

Afterlife

Curated by Paul Laster

Andrew Edlin Gallery

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Morton Bartlett

Morton Bartlett (1909–1992) was an American photographer and graphic designer known for his "outsider art," specifically a secret collection of lifelike plaster dolls and staged photographs.

Who was Morton Bartlett?

- **Artistic Practice:** Between 1936 and 1963, Bartlett spent his spare time creating a "fantasy family" of 15 anatomically correct, half-sized plaster dolls of children (12 girls and 3 boys).
- **Multidisciplinary Skill:** He was entirely self-taught, learning anatomy from medical books to sculpt the figures, sewing and knitting their detailed clothing, and teaching himself photography to stage them in various scenes.
- **Private Life:** Professionally, he worked as a freelance graphic designer in Boston. He lived alone and never married; his art remained a private hobby that he rarely shared, except for a few close friends and a 1962 feature in *Yankee Magazine*.

How was he discovered?

Bartlett's work was only widely recognized after his death in 1992.

- **Initial Find:** After Bartlett passed away, his entire collection—which he had packed away in wooden boxes wrapped in 1963 newspapers—was found in his estate.
- **The 1993 Rediscovery:** In 1993, New York art and antiques dealer **Marion Harris** discovered the dolls and roughly 200 staged black-and-white photographs for sale at the Pier Show, a New York antiques fair.
- **Public Acclaim:** Harris purchased the entire collection and published a catalog titled *Family Found: The Lifetime Obsession of Morton Bartlett*. This led to international acclaim and exhibitions at major institutions, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Folk Art Museum.

E.J Bellocq

E. J. Bellocq (1873–1949) was an American commercial photographer in New Orleans, best known posthumously for his intimate portraits of prostitutes in **Storyville**, the city's legal red-light district. While he earned his living documenting ships, machinery, and landmarks, his private work captured a hidden side of local life.

Who Was E. J. Bellocq?

- **Background:** Born into a wealthy French Creole family, Bellocq was a reclusive and eccentric figure. He was often described as having physical deformities, including a "misshapen" appearance, which some sources attribute to hydrocephaly.
- **Professional Work:** He was a member of the New Orleans Camera Club and a professional photographer who specialized in industrial subjects like shipbuilding for local companies.
- **Artistic Style:** His Storyville portraits are noted for their **humanizing intimacy** and the relaxed, unself-conscious demeanor of the women, which was unusual for the long exposure times required by the glass-plate negatives he used.

How Was He Discovered?

Bellocq remained unknown as an artist during his lifetime; his "Storyville Portraits" were discovered and popularized years after his death:

- **Posthumous Discovery:** Following his death in 1949, **89 glass-plate negatives** were found in his desk. Many of these plates had been intentionally damaged, with the faces of the women scratched out.
- **Lee Friedlander's Role:** In 1966, photographer **Lee Friedlander** purchased the negatives from an antique dealer (Larry Borenstein) in New Orleans. Friedlander meticulously printed them using a period-appropriate "printing-out paper" process.

Public Recognition: Bellocq achieved international fame in 1970 when Friedlander's prints were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, curated by John Szarkowski. This exhibition and the accompanying book, *Storyville Portraits*, cemented his place in photographic history.

Pearl Blauvelt

Pearl Blauvelt (1893–1987) was a self-taught American "outsider" artist who lived a reclusive life in rural northeastern Pennsylvania. Known by local villagers as the "Village Witch," she lived for decades in a house without electricity, running water, or central heating.

Artistic Style

Blauvelt's work consists of approximately **800 drawings** primarily created in the 1940s and 1950s using graphite and colored pencil on humble materials like ruled notebook paper, envelopes, and paper bags. Her style is characterized by:

- **Unique Perspective:** She utilized a "transparent" or "X-ray" vision, where interior walls, skeletal structures, or objects behind facades were visible simultaneously.
- **Everyday Imagery:** Her subjects included houses, furniture, clothing, horse-drawn carriages, and even carefully rendered banknotes in fantasy denominations.
- **Commercial Influence:** Many of her drawings were meticulously labeled and inspired by items she saw in mid-century mail-order catalogs.

Discovery

Blauvelt's artwork was discovered by chance years after she had left her home.

- **Relocation:** In the mid-1950s, she was declared incompetent and moved to a care facility, where she remained until her death in 1987.
- **Finding the Cache:** Her former residence stood vacant for nearly 50 years until it was purchased in the early 2000s by artists **Donna and Dennis Corrigan**.
- **The Wooden Box:** During the house's restoration, the Corrigans found a leather-hinged wooden box hidden under piles of abandoned debris that contained her entire body of work.

