerous aesthetic concerns marry these two artists: both approach perspective in a similar fashion, creating shallow space on their flat surface, while still shaping superb detail-laden landscapes. A shallow perspective is, for Darger, most likely a result of his lack of formal training, though we know from the artist's extensive archives that he experimented and developed his own homemade solutions for creating convincing depth on a flat surface. For Ji, the low-lying landscape results from his mirroring of the techniques of early Chinese ink- and brush-painting traditions, as well as that of Darger. Both artists appropriate images from a variety of sources: Darger borrowed from coloring books, comics, magazines, and

newspapers, while Ji relies on his own photography and information gathering—mainly with the help of the Internet—to build up his visual vocabulary. *Dinner at the Forbidden City* depicts the First Opium War between the British and Chinese, which took place from 1839 to 1842, just a couple of decades before the American Civil War of 1861–1865, which was Henry Darger's main reference during the creation of *In the Realms of the Unreal*. Ji's three British officers in the center of the composition recall Darger's Glandelinian soldiers in the way that both artists delight in illustrative details, lightly applying color to their figures.

Yun-Fei Ji has been working for many years on a series addressing the mass destruction and massive relocation of people caused by the Three Gorges Dam—an epic transformation of the Chinese landscape. Ji could nearly call his series *In the Realms of the Unreal*, as this national project so startlingly seems to be taking shape in an entirely different universe. Given Henry Darger's ongoing fascination with disastrous events such as the Great Chicago Fire and seasonal tornadoes, if he were alive today he most likely would be just as intrigued as Ji is by this twenty-first-century enterprise.

YUN-FEI JI



THE EMPTY CITY—LISTEN TO THE WIND

2003
Mineral pigments and ink on mulberry paper
25 × 116 1/2"
Collection of Susan Swenson and Joe Amrhein
Copyright © 2003 Yun-Fei Ji
Photo courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York



DINNER AT THE FORBIDDEN CITY

2001
Mineral pigments on rice paper
54 × 67"
Private collection, New York
Copyright © 2001 Yun-Fei Ji
Photo courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York

JUSTINE KURLAND

BORN IN 1969 IN WARSAW, NEW YORK
LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK CITY

Images of girls dominate Henry Darger's and Justine Kurland's narratives. Girls as innocents, girls as warriors, girls as their own cosmology. Like Darger's paintings, Kurland's staged photographs capture a moment on the brink of violence, sex, or some other threatening scenario for these "girl packs." She had heard all about Darger's artwork from the exhibitions presented at the American Folk Art Museum in 1997 and 2001 before she actually saw it. Concurrent with these museum shows, Kurland was choreographing groups of girls in nature settings, resulting in the creation of an entire world that is mythic in its otherworldliness, strangeness, and unsteady mood.

Kurland has described her images as "a Huckleberry Finn narrative but giving it to girls." At times her scenes of girls confuse us—are the girls on a field trip or part of an army? Staging one of her photographs in the 2001 *New Zealand* series, which includes *Sheep Wranglers* and *Battlefield* (page 30), Kurland was thinking of Darger's Vivian Girls as she directed the positions and postures of her girl subjects. Her set-up tableaux evoke teenage escape fantasies and brave new worlds. Their Darger-esque sensibility means that Kurland's girls, too, are on the run in a threatening universe. The artist says, "These photographs were created out of an effort to fuse unreality with reality; to impose girls' fantasies over the world as they have inherited it. The girls in the pictures are participants in an ideal game in which adolescent posturing is the most cunning form of strategy. The object of the game they play is to conquer the world and complete it according to a model gleaned from the collective imagination of girls everywhere. It is a mythic vision of youth, one where teenage runaways are sprites haunting the American landscape."

Some of Kurland's other references include Timothy O'Sullivan's Civil War photographs and the work of Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Cole, and Arthur Rackham. About Henry Darger, she writes,

The girls I photographed were, in the same way Darger's girls were, conduits of my own fantasy, the difference being that with photography we are not left in the hermetic world of the fantasy, because the photograph has an actuality, an actual place and time.

The idea of Darger preceded my seeing his work, and I was as much influenced by this rumor of Darger's armies of girls as I was when I finally saw his work, maybe more so when it wasn't concrete and I could blend it into my own imagination. It gets complicated and hard to describe how his fantasy influenced something I was building up to in my photographs of girls, and almost impossible to know if this idea of armies of girls was something I took from him or if I just responded to it in his work because I had already been thinking about it. These lines are never so straight.

