

American Folk Art

The Herbert Waide Hemphill Jr.
Collection

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Whitney Museum of American Art
Fairfield County

Excerpts of the discussion between Michael D. Hall and Herbert W. Hemphill Jr., from the catalogue *American Folk Art: The Herbert Waide Hemphill Jr. Collection*, published by the Milwaukee Art Museum, 1981, are reprinted below.

M.D.H.: Folk art is always referred to as “the peoples’ art”. This idea has produced unfortunate clichés about the common man and his artistic creations, but Bert has successfully collected around this host of stereotypes and rarely found himself trapped by them. Taking his cue from the idea of a peoples’ art he has assembled a collection that represents an unbelievably diversified America. I can’t think of any other folk art collection (public or private) that is so broadly based in the whole political, social and geographic fabric of the United States. His collection is a great American mirror because it is the most complete microcosm of the “melting pot” yet assembled.

H.W.H.: I have tried to cover as much ground as possible, both ethnic and geographic. This country, after all, does include more than the northeastern states. Too many collectors considering American folk art think only of things from New England and Pennsylvania. The southern and westward migrations have always fascinated me. Many nationalities tried valiantly to hang on to the security and the memory of their home cultures. This tradition of culture bearing was mitigated and modified in their travels till it became its own entity. Though a few isolated communities of German, Spanish, African, Scandinavian, etc. managed to hold to their original culture either through religious solidarity or geographic isolation, the cross-cultural marriage of individual life styles in America produced a distinct product of its own, as hardy and unique as the migrants who created it.

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H.W.H.: Sometimes I view all of this stuff I’ve brought together as little more than personal folly—and I pause from time to time to wonder who on earth collected it. It’s actually, in one sense, a kind of alter ego. The whole thing is really just one big “study collection” which includes everything from the kitch to the fine. My real intention with the collection is to document the endlessly diversified creative output of our geographically enormous country with its amazing, heterogeneous population.

The “crown jewel” idea is curious. I get strong feelings about certain objects in the collection but my feelings alone cannot elevate anything to that designation. Simply stated, the crown jewels are the things that are chosen for

exhibitions and books. They are the things that constantly epitomize what everybody thinks great folk art is. These things are crowned over time by a process of consensus which continually ratifies them from the outside. "Black Hawk", "Stag at Echo Rock", etc.—these things have a life in a wider consciousness.

I always find the game of trying to name my favorite object to be most annoying and depressing. Most art objects are irreplaceable and if there were a fire in my apartment and I could only salvage one thing, I might grab the first thing I ever bought when I was seven, a duck decoy. Then I would have a completely new beginning—hopefully, making fewer mistakes. Or I could have an even more drastic reaction and let it all go.

One thing I never do is to dwell on the things I missed—the ones that got away. There is a competition with fellow collectors but for me this is only in a sporting context. The more competitive (and I don't mean combative) the field becomes the better for all. There are hundreds of things I would have owned but couldn't afford. I always wonder what kind of collection I might have had if I could have bought anything. I would probably have also bought 13th-century European primitives and surely would have been interested in Hanniwa and Cycladic sculpture. One thing I know: I usually gravitate to the primitive, the provincial, over the high or court style when it comes to art.

M.D.H.: Given Bert's thesis that objects per se are always part of a larger whole, it would follow that for him any folk object exists as one or another kind of fragment. Almost in the manner of an archeologist he has dug his way through a mound of cultural refuse salvaging a shard here, a blade or a scraper there.

The condition of an object has never bothered him. He isn't looking for the perfect "artifact cum art object". Instead he seeks anything, no matter how deteriorated or fragmentary, which retains enough of its essential recognizability to argue that it did indeed exist at some point in the past and which, through its introduction into his collection, can argue for the validity of its perpetuation into the future.

It is interesting to note that Reverend Howard Finster, in his portrait of Hemphill, boldly painted an epigram into the picture designating Bert as "the man who preserves the lone and forgotten". I find Finster's insight almost uncanny. Having only met Bert once or twice before he began the painting, Finster nevertheless discovered something about his sitter which cuts to a critical core of Hemphill's absolute identity.

Sometimes Bert's apartment feels like an orphanage and maybe that's because the things he finds and brings home are often the things that are so close to us as to be overlooked and cast off the most easily. Bert has a sense of mission in finding the beauty in the disregarded and the eccentric and in offering his collection as an alternative perspective on our folk art—and thus on ourselves.

Checklist

All dimensions are in inches, followed by centimeters in parentheses; measurements are height, width and depth, in that order.

1. Artist Unknown
Boston, Massachusetts
Masonic Regalia Box
18th century
Painted wood
10 x 20 1/4 x 10 3/8
(25.4 x 51.4 x 26.4)

The order of the Free and Accepted Masons, a major secret fraternal organization, was extremely well thought of in early America. Its symbols appear frequently in portraits and on artifacts. This particular box is compartmented inside to hold the regalia.

2. Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania
Cavalry Marching on the State of Zurich in Switzerland Fractur
mid-18th century
Watercolor on paper
7 1/2 x 10 (image)
(19 x 25.4)

A fractur (German fraktur) is a decorative record of important events in family life. The word originally referred to the Gothic-style lettering, but in America has come to refer to the certificate itself. Showing religious, secular or historical events, fracturs were based on traditional images native to the immigrant artist's homeland.

3. Attributed to J. Seymour
Portland, Maine
Captain Coffin circa 1780
Watercolor on paper
4 1/4 x 3 7/8 (10.8 x 9.9)

Possibly by the American engraver Joseph H. Seymour, known to have worked in New England between 1791 and 1796. This tiny work shows the European and American ideal of depicting landowners with their property and captians with their ships.

4. Artist Unknown
Memorial Picture to Margaret Bates 1805
Watercolor on paper
16 9/16 x 19 1/16
(42.1 x 48.4)

Memorial pictures were often done in watercolor or needlework by young ladies as school exercises, resulting in many being dedicated to popular heroes. The Romantic imagery, of European origin, follows a strict formula, always including mourners, tombs, garlands, and willow trees—fast-growing trees that are the symbol of life—either shown flourishing or as stumps to indicate the cutting off of a life.

