

DEALER'S NOTEBOOK

Andrew Edlin

A participant in the New York-based Outsider Art Fair since 2004, Edlin began managing the event through his company, *Wide Open Arts*, in 2012, expanding it to Paris the following year. For this year's New York edition, opening January 21, Edlin is bringing chicken bone sculptures by Eugene Von Bruenchenhein, among other surprises. Meanwhile, work by Guo Fengyi remains on view through January 31 in the inaugural show at the new Lower East Side venue of Edlin's eponymous gallery. On the heels of this past October's fair in Paris, Edlin shared some thoughts on his start in the business, his ambitions, and the changing market for outsider art.

ORIGINAL WORK

The first artworks to make an impression on me were postage-stamp collages made by my late uncle, Paul Edlin. He was deaf and never had much of a career path. But he started making art when he was around 40 and developed a technique of creating collages exclusively made up of tiny slivers of postage stamps. I was amazed when I saw them in a small show and volunteered to help him find a gallery in New York. Showing them to dealers in SoHo—this was in 1995—I was told the work was “outsider,” a term I had never heard before. We found American Primitive Gallery, which took him on and had great success selling his art. Holland Cotter wrote a compelling review in the *New York Times* of my uncle's first group show in 1996, and the whole experience changed his life. He was 66.

IN THE BEGINNING

I was gratified that I had been able to help Uncle Paul—I was the middleman between him and the gallery, as he wasn't even able to



FROM LEFT: ANDREW EDLIN GALLERY; HERVÉ PERDRIOLLE GALLERIE

THE ESSENTIALS

HAILS FROM: Bronx, New York
PRESIDES OVER: Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York
GALLERY'S SPECIALTY: Outsider art
FIRST GALLERY SHOW: Vahakn Arslanian, September 2001

use a normal phone—and through that experience I got my first glimpse of the art world. After his art won attention, it occurred to me that I might become a dealer. I was in my mid 30s and open for anything.

BIG BREAK

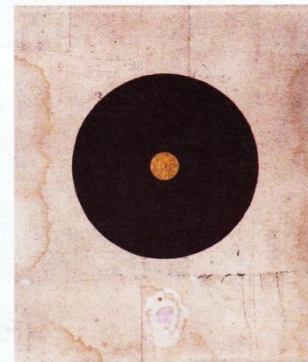
In 2002 I put on the first exhibition ever in this country for the great Swiss outsider artist Hans Krüsi. A feature article in the *New York Times* included some great color shots of the work, and the next day a guy from Texas called me and bought one of the pictured pieces for \$14,000. It felt like a million bucks at the time.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

My greatest challenge has been to expand the audience for outsider art. In the 1990s, the community revolved around the American Folk Art Museum. Veteran dealers were territorial, and many were not so welcoming. Established collectors were very loyal, and it was hard to break through to them. I began traveling to Europe to source art that was phenomenal but not well known in the States. Having fresh material that no one else had was key to building my business. I also began applying to and exhibiting at international art fairs like Art Brussels, Art Cologne, and the Salon du Dessin in Paris. These fairs brought me new clients who came more from a contemporary art background.

MARKET FORCES

There is a limited supply of great material, which makes prices climb. There may also be a bit of fatigue with the status quo in the contemporary market that has helped point collectors to the work of self-taught and non-mainstream artists. Also, they see visionary curators like Massimiliano Gioni, Daniel Baumann, Ralph Rugoff, Lynne Cooke, and many others placing outsider work in major shows in places like Venice, Madrid, and London, basically questioning the hierarchies that have prevailed in the mainstream art world for so long. Now the Met, the Brooklyn Museum, and other major museums are getting behind self-taught artists. Even more astonishing is the incredible comeback the American Folk Art Museum has made—the shows they have mounted over the last few years have been the most dynamic ever, which has led to critical acclaim and record attendance for them. Finally, Christie's has recently gotten into the fray, and last year they set a record for a work by Henry Darger. Their commitment, in addition to all the critical attention the field has received, signals its emergence in the marketplace.



NEW YORK

Outside Perspective

The **Outsider Art Fair** appeals to a clientele as diverse as the artists it promotes. “We have people right out of college who are interested in work for under \$1,000 from art therapy centers like the **Gallery at HAI** and the **Creative Growth Art Center**, to seasoned collectors who go for **Jean Dubuffet** and who hang outsider art masters next to masters of contemporary and modern art,” says **Rebecca Hoffman**, director of the fair, which relocates this year a few blocks east from the former Dia space on 22nd Street to the **Metropolitan Pavilion** for its run January 21 through 24. The new site allows the expanded roster of 58 exhibitors—up from 50 last year—to show on a single floor, where they will be joined by the fair's first-ever artist commission. Among the returning dealers

Jaipur, 2004, by an anonymous Indian artist, is at the booth of Hervé Perdrille. are **Ricco/Maresca** of New York, **Carl Hammer Gallery** of Chicago, and **Galerie Polad-Hardouin** of Paris. According to Hoffman, the only criterion for the material on view—ranging from folk art to Art Brut—is that it be executed by artists who are self-taught or nonacademic. Exemplifying this inclusiveness is an installation conceived by British artist and curator **Leah Gordon** that began with an open call to “all visionary artists, architects, engineers, 3-D designers, and model makers” requesting designs for towers—“industrial or religious; fantastical or utilitarian; Brutalist or Gothic...from air traffic control towers to bell towers to tower blocks and skyscrapers.” Gordon will introduce a note of 21st-century technology to the artistic field most often associated with the handmade by realizing selected submissions using 3-D printing technology. —BRIDGET MORIARTY