

# ARTnews

## The 9 Best Booths at New York's Outsider Art Fair

BY TESSA SOLOMON

March 4, 2022



Martín Ramírez, 'Untitled', (Man Riding Donkey), 1960 Drawing, Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on paper. COURTESY OF RICCO/MARESCA, NEW YORK.

At the Outsider Art Fair, which returned to New York this week after a two-year hiatus, there is no scene-stealing piece—and that attests to the strength of its presentations. Art—painted, woven, wired—can be seen in just about every corner of this fair, spilling out of a booth, crawling up the wall toward the ceiling, descending from above by strings, and sitting pretty on a tabletop. There's a joyfully chaotic feeling to some sections, as if the dealers, visibly delighted to be back, could scarcely leave anyone home.

Around 65 galleries came out this year, which marks the fair's 30th anniversary. Many brought new works or art from overlooked outsiders well past due for acclaim. At Andrew Edlin Gallery's booth, for example, visitors packed in to see a suspended self-portrait by Tom Duncan and an atomic collage by the recently rediscovered cigar-roller-turned-artist Felipe Jesus Consalvos.

The veteran galleries have bigger booths by the entrance, and most brought the masters: Martín Ramírez, Henry Darger, Joseph E. Yoakum, William Hawkins. The extra space invites the crowd to slow down and really study the works. In particular, a book made of soot and saliva by James Castle, the enigmatic Idahoan, at Hirschl & Adler Modern benefits from close viewing.

Below is a look at some of the best booths at the New York fair, which runs through Sunday, March 6.

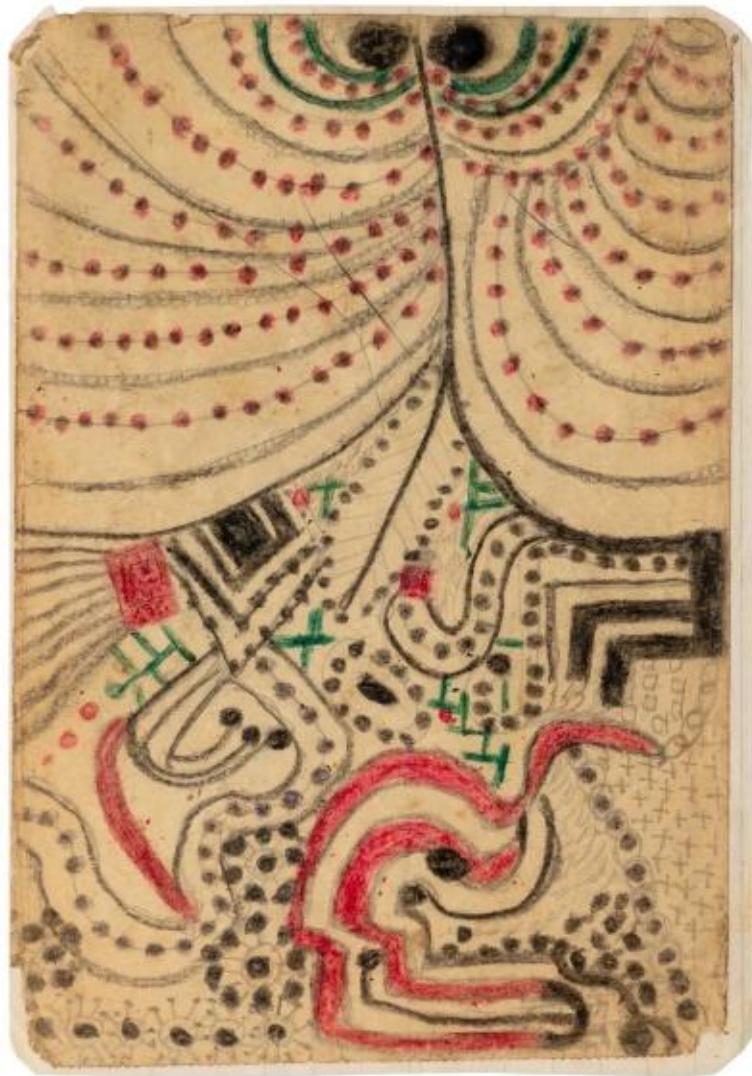
## **Ricco/Maresca Gallery**



William L. Hawkins, *Diplodocus*, 1987. Courtesy of Ricco/Maresca, New York.

For one of the biggest booths at the fair, Ricco/Maresca brought a wide selection of classic and contemporary figures, including Domingo Guccione, Ken Grimes, and Eddie Arning. Martín Ramírez, the master draftsman who spent the last 15 years of his life institutionalized, is there riding a donkey. George Widener, described here as a “high-functioning savant,” is represented with a maximalist sequence of dates, patterns, and places that equates to a self-portrait. Taking up the most wall is a whimsical painting by William L. Hawkins titled *Diplodocus* (1987), its title a reference to the longest-known dinosaur. *Diplodocus* towers over a forest that may be on fire. The lizard, regardless, is unbothered.

