Extraordinary and Ordinary:
Folk Art from the UWM Art Collection

November 6 - December 18, 2014
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Art History Gallery
Mitchell Hall, Room 154
3203 North Downer Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211

Gallery Hours:
Monday - Thursday, 10am - 4pm

This exhibition is generously sponsored by the Friends of Art History and the Department of Art History.

Front cover details:
Prophet Blackmon
Second Chronicles, 1991
Acrylic on wood
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogelee
1995.001.08
Introduction

Folk art can be an ambiguous subject, difficult to locate in a single, simple definition. As a categorical term it implies artists who follow in the traditions and expectations of their immediate cultural context, making utilitarian objects with a flair for decorative character. The term is often used as an elastic form, widening to embrace the opposite: artists who are strictly individual, even renegades making work that might be known only to them. Often they are untrained in academic conventions or techniques. While some seek wider acknowledgement of their art through established networks of galleries and collectors, many seek no audience at all, or find patronage that is random and facilitated by grassroots knowledge of makers and their communities.

The varying names of Self-taught or Vernacular may be applied to suggest works made outside the structures of the art academy and formal instruction. The monikers Art Brut, Visionary, and Outsider art also carry connotations related to the biography and training of the artist, but further imply imaginative representations of dreams, sentiments of religious fervor, and a willingness to explore the darker corners of the psyche akin to Symbolist or Surrealist tendencies.

This exhibition draws together significant selections from the UWM Art Collection, with content including genre scenes and thoughtfully forthright representations of daily life translated through painting and sculpture. The realms of the mind, beliefs, fears, and fantasy are also represented, sometimes with overt connections to established Biblical narratives, and in other cases manifest with the expressionistic force of vigorous brushwork, color, and abstracted forms.

To recreate the world, to represent and comment on the conditions of living, is inherently human, and ultimately at the heart of folk art.

Katherine Murrell, Curator
Exhibition Checklist with Artist Biographies

Biographies in alphabetical order, written by Nora Jiménez

**Leroy Archuleta**
(American, 1949-2002)
Archuleta apprenticed with his father in wood sculpting at the age of sixteen. Like his father, Archuleta looked to animals for his subject matter. He used found objects to embellish the final sculpture; used marbles for eyes and scrap wire for whiskers.

Leroy Archuleta
*Bottle Cap Snake*, 1990
Painted bottle caps and wood
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1992.004.06

**Lillian Fay Barker**
(American, 1930-1997)
Barker assisted her husband, Linvel, when he began to carve animal sculptures after their retirement. Lillian became a folk artist in her own right when she began to paint biblical scenes in acrylic on canvas board.

Lillian Fay Barker
*Joseph’s Coat of Many Colors*, 1989
Acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1992.004.05

Lillian Fay Barker
*Ruth Gleaning the Wheat*, 1990
Acrylic on board
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1995.001.06

**Prophet Blackmon**
(American, 1921-2010)
In the 1970s Blackmon moved to Milwaukee, where he established a series of combination storefront churches and enterprise centers throughout the inner city. These centers offered religious services, as well as served as a site to recycle goods and learn job skills, such as shoe repair and tailoring. To advertise these services, Blackmon produced an assortment of hand-lettered signs using inexpensive materials such as scraps of wood found in dumpsters and household paint straight from the can.

Prophet Blackmon
*Second Chronicles*, 1991
Acrylic on wood
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1995.001.08

**Georgia Blizzard**
(American, 1919-2002)
Blizzard was a clay sculptor who came from an American family with roots in three diverse cultures: Apache, Irish, and Appalachian. When Blizzard was a child, she was taught traditional Native American clay firing techniques by her father. As a published poet, Blizzard often incised poetry into her ceramic work.

