

“Photo | Brut”



In the aftermath of the Second World War, the French painter Jean Dubuffet began to champion the unrecognized geniuses making art on the streets and in psychiatric institutions, labelling their raw passion “art brut.” But photography was still considered subpar by high culture, so the visionaries with cameras remained unseen. “Photo | Brut: Collection Bruno Decharme & Compagnie,” an overwhelming, exciting, disturbing, and inspiring exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum (through June 6), corrects that omission with some four hundred pieces by more than forty artists, made between the late nineteenth century and the past few years. A few names may be familiar: Mark Hogancamp, an American world-builder who stages gritty and tender wartime tableaux with dolls, inspired a 2018 Hollywood movie. (Dolls, sex, and alter egos are among the show’s recurring themes.) And the legendary Lee Godie, an Illinois native and a self-proclaimed French Impressionist, had a thirty-year show at the Art Institute of Chicago—on the front steps, where, starting in the late sixties, she would attach the embellished self-portraits she made in a bus-depot photo booth (such as the undated image above) to her paintings, or gift one to a lucky admirer.

– Andrea K. Scott