5. J. Brown
Keeseville, New York
Mrs. Richard Keese
circa 1810
Oil on canvas
30 x 25 (76.2 x 63.5)

The portraits of Mrs. Keese's finest lace and jewelry, possibly even the "best" chair, share her portrait. Her husband founded Keeseville, New York.

6. Artist Unknown
Ohio
Rooster Weathervane
circa 1820
Sheet and wrought iron
29 x 65 1/2 (73.6 x 166.4)

The silhouette of a weathervane against the sky is its most important artistic form. The subject often indicated the interest of the owner, and its function of indicating the direction of the wind was basic to people whose livelihood depended on the weather.

7. Artist Unknown
Maryland
Two-Drawer Blanket Chest with Eagles and Roses circa 1820
Painted wood
34 7/8 x 43 3/4 x 18 1/2
(88.6 x 111.1 x 47)

Cupboards and chests were necessary for storage in early homes, built without modern closets. Country furniture was carefully made and often painted in a wood grain to simulate finer woods. Graining was done with a variety of tools—sponges, bits of cloth, feathers or fingers—in a second color over the base coat of paint.

8. Artist Unknown
Connecticut
Man in a Yellow Chair
circa 1820
Oil on canvas
30 x 24 (76.2 x 60.9)

More academic training than many early American artists received is revealed in the subtle modeling of the face and the backlighted wall behind the figure. Although painted furniture was common, the bright yellow of this chair is unusual, and might have been used for a decorative effect in the painting.

9. Artist Unknown
Norwich, New York
Hat Box 1825
Painted wood
12 1/4 x 17 1/2 x 17 1/2
(31.1 x 44.6 x 44.6)

A sturdy wooden hat box was a necessity for travel and storage. Like most functional objects, it was decorated to please its owner, Mr. J. Hayne, of Norwich, New York.

10. Roger Williams
Long Island, New York
Red-Breasted Drake Merganser Decoy
circa 1830
Painted wood, root
4 3/4 x 5 x 16 1/4
(12.1 x 12.7 x 41.3)

Decoys are a uniquely American folk art, adapted from Indian hunting methods, in which a "portrait" of an animal is used to attract its living counterpart. Although the body was carefully carved and painted, the artist used a root, a found object in its natural state, to form the head. Except for Indian decoys, this is one of the earliest known American decoys.

11. Artist Unknown
Document Box circa 1840
Painted wood
6 1/4 x 14 x 8 1/2
(15.9 x 35.6 x 21.6)

The document box, painted in primary colors, is given a modern appearance with its careful geometric patterning.

12. Elizabeth W. Capron
Still Life Theorem
circa 1840
Oil on velvet
17 1/8 x 18 3/8
(43.5 x 46.7)

Floral still lifes painted on velvet, paper and canvas were commonly done by "ladies" to decorate their homes before the time of cheaper lithographic prints. Theorems were relatively simple compositions created with stencils of the various fruits and flowers.

13. Artist Unknown
New Jersey
Washstand with Eagle Heads circa 1840
Painted pine
35 1/4 x 18 5/8 x 18 1/2
(89.5 x 47.3 x 47)

Of painted pine stenciled with rose-wood graining, this washstand holds the pitcher, washbowl, waste jar and towel necessary to homes without plumbing. The bald eagle, symbol of the young republic, was one of the most popular decorative forms.

14. Erastus Salisbury Field
1805-1900
Massachusetts
Daughter of Governor
John Cotton Smith
circa 1840
Oil on canvas
35 1/4 x 26 (89.5 x 66)

Field, who was born and lived in Leverett, Massachusetts, was an itinerant painter whose only professional training was three months, at age 19, spent in the studio of Samuel F. B. Morse. He painted with great speed and is known for patterned effects in his work created by rows of dots and lines used to delineate highlights or texture. The painting depicts the daughter of the governor of Connecticut.

15. Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania
Amish Farmhouse Gate
circa 1840
Wood, iron, traces of paint
34 1/2 x 41 x 2 1/2
(87.6 x 104.1 x 6.3)

A prime example of a functional object becoming a work of art because of the care with which the artist craftsman created it, and its striking clarity of design.

16. Thomas Chambers
circa 1808-after 1866
New York
Hudson River Fantasy
circa 1840
Oil on canvas
14 x 18 (35.6 x 45.7)

A view of the Hudson River, modelled after European Romantic painting, Chambers was an English painter of marine views, landscapes and portraits, who came to America in 1832 and became a citizen. He lived in New York City from 1834 to 1840, then resided in Boston and Albany, New York, until his return to New York City in 1858.

17. Artist Unknown
Texas
The Texas Eagle
before 1845
Painted and gilded wood,
metal
53 x 32 x 14
(134.6 x 81.3 x 45.7)

The eagle was probably made in Texas, where it was found, while that state was still under the domination of Mexico. It possibly symbolizes the founding of Mexico City, which according to an Aztec legend, was built where the people were directed to find an eagle perched on a cactus devouring a snake. This eagle probably held a snake in its upraised claw.

18. Artist Unknown
New York
Burnham's Hotel
circa 1845
Oil on canvas
25 x 30 (63.5 x 76.2)

Built in 1792 as the Vandenheuevel mansion, the hotel stood on Bloomingdale Road in New York City, now Broadway between 78th and 79th streets.

19. J. Owens
Leesburg, Virginia
Thelma Snowden 1846
Watercolor on paper
9 1/8 x 6 1/8 (23.2 x 15.6)

This typical profile portrait is signed by the artist "J.O. 1846 Leesburg, Va." and inscribed on the back "Thelma Snowden by J. Owens 1846".

