

Henry Darger (1892-1973) was born in Chicago, Illinois. His mother died when he was four years old and his father was permanently disabled when Darger was eight. He was initially institutionalized in a Catholic orphanage and then was sent to an asylum for “feeble-minded” children following an erroneous diagnosis at age twelve. He escaped from the asylum when he was seventeen and worked as a janitor at several Chicago hospitals throughout the rest of his life. A devout Catholic, Darger went to mass every day and lived a solitary life.

Sometime between 1910 and 1912, Darger began writing an epic 15,000-page fantasy-adventure novel entitled *The Story of the Vivian Girls in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*. This expansive, complex narrative together with over 300 imaginatively constructed fantasy drawings has come to be regarded as one of the 20th century’s most original and unusual literary works.

It was not until after Darger’s death that the full scope of his artistic production became known. His landlord, Nathan Lerner, himself an artist and inventor, discovered Darger’s artworks after the artist was sent to a nursing home just before the end of his life. As Darger’s work has become better-known to both outsider-art and contemporary-art audiences in the U.S. and in Europe, it has won wide acclaim from critics, artists, art historians, curators and collectors who have recognized the withdrawn art-maker and storyteller as one of the most original talents—and as a true visionary—of his time.

Darger’s art has been the subject of the monographs *Henry Darger: Selected Art and Writings*, by Michael Bonesteel (Rizzoli, 2000), *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal*, by John M. MacGregor (Delano Greenridge Editions, 2002) and *Henry Darger* by Klaus Biesenbach (Prestel, 2009). The artist’s work and life were also the focus of the 2004 documentary *In the Realms of the Unreal* by the Academy Award-winning film-maker Jessica Yu.

Darger’s works have been exhibited worldwide including in the traveling exhibition *Disasters of War* curated by Klaus Biesenbach (P.S.1, 2001) which paired the artist with Goya and Jake and Dinos Chapman. More recently, his work was included in the traveling exhibition curated by Lynne Cooke, *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* in 2018-19 (National Gallery, High Museum of Art, LACMA).

Darger’s works are included numerous public collections including the American Folk Art Museum (New York), the Art Institute of Chicago, the Collection de l’Art Brut (Lausanne), the High Museum of Art (Atlanta), the Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin), the Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art (Chicago), the Museum of Everything (London), Musée d’Art moderne de Paris, the Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago), the Milwaukee Art Museum, the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington, D.C.), the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis) and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).