

David Ekdahl
(1952—) Minnesota

David Ekdahl recalls spending many youthful hours on an island in Mud Lake which bordered his family farm in New London, Minnesota. "There was nothing to do there, just fantasize."

David started drawing seriously in high school. His educational experiences were untraditional because his teachers recognized and respected his special talent. While studying art at St. Cloud University, he built a lean-to on an island in the Mississippi River where he lived for a period of time. This was but one of a number of unconventional living arrangements. He was allowed to earn a Master's degree by pursuing an independent course of study, bypassing the usual student requirements. Books and music are important resources for him. Although he does not overtly translate these literary images into visual ones, they do serve as a catalyst and have an impact on his work. "Although I receive inspiration from other artists, books, and music, I believe that I am tuned in to a very narrow being that never lets me lose sight of my own, inner visions. My pictures are extremely personal to me, and I often feel reluctant to show them to people because to me they very nakedly reflect my feelings and attitudes. I think they show a high anxiety about the world and my place in it." Presently he lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has a full-time job as an engraver. He doesn't have a studio. He lives in a small apartment and does his art on the kitchen table at night. "I like to look at my pictures and wonder what they are about. I'm happy when I'm working on them, even though it is always a struggle and many times ends in failure."

Catherine Egenberger

Howard Finster
(1916—) Alabama

Although for twenty-five years Howard Finster worked as a minister, plumber, mechanic, toy-maker, farmer, cabinet-maker, taxidermist, and repairman, he insisted that "Nothing I ever tried or wrote amounted to anything until I discovered art. I didn't know



I could until I had tried." Finster had his first vision in 1919 at the age of three, but the most compelling of his visions came in 1976 when a voice urged him to "get on the altar and make sacred art." In that year Finster proclaimed himself to be a "Man of Vision."

He dedicated himself to God's calling and since that time has produced one of the most extraordinary visual documents of the United States. Both the republic's history and its religion have been celebrated in his multimedia creations. The proliferation of paintings, sculptures, wall reliefs, boxes, and assemblages that he has produced are both an accolade to his genius and a reminder of the glory of God. Finster creates his visual sermons from the refuse of civilization. His goal is to eventually include one of every object invented by man in his artistic output. Although he, like the prophets of bygone days, is obsessed by dreams of the apocalypse and salvation, Finster populates his images with actual figures from history, from politics, from pop music, and the media. They stand beside the legions of angels in a glorious vision which includes the ancient world and the electronic, technological, space-age setting in which he lives.

Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr.

Alexander A. Maldonado
(1901—) Born Mexico & Lives California

Halley's Comet changed Maldonado's life. The first time he saw it the year was 1911. He was in a stage coach migrating to the United States from his native Mexico. It established a lifelong fascination with astronomy that was not expressed until he began to paint fifty



years later. Painting was adopted to keep him occupied after his retirement from Western Can Company where he had been employed as a production worker. Maldonado paints his private, joyfully optimistic view of the future. His world is free of pollution, bigotry, shortages, stupidity, unemployment, crime. Each painting presents a logical, if unlikely solution to each problem. For instance, the energy crisis is solved by harnessing the power from the earth's rotation, communication problems are insignificant in a world where everyone can speak to beings on other planets, gas is produced from the fermentation of garbage, salt water is easily converted into fresh. His pleasure in painting is such that he is rarely content to paint only the canvases; often he also paints the frames, using patterns of stripes and dots or even bands of figures at the bottom of the frame looking at the painting above. He has even been known to paint the backs of the frames. It is as if the canvas itself can never be large enough to contain his vision.

Maldonado explains the enormity of his mission as an artist in simple terms, "Only part of the picture is on the canvas. There are always more buildings underneath, and more sky beyond the top."