## Shrine



Minnie Evans, Untitled, ca. 1938. Courtesy Minnie Evans and Shrine

In a departure from the expected, Scott Ogden, the owner of New York’s Shrine, presents an homage to outsider art dealer Luise Ross, who operated a gallery in New York from 19982 to

2013, and whose achievements include the introduction of Mose Tolliver and Minnie Evans (both represented here). The drawings by Evans, a Southern artist visited by visions in bits of insomnia, are particularly arresting, like wallpapers from a dream world. Also of note are pieces by Carlo Zinelli, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War whose visual impact extends beyond the outsider field. Accompanying the show is an online archive of materials from Ross, including exhibition posters and announcements.

## Hill Gallery



Ralph Fasanella, *Seated Woman in a Yellow Dress*, 1954. Courtesy Ralph Fasanella Estate, Hill Gallery

This booth is dedicated to the work of Ralph Fasanella, and a full-length portrait makes it a must-visit. A working-class New Yorker who approached midcentury America by way of matters of race and labor, he excelled in celebrating passersby. In *Seated Woman in a Yellow Dress*

(1954), he depicts a Black woman with grace, lost in thought and dressed in a short, vibrant brushstrokes that complement the picture's shifting patterns. Also on offer are small portraits of subway riders, some lost in thought, others bored or dozing, approaching destinations unknown.

## Carl Hammer



Lee Godie, Untitled, 1908. Courtesy of Carl Hammer Gallery, Chicago

Bill Traylor appears throughout the fair, but the best selection of the Alabama artist's work is at Chicago gallery Carl Hammer. A Black man born into slavery, Traylor charted a society reluctantly facing its future—Emancipation, the Great Migration, and later Jim Crow and urbanization—through simple figures. Also on view are drawings by Chicago stalwart Lee Godie and a double panel from Henry Darger's unnerving epic *In the Realms of the Unreal*.

