

# BLOUINARTINFO

## The Inside View On Outsider Art

Who is an artist? Somebody who has attended an art school or anybody capable of giving creative expression to various impulses? Perhaps, the latter. That's what Outsider Art is all about, art that is raw and unconditioned by institutional regimen. It's an interesting field where there are no boundaries to what art can be. Wide Open Arts (WOA), the producers of the upcoming third edition of the



Outsider Art Fair in Paris, explain it best on their website: "... the central characteristic shared by Outsiders is simply their lack of conditioning by art history or art world trends. Over the years, the parameters of Outsider Art have expanded dramatically to include art made by a wide variety of art-makers who share this common denominator of raw creativity. Outsiders come from all walks of life, from all cultures, from all age groups."

The WOA, formed by art dealer Andrew Edlin, bought the Outsider Art Fair of New York in 2012. Then in its 21st year, the WOA expanded and relocated the New York fair to Center 548 in Chelsea and its debut 2013 edition saw the attendance tripling over previous editions. Prompted by its success in New York, the WOA took the fair to Paris for the first time in October 2013. Ahead of the

upcoming third edition of the Outsider Art Fair in Paris, its director Becca Hoffman shares her thoughts on the fair and outsider art with Blouin Artinfo.

**As you move to the third edition of the fair in Paris, how has been the reception of the art world so far, to a fair that does not conform to one of the most crucial ingredients for commercial success in the field -- a pedigreed education?**

Given that we are returning for our third year with a new venue and 50% increase in the number of exhibitors, it's clear that we are having success in Paris. Our venture there was an outgrowth from the incredible response to the first New York edition under our ownership. The New York fair was already a well-established institution when we took over, and the whole allure has always been that the artists are self-taught. So the lack of "pedigreed education" has always been the point.

**Could you share the idea behind the exhibition of sculptures by Shinichi Sawada, the curated exhibition at the upcoming edition of the fair?**

Sawada's work is really sensational and has been in some major shows over the last few years: 2013 Venice Biennale, London's Wellcome Collection, Collection de L'Art Brut and Halle Saint Pierre. But the work has never been available for sale which has made it generally less visible and should prove a real treat to our visitors.

**Some of the most successful artists in history have been self-taught and driven by impulse, rather than following academic rules. Yet, it**

**was not easy for them to gain recognition. Does this hold true for Outsider artists even today?**

There has been much broader recognition for Outsider Art on the institutional and global level. Certainly, the online culture has been key to disseminating information and images of these incredible works.

**Even for Outsider artists, avoiding the gallery route to success and recognition is not possible. Are there enough galleries who are ready to throw their weight behind artists who are immensely talented yet don't have big names of educational institutions backing them?**

There are many avenues to getting one's work noticed, however most outsider artists have the support of a third party - friend or family member that helps champion their work and brings it to the attention of art world players. Ateliers and art therapy centers like Creative Growth help facilitate the development of artists as well. I think it is fair to say that this is an expanding field with new galleries whose focus is on self taught art.

**I'm not aware of any other fair dedicated to Outsider art being held anywhere in the world. Does this make it easier for your fair to steer the world of outsider art the way you want to or is it an impediment?**

We are the only Fair in the world that focuses on Outsider Art, you are right. This is a tremendous responsibility and privilege for we are actually, in effect, curating the largest shows of Outsider Art every year with our two fairs. Since Wide Open Arts purchased the Fair we have worked hard at invigorating, enlivening, and expanding the field — recruiting and mentoring new dealers, finding galleries with broader programs who are interested in participating. This is a small field but an expanding one.

**Could you name some Outsider artists of our times who have become the toast of collectors and are in the same league as some top contemporary artists?**

Dan Miller, Susan Te Kahurangi King, George Widener, Julian Martin, and M'onna are a just a handful of the highly lauded active self-taught artists you'll see at our fairs.

**How do you foresee the market for Outsider art shaping up in near future?**

The market continues to grow, especially when it comes to the top echelon of artists - the supply is very limited and now Christie's has jumped into the business, setting a record for Darger in Paris last year with more activity planned for New York in September and January. It is a field that provides welcome solace from the contemporary art world.

**What would your advise be to artists with raw talent that are waiting to be recognised?**

Outsider artists don't need any input from dealers or any other forces trying to put them on some kind of career track. Sooner or later good work finds their way to someone who gets it into the public's eye. Or it doesn't and that's just the nature of things.

*Outsider Art Fair will be held at Hôtel du Duc, 22 rue de la Michodière, 75002 Paris, from October 22 - 25. Vernissage on October 22 from 5 pm. For details, visit [www.outsiderartfair.com](http://www.outsiderartfair.com)*