Linda Weintraub

St. EOM

(1908 - 1986) Georgia

Saint EOM (a.k.a. Eddie Owens Martin) was born July 4, 1908, into a poor sharecropper's family in Marion County, Georgia. In 1922, at the age of 14, he ran away to New York City, where he spent most of the next 35 years. In New York he worked first as



a male prostitute and later as a gambler and small-time marijuana dealer. In 1945 he began a career as a fortune-teller in a 42nd Street tea room, and he remained in this line of work for the remainder of his life. Martin's artistic labors began in 1938 in the wake of a visionary experience. Following the advice which he claimed to have received in this vision, he changed his name to St. EOM and began developing a "new religion," which he called "Pasaquoyanism." Pasaquoyanism is a complex amalgam of beliefs and rituals derived from the Hindus, the Sikhs, the Buddhists, American Indian and African sources and James Churchward's books about the legendary "lost continent of Mu." A central tenet of St. EOM's religion was that human beings should never cut their hair, and should train it to grow upward, so as to serve as an "antenna to the universe." In the late 1950s, not long after the death of his mother, St. EOM inherited her small farmhouse and four acres in his native Marion County. He left New York City, moved to this small rural plot, and began transforming it into a colorful compound of visionary architecture based on the same sources as his one-man religion. In keeping with his religious theme, he dubbed the compound "Pasaquan." St. EOM built and expanded Pasaquan over a period of 30 years, continuing to work on it until his suicide on April 16, 1986. In addition to this homemade ritual fantasy world, he also left behind thousands of paintings, drawings, sculptures and Pasaquoyan ceremonial costumes, all of which is now in the custody of the Columbus Museum in Columbus, Georgia.

Tom Patterson

Martin Ramirez

(1955 - 1980) Born Mexico, lived California

What remains of Martin Ramirez's life are his drawings. The labels, mute, paranoid, schizophrenic, deteriorated—tell us what others thought of him, which is not as pertinent as that which can be realized from his art. Anything we will ever know of him is



found within these skillfully crafted drawings. His depictions of madonnas, caballeros, deer, cathedrals, and peyote buds tell us of his native Mexican heritage. It is this information that is the base on which we can build an understanding of his life, his probable involvement in shamanistic traditions and references to hallucinogenic drug use. Interwoven with his mystical past is an attempt to deal with contemporary technological images. Trains, cars, and skyscrapers co-exist with classical Mexican images. Recording these images and making them is what illuminates the life of Martin Ramirez. Martin is what an artist who speaks in a clear visual language that can be felt and understood by any person who is willing to examine the presented information and the sources from which it came. The understanding of any art in history is the result of such examination. Alienated from traditional western society, Ramirez relied on creation to be seen, heard, and immortalized. His passion and ability to create is so powerful that he has left an indelible mark on the history of 20th century art.

John Olman with Heather Mahoney

Anthony Joseph Salvatore
(1938—) Ohio

There is little or no separation between art, religion, and life in Joe Salvatore's work. Inspired and fired by the Bible, his vivid pastels of God bring us to a realization of the earlier ecstatic concepts of desert Christianity—a serious solitude interrupted only by prayer and the voice of God. His immaculate formal sense, however, is great enough to universalize the impact of his imagery. One can be drawn in by composition and color. Though his intent is to evangelize, his aesthetic drives his exploration. There is not one piece by Salvatore that is not seductively beautiful. It is through this power that we are bathed in his message. Both of his parents were Italian. When he was sixteen he was pulled from school for fainting spells. In 1958 he joined the Pentecostal Church. In 1972, after a heart attack, Salvatore felt he had died and was sent back by the Lord who felt the death was premature. A nun in the hospital gave him some wax crayons and he began the latest phase of his work. He shows not the Devil's wrath, but the Lord's. His works are teaching devices, warnings of the coming Armageddon. There is a tremendous amount of physical energy that goes into the making of a Salvatore piece. His huge thirty-foot murals have just as much pressure in the application of the wax and pastel as his smaller drawings. Some of the pieces have a nostalgic scent due to his use of Clairol hairspray as a fixative.