JUSTINE KURLAND



THE ORCHARD

1998
Color photograph
30 x 40"
Collection of brae Art
Photo courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York



BOY TORTURE: DOUBLE-HEADED SPIT MONSTER

1999
Color photograph
30 x 40"
Collection of Scott J. Lorinsky
Photo courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

JUSTINE KURLAND



SHEEP WRANGLERS

2001
Color photograph
30 x 40"
Collection of A.G. Rosen
Photo courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York



BATTLEFIELD

2001
Color photograph
30 x 40"
Courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

JUSTIN LIEBERMAN

BORN IN 1977 IN GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA
LIVES AND WORKS IN PHILMONT, NEW YORK

Unlike the other artists in this exhibition who quote Henry Darger's methods, motives, or narratives, Justin Lieberman steals the landscapes from the self-taught artist's paintings in the American Folk Art Museum's collection. By manipulating images of Darger's artworks in Photoshop, Lieberman empties the landscapes of human presence and resizes the reproductions back to their (nearly) original scale. Now absent of Darger's figures, these compositions instead are teeming with girls taken from photographer Jock Sturges's infamous series of nude pubescent girls, splicing them with images of the heads of child beauty-pageant contestants or Paul McCarthy figures. Lieberman first showed these works as part of his Yale graduate thesis project titled "Folk Art Is the Work of Satisfied Slaves."

Preteen beauty pageants are a cultural phenomenon that thrives on visuals dismissed by elite culture as kitsch. Heavy makeup, frilly dresses, bright colors, and artifice pervade the images. Sturges's pictures are the exact opposite. They are often taken in natural settings, and his use of black-and-white photography serves to highlight the formal aspects of the medium. In a perfect inversion of the situation surrounding the pageant photos, they are frequently labeled by the mass media as artsy kiddy porn. When I showed these isolated figures to people, their reaction was surprising. Most people saw the figures as pathological, created out of desire. In keeping with this unexpected interpretation, I employed the background from a Henry Darger painting from which I removed his own painted figures in Photoshop.

Darger was an obvious choice in this case, as he is an artist who is nearly always interpreted in terms of pathology, i.e., had he not found an outlet in his paintings he surely would have been a serial killer. I do not personally agree with this interpretation, but its prevalence is indisputable.

I have loved the bizarre pictures and writings of Henry Darger since the moment I saw them in an issue of *Juxtapoz* magazine when I was 17 years old and in my first year of art school, yet it is strange to think of my work as being influenced by Darger's. My work plays with aesthetic and cultural conventions and discourse, things from which Darger himself was completely removed. Although, thinking it over now, there are many ways in which I identify with Darger himself. I am a fairly solitary person (not nearly so much as Darger, but I consider his example of solitude to be a beautiful one). I also believe that art must reside within a moral universe. So perhaps I could call him an influence after all.

JUSTIN LIEBERMAN



THANK HEAVEN FOR LITTLE GIRLS (double-sided)

2004

Ink-jet prints and Plexiglas

32 x 82 x 1"

Collection of Sue and Joe Berland

Photo courtesy Zach Feuer Gallery, New York (LFL)



UNTITLED

2005

Mixed media on paper

12 x 36"

Collection of Jennifer Stockman

Photo courtesy Zach Feuer Gallery, New York (LFL)

ROBYN O'NEIL

BORN IN 1977 IN OMAHA
LIVES AND WORKS IN HOUSTON

I first saw Darger's work in a small catalog when I was about 20 years old. My painting professor, Michael Miller, handed it to me in his office. I sat down with it in an uncomfortable office chair, students whirling around me, words and questions surrounding my body, but I was in an entirely new world looking at those pages. I could not speak for the rest of the day. I knew I had viewed work that could not be compared to anything else I had ever seen. It was better. More genuine. More beautiful. More articulated and considered. And it jarred me. Great art should baffle, but how often does that truly happen? When images bewilder and quiet, they resonate forever.

Robyn O'Neil feels a strong harmony with Henry Darger because they share Midwestern and Catholic roots, a sense of isolation from the larger community, and a fascination with weather. O'Neil identifies with Darger's artwork, too: Her preference for using the landscape as a stagelike device for her anonymous community of men recalls Darger's methods and motivations.

