

Home > Interviews > Artists > Melvin Way

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Artists

Melvin Way

By **Brainard Carey** May 1, 2024



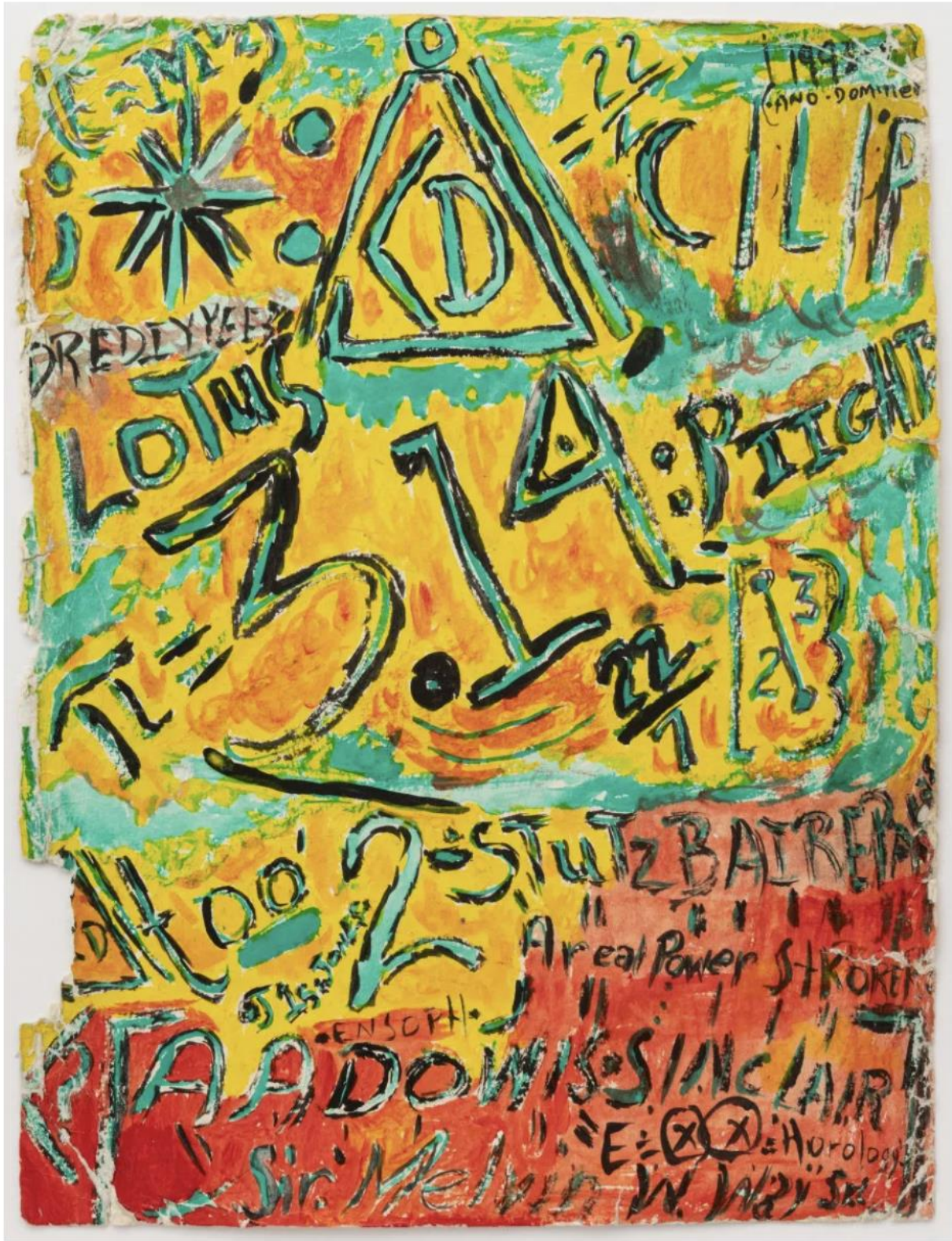
This is an interview with the curator Andrew Castrucci. **CO₂ Blues**, scheduled since mid-2023, is the first exhibition of the enigmatic art of Melvin Way (1954-2024) since his passing, and the third solo show of his work with the gallery. It serves as a retrospective for a visionary who was one of the most admired self-taught artists in the contemporary art arena. Way's mostly small-scale drawings are strange and alluring concoctions of science and art that seem intent on revealing the secrets of the universe. They contain chemical and mathematical formulae, musical notes, abstract designs, and cryptic words and phrases. It is hard to look at one without becoming entangled in trying to figure out what it means. "I felt like I was seeing another kind of infinity, thought made visible, wild nerves, optical barnacles coming to hermetic life, delirium legible," wrote *New York Magazine's* senior art critic Jerry Saltz in a 2015 review in *Vulture*.

The exhibition includes some of Way's most memorable creations including forays outside of his better-known ballpoint pen drawings, especially a selection of the artist's xerography—he routinely carried his original ink drawings on his person for months at a time and was reluctant to release them for sale because they functioned as protective amulets. His raincoat pockets might be filled with as many as two hundred drawings. At times, his sweat, or a hard rainfall, would cause the ink to bleed, adding complexity to the already dense works. Andrew Castrucci, his lifelong advocate, has likened this process to a kind of baptism, a rite of passage before the works headed off into the world. Before the artist did

surrender his works, he often made Xerox copies of them which inspired a new approach—Way then added blue and/or black ink to the copies. These xerographies comprise a small but significant portion of his oeuvre.



Melvin Way (1954 – 2024) Fauvi, c. 1989 Ballpoint pen and Scotch tape on paper 10.75 x 8.5 inches.



Melvin Way (1954 – 2024) *Loki*, 2020 Pen and paint on paper 12 x 9 inches.