20. Artist Unknown
Massachusetts (?)
Missionary Map mid-19th century
Watercolor on paper
50 x 69 1/2 (127 x 176.5)

A banner made by the Millerites, followers of William Miller (1782-1849), who believed the world would come to an end in 1844, a date determined by Miller's own system of mathematics based on dates from the Bible. The assorted creatures, drawn from the Book of Revelations, represent pagan countries as opposed to heavenly forces. This was probably a teaching aid.

21. Attributed to M.A. Hall
New Jersey
Stag at Echo Rock
circa 1850
Oil on canvas
35 1/2 x 29 (90.2 x 73.7)

The stag painting appears to be an imaginary puzzle picture, although it is set in the specific site of Echo Rock, New Jersey. Animal and human forms are hidden throughout the picture in the repetitious patterning. Look for a porcupine at left and an owl head, cat and Indian head in the rocks at right.

22. Artist Unknown
New York
Todt Hill, Staten Island,
New York circa 1850
Oil on canvas
27 x 34 (68.6 x 86.4)

This painting depicts iron mining operations in New York. The hill could be named for the owner of the mine, or is possibly a play on the German word for death, indicating the difficulty of the work.

23. Prior-Hamblen School
Boston, Massachusetts
Woman with Gold Neck-
lace circa 1850
Oil on canvas
27 1/4 x 22 1/4
(69.2 x 56.5)

24. Prior-Hamblen School
Boston, Massachusetts
Man with Gold Pencil
circa 1850
Oil on canvas
27 1/2 x 22 1/4
(69.8 x 56.5)

A pair of portraits painted by either William Matthew Prior (1806-1873) or his brothers-in-law Sturtevant J., Eli, Joseph, and Nathaniel Hamblen, all of whom lived and painted together in Portland, Maine, and, after about 1840, Boston, Massachusetts. They all rendered quickly-painted, flat, stylized likenesses, although each artist had a personal formula for showing anatomy and perspective. Attributions within the school are yet to be determined.

25. Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania
Lion Hooked Rug
circa 1860
Wool on burlap
25 1/2 x 48 (64.8 x 121.9)

Although the hooked rug was a common craft, most were done in all-over patterning, including flower and animal motifs. This rug is unusual in its concentration on a single animal image.

26. Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania
Heaven and Hell Fractur
1865
Watercolor on paper
13 3/4 x 17 7/8
(34.9 x 45.4)

A watercolor done in the linear, graphic fractur style, this work takes its heaven and hell imagery from medieval sources. It has been updated by the contemporary dress of the figures, and represents a sect that believes those who sing, dance and fight battles will go to hell, while those who live in peace will enter the gates of heaven.

27. J.C. Saterlee
Corry, Pennsylvania
Why Not Learn to Write?
1866
Ink and watercolor on
paper
28 x 76
(193 x 71.1)

Writing with steel pens was considered an art form suitable for both men and women. Many of these decorative works that survived were well-embellished advertisements for writing schools.

28. Artist Unknown
New Jersey
Indian Brave and Indian Squaw circa 1870
Brave: Painted and stained wood, metal
61 1/2 x 16 1/2 x 18 1/2 (156.2 x 41.9 x 47)
Squaw: Painted and stained wood
48 1/2 x 16 1/2 x 16 (123.2 x 41.9 x 40.6)
- The squaw and brave figures were probably done as cigar store figures. It is thought they came from New Jersey, since a similar figure has been found in that area belonging to a single family since the late 19th century.*
29. James Bard 1815-1897
New York, New York
The "Thomas McManus" 1872-73
Oil on canvas
30 x 50 1/4 (76.2 x 127.6)
- James Bard and his twin brother John were born at Chelsea, now part of New York City, and were listed at 152 Perry Street in 1854. They were both known for exacting, meticulous portraits of the sail and steam boats on the Hudson River. This work, a stern propellar ship, is signed "J. Bard", a signature used by both brothers.*
30. Artist Unknown
Banjo Chair circa 1875
Inlaid and stained wood
41 x 15 x 17 (104.1 x 38.1 x 43.2)
- A banjo-shaped chair was unusual, and was probably made for a minstrel show.*
31. Probably L.W. Cushing and Sons
Waltham, Massachusetts
Black Hawk Horse Weathervane Pattern circa 1875
Painted wood
23 x 33 3/4 x 2 1/2 (58.4 x 85.7 x 6.3)
- The horse, long associated with wind and speed, was popular as a weathervane. This is a wooden pattern for a three-dimensional weathervane. Iron templates, different ones for each side, were cast from it, often in sections. A lead mold was made from the iron template, then a sheet of copper was sandwiched between the iron and lead and hammered into shape, finally being soldered together. Each piece was hand-finished, giving variety to the finished work.*
32. Joseph Koenig
Wisconsin
Crucifixion: House Shrine 1875
Painted wood, glass
23 x 19 1/4 x 6 3/4 (58.4 x 48.9 x 17.2)
- Joseph Koenig moved to Wisconsin from Pennsylvania. He carved this shrine for his home, which was used as a meeting house before a church was built.*
33. R.M. Chalmers
Hartford, Connecticut
Architect's Drawing for Proposed New England Art Exposition Building and Tower, Philadelphia Exposition of 1876 1876
Ink and watercolor on paper
27 7/8 x 15 3/4 (70.8 x 40)
- An architectural rendering from a competition for the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876. This kind of visionary architecture, in vogue in Europe from the early 18th century, is often seen in American paintings as well as architectural drawings.*
34. Artist Unknown
New York, New York
J. Prouse Cooper's Down Town Store, New York circa 1880
Watercolor on paper
12 1/8 x 16 1/4 (30.8 x 41.3)
- A "portrait" of a meusewear store in the gaslight era. This work may have been painted by a traveling artist to earn his room and board.*
35. Artist Unknown
Georgia (?)
Stoneware Pot circa 1880
Glazed clay
16 3/4 x 14 1/2 x 38 1/2 circumference (42.5 x 36.8 x 97.8)
- This type of pot, used for storing and preserving food, is probably from Georgia, which developed a unique ceramic tradition from African sources. The glazes used between 1830 and 1910 have a wide range of green and brown shades, and are either glossy smooth or have a dripped effect. The patterned quality of the glaze application on this pot is unusual.*
36. Jose Benito Ortega
New Mexico
Christo Bulto circa 1885
Painted wood, parchment, leather
30 x 9 3/4 x 8 (76.2 x 24.8 x 20.3)
- "Bultos" are three-dimensional religious sculptures, reflective of the Spanish culture which came to the American southwest through Mexico. These melodramatic figures were often richly dressed and carried through the streets on Holy Days or major festivals.*
37. Artist Unknown
Montana
Sun River, Montana circa 1885
Watercolor on paperboard
6 x 9 1/2 (15.2 x 24.1)
- A view of a small Montana town that clearly depicts the types of buildings and businesses to be seen in 1885. The variety of family names indicates the many kinds of people who settled the American West. The mule teams were probably used for mining operations in the area.*
38. Artist Unknown
Bandstand Box circa 1890
Painted wood, metal
Roof: 17 1/2 x 9 3/4 x 11 (44.4 x 24.8 x 27.9)
- The bandstand box is modeled after a common feature of American town squares and parks. The roof can be lifted to reveal a small storage compartment.*
39. Brown Pottery Works
1890-1900
Bolton, Georgia
Effigy Jug circa 1895
Glazed clay
6 7/8 x 16 (17.5 x 40.6)
- The source of effigy jugs is not known, but most likely came from African religious rites, transferred to America by slave workers. The features are Negroid, and appear to have no relationship to European "Toby" jugs. This jug is stamped on the bottom "Brown Pottery".*
40. F.J. Howell
California
California Ranch Scene 1882
Ink on paper
8 1/2 x 11 (21.6 x 27.9)
- As the inscription indicates, this work depicts the ranch of Michael Caricof, Stockton, California. Such "portraits" of homes, farms, prize animals and equipment were commonly commissioned by proud 19th-century landowners.*
41. Artist Unknown
Whirligig with Men Sawing Wood circa 1900
Painted wood, metal
18 x 16 1/2 x 14 (45.7 x 41.9 x 35.5)
42. Artist Unknown
Weathervane Whirligig with Two Figures circa 1900
Wood, wrought iron, metal, traces of paint
31 x 31 3/4 x 2 1/4 (78.7 x 80.6 x 5.7)
- Whirligigs were generally made for amusement, although some became part of weather vanes. They have one or more moving parts, and are set in motion by the action of wind or water. The form was brought to America by European carvers, but there is no set subject matter—anything from the practical to the absurd is acceptable. This weather-vane whirligig is rare because of its large size, the weight of its material, and the fact that the weather-vane and whirligig forms are combined.*

