

Melvin Way

Born 1954, South Carolina; died 2024, South Carolina.

Melvin “Milky” Way was an Outsider Artist whose work occupies the uncharted border between art and science. Born in South Carolina in 1954, Way came to New York City in the 1970s to attend a technical school, earning a certificate to operate a power press. He played bass in local bands, and recorded a solo album with Encounter Records, which folded before the album could be released. Soon after, Way was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and following a string of unsuccessful relationships, became homeless.

By 1989 Way was residing in the shelter run by Hospital Audiences International, a nonprofit organization offering art workshops to people with disabilities. Lower East Side artist Andrew Castrucci, a volunteer workshop leader at the time, encouraged Way to make art, and acted as his advocate during subsequent years. Way soon began to produce small, exquisite ballpoint-pen and ink drawings on found paper. Despite the very straightforward of his chosen genre, Way’s drawings are strikingly complex. Rich hybrids of scrawled text, mathematical equations, astronomical shorthand, chemical formulae, and alchemical punning, each work is marked by the artist’s signature, thrillingly dense sensibility. Way engages both the eye and the mind, drawing viewers into exquisite mysteries that may never be solved.

- Jenifer P. Borum

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2024

CO₂ Blues: The Art of Melvin Way (1989-2024), Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY

2023

Melvin Way, Salon du Dessin, Paris

2022

Melvin Way, Outsider Art Fair, New York, NY

2020

Melvin Way: Recent Work and Drawings from H.A.I., Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY
Xerography, Institute 193, Lexington, KY

2018

The Cocaine Files Dossier (1989-2017), Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY

2016

A Vortex Symphony, Galerie Christian Berst, Paris, France

2015

Gaga City, Christian Berst Gallery, New York, NY

2012

HAI, New York, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2025

Looking Back: 15th White Columns Annual, curated by Elisabeth Kley, White Columns, NY

2024

The Apex Is Nothing, curated by John O'Connor and Ken Weathersby, Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York, NY

The Dictionary of Accepted Ideas, CLEARING Gallery, New York, NY

2023

Schema: World as Diagram, Marlborough Contemporary, New York, NY

2021

In Search of the Miraculous, The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY

Figure Out: Abstraction in Self-Taught Art, Outsider Art Fair New York, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY

Small World, Outsider Art Fair New York, Shin Gallery, New York, NY

2020

Six Decades Collecting Self-Taught Art: Revealing a Diverse and Rich Artistic Narrative, curated by Emelie Gevalt and Valérie Rousseau, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY

An Alternative Canon: Art Dealers Collecting Outsider Art, curated by Paul Laster, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY

In Sickness and In Health (Online), Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, NY

2019

HEALING ARTS! - work from the archives of Healing Arts Initiative / H.A.I., White Columns, New York, NY

Summer Exhibition: Recent Works, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY

Atlanta Biennial: 'A Thousand Tomorrows', Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA

Doors of Perception, curated by Javier Téllez in collaboration with the Outsider Art Fair, Frieze New York, New York, NY

Drawn Together Again, The Flag Art Foundation, New York, NY

2018

False Flag, Franklin Street Works, Stamford, CT

The Museum of Everything, Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia

2017

Outsider Art-Art Brut, Art Absolument, Paris, France

2016

World Made By Hand, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY

Once Something Has Lived It Can Never Really Die, American Folk Art Museum, New York

2015

Art Brut: A History of Individual Mythologies, Oliva Creative Factory, Sao Joao da Madeira, Portugal
Art Brut live, DOX Center for Contemporary Art, Prague, Czech Republic

2014

Self-Taught Genius, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
Le Mur, Oeuvres de la Collection Antoine de Galbert, La maison rouge, Paris, France

2013

The Alternative Guide to the Universe, Hayward Gallery, London, UK
Farfetched: Mad Science, Fringe Architecture and Visionary Engineering, Gregg Museum of Art and Design, Raleigh, NC

2012

Towards a Warm Math, curated by Chris Wiley, On Stellar Rays, New York, NY

2010

And One More Thing, Bullet Space, New York, NY

2009

Approaching Abstraction, American Folk Art Museum, New York

2008

Communication Breakdown, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York and Galerie Impaire, Paris, France
To Infinity and Beyond: Mathematics in Contemporary Art, Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, NY

2005

Visual Glossolalia, Luise Ross Gallery, New York, NY

2004

Cryptic Communications, Transformer, Washington, D.C.

1997

a continuation of something else, Bullet Space, New York, NY

1996

Resistance of Memory, Bullet Space, New York, NY

1991

Art's Mouth, curated by Connie Butler, Artists Space, New York

COLLECTIONS

American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore
Antoine de Galbert Collection, Paris
Collection abcd, Montreuil, France

Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Switzerland

Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Transformer, Washington, D.C., WA

Treger Saint Silvestre, Porto, Portugal
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., WA

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- Jerry Saltz, "Studying the Masterpieces of Visionary Melvin Way," *Vulture*. Alanna Martinez, "Artist Melvin Way's Journey from Homelessness to Art World Acclaim," *NY Observer*, 2015.
- Maurizio Cattelan, et al (ed.), *Charley*, 2005.
- Ken Johnson, "Of Signs and Wonders, Visionaries and Loners," *The New York Times*, January, 2004.
- Weiss, Allan S., "Algebra is Drunkenness," *Cabinet Magazine*, New York, Fall, 2002.
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- Fass, Allison, "The Legacy of the Outsider," *The New York Times*, July, 2000.