

Outsider Art Fair: The Highlights

Text by Emily Steer

Outsider Art Fair is the only one of its kind, dedicating itself entirely to Art Brut and Outsider Art. It opens tomorrow for the 4th edition in Paris — its New York thread was founded in 1993 — running in line with FIAC at the city's Hôtel du Duc.

Outsider Art (defined by Roger Cardinal in 1972) and Art Brut — a term created in 1947 by Jean Dubuffet, and characterised as such: “...works produced by persons unscathed by artistic culture, where mimicry plays little or no part (contrary to the activities of intellectuals). These artists derive everything...from their own depths, and not from the conventions of classical or fashionable art.” — are not new to the world, but they are going through something of a peak in popularity with collectors and individual galleries in recent years, with the appearance of art spaces such as London's Museum of Everything. Both terms have come to connect with artists who are marginalised, and of course, there is often the generalised understanding that these artists create work for something that exists slightly outside the typical perimeters of art making; more emotional, less reliant on trends and the narrative of art history. It is almost always self-taught.

For this year's Paris edition of the fair 38 galleries come together from Europe and the USA. Photographic advertisements serve as repeat inspiration for the artists on show, with Pietro Ghizzardi and Helen Rae's paintings in particular. Ghizzardi's pieces almost betray their origins completely, his female subjects rendered vulnerable and distant, an unavoidable sadness creeping into their forced smiles. Rae's, by contrast, pump up the volume; colours are vibrant, forms long and elegant, the lie of the fashion image pushed to its max.

There is also a focus on self-taught artists from America's South, with a handful of artists born in the first half of the 20th century making comment on the world from which they emerged: “the ashes of the Jim Crow-era South”. The development of communities from a history of sharecropping serves as political ground for inspiration for Memphis-born American Indian Hawkins Bolden (1914 – 2005) — blinded by a

basketball accident aged 8, and using materials from local garbage collectors — Willard Hill (1934) and William Young (1942), who creates freely drawn works which attempt to entirely avoid narrative and naming.

Also watch out for a multitude of intricately formed sculptures, with repetitive processes and meticulously formed pieces coming from a number of artists. “This seriality fits within a formal vocabulary that oscillates back and forth between the ordered and monotonous filling of the surface of the work and the rhythmic and dynamic variation between the void and fullness of the composition,” says Raw Vision’s Carine Fol (Raw Vision are a partner of the fair). “These ordered or organic, symmetrical or chaotic works are created from a ritual the artist continually repeats, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year...”

‘Outsider Art Fair’ runs from 20 to 23 October 2016 at Hôtel du Duc