

## Art for Art's Sake: Insider Picks at the Outsider Fair

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | JANUARY 29, 2015



Larry Lewis's "Untitled (Woman with open mouth and blue dress)," 1970, on view at the Fred Giampietro booth at this year's Outsider Art Fair.  
(Courtesy Outsider Art Fair)

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Anyone fed up with the art world's same old, same old will find a bracing antidote at this year's edition of the [Outsider Art Fair](#), which comes to Center 548 in New York from January 29 through February 1. Boasting 50 galleries from eight countries — the biggest edition yet — the fair isn't just for the deep-pocketed; I spotted plenty of covetable work for less than \$1,000, alongside big-ticket items from the likes of

Henry Darger and Bill Traylor. And while so-called "outsider" hallmarks abound — plenty of astoundingly obsessive, meticulous markmaking is to be found — it's refreshingly impossible to pigeonhole the work on view. However one chooses to define the genre, the commonalities here tend toward the idiosyncratic and eccentrically personal: Art made for its own sake, often without an audience in mind, let alone a market. That sort of passion, in an increasingly careerist climate, is reason enough to spend an afternoon here.

In that spirit, a few idiosyncratic and highly personal favorites would include Eicchi Shibata's pen-on-paper and pen-on-canvas work on view at Yukiko Koide Presents's booth: abstract explosions of dotted and scribbled lines in black, magenta, orange, green, and red. (While the compositions have a quasi-microscopic feel, as if they're depicting life on the cellular level, the artist is evidently capturing the appearance of soap and soap bubbles.) Carl Hammer Gallery has awesome, shimmery paintings of fantastical castles by the late Milwaukee artist Eugene von Bruenchenhein, and a series of expressive landscapes — sinuous rivers, yearning trees — by Joseph Yoakum. Both Carl Hammer and New York's Ricco/Maresca Gallery have drawings by Martin Ramirez (1895-1963); a typical composition, as in a piece at the latter gallery's booth, features an oversized man on a diminutive horse blowing a bugle whose enormous horn emits a rainbow of noise.

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New Haven's Fred Giampietro Gallery gives the lion's share of its presentation to experimental Xerox collagist Larry Lewis, who created elaborate artist's books not seen or celebrated until after his death. With their mixture of photocopying and hand-painting, they're equal parts Pop, Monty Python, and Hairy Who. More than 50 large-format books exist; smaller books assembled by the artist have been separated into individual, framed pieces. Fleisher/Ollman Gallery features pieces by another Xerox practitioner, John Patrick McKenzie, who combines photocopied images of accordion players or Neil Young with insistent, stream-of-consciousness poetics ("he is genius he likes Post Raisin Bran cereals in the forties he has light skin he thinks well too much pressure on him").

Pure Vision Arts has astounding drawings by Nicole Appel, densely packed compositions that cluster seemingly unrelated constellations of imagery, like Russian propaganda material alongside ornate vases, or In-n-Out Burger iconography with ice cream cones and fancy gowns. Chris Byrne (co-founder of the Dallas Art Fair) has his own solo-curated booth,

mixing cartoon-inflected drawings by New Zealander Susan Te Kahurangi King with sketches and studies by the inimitable Peter Saul. Outsider powerhouse Andrew Edlin Gallery has a wealth of good stuff at the fair — my favorites include large-scale drawings by Charles Steffen, and a folded-and-painted-tin work (depicting an enormous deer caught in a net, looming in the foreground of a bucolic mountain scene) by Ronald Lockett.

Louis B. James has a two-person booth, combining marching-band drawings by New Orleans' Bruce Davenport, Jr. (who has a [solo](#) at the gallery's L.E.S. location through February 27) with paintings by Matthew Kirk, including a superb triptych on leaning sheetrock slabs. Shrine, of Brooklyn, has a focus on assemblage by Southern artists, many of whom originally showcased the work in their own front yards. That includes Reverend George Kornegay of Alabama (whose sculptures incorporate things like wooden crutches and Nintendo guns), and Hawkins Bolden, who made elaborate scarecrows out of soup cans, rubber, and other found materials. And Webb Gallery, of Waxahachie, Texas, has one of the fair's most delightfully jam-packed salon hangings (not to mention a functioning Tiki bar). The work on view includes ink paintings by Daniel Higgs, of the band Lungfish; an incredibly detailed, large-scale drawing of what might be a cave's interior, by Hector Alonzo Benavides; and several unexpected gems (including a feline-focused mixed-media piece) by the writer William S. Burroughs, who showed with this Lone Star gallery before his death in 1997.