Today, Pearl Blauvelt's drawings are highly regarded in the outsider art community and are held in prestigious collections, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

John Byam

John Byam (1929–2013) was an American **self-taught "outsider" artist** from Oneonta, New York, who spent his life working in relative obscurity as a trailer park attendant and part-time gravedigger. His work—primarily wood carvings and intricate drawings—remained largely unknown until very late in his life.

Discovery

- **Initial Find (1998):** His work was discovered in 1998 by **antiques dealer Neil Rochmis**. Rochmis found an "odd assortment of buried treasure" consisting of carvings, signs, and drawings that Byam himself viewed merely as a hobby rather than "art".
- **Public Recognition (2012):** Byam's work was first exhibited publicly in 2012, just one year before his death. His first solo New York exhibition opened at the [Andrew Edlin Gallery](#) only weeks before he passed away in 2013.

Artistic Style and Career

- **Mediums:** He is known for roughly hewn wood carvings made from combinations of **wood, sawdust, glue, and paint**. His drawings often feature written commentary and portraits of family or celebrities.
- **Themes:** His art was deeply influenced by **20th-century culture**, including his service in the U.S. military during the Korean War and everyday objects like caskets, ladders, and furniture.
- **Acclaim:** Posthumously, his work has been featured in major institutions like the American Folk Art Museum in New York and the **Collection de l'Art Brut** in Switzerland.

Mary Paulina Corbett

Mary Paulina Corbett (1930–2019) was a self-taught American outsider artist known for her extensive collection of drawings created during her youth in Pennsylvania.

Background and Art

- **Early Life:** Corbett lived her entire life on her family farm in Delaware County, Pennsylvania.

- **The Artworks:** Between the ages of 12 and 21 (1942–1951), she produced 714 double-sided drawings using colored pencils and watercolors on letter-sized paper.
- **Themes:** Her work centered on "The Catville Kids," a fictional cast she created to depict scenes of daily life, parties, and romantic reunions. The drawings blended her farm experiences with American pop culture, often featuring human-animal hybrids and characters like the Lone Ranger.

Discovery

Corbett was discovered late in her life through an estate sale:

1. **Estate Sale:** In 2013, following an injury that forced Corbett to move into a nursing facility, two boxes containing her life's work were found in her attic and sold at an estate sale.
2. **Tracking the Artist:** The purchaser of the boxes recognized the artistic value and tracked Corbett down to learn the context and stories behind the drawings.
3. **Public Recognition:** Corbett, who had kept the drawings private for decades, approved of their conservation and public sharing. Her work has since been featured at major venues like the Outsider Art Fair (2022–2024) and the Hirschl & Adler Gallery.

Robert Coutelas

Robert Coutelas (1930–1985) was a Parisian artist known for his **outsider approach** and refusal to conform to the commercial art world. Born into poverty, he was **almost entirely self-taught**, having left school at age 11. Despite being championed early in his career as "the new Utrillo," he broke ties with galleries to maintain his artistic freedom, choosing to live in abject misery in a small room shared with rats and pigeons.

Principal Creations

Coutelas created a deeply personal, mystical universe through thousands of small-scale works often made from found materials.

- **Mes Nuits ("My Nights"):** His most iconic series, consisting of several thousand miniature oil paintings on found cardboard and wood.
 - These pieces are roughly the size of **tarot cards** (approx. 12 x 6 cm) and feature rounded corners.

- They depict a symbolic, "personal eternity" populated by hybrid creatures, burning towers, saints, and lovers.
- **Mes Ancêtres ("My Ancestors"):** A collection of several hundred gouache paintings, often created on the reverse side of unused posters.
- **Sculptures:** Dozens of "mostly tiny" sculptures crafted from stone or terracotta.
- **Early Works:** Prior to his reclusive period, he produced larger oil paintings including still lifes, street scenes of Paris, and landscapes.

Coutelas's work is characterized by a "quiet melancholy" and a yearning for the spirit of **medieval craftsmanship**. He rejected the "flashy fashions" of the contemporary art scene, preferring the timelessness of folk art (*arts populaires*). His work gained significant international recognition posthumously, notably through major exhibitions at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo (2022) and various galleries in Paris and London.