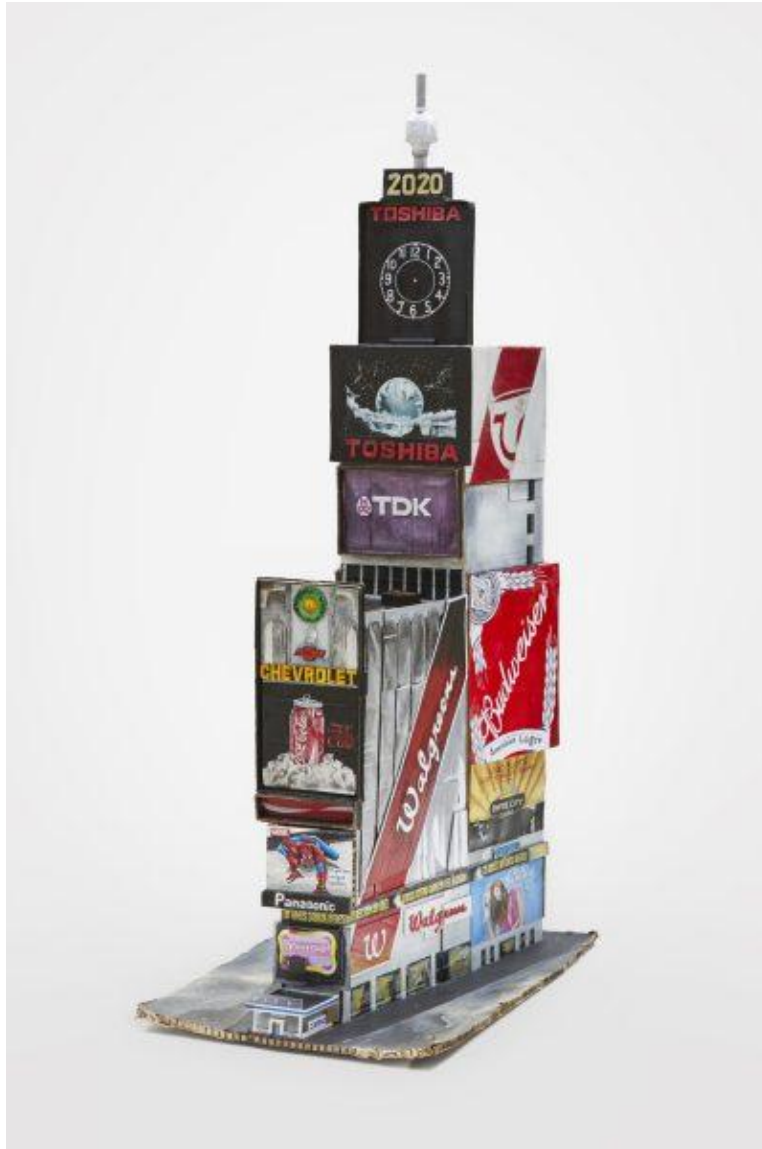
## Bruce Bickford



Bruce Bickford, *Twin Peaks Topography*, ca. 1990. Photo by Tessa Solomon

You can pay a visit to the fictional town of Twin Peaks in this curated exhibition featuring the work of Bruce Bickford, who has here recreated the location of David Lynch's cult-classic television series in the form of a painstaking miniature model. Diehard fans will recognize landmarks like the waterfall, the gazebo, and the Great Northern Hotel (all places with real-life counterparts). Speaking at the booth, the organizers, the artists Eric White and Aaron Guadamu, related some difficulty with transporting the set, as most some of the clay is still soft. The walls of some houses tilt, as though Bickford had placed them on the table only moments ago. It gives the town an appropriately lived-in look.

## **Fleisher/Ollman**



Kambel Smith, *Times Square*, 2020. Courtesy of Fleisher/Ollman, Philadelphia

Veteran exhibitor Fleisher/Ollman has assembled one of the most wide-ranging displays of artwork at this fair. The best works on display at this booth are small wire sculptures by the anonymous artist known as Philadelphia Wireman, a cardboard facsimile of the Times Square clocktower by Kambel Smith, and a painting by the Bohemian artist Josef Karl Rädler. Rädler took to painting scenes from the various hospitals to which he was committed throughout his life. Here, he's captured fellow inmates asleep as lines of prose fall between them, daybreak streaming through a locked window.

## **Portrait Society Gallery of Contemporary Art**

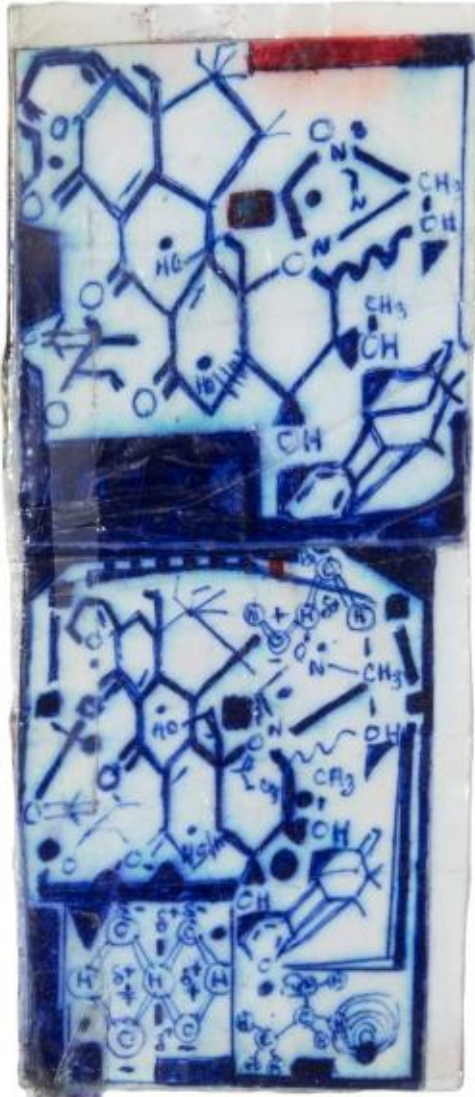


Della Wells, *There I Be*, 2022. Courtesy of Portrait Society Gallery of Contemporary Art, Milwaukee.

The star of this group presentation is Della Wells, an under-sung collagist born in 1951 who imagined a “magical land” run by regal Black women, according to a 2020 interview with the artist. She creates collages from pieces torn out of magazines, and the results are dazzling. In one, the sky consists of chipped blues that sparkle like Tiffany mosaics. Throughout, Wells tucked small images of a home, sometimes in the shadow of steely-eyed girl, hinting at a hidden world all her own.



## Bullet Space



Melvin Way, *Untitled (Woop)*, 2014. Courtesy of BULLET SPACE, New York

Melvin “Milky” Way was born in 1954 and came to New York City in the 1970s to study at a technical school. His career was derailed by a diagnosis of schizophrenia, and he spent the next decade unhoused, in and out shelters where he bided his time with pen and ink drawings of mathematical equations and personal alchemies. Andrew Castrucci, the founder of Bullet Space, found out about his art and debuted it to the public at the first Outsider Art Fair. Around 30 of Way’s drawings are on view at this year’s fair. Chemical formulae and scientific shorthand mingle race across the page, his mind exposed like computer circuitry. Answers are irrelevant—the point is how the questions unfold.

## Norman Brosterman



Unknown artist, dated 1866. Courtesy Norman Brosterman.

One of the fair's most striking presentations tells the story of a freed family in the South and their former white enslavers, whose fortunes are upended after Emancipation. The tale is collected in a small booklet dated to 1866 consisting of text and 12 ink drawings. Its artist is unknown, so whether this is a biography or fantasy is the choice of the viewer. But it is satisfying to see the smiling family, finally ascendant.