43. Artist Unknown
Steeplechase Park,
Coney Island, New York
Head from a Ball Toss
Game circa 1900
Painted wood
11 x 6 x 7
(27.9 x 15.2 x 17.8)

This carved head with Negroid features stood directly above the target in a game of chance at Coney Island, New York. When the target was hit, smoke erupted from holes on either side of the mouth.

44. Artist Unknown
American Indian (?)
Turtle and Wolf Carving
circa 1900
Stained wood, bone
15 7/8 x 9 1/2 x 13 1/4
(40.3 x 24.1 x 33.6)

The wolf seated atop a turtle or tortoise image most likely comes from the American Indian legend of the Creation.

45. Artist Unknown
Long Island, New York
Seated Man circa 1900
Wood, metal
12 3/4 x 4 1/2 x 8 3/8
(32.4 x 11.4 x 21.3)

The seated man appears to be a figure at rest, but becomes a complex test of the artist's ability to create a visual puzzle of intersecting verticals and horizontals, some of which can be moved because the work is articulated.

46. Artist Unknown
Head of a Man circa 1900
Brick
7 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 6 1/4
(19.1 x 11.4 x 15.9)

A fine example of artisans creating decorative objects from the materials at hand, often using up the material at the end of the day. Both brick and glazed red-clay artifacts have been found in areas where brick and sewer pipe is made.

47. Artist Unknown
Muchabongo circa 1900
Mixed media
9 3/4 x 17 1/2 x 11 1/2
(24.7 x 44.4 x 29.2)

According to the inscription, Muchabongo's head is all that was left of him after being attacked by mountain lions. This was undoubtedly a clever, horrific side show display guaranteed to bring in the public.

48. Artist Unknown
Ohio
Walking Stick circa 1900
Wood with traces of paint
37 long (94)

This walking stick from Ohio is carved with decorative floral and animal forms. Decoration of this kind probably originated with Negro craftsmen in the southern states, rooted in the African culture, where symbolically carved walking sticks indicated power and prestige.

49. Artist Unknown
New Jersey
Owl Decoy early-20th
century
Painted wood, glass,
leather
14 1/2 x 5 1/4 x 5 1/4
(36.8 x 13.3 x 13.3)

Owls are a relatively rare decoy form. They attract crows which, while trying to drive the owl away, become targets for farmers' guns.

50. Artist Unknown
Wisconsin
Sturgeon Decoy early
20th century
Painted wood, rubber,
lead, bottle cap
4 1/2 x 4 x 28
(11.4 x 10.2 x 71.1)

Fish decoys, largely from the Great Lakes area, were most frequently used for ice fishing. They have hollow bodies weighted with lead to keep them under water, and do not have hooks, but are used to attract living fish. They can be made from a variety of materials, including imaginative ones such as the bottle-cap mouth on this sturgeon.

51. Artist Unknown
Wisconsin
Frog Decoy early-20th
century
Painted wood, glass and
metal
3 3/4 x 3 3/4 x 9 3/4
(9.5 x 9.5 x 24.8)

This decoy is used as food bait, rather than attraction by the same species. It is covered with bits of metal to look like it is reflecting the sparkle of the sun on the water.