Henry Darger

Henry Darger (1892–1973) was an American "outsider artist" and writer who worked in total obscurity as a hospital janitor and dishwasher in Chicago. He is now recognized as one of the most significant self-taught artists of the 20th century.

His Work

Over several decades, Darger privately created a massive body of work centered on an epic 15,000-page fantasy novel titled *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal*.

- **The Narrative:** The story follows seven young princesses, the Vivian Girls, who lead a rebellion against the evil "Glandelinians" to end child slavery.
- **Visual Art:** He produced over 300 large-scale, panoramic watercolor and collage paintings, some exceeding 10 feet in length, to illustrate his saga.
- **Techniques:** Because he felt he lacked formal drawing skills, Darger used tracing and collage, pulling figures from popular media like magazines, comic strips, and children's coloring books.

How He Was Discovered

Darger kept his creative life a complete secret. His work was only discovered in late 1972, shortly before his death at age 81, when he moved into a charity nursing home due to failing health.

- **The Discovery:** While clearing out Darger's cramped, one-room apartment at 851 Webster Avenue, his landlord, **Nathan Lerner**—who was himself a photographer and artist—and another tenant, David Berglund, found the vast collection of manuscripts and paintings buried under decades of accumulated trash.
- **Darger's Reaction:** When informed of the discovery, Darger reportedly told them to "throw it all away," saying the items were of no further use to him.
- **Preservation:** Recognizing the artistic importance of the find, Lerner and his wife Kiyoko saved the collection. Darger died in 1973, and the Lerner's began sharing his work with the art world shortly thereafter, leading to his first public exhibition in 1977.

Today, major repositories of his work are held at the American Folk Art Museum in New York and the Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art in Chicago.

James Edward Deeds

James Edward Deeds (1908–1987) was an American **outsider artist** who spent most of his adult life committed to a psychiatric institution. His work, primarily created while he was a patient at Missouri's State Hospital No. 3, consists of meticulously detailed pencil and crayon drawings on hospital ledger paper.

Discovery and Identification

His body of work was discovered and identified through a series of accidental events:

- **Initial Discovery (1970):** A 14-year-old boy named Reid Henderson found a hand-sewn album containing 283 drawings in a pile of trash on a curb in Springfield, Missouri. The album had been accidentally discarded by Deeds' brother, Clay, during a move.
- **The "Electric Pencil" Moniker (2006):** After holding onto the album for 36 years, Henderson sold it on eBay in 2006. Art dealer Harris Diamant purchased the drawings and nicknamed the then-anonymous artist "**The Electric Pencil**". This name came from a misspelling in one drawing, "ECTLECTRC PENCIL," which was

later theorized to refer to electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) that Deeds underwent at the hospital.

- **Final Identification (2011):** Diamant sought to uncover the artist's true identity through public research. A 2011 article in the *Springfield News-Leader* caught the attention of Deeds' nieces, who recognized the drawings and identified their "Uncle Edward" as the artist.

Artistic Style

Deeds' work is characterized by:

- **Distinctive Portraits:** Figures often feature haunting, wide-eyed gazes with enlarged pupils and meticulously drawn vintage clothing.
- **Thematic Variety:** His drawings include animals, landscapes, steamboats, trains, and architecture, often depicting a nostalgic, idealized version of early 20th-century America.
- **Medium:** He used graphite and colored pencils on double-sided, official ledger paper from **State Hospital No. 3**.

Charles A.A. Dellschau

Charles August Albert Dellschau (1830–1923) was a Prussian-born immigrant and retired butcher who is now recognized as one of America's earliest documented **outsider and visionary artists**.

Who was Charles Dellschau?

- **The Artist:** Dellschau spent his 20-year retirement (roughly 1900–1923) working in a small attic apartment in Houston, Texas, where he obsessively created at least 13 large, hand-bound notebooks containing over 2,500 drawings, watercolors, and collages.
- **The Subject:** His work focused on "Aeros," fantastical steampunk-like airships that he claimed were developed by a secret society called the **Sonora Aero Club** in mid-19th century California.
- **The Narrative:** Dellschau acted as the club's "scribe," documenting its members and their use of a mysterious anti-gravity fuel called **"NB Gas"**. His pages included "Press Blooms," which were collaged newspaper clippings about early aviation.

How was his art discovered?

Dellschau died in obscurity in 1923, and his work remained forgotten in his family's attic for decades.