The theme of weather is employed symbolically by both artists in their comprehensive tales, acting as a premonition to fighting, violence, and death. O'Neil is particularly inspired by Darger's landscapes, and she conjures his emotive skies to convey meaning in her own graphite drawings, landscapes that are peopled by a tribe of men in sweat suits who face the apocalypse. (The last drawing in this seven-year series, *These Moving Bodies, These Numb Processions*, is on view in this exhibition.) O'Neil's epic tale featuring a fixed set of characters recalls Darger's own tale of good versus evil, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, and ties both artists to one another in their convincing depictions of isolation. The melancholy mood pervading these fantasy settings provokes our imagination about the moral battle both O'Neil and Darger take us into. Admiration for the grand American landscape painting tradition is also highlighted in the large horizontal format enlisted by the two artists.

O'Neil—whose meticulous work is often compared to Bosch and Bruegel—found Darger's imaginary world a departure point for her own colossally scaled fantasy universe. For Darger it was not unlikely that a band of blond-headed girls could win a battle against adult men; for O'Neil, middle-aged suburban men seem unable to ward off the ominous and inevitable signs of an apocalyptic conclusion. The artist says of her despairing protagonists, "I always knew I was going to kill off all of these men I have been drawing. . . . I think the desire for a clean slate (what it would be like after the apocalypse) is what I have always been after. . . . To me, that's the ultimate Utopia—a land with no one."

ROBYN O'NEIL



THESE MOVING BODIES, THESE NUMB PROCESSIONS

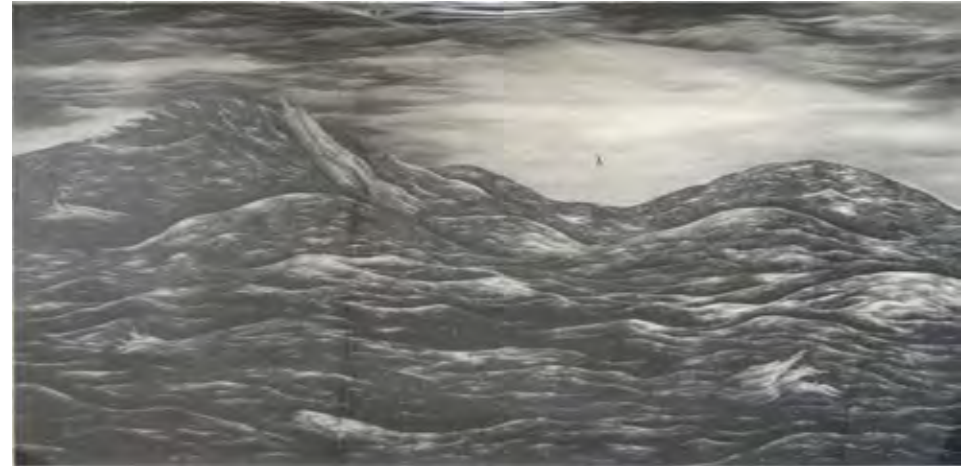
2005

Graphite on paper

65 × 37"

Private collection, New York

Photo courtesy Clementine Gallery, New York



THESE FINAL HOURS EMBRACE AT LAST; THIS IS
OUR ENDING, THIS IS OUR PAST

2007

Graphite on paper

83 × 166 3/4"

Courtesy of the artist and Dunn and Brown Contemporary,
Dallas

Photo courtesy Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas

GRAYSON PERRY

BORN IN 1960 IN CHELMSFORD, ENGLAND
LIVES AND WORKS IN LONDON

Henry Darger is my favorite artist.

Grayson Perry has, far more than any other artist, neatly internalized Darger's artwork and incorporated the self-taught artist's subjects and methods into his own body of work—employing war and child-abuse imagery into his compositions; executing his narrative with collage, drawings, and thought bubbles; and appropriating Darger's figuration and transgendered characters. Perry once said about Darger's watercolor paintings, "I felt that they were like one of my pots rolled out."

Issues of war, civility, and gender equally transfix Perry and Darger. Perry's richly embellished pots appear lush and opulent, and Darger's lusciously colored watercolor paintings defy their gruesome battle scenes and dark subject matter. The seductive use of materials to convey challenging, often transgressive themes aims to comment on contemporary society's "deep flaws." Perry, like Darger, uses the narrative style and figurative aesthetic to get at these gripping realities. He explains, "I have spent a life long playing out of his world and I tried to emulate his technique."