Randall Morris

Clarence Schmidt
(1897 - 1978) New York

Clarence Schmidt's "environment" was built on the sloped site of Ohayo Mountain in Woodstock, NY. It encompassed two houses, a "House of Mirrors" and "Mark II." The latter was built around a Studebaker station wagon. The former, which began as a simple



cabin, developed into a unique, seven-story, multi-roomed architectural complex. It spilled down Ohayo Mountain in various tiers, each tier complete with walkways, balconies, and ramps. A series of passageways and "rooms" enveloped with plastic flowers, dolls, Christmas tree lights, aluminum foil, mirrors, and other found objects, eventually led to Schmidt's living quarters, his "inner sanctum." By the mid-1960s, Schmidt had also begun to create a series of individual shrines and grottoes. His constructions were assembled out of rubber masks, automobile hubcaps, mirrors, photographs, tinsel, tar, and children's toys, all surrealistically juxtaposed on makeshift pedestals, hung off tree branches, or encased in wooden framing devices. Thematically, the work includes memorials to John Kennedy as well as to George Washington; to the Red Cross ("Hope"), and to Meer Baba. Yet most of the work has no assigned referent. As Schmidt noted (September 12, 1964 issue of Saturday Evening Post), "If I put together a typewriter, an outboard motor, and a golf bag, one person would tell me I'd created a cow, a second would think it was an angel, and someone else would come along and see a fish. I tell them all they're right and they go away happy." Initially trained in New York as a plasterer and stone mason, Schmidt moved to Woodstock year-round in 1940. His first house was destroyed by fire in 1968. "Mark II" caught fire in 1971. Schmidt spent his remaining years in a nursing home and died in 1978. For Schmidt, his sculpture, as well as the architectural backdrop and the terraced planted hillside of Ohayo Mountain was a "dedication."

William C. Lipke and Gregg Blasdel

Skip Schuckman
(1944—) California

Although his birth certificate may identify him as Raymond Edward Schuckman, Jr., he is now known by other names. Coyote Baca, Mountain Heart, Ignorance Grass, Floodbuster, Rainbow Flicker, provide insight into his spiritual art journey. His childhood preoccupation with natural history, fishing, and hiking evolved into his first profession: forestry and wildlife management.



The scientific information he had acquired at Colorado State University and the University of Massachusetts was not forgotten as he then began a profound study of the indigenous Native American Indian philosophies and mythologies. This led him to undertake a Vision Quest. Like the prophets of ancient times, Schuckman gave away all of his material possessions and retreated from the world for seven years, from 1972 to 1979. His training as a resource planner has sensitized him to the interaction of environmental variability. This is symbolically expressed in his "Micro-Bio Sculpting" which often take the form of Kivas. A kiva is a circular, underground room that is commonly found among the indigenous cultures of the Southwest. It represents the center of the universe and is a potent reminder that the world is composed of all preceding times and anticipates all future time. Schuckman explains, "Mother Earth is crying out for more thoughtful, connected interaction from the two-legged beings." The kiva is not just a symbol of an integrated life support network; it is a visual sermon: "At the center [of the Kiva] is the fire pit, the focus of energy exchange. . . . Around it flows the water of life, and the gardened walls, growing from the refuse, heaped as it is spun off from the activities of life. . . . As we discover our relationship with the fire/heart/hearth, we will uncover the house/skin/spin of our life interface with all the world which surrounds us at Home."

Linda Weintraub

Sister Gertrude Morgan
(1900 - 1980) Louisiana

The Gospel according to Sister Gertrude Morgan: "Jesus is my airplane and he takes me so high!" Who is Sister Gertrude? Bride of Christ, the Nurse of Dr. Jesus, and the Housekeeper for Dada God. Until just a few years ago she was a resident of New Orleans' Ninth Ward, a low down Black suburban ghetto full of a lot of old one story houses, broken streets, and overgrown lots—a place that was once a grand swamp. Some 250 years later in time and the area is a steamy, broken kind of residential underbelly, where a few bucks can find you a variety of powers and powders, things like John the Conqueror root and Fast Luck oil. At Sister Gertrude's house, also known as "The Everlasting Gospel Revelation Mission," the served as a decidedly different sort. A white-washed white room served as mission control. From there the good Sister piloted her divine airliner, fended off the neighborhood conjurers and prayed over people's cases, telling them to Get Their Business Fixed, and to be ever mindful of the dangers posed by that Bad Red Man, Lucifer, who's always trying to get next to them. She was a missionary and a prophetess, a singer and a shouter. She painted gospel paintings to spread the Word. Her main theme was Revelations, especially the new city, created after Armageddon, the city whose streets were paved with gold. Often she depicted this New Jerusalem as an apartment house with the sides cut away to reveal all of the happy pink and brown angels inside. The Bride of Christ, herself, can be found in many of her works standing beside or swinging on a swing set or flying through the air in an invisible airplane with Jesus, who always is attired in black pants, white shirt, and black bow tie. As the good Sister put it so well, the purpose of her paintings was to "Whup up on sin." Sister Gertrude was worried about all of us. "You don't have to look far to see fire and brimstone."