- **Discarded:** Following a house fire in the 1960s, the notebooks were cleared out and thrown onto a sidewalk for trash collection.
- **Salvaged:** A local second-hand furniture dealer, **Fred Washington**, spotted the books and purchased approximately 12 of them from a trash collector for about \$100. They sat in his warehouse under a pile of old carpets for over a year.
- **Recognized:** In 1968, art student **Mary Jane Victor** discovered the books while searching Washington's warehouse for items for a university display on flight.
- **Exhibited:** Victor brought the work to the attention of art patron **Dominique de Menil**, who purchased several notebooks for \$1,500 and exhibited them at Rice University and the University of St. Thomas, launching Dellschau's posthumous fame.

Frank Johnson

Frank Johnson (1912–1979) was a Chicago-based shipping clerk and musician who secretly created a massive body of comic art over five decades.

Discovery

Johnson's artistic legacy was unknown even to his wife until after his death in 1979.

- **Initial Discovery:** His wife, Kay, found a vast collection of work in their apartment, including 126 hand-drawn notebooks and a cigar box full of loose sketches.
- **Public Unveiling:** The work remained largely private until roughly 15 years ago when Dallas-based art dealer **Chris Byrne** and artist **Keith Mayerson** brought the collection to public attention.
- **Recognition:** His work gained significant acclaim at the 2017 **Outsider Art Fair**.

Artistic Background

- **Self-Taught Status:** Johnson had no formal training in visual art. He developed his style independently while working as a shipping clerk and playing blues and country music on live radio.

- **Body of Work:** He produced over **2,300 pages** of comics and drawings between 1928 and 1978.
- **Major Works:**
 - **"Wally's Gang":** A 50-year "magnum opus" following the lives of bachelor friends.
 - **"The Bowser Boys":** Described as a darkly slapstick depiction of street life and potentially the first underground comic series.
- **Legacy:** He is now recognized as a "secret pioneer" of American comics for inventing storytelling tropes in private long before they became industry standards.

Vivian Maier

Vivian Maier (1926–2009) was an American **street photographer** who spent over 40 years working as a **nanny**, primarily in Chicago, while secretly capturing more than 150,000 images. She is now celebrated as one of the most significant photographers of the 20th century.

How She Was Discovered

Maier's work remained unknown and largely undeveloped during her lifetime. Her discovery occurred by chance shortly before her death:

- **The Auction (2007):** Due to non-payment of rent, the contents of Maier's storage lockers were auctioned off in Chicago.
- **The Purchaser: John Maloof,** a real estate agent and amateur historian, purchased a large box of her negatives for about **\$400** while searching for historical photos of Chicago for a book. Other collectors, including Ron Slattery and Randy Prow, also acquired portions of her work at the same auction.
- **The Viral Sensation (2009):** After Maier's death in April 2009, Maloof posted a selection of her scanned negatives to the image-sharing site **Flickr**. The images went viral, sparking massive international interest and critical acclaim.
- **Identity Revelation:** Maloof only discovered Maier's name on a photo lab envelope inside one of the boxes. A Google search for her name led him to her obituary, which had been published just days earlier.

Key Characteristics of Her Work

- **Equipment:** She primarily used a **Rolleiflex twin-lens reflex camera**, which she often held at waist level to capture candid, unposed moments.
- **Subject Matter:** Her photography focused on urban life, children, the marginalized, and architecture in New York City and Chicago. She is also well-known for her many creative **self-portraits**.
- **Legacy:** Her life and discovery were the subject of the 2013 Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Finding Vivian Maier*.

Melvin Edward Nelson

Melvin Edward Nelson (1908–1992) was a self-taught "Outsider" artist and inventor who lived as a recluse on a 70-acre farm in Colton, Oregon. He considered himself an "official recorder" of cosmic and spiritual truths, often signing his work with the acronym **M.E.N.**, which stood for "**Mighty Eternal Nation**".

His Artistic Creations

Nelson produced a large body of abstract paintings and drawings, primarily between 1961 and 1966, which he referred to as "recordings" rather than art.

- **"Photo Genetics" Series:** These abstract works were designed to reveal the relationship between atoms and planets. They often featured organic shapes in earthy tones like maroon, green, and brown.
- **Cosmic Landscapes:** His paintings depicted what he claimed were direct observations of outer space, the birth of planets, and otherworldly technology, often reached via "astral projection".
- **Prophetic Imagery:** Some series, such as those held by the American Folk Art Museum, depicted symbolic events like an "octopus" crushing the earth or "greater earthquakes" to come.