The two artists prefer obsessively made, colorful, and decorative works, referencing folk art, craft, and popular culture. They are both drawn to an opulent aesthetic, including intricate details to display sweet, chilling, and searing scenes. They explore the complexities of human behavior and create artworks illustrating our shared time.

I first encountered the art of Henry Darger in 1979 in an exhibition called "The Outsiders" at the Hayward Gallery in London. It was a show that was to be a significant influence on my aesthetic. After seeing all the outpourings of artists unconcerned by the values of art history or the market I felt like I had been given permission to make works principally motivated by my obsessions and my inner imaginative world. Apart from the intrigue of the discovery of his oeuvre, what resonated for me about Darger's works was the central metaphor of war, which also dominated my own highly organized imaginary world, which was my refuge between the ages of 5 and 15.

Twenty years later I found myself fascinated by his works anew as a consequence of my experiences with psychotherapy and also my transvestism developing into a delight in dressing as a little girl. I found myself identifying with Henry Darger in a profound way. I felt a kinship in that I sensed we used similar channels to direct our internal emotional dramas into our art.

I love Darger's work not just because of its inventiveness and beauty, not just because I, too, constantly return to themes of childhood, gender, and war, but also because we shared an escape route from difficult times. I only retreated to an imaginary world for a few childhood years. Darger lived almost exclusively in the realms of the unreal.

GRAYSON PERRY



HE COMES NOT IN TRIUMPH

2004
Glazed ceramic
20 7/8 x 11 3/4" diam.
Collection of Monica and Rick Segal
Copyright © 2004 Grayson Perry
Photo courtesy Victoria Miro Gallery, London



BLACK DOG

2004
Glazed ceramic
20 1/2 x 13" diam.
Collection of Joan and Michael Salke
Copyright © 2004 Grayson Perry
Photo courtesy Victoria Miro Gallery, London

PAULA REGO

BORN IN 1935 IN LISBON
LIVES AND WORKS IN LONDON

Storytelling is at the root of each of Paula Rego's artistic influences, and it is the narrative that is the key to unlocking her art. Portuguese and British fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and folk tales have provided Rego with much inspiration over the last fifty years. She credits Disney films as her "ultimate artistic influence" and names Walt Disney "one of the greatest pictorial geniuses of the twentieth century." Her love of Disney cartoon animation and children's picture books as a young girl provided an early visual vocabulary she has been mining for decades. So, in 1979, when she first saw Henry Darger's artwork, she was overwhelmed. She shares with Darger favored themes of mischievous power games and hierarchies, particularly if girlhood and its appetites entangle with obedience as part of the narrative.

Rego was enough in awe of Darger's work to incorporate his Vivian Girls into a 1984–1985 series of paintings, three of which are on view in this exhibition. Drawn to the Vivian Girls' pranks, she, like Darger, made them both heroines and slaves of her painted stories. These spontaneous and colorful artworks demonstrate the historic and generational depth of Darger's effect on the world of art. The artist recalls,

I first came across Henry Darger's work when it was shown at "The Outsiders" exhibition at the Hayward Gallery [in London] in 1979, and was then introduced to more of it by Victor Musgrave. Musgrave and Monika Kinley ran the Outsider Archive in England, which included Henry Darger. I loved the narrative look of the pictures and the stories they told of the Vivian Girls, of their constant fight, tormented and enslaved by the army that occupied their magic country. I liked the way the Vivian Girls were helped by winged, magic animals. I began doing a whole series of pictures using the idea of the Vivian Girls, but telling very much my own stories.

Sometime after doing my pictures, I made a pilgrimage to Chicago with Monika Kinley to visit Henry Darger's studio. I met Nathan Lerner who had been Henry Darger's landlord, and who had preserved the studio and all the work. The studio was dark and dingy, still with photographs of girls (mostly Shirley Temple) on the walls. I was shown rolls of drawings of the Vivian Girls undergoing the most awful tortures. Most of them were naked and had little penises.

I have always been interested in art brut as collected by Jean Dubuffet, but discovering the Vivian Girls was different. Darger was the most exquisite colorist, and I loved the mixture of magic, pain, and beauty. As I left the room the door closed very hard on my hand and trapped it for a while. I knew then that I would not do another picture about the Vivian Girls.