Georgia Blizzard
*Cleaners of the Streams*, 1991
Glazed and fired ceramic
Gift of the Arient Family
1992.010.05

**Russell “Smoky” Brown**
(American, 1919-2005)
Brown began painting when he moved to Columbus, OH in 1976, where he entered a drug and alcohol rehabilitation institution. Brown is known for working with found objects. His work responds to popular culture with a twist of sci-fi, cartoon, and street characters. Unlike other folk artists in the exhibition, Brown is a trained artist.
Richard Burnside  
(American, b. 1944)  
Burnside turned to art in the 1980s after a series of unsettling visions, what he came to refer as “night visions ancient times.” Burnside’s works are primitive in style painted with oil-based enamel paint on found objects such as paper bags or plywood. His paintings of kings, queens, tigers, wolves, and cats are allegorical expressions of the African-American cultural experience. The figures in his paintings are often surrounded by snakes, symbols, or bugs he calls the “Roman Alphabet.” Burnside’s work has been likened to Navajo sand paintings by some scholars of folk art.

Jerry Coker  
(American, b. 1938)  
Coker is best known to create “Identity Masks” and imposing sculptures culled from experiences and personages from his childhood out of salvaged rusted roofing tin. He considers himself a rural “Renaissance Man” turned into a professional artist. His paintings consist of acrylic on board, cardboard, and cast-off materials. Coker currently resides in Florida and continues to make his art.

Jessie Cooper  
(American, 1932-2013)  
Cooper started drawing and painting as a child, but did not focus on her art until the 1980s, when her husband Ronald was recovering from a car accident. She painted on furniture and other found objects, and portrayed religious and autobiographical subjects. The husband and wife team complemented one another’s work: Jessie creating a world of heaven and Ronald depicting hell out of his own subconscious feelings.
**Ronald Cooper**  
(American, 1931-2012)  
Ronald Cooper worked as an artist from 1987 until 2012. Cooper turned to art while recovering from a serious car accident. He saw art as a way to exorcise the terrible nightmares that he suffered while in recovery. He is best known for his wood sculptures depicting the hell out of his subconscious, tortured sinners, and devils.

Jessie and Ron Cooper  
*Tree of Serpents*, 1988  
Carved, painted and assembled wood  
Gift of the Arient Family  
1992.010.01

Jessie and Ron Cooper  
*Son of God*, 1988  
Painted and assembled wood  
Gift of the Arient Family  
1994.009.01

**William Dawson**  
(American, 1901-1990)  
Dawson grew up in Huntsville, AL, later moving to Chicago, IL. It was not until he retired in 1965 that he began to devote his time to art. Dawson's art consisted of works whittled out of wood pieces. He later used discarded pieces of lumber, old tables, and chair legs he found in alleys or on the street to carve out totems made up of human faces.

William Dawson  
*Two Birds*, 1988  
Watercolor and acrylic on paper  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Voge  
1992.004.11

William Dawson  
*Brown Horse*, 1980  
Acrylic on canvas mounted on board  
Gift of the Arient Family  
1994.006.11

**Josephus Farmer**  
(American, 1894-1989)  
Farmer, son of a poor Tennessee sharecrop farmer, began to whittle his own toys as a young boy, discovering his woodcarving skills at the tender age of six. Soon after arriving in Milwaukee in the 1940s Farmer became known for his Pentecostal storefront church and street preaching. Farmer began to make wood carvings upon retirement in order to finance his religious work. Made from redwood and painted in colorful enamels, Farmer's wood carvings were meant to be both inspirational and informative. Most of his carvings are long, horizontal pieces with multiple scenes favoring themes from the Bible, as well as patriotic scenes. Farmer is known to have borrowed his scenes from books and magazines but he made them his own by interweaving narratives and augmenting the visual iconography.

Josephus Farmer  
*Dixieland I (Picking Cotton)*, 1980  
Painted and assembled wood  
Gift of Mr. Richard B. Flagg  
1983.064AH

Josephus Farmer  
*Dixieland II (Bale Wagon)*, 1980  
Painted and assembled wood  
Gift of Mr. Richard B. Flagg  
1983.065AH
Howard Finster
(American, 1916-2001)
In 1961 Finster moved to Pennville, GA where he began the construction of what he called his “Plant Farm Museum” in the marshy field behind his home. The construction eventually included plywood and concrete sculptures; walls, buildings, and trellises festooned with man-made items; didactic, humorous, and religious texts and homilies; biblical signs and painting; canals and ponds; and two towers made of bicycle and lawnmower frames. In 1975 an Esquire magazine article on self-taught artists renamed the structure “Paradise Garden.”

Howard Finster
*Coca-Cola*, 1988
Acrylic on board
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Jim Arient
1993.019.02

Howard Finster
*Figure in blue*, 1988
Acrylic on board
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Jim Arient
1993.019.03

Elsie Hagert Heindl
(American, b. 1908)
Heindl was born in Germany and immigrated to Milwaukee, WI at a young age. Heindl recounts that art has always been a part of her life though it wasn’t until the 1950s, after her father’s death, that she dedicated herself to her art. Heindl’s skill has been recognized both locally and internationally. The Milwaukee Journal awarded her with numerous prizes when she was a teenager and in 1953 she joined the League of Milwaukee Artists. Her art is highly influenced by rural life, often depicting colorful country scenes. Her compositions are orderly and often methodical yet still contain a sense of whimsy and delight. Upon closer inspection one will always find a blue jay in her paintings, a personal identifying mark.

Elsie Heindl
*Farm Activity in Winter*, n.d.
Acrylic on masonite
Gift of Douglas and Eleanor Seaman
1987.163

Denzil Goodpaster
(American, 1908-1995)
Goodpaster began to whittle and carve in the late 1960s after retiring from farming. Goodpaster is best known for his walking sticks, but also carved figures and animals common to his daily life. Goodpaster decorated his canes with a wide variety of images, including traditional carvings of snakes and birds, nude women, political figures, and celebrities.

Denzil Goodpaster
*Raised Snake Cane*, 1990
Carved and varnished wood with paint
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Voge
1992.004.14

Denzil Goodpaster
*Incised Snake Cane*, 1990
Carved and varnished wood with paint
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Voge
1992.004.15
Anderson Johnson
(American, 1915-1998)
When Johnson was eight years old he recalled being visited by two angels who commanded him to become a preacher. As an adult he eventually became an Evangelical minister and moved to Newport News, VA, where he opened the Faith Mission out of his home. To attract passersby, he adorned both the exterior and interior with colorful paintings. Some were life-size wall murals; most were done on cardboard and other found materials, such as metal and plastic. The majority of his work shows a mystical realm populated with thousands of faces—portraits of U.S. presidents, women, figures from the Bible, celebrities, animals, and foremost, angels.

Anderson Johnson
Woman with Cat, n.d.
Acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1992.004.02

Shields Landon Jones
(American, 1901-1997)
Using his Bowie knife, Jones began carving miniature figures and animals out of local wood. Due to his deteriorating health Jones took up drawing in the mid-1980s. His drawings developed from his wood carving. He drew the same human and animal subject matter as he had carved in colored pencil, crayon, pastels, water-based paint, and ball point pen.

Shields Landon Jones
Two Fiddlers, 1991
Ink and pastel on paper
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1992.004.12

Andy Kane
(American, b. 1956)
Chicago based artist, Kane grew up in the New York City area. After dropping out of high school, he spent time traveling in the US and Europe. In the late 1980s he found himself homeless in Boston. Kane’s art addresses a variety of topics ranging from contemporary events to apocalyptic visions and futuristic landscapes. He appropriates Biblical themes to explore questions of mortality and identity. Kane’s style is characterized by bold forms and the use of primary, brazen color combinations. His art has been associated with the work of the German Expressionists (ca. 1920s).

Andy Kane
Animal Theater, 1992
Acrylic on canvas
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1995.001.10

Mary T. Smith, Four Figures
Tim Lewis
(American, b. 1952)
Lewis began carving walking sticks in 1988 and in 1989 began stone carving. Lewis has worked with many types of stone including coal, but he often finds accessible material in the ditches along East Kentucky highways. He has become one of America’s best-known folk stone carvers.

Tim Lewis
_Duck Cane_, 1989
Carved and varnished wood with paint
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1992.004.16

Albert “Kid” Mertz
(American, 1905-1988)
Mertz was a one-time prizefighting champion and received his nickname “Kid” during his time as a boxer. Most of his life was spent on an assembly line in Detroit, MI, and after retiring lived almost entirely off the land, foraging for nuts and berries, fishing and hunting, and cultivating a garden. He gathered roadside bottles and cans and transformed them into striped and polka-dotted vessels. He is also known to have painted colorful signs on found metal material with offbeat sayings.

Kid Mertz
_Untitled_ (Painted Sign), 1984
Paint and marker on metal
Gift of the Arient Family
1992.010.07

Kid Mertz
_Untitled_ (Winter scene), 1984
Paint, tack eyes, found images on wood
Gift of the Arient Family
1992.010.10

Kid Mertz
_Most of us want to change our circumstances but not ourselves / Owl’s Roost_ Mich., 1984
Paint on wood
Gift of the Arient Family
1992.010.11

Kid Mertz
_Katz may have kittens in the oven but that don’t make them biscuits_, 1984
Paint on wood
Gift of the Arient Family
1992.010.21

Kid Mertz
_Real happiness is cheap yet how dearly we pay for its counterfeit_, 1984
Paint on wood
Gift of the Arient Family
1992.010.22
Reverend B.F. Perkins  
(American, 1904-1993)  
As a marine, Perkins guarded President Coolidge; he went on to become an Evangelist preacher and later an artist. His studio was located in Bankston, AL. He painted mostly in acrylic, often on canvas. His signs and painted patterns adorned his home environment. Perkins’ bold, brightly colored paintings favored three themes: illustrated Biblical stories or sayings, patriotic scenes and slogans, and images such as the “Sacred Condor” and “Love Birds”, influenced by the of the 1922 discovery of King Tut’s tomb.

Reverend B. F. Perkins  
*His Environment*, 1991  
Acrylic on canvas  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogełe  
1992.004.08

Mary T. Smith  
(American, 1904-1995)  
In 1975, after her retirement, Smith began to create a decorated or “dressed” yard, an African-American genre that illustrates the persistence of African visual traditions in the New World. In this manner, Smith enclosed her acre property with strips cut from corrugated metal and punctuated the fence with plaques of figures and messages.

Mary T. Smith  
*Four Figures*, 1989  
Enamel on wood  
Gift of the Arient Family  
1992.010.04

Oscar Spencer  
(American, 1908-1993)  
Spencer began carving after he lost a leg in a mining accident when he was twenty. His meticulously carved snakes are a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the urge to create. Snakes are a recurring motif in folk art, not just for their ubiquity in rural areas, but also for their religious connotations involving sin, death, and redemption.

Oscar Spencer  
*Snake*, 1990  
Carved and painted wood  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogełe  
1995.001.01

Hugo Sperger  
(American, 1922-1996)  
Sperger began to paint in the 1970s after being diagnosed with cancer as a way of keeping occupied. Sperger conveys a sense of otherworldliness by framing his subjects with architectural elements and utilizing an exaggerated perspective similar to the works of early surrealist, Georgio De Chirico (1888-1978). He often includes text that furthers his painting’s narratives, emphasizing themes of life, death, salvation, redemption, and hope.

Hugo Sperger  
*And There Were Giants on Earth in Those Days*, 1989  
Paint, sand and tinfoil on canvas  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogełe  
1992.004.10
Hubert Walters
(American, 1931-2008)
In the early 1970s Walters began to build replicas of small fishing boats using wood and auto body putty called "Bondo". He paints them in graphic black and white, with touches of reds and oranges. His repertoire has grown to include grandfather clocks, animals, people, and buildings.

Hubert Walters
_Tugboat_, 1990
Painted wood with rope
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1995.001.09

Derek Webster
(American 1932-2009)
In 1964 Webster moved to the United States from Belize. He settled in Chicago, IL and worked as a night janitor. He eventually bought a house, and in order to distinguish it from others in the neighborhood, he began building a fence of colorful figures reminiscent of South American Carnival dancers. The figures were made of wood and found objects. From embellishing his fence, he evolved into making individual figures, made of found objects, often inspired by his memories of Belize.

Derek Webster
_Untitled_, 1983
Assembled and painted wood
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vogele
1992.004.18