Materials and Techniques

Nelson's process was as idiosyncratic as his subject matter:

- **"Stardust" Pigments:** He ground local rocks and soil—specifically from sites where he believed UFOs had landed—using a hand-cranked gold crusher to create his own pigments, which he called "stardust".

- **Scientific Recipes:** His notebooks contained complex recipes for colors; for instance, his "burnt umber" used a mixture of roasted coffee, iodine, and ammonia nitrate.
- **Decalomania:** He frequently used a technique where he pressed a metal plate onto paper coated with wet pigment to create spontaneous, non-preconceived patterns.

Inventions and Ideology

Beyond his paintings, Nelson was an eccentric inventor who created devices to bridge the gap between science and mysticism:

- **Electronic Devices:** He built machines like the "**cyclotron generator**" for levitation and the "**anyzager**" (or "anyzger"), which he used as an "instrument of truth" for astral projection.
- **UFO Tracking:** He created a device called the "**planetron**" to track and communicate with unidentified flying objects.

Nelson never shared his work with the public during his lifetime. His "recordings" were only discovered in a San Francisco bookstore years after his death and are now featured in major collections like the Cavin-Morris Gallery.

Philadelphia Wireman

The **Philadelphia Wireman** is the pseudonym given to an anonymous "outsider" artist responsible for approximately **1,200 small-scale sculptures** discovered in Philadelphia during the late 1970s or early 1980s. Despite international recognition, the artist's true identity, gender, and motives remain unknown.

Identity and Art Style

- **The Sculptures:** Most pieces consist of tightly wound, heavy-gauge wire bound around various "junk" or found objects, including coins, batteries, plastic, food wrappers, and toys.
- **Theories on the Artist:**
 - **Gender:** It is widely assumed the artist was a man due to the physical strength required to bend the thick wire by hand.

- **Ethnicity:** Scholars and curators often speculate the artist was African American based on the demographics of the neighborhood where the work was found and the sculptures' resemblance to West African *nkisi* (spiritual power objects).
- **Witness Account:** In 1999, a gallery visitor claimed to have seen an elderly Black man creating similar sculptures in the neighborhood around 1970, though this has never been formally confirmed.

Discovery

The artist's entire body of work was found through a chance encounter on trash night:

- **The Initial Find:** In 1982 (or the late 1970s, as accounts vary), a passerby and student named **Robert Leitch** spotted boxes and bags full of the sculptures abandoned in an alley off South Street.
- **Salvage:** Leitch recognized their aesthetic value and collected the pieces just before they were to be picked up by garbage collectors. He stored them in his attic for several years before seeking professional advice.
- **Introduction to the Public:** In 1984, Leitch brought the collection to the Fleisher/Ollman Gallery (then the Janet Fleisher Gallery). Director John Ollman recognized their significance and held the first exhibition of the work in 1985, coining the name "Philadelphia Wireman".
- **Preservation:** It is hypothesized the sculptures were discarded by relatives or landlords following the artist's death or eviction during a period of rapid urban renovation in the neighborhood.

Martín Ramírez

Martín Ramírez (1895–1963) was a Mexican-born self-taught artist who is now considered one of the masters of 20th-century **Outsider Art**. He spent the last 30 years of his life institutionalized in California psychiatric hospitals, where he produced a vast body of highly sophisticated drawings and collages.

Who Was Martín Ramírez?

- **Background:** Born in Jalisco, Mexico, he migrated to the United States in 1925 to work on railroads and in mines to support his family.

- **Institutionalization:** Following the onset of the Great Depression and personal hardships, he was arrested in 1931 and eventually diagnosed with catatonic schizophrenia. He remained in psychiatric facilities, primarily **DeWitt State Hospital**, until his death in 1963.
- **Artistic Style:** Despite limited resources, he created roughly 450–500 works using materials like brown paper bags, examining-table paper, and a paste made from potatoes and saliva. His work often featured recurring motifs such as:
 - **Trains and tunnels, Horsemen (*jinetes*), Mexican Madonnas, Intricate, rhythmic parallel lines** that created deep perspective.

How Was He Discovered?

Ramírez's discovery occurred in several key phases:

1. **Initial Recognition (1948–1950s): Dr. Tarmo Pasto**, a professor of psychology and art, met Ramírez at DeWitt State Hospital. Recognizing the artist's extraordinary talent, Pasto began providing