Guy Mendès

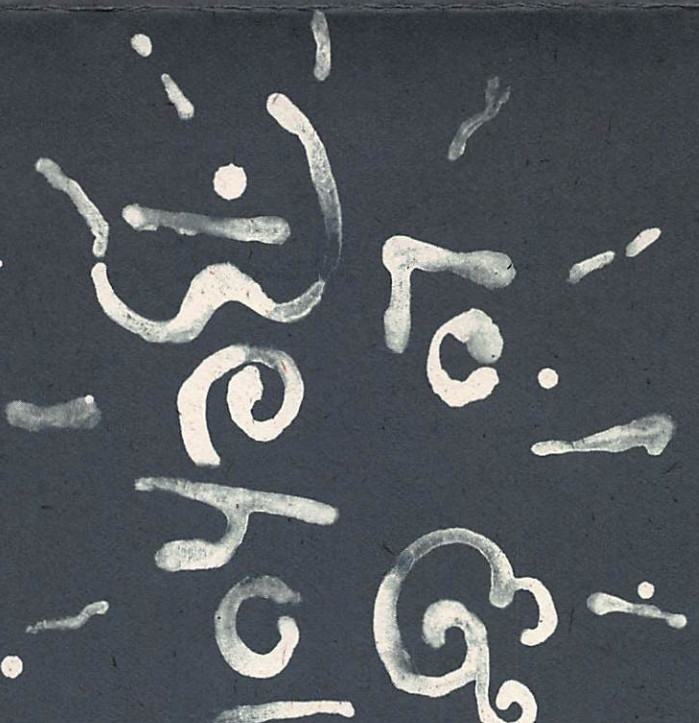
Malcah Zeldis
(1931—) New York City

Born in New York in 1931 and raised in Detroit, Michigan, Malcah Zeldis immigrated at the age of seventeen to a kibbutz in the newly established state of Israel "in search," as she likes to say, "of my roots." Such a motivation is not surprising of Zeldis who, even now through her art, is engaged in a



passionate exploration of herself and the world around her. A year after her move to Israel, Zeldis married a young American Zionist and became, as she had been raised to be, a devoted Jewish wife, and then mother. Childhood interests in painting—stimulated, but not particularly encouraged by her father, himself a Sunday painter—were largely repressed during this time as family and kibbutz life dominated her days. Even after nine years, when the family returned to the United States, Zeldis resisted the urge to pick up a paint brush, channeling her creative energies into Halloween costumes, antique collections, and domestic chores. It wasn't until 1972, her children grown and her marriage crumbling, that Malcah Zeldis began to paint in earnest. She started with a tentative pastel depiction of the ballet Petrushka, painted for her daughter. As her confidence grew, so did the boldness of her palette. No subject is outside of Zeldis' interest. In energetically composed, vividly colored paintings, she examines her relationships, her past, her fantasies, and her sexuality. She depicts her heroes—Abraham Lincoln, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Martin Luther King, and Albert Einstein. She turns to the Bible to tell the stories of Joseph, Isaac, Hagar and others. And she continues the search she began forty years ago to examine her Jewish roots in a remarkable series of paintings that depict the holidays, the Holocaust, and the founding of the state of Israel.

Didi Barrett



Exhibition funded in part by:
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220 miles southwest of Boston. Airfare service is available from
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