PAULA REGO



THE VIVIAN GIRLS IN TUNISIA

1984
Acrylic on canvas
79 × 40"
Collection of Paula Rego
Photo courtesy Marlborough Gallery, London



THE VIVIAN GIRLS BREAKING CHINA

1984
Acrylic on canvas
94 1/2 × 71"
Collection of Isabel and José Dias Silva
Photo courtesy Marlborough Gallery, London



THE VIVIAN GIRLS AT THE END OF THE WORLD

1984
Acrylic on canvas
95 1/2 × 70 1/2"
Collection of Módulo—Centro Difusor de Arte, Lisbon
Photo courtesy Marlborough Gallery, London

MICHAEL ST. JOHN

BORN IN 1957 IN INDIANA
LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK CITY

Inspired by Henry Darger's imagination, individualism, and singularity, Michael St. John has made two sculptures of Darger's fantasy creatures, the Blengiglomeneans. Copied from one of Darger's paintings, the *Blengin* on view in this exhibition is intimate in scale and transforms the two-dimensional watercolor version into a three-dimensional sculpture made out of Sculpey. St. John studied in Chicago, a city known for championing self-taught artists and their work, and has been an admirer of this art for decades. He feels that "outsider art" is always a part of his artistic exploration. St. John has a deep respect for Darger's ability to persevere in a creative endeavor and manifest his own singular vision that symbolizes, for St. John, a comfort and recognition of one's own voice.

St. John first came across Darger's work in magazines. *Blengin* is one of several sculptures he has made commemorating artists he admires, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Philip Guston, and Ray Johnson. The artist has also made Sculpey works in honor of *Jaws*, the smiley face, Liz Taylor, and Jason from the *Friday the 13th* movie franchise. With his homages, St. John celebrates the "building [of] private worlds, whole cosmologies out of the things of this world." His use of appropriated images elevate them to iconic status: for St. John, the *Blengin* "represents Darger's complex world of male and female and protector and victim simultaneously."

MICHAEL ST. JOHN



BLENGIN

2002–2003

Polychromed Sculpey and wood

14 × 5" diam.

Collection of Martina Batan

Photo courtesy Marvelli Gallery, New York

DICKENS AND THE COPPERTONE GIRL: HENRY DARGER AND HIS INFLUENCES

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Henry Darger moved into the small Chicago apartment that would serve as his home and studio for the remaining forty years of his life. In that safe haven, brimming with mementos and ephemera acquired over decades, Darger constructed an elaborate fantasy world that continuously inspired his personal vision and kept the self-taught artist immersed in the materials needed for the creation of his most dramatic work. The objects assembled here hint at some of the major influences on the development and production of Darger's art and writings.

Darger loved books, and many of his sources were literary, with illustrated volumes holding a particular fascination. Taught to read at an early age, his personal library includes some of the great modern classics, such as Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, and most of L. Frank Baum's *Oz* series, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe's affecting antislavery epic, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The strong narratives in these and other stories, combined with their visual counterparts, proved to be an influential source for the development of Darger's own 15,000-page novel, *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*.

Once completed, Darger's text would form the foundation for the artist's visual output. His often violent fantasy adventure is populated with brightly colored gardens, fantastic otherworldly creatures, dramatic battle scenes, and vigilant, heroic young women—visions made unforgettable by Darger's elaborate drawings.

With no formal art training and unsure of his own drawing skills, Darger again turned to popular culture for assistance, appropriating countless images from a wide variety of sources: tracing, collaging, enlarging, and rearranging this material into expressive and suspenseful narratives that suited his own intentions. Pictures of storm clouds, religious ephemera, Civil War illustrations, children's coloring books, classic literature, and contemporary advertising all carry equal weight in Darger's democratic creative process. Marching guards and waving cowgirls make direct appearances elsewhere in these galleries, while winged cartoon creatures, John Wayne in *The Alamo*, and the stormlike visions haunting Don Quixote may have been more inspirational in nature.

Darger left no written documentation of his artistic navigation, but buried there alongside his completed works, among the stacks of newspapers, popular magazines, and religious items, was an amazing record of an artist's life, his influences and processes. Picasso once remarked, "We must not discriminate between things. . . . We must pick out what is good for us where we can find it." As an artist, Darger also sought inspiration from the world at large; the volume and variety of material discovered after his death is testament to his wide-ranging interests and obsessions and offers us a small peek into Darger's talents at work.

Kevin Miller
Intern, The Contemporary Center
American Folk Art Museum

VARIOUS EPHEMERA FROM HENRY DARGER'S ARCHIVE

