

Frank Calloway: *Pageants from the Old South*



Edlin Gallery is pleased to present Frank Calloway: *Pageants from the Old South*. This marks the first gallery exhibition for Calloway - his work has a wing devoted to it at the American Visionary Art Museum where "The Marriage Of Art, Science and Philosophy" is currently on view. Show dates are **March 5 - May 2, 2009** with an opening reception Thursday, March 5 from 8 - 10 PM.

By the records of the State of Alabama, Frank Calloway has lived in three centuries: the 19th, the 20th, and the 21st. In the first two, he was anonymous. Calloway was born poor, black and fatherless in Montgomery, the state capital, 112 years ago and has been committed for the last half of his life to the buildings and grounds of Bryce Hospital and the Alabama Department of Mental Health in Tuscaloosa.

When Calloway entered Bryce in 1952, the 200-acre hospital campus still had its own crops and vegetable gardens, orchards, birds and animals. Calloway worked in the fields and on the grounds. When U. S. District Judge Frank Johnson banished that system, replacing manual labor with arts and crafts, Calloway began to draw with the crayons and markers he was given. He didn't want to do anything else, and he didn't want to stop, so the staff began giving him 30-foot long rolls of butcher paper.

He started to make long murals of people in houses, buildings and buses, working men on their trucks, paddle wheel steamboats, locomotives and trains, and their crews. He had a method. "I make a mark, and then add some others to it-the way you build a house," he said. But before he started to draw, he seemed always to write long series of lines of multiplied numbers at the bottom of the paper. "That's how many bricks I need to build the house," Calloway replied, when someone asked him what the numbers were. He has a talent for multiplying large sums in his head, and the numbers and drawings were parts of a whole, like an engineer's calculations in the margins of a rendering.

Some of Calloway's drawings extend to over 60 feet in length. They burst with color: deep greens, highlighter yellows, navy blues and Pepto-Bismol pinks. Many are stained with tobacco juice. His images of houses with their smoke-billowing chimneys recall Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* .

Calloway appears to apply no rules in determining when his compositions are complete, as he continues to unroll his scrolls of butcher paper. When asked he simply states "I done my best".