52. Artist Unknown
Tramp Art Pin Cushion
Box early-20th century
Painted wood, beads,
velvet
12 1/2 x 10 x 10
(24.8 x 25.4 x 25.4)

Tramp art is a late-19th century craft practiced by peddlers, migrant workers and tramps who wandered across the country in search of work. It was created with simple tools for amusement and to sell; its chief characteristic is the V-shaped notch called chip carving. Discarded cigar boxes were the most commonly used material, although other soft woods and found objects were incorporated. This pin cushion box is exceptional because of its elaborate painted decoration.

53. Artist Unknown
Long Island, New York
Touring Car circa 1907
Painted wood, metal
11 1/4 x 7 3/4 x 25
(28.6 x 19.7 x 63.5)

The touring car is probably a trade sign, since it is too awkward to be a weathervane. It has a weathered surface and socket in the bottom indicating it was mounted on a pole.

54. Attributed to Benny
Layton 1880's-1970's (?)
York, Pennsylvania
Accordion Player
circa 1910
Carved and painted wood,
peach pits
30 x 11 7/8 x 7 3/4
(76.2 x 31.9 x 19.7)

This piece is attributed to an obscure wood carver from York, Pennsylvania. Only one other similar work is known, although his family reported that he made chip-carved picture frames as well. Peach pits are used for decoration, and the balls within the pole are carved in the fashion of the Chinese "ball within a cage."

55. Artist Unknown
Fish Head Box circa 1910
Painted wood, cardboard
13 1/2 x 30 x 10 1/2
(34 x 76.2 x 26)

This is a fish-shaped storage box rather than an accurately carved and painted decoy.

56. Dana Smith
Franklin, New Hampshire
House of Ill Repute
circa 1910
Collage, oil on canvas
18 x 26 (45.7 x 66)

Smith's daughter disliked his work and destroyed most of it after his death. "House of Ill Repute" is one of the few surviving works discovered by Robert Bishop.

57. Artist Unknown
Providence, Rhode Island
Eagle circa 1910
Painted wood
25 1/2 x 12 x 23
(64.8 x 30.5 x 58.4)

The streamlined shape of this American bald eagle is hidden under a patterned feather design. The eagle is seen repeatedly in American folk art, with expressions ranging from benevolent protector to fierce defender, as seen here.

58. Artist Unknown
Staten Island, New York
The "Thomas W. Lawson" circa 1910
Collage, sand, oil on
poster board
23 7/8 x 31 3/4
(60.6 x 80.6)

The "Thomas W. Lawson" is the only seven-masted schooner known to have been built. The artist painted on easily available material, the back of a discarded movie poster.

59. Clark Coe
Killingsworth, Connecticut
Girl on a Pig circa 1910
Painted wood, metal
37 1/4 x 36 1/2 x 20 1/2
(94.6 x 92.7 x 52.1)

Mr. Coe was a farmer, basket maker and ax handle maker who lived in Killingsworth, Connecticut, near New Haven. He created a life-size group of figures moved by water power from a waterwheel to entertain a nephew. The group, of which this is one, has become a local tourist attraction.

60. Prof. John H. Coates
California
Eve and the Serpent in the Garden of Eden 1916
Ink on paper
27 1/2 x 21 1/2
(69.8 x 54.6)

An example of calligraphy advertising the merits of a penmanship master's work. A standard Bible scene has been idealized into a decorative pattern.

61. Artist Unknown
New Orleans, Louisiana
Baron Samedi circa 1920
Painted wood, metal
32 3/4 x 13 x 6 1/2
(83.2 x 33 x 16.5)

Baron Samedi is the voodoo god of death and graveyards, a cult figure that can be traced back through Haiti to African origins. Found in the Vieux Carré in New Orleans, the figure was covered with chicken blood and feathers. The arms and legs are articulated so that it can be placed in different positions, and it is likely that it once was clothed.

62. Artist Unknown
Philadelphia (?)
Policeman circa 1920
Painted wood, leather
19 3/4 x 11 1/2 x 5 7/8
(50.2 x 29.2 x 14.9)

Authority figures such as policemen, firemen and famous men are popular in folk art. This policeman is thought to have come from the area around Philadelphia because of its distinctive English "bobby" type hat.

63. Artist Unknown
Horse circa 1920
Wood, cloth, metal;
leather
56 3/4 x 13 x 55
(144.1 x 33 x 139.7)

The horse figure is one of pair, and originally had draft harnesses attached to some kind of wagon behind it. Because of its fragile structure and cloth covering, the pair of horses and wagon must have been display figures of some kind rather than outdoor pieces.

64. Augustus Aaron Wilson
Portland, Maine
Pair of Penguin Gatepost Ornaments circa 1920
Painted wood
19 x 9 5/8 x 9 each
(48.2 x 24.5 x 22.8)

The maker of these penguin figures was a well-known decoy carver. They were used as fence post ornaments at the Nantucket Yacht Club.

65. Artist Unknown
Hoboken, New Jersey
*Orient Delights—
"Orient's Most Famous Sweets"* circa 1920
Housepaint on plywood
36 x 72 (91.4 x 182.9)

This sign, a 1920's advertising sign growing out of the old tradition of trade signs, was painted with housepaint on a candy factory in Hoboken, New Jersey.

66. J.C. Huntington
Sunbury, Pennsylvania
School Scene circa 1920
Watercolor on paper
20 1/2 x 46 1/2
(52 x 118.1)

Huntington began painting when he retired from his job on the railroad. Local scenes around his home in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, and fanciful geometric flower and tree designs are his favorite subjects, which he renders in a flat, linear fractur style.

67. Artist Unknown
Summer Camp or Hotel
Sign circa 1920
Painted wood
72 x 36 3/4 x 1 3/8
(182.9 x 93.3 x 3.5)

Like a trade sign, the silhouette of an Indian brave probably identified a camp or summer hotel to travelers.

68. Artist Unknown
New York, New York
Airplane Table circa 1920
Wood, painted metal,
glass
30 x 43 x 43 1/2
(76.2 x 109.2 x 110.5)

The size of this airplane indicates that it may have been used as a table; it is too fragile for use as a toy by children. The cabin opens to reveal a storage space.

69. John Orne Johnson Frost
1852-1928
Marblehead, Massachusetts
Shark House Ornament
circa 1925
Painted wood
12 3/4 x 71 x 1 3/8
(32.4 x 180.3 x 3.5)

John Frost was born in Marblehead, Massachusetts, the youngest of eleven children. He was a seaman, carpenter's apprentice and restaurant owner who began painting after retirement and his wife's death in 1919. He is best known as a painter of harbors and seaport towns, but carved the shark as an ornament for the art building that he built for display of his more than eighty works.

70. Artist Unknown
New York
Dalmatian circa 1925
Painted wood
13 3/4 x 20 x 3
(34.9 x 50.8 x 7.6)

A stylized and brightly painted interpretation of a Dalmatian dog, once a very popular pet and firehouse mascot.

71. Artist Unknown
Appalachia (?)
Rattlesnake circa 1930
Painted wood
6 1/4 x 23 x 15
(15.9 x 58.4 x 38.1)

The snake was created from a naturally formed root or branch, and is a common form in the southeastern states.

72. William O. Golding
1847-1943
Savannah, Georgia
U.S.S. "Tybee" in
Savannah Harbor 1932
Colored pencil on paper
8 x 10 (20.3 x 25.4)

Golding was born in Savannah, Georgia, and lived there until his death in 1943. He was a seaman, traveling the world, which was reflected in his sixty known pencil drawings of sailing ships. During a period of hospitalization from 1925 to 1935 he taught himself to draw with the encouragement of the staff, and was always deeply concerned with and critical of his work.

73. Ed Davis
New York (?)
Girl with Tambourine
1935
Painted wood
17 x 5 7/8 x 3 3/8
(43.2 x 14.9 x 8.6)

Nothing is known of this artist except that he worked in the state of New York in the 1930's. This figure may be part of a group, and is reminiscent of the work of modern sculptor Elie Nadelman, an important early collector of folk art.

74. Artist Unknown
Illinois
Flying Mallard Hen
circa 1935
Painted wood, metal
14 x 15 x 29 1/2
(35.5 x 38.1 x 74.9)

A bird decoy in full flight is very unusual. This one has a socket on the bottom so that it can be mounted on a stick and placed in the ground or shallow water.

75. Lewis Simon
Brooklyn, New York
Bicycle Shop Sign
circa 1950
Painted wood, metal,
rubber tires
35 x 24 x 14
(88.9 x 60.9 x 35.5)

Two bicycle shop trade signs were created by Lewis Simon, owner of a Brooklyn bike shop. One is in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, and is well weathered, while this sign from the Hemphill collection is in good condition, with unweathered paint.

76. John W. Perates 1900-1970
Portland, Maine
Icon of St. Mark circa 1940
Carved, assembled and
painted wood relief
49 1/2 x 28 x 6
(125.7 x 71.1 x 15.2)

Perates was born in Amphikleia, Greece, and emigrated to Portland, Maine, early in the century. He was a cabinetmaker by trade, and began carving large religious relief panels in 1938. His work reflects the carved and painted Byzantine-style icons seen in Greece, which Perates studied seriously for over thirty years.

77. William Edmondson
circa 1883-1951
Nashville, Tennessee
Rabbit circa 1940
Limestone
12 high (30.5)

Edmondson, of Nashville, Tennessee, was the son of slaves. He worked on the railroad until 1907 and in hospitals until 1931, after which he was employed as an artist by the WPA project. In 1937 he became the first black artist to have a one-person exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Edmondson's work, reflecting modern art of the period, is made from a basic stone block which he believed was God's symbol of perfection. He created his forms by removing as little of this block as possible.

78. Artist Unknown
Ogdensburg, New York
The Galvanized Man
circa 1950
Iron coated with zinc
79 1/2 x 44 x 19 1/2
(201.9 x 111.7 x 49.5)

The "tin man" was created as a trade sign for a plumbing and heating shop in Ogdensburg, New York. The artist used the materials of the trade, rather than more traditional craft materials.

79. "Creek Charlie" Fields
1883-1966
Cedar Creek, Virginia
Pair of Polka Dot Figures
circa 1950
Painted wood, cloth and
metal
Fig. 1: 44 1/2 x 11 1/2 x 8
(113 x 29.2 x 20.3)
Fig. 2: 48 1/4 x 14 1/2 x 6
(122.5 x 26.8 x 15.2)

Charlie Fields earned his nickname by not leaving his home in Cedar Creek, near Lebanon, Virginia. He never married or traveled, and after the death of his mother began to decorate the family home with brightly colored decorative designs, mostly polka dots. Eventually he decorated his whole "world"—the house, yard, bridge over the creek, down to shoes, clothing and the dolls that he collected. Children were invited to the yard with its whirligigs and dancing dolls on Sunday afternoons.

80. Wilbur A. Corwin,
assisted by Schuyler
"Bud" Corwin
Bellport, Long Island
Cormorant 1951-53
Painted wood
32 1/2 x 38 (82.5 x 96.5)

The cormorant is one of twelve carved by Wilbur Corwin, and assembled by Schuyler Corwin. A flat silhouette of a bird, this piece could be used either as a decoy or for decoration.

81. "Peter Charlie" Bochero
?-1962
Leechburg, Pennsylvania
Lady Liberty of 1953 1953
Acrylic on cardboard
23 x 28 1/2
(58.4 x 72.4)

Bochero came to America from Armenia in 1903, settling in Leechburg, Pennsylvania, where he was a house painter and handyman. He painted in secret, his work being discovered only after his death. The paintings are complex and filled with private symbolism representing Bochero's fears. Combining traditional Armenian folk motifs with modern ideas, he created scenes from American history, outer space, and unknown planets.

82. Martin Ramirez
circa 1885-1960
California
Our Lady of Guadalupe
circa 1955
Pencil, watercolor on
paper
71 x 24 (180.3 x 60.9)

83. Martin Ramirez
circa 1885-1960
California
Fantasy City circa 1955
Pencil, watercolor on
paper
31 1/2 x 37 (80 x 93.9)

Although Mexican born, Ramirez spent his life in California, most of it, from 1935 to his death in 1960, in a mental institution. He left about two hundred pictures done with crayons, colored pencils, watercolors and collage on whatever paper was available, including brown wrapping paper, laundry lists and old letters. His visionary works are highly patterned with lines and geometric designs.

84. Henry Darger 1892-1972
Chicago, Illinois
After Marcocinio (recto)
circa 1960 (Illustrated)
At Jullio Callio (verso)
circa 1960
Tracings, watercolor,
pencil
19 x 47 1/4 (48.2 x 120)

Born in Morton Grove, Michigan, Darger spent his childhood in Chicago orphanages, including the Little Sisters of the Poor. He lived alone all his life in one room filled with his possessions, including nearly four hundred drawings and paintings illustrating his lifework, thirteen huge volumes of writing titled "Realms of the Unreal". The books document the trials and tribulations of his heroines, the Vivian girls, and the drawings are sexually charged and sometimes shockingly violent.

85. Alfred Walleto
Community of the Nageezi
Chapter of the Navajo
Nation, New Mexico
Navajo Indians circa 1964
Carved and painted wood
66 x 16 x 10
(167.6 x 40.6 x 25.4)

Walleto is a Navajo Indian, living in New Mexico. He sculpts pine and cottonwood with carpenters tools such as axe, hammer and saw, and paints with whatever paint is at hand. This pair of figures was created for a Santa Fe Trading post, and were separated for many years after one was hit by a car.

86. Artist Unknown
New York, New York
Bing Crosby Dancing
Doll circa 1965
Tin can, painted wood
10 1/2 x 3 1/8 x 2 5/8
(26.7 x 7.9 x 6.7)

Made of found objects, this dancing doll represents a beloved American showman, and is reminiscent of Southern minstrel dancing dolls. These were loosely jointed wooden dolls on a stick, which dance a jig when held on a moving surface, such as a thin board tapped with the fingers.

87. Eddie Arning 1898-
Austin, Texas
Airplane circa 1965
Crayon on paper
20 x 32 (50.8 x 81.3)

Arning was born near Kenney, Texas, and spent most of his life, until 1965, in a mental institution. At this time, in his 67th year, he began making crayon drawings from childhood memories. He later progressed to "inspiration" pictures based on four-color magazine advertisements.

88. Jack Savitsky 1910-
Lansford, Pennsylvania
Train in Coaltown 1968
Acrylic on masonite
31 1/4 x 48 (79.4 x 121.9)

Born in Silver Creek, Pennsylvania, and now living in Lansford, Pennsylvania, Savitsky portrays the environment of his youth around foundries and mines, his lifetime in coal mines, and Bible stories. He began painting in 1959 after leaving the mines because of black lung disease. His works in many media, particularly enamel or oil paint on masonite, are distinguished by repetitive patterning of decorative motifs.

89. Joseph Yoakum
circa 1886-1972
Chicago, Illinois
Sullivan Coal Company
1968
Crayon, pastel, ballpoint pen
17 5/8 x 23 1/2
(44.8 x 59.7)

Yoakum claimed to have been born on a Navaho Indian Reservation in Window Rock, Arizona. At fifteen he left home to join the circus. After traveling around the world, he settled in Chicago, where at age 70 he had a dream that the Lord wanted him to draw. Beginning with pencil and ballpoint pen on grocery-bag paper, he found he preferred pastels, polished to a sheen with tissue.

90. Alexander A. Maldonado
San Francisco, California
San Francisco to New York
1969
Oil on canvas
22 x 27 1/2 (55.9 x 69.8)

Maldonado has painted since his retirement, concentrating on historical themes, moonscapes, imaginary planets and futuristic landscapes. He lives in San Francisco, settling there after being brought as a child from his birthplace at Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico.

91. Sister Gertrude Morgan
circa 1910-1980
New Orleans, Louisiana
Jesus Is My Airplane
circa 1970
Ink, watercolor on paper
18 x 26 3/8 (45.7 x 67)

Sister Gertrude Morgan, who died recently in New Orleans, was born in Columbus, Georgia. She felt that her paintings, as well as her white robes, her career as street preacher and gospel singer, and her Everlasting Gospel Mission, were commanded by the Lord. Working in ink and crayons, she combined writing and illustrations in vividly imaginary scenes, usually inspired by the Bible.

92. Steve Ashby 1907-1980
Virginia
Woman circa 1970
Painted wood, metal,
mixed media
48 x 23 1/2 x 18
(121.9 x 59.7 x 45.7)

Born in Fauquier, Virginia, Ashby was a farmhand and odd job man. He began constructing things in 1962 from wood and found objects. His works, unlike most carefully crafted folk art, are crudely finished, and many have faces cut from magazines or bits of cloth pasted on them.

93. Edgar Tolson 1904-
Campton, Kentucky
Temptation of Eve 1970
Carved and painted white
elm
22 x 11 3/8 x 16
(55.9 x 28.9 x 40.6)

Tolson was born in Lee City, Kentucky. He has fathered eighteen children and worked at various occupations, including preacher, cobbler and chairmaker, and is known as a storytelling philosopher. After a stroke in 1955, Tolson began carving seriously, and became recognized for his very literal, unemotional interpretations of Biblical themes.

94. Miles Carpenter 1889-
Virginia
Root Monster 1971
Painted wood
22 5/8 x 28 1/4 x 27 3/4
(57.5 x 71.7 x 70.5)

"Root Monster" was created from tree roots, one of a variety of types of gently humorous carvings by Miles Carpenter, which range from life size figures to half-eaten watermelons. Carpenter, born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, moved in 1901 to Waverly, Virginia, operating a sawmill until his retirement in 1957. He had always carved small animals for amusement, but by 1963 increased his output and presented his work at his fruit, vegetable and soda pop stand.

95. Gustav Klumpp 1902-1917
Brooklyn, New York
Dream of a Nudist Camp
Wedding 1971
Oil on canvas
24 x 30 (61 x 76.2)

Klumpp was born in Germany in the Black Forest Mountains, and emigrated to Brooklyn, New York, in 1923. He was a compositor and linotype operator until his retirement in 1964, after which he began painting at a local senior citizens center. His works are humorous fantasies of beautiful women in fictitious surroundings, often indicating Klumpp's familiarity with European art.

96. George Lopez 1900-
New Mexico
San Miguel and the Devil
Bulto 1972
Cottonwood
48 x 33 x 30 1/2
(121.9 x 83.8 x 77.5)

Five generations of "Santos" carvers lie behind George Lopez and his family, all of whom carve figures from cottonwood, cedar and white pine. "Santos", carved representations of saints and biblical figures, can be either two-dimensional ("retablos") or three-dimensional ("bultos") and are often brilliantly painted. Lopez and his family live and work in Cordova, New Mexico.

97. Albina Felski 1920's
Chicago, Illinois
The Circus 1972
Oil on canvas
48 x 48 (121.9 x 121.9)

Colorful, tightly composed paintings depicting events and scenes from her life are characteristic of Albina Felski's work. She was born in Ternie, British Columbia, and now lives in Chicago, where she began painting in the early 1960's.

98. Peter Minchell 1889-
Florida
*Judith with the Head of
Holofernes* 1973
Pencil, watercolor
12 x 25 (30.5 x 63.5)
A builder by trade, Minchell traveled from his birthplace of Trier, Germany, to New Orleans in 1906, later going to Miami, Florida. In 1960 he began painting flowers with watercolors, moving on to biblical and other scenes. Throughout 1972 he created a series of visionary works titled "Geological Phenomena".
99. Elijah Pierce 1892-
Columbus, Ohio
*Your Life Is A Book and
Every Day Is A Page*
1973
Carved and painted wood
relief
17 5/8 x 27 (44.8 x 68.6)
Pierce, who carved to please God, came from a deeply religious farm family near Baldwin, Mississippi, and now lives in Columbus, Ohio. Although he supports himself as a barber, he began carving at an early age, and now sells his carvings and preaches his personal religious views at fairs and markets.
100. John William "Uncle
Jack" Dey 1915-1979
Richmond, Virginia
Adam and Eve Leave Eden
Model paint on masonite
23 x 47 (58.4 x 119.4)
"Uncle Jack" Dey was a retired policeman from Richmond, Virginia, who left over 650 paintings done between 1955 and 1979. His favorite works depicted youthful experiences in a Maine lumber camp, done with stylized designs for trees, bears, cabins, etc., which he used over and over again. He preferred using shiny model airplane paint, examining each work closely to be certain it was perfect.
101. Harold Garrison
North Carolina
Watergate Pistol 1974
Wood, mixed media
14 1/2 x 17 1/2
(36.8 x 44.4)
Little is known of Harold Garrison except that he is a 7 foot tall, whittling mountain man from western North Carolina. The "Watergate Pistol" is an unusual work among his small carved single pieces and groups. It is a complex, moving piece, in which Garrison makes a personal commentary on the front-page news of the time.
102. Inez Nathaniel-Walker
1911-
New York
*Double Portrait with Bald
Man* 1977
Ink, crayon on paper
22 x 27 7/8 (56 x 71.1)
Inez Nathaniel-Walker, now a migrant farm worker in upstate New York, was born in Sumter, South Carolina, where she married at 13 and had four children. During a term in prison in New York until 1974, she began painting to escape reality, drawing from her imagination. Her work is direct and childlike, and is usually done with pencil, crayon and felt markers.
103. Shields Landon Jones
1901-
Hinton, West Virginia
Country Band 1975-77
Carved and painted wood,
pencil, string
Banjo player, 1977:
25 1/4 x 9 3/8 x 5 1/2
(64.1 x 23.8 x 13.9)
Guitar player, 1976:
25 5/8 x 8 x 4 7/8
(65.1 x 20.3 x 12.4)
Fiddle player, 1975:
23 1/4 x 7 3/4 x 5 5/8
(59 x 19.7 x 14.3)
By carving away all the wood from the forms he sees inside the blocks, Jones creates his large figures. He did not begin carving until he retired from the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad in 1968, where he began at fifteen as a carpenter and progressed to bridge and building foreman. Jones, born in Indian Mills, West Virginia, came from a large musical family, and taught himself to play the fiddle and the banjo.
104. Felipe Archuleta 1910-
Tesuque, New Mexico
Baboon 1978
Carved and painted wood,
glue, sawdust
16 1/2 x 42 1/2 x 13
(41.9 x 107.9 x 33)
Archuleta, a carpenter from Tesuque, New Mexico, sees his carvings as a means of earning a living. In the mid-1950's he began carving animals, ranging from ordinary pigs and goats to exotic tigers and gorillas, making them of joined pieces of wood, which he carved, then modeled with filler paste, often pressing in other materials. The animal forms are exaggerated, with fierce, toothy faces, that perhaps represent Archuleta's view of the predatory nature of human beings as well as animals.
105. Reverend Howard Finster
1916-
Summerville, Georgia
*Portrait of Herbert Waide
Hemphill, Jr.* 1979
Oil on plywood
79 1/2 x 50 (201.9 x 127)
A retired Baptist preacher from Pennville Community in Summerville, Georgia, the Reverend Finster paints and plays and sings gospel music in his Paradise Garden, a park of approximately two acres filled with fantasy structures created of concrete set with found objects. He began painting in 1976 after a vision of God told him to paint sacred art. Using auto lacquer, Finster makes large moralistic works interweaving symbols, writings and realistic forms, probing deeply into the achievements and failures of mankind.

This exhibition was organized by the Milwaukee Art Museum.

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