

Le Monde

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On the Sidelines of the FIAC, an Art Fair Held in the Comfort of a Hotel

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The first Parisian edition of the Outsider Art Fair takes place in a chic boutique hotel of the French capital.

During an art fair, the gallery owner is usually at his stand. But here, he stands in his room, a real bedroom with a bed and a bathroom. The first Parisian edition of the Outsider Art Fair is being held in a hotel, Le A, on the sidelines of FIAC.

The Outsider Art Fair, which can be translated in French as "foire d'art brut", was founded in New York some 21 years ago. Among the 24 galleries attending the Fair - 4 galleries per floor across 6 floors and the bar on the ground floor -, half of them are thus coming from New York, Baltimore and Oakland. The others are from London, Turin, Lausanne, Paris or Tokyo.

This geographic diversity and the mere existence of the Fair show that self-taught or marginal artworks, created sometimes in prisons or asylums, are arousing the interest of art lovers and collectors from everywhere. The Halle Saint-Pierre, the ABCD Collection and the Maison rouge have played a decisive role in this process, which has even become in fashion as the Venice Biennale now also showcases Outsider Art.

And now Outsider Art is being showcased in a chic neighborhood of Paris. The paradox is obvious: drawings, paintings and sculptures, born often in miserable and painful conditions, in confinement or illness, without any hope of recognition nor any commercial objectives, are displayed and sold in the comfort of a hotel as real works of art, when they were initially created for other purposes, such as exorcism or ex-voto, prayers or confession. This contradiction may arouse feelings of indignation. But such a feeling won't last for long as some of the artworks have such intensity and are so unique that we forget their background. The emotion and bewilderment triggered from seeing the ink drawings and the paintings of Dan Miller leave no room for hesitation: what we are seeing belongs to the core of

contemporary art. These scratched papers, intertwined letters and sore traces depict what we can barely think of: the collapse of language, the scattering of the conscience.

TALISMANS

On the other hand, the chemical, cosmogonical and anatomical patterns of Daniel Martin Diaz invent an absurd and mythical order, just like men love to create in order to venerate it. The stained and torn sketches of Melvin Way serve the same purpose: they are talismans.

Some galleries have felt necessary to exhibit works by some of the most prominent figures of Outsider Art such as Aloise Corbaz, Anna Zemankova, Henry Darger, Louis Soutter or Jules Lesage. Thus, they guaranteed an educational side to the Fair, which is useful. But, we may choose to linger at exhibitors showing lesser-known artists, such as the American Charles Steffen and the Iranian Mehrdad Rashidi, both fabulous draftsmen, or the British Richard C. Smith, whose polychrome wood sculptures would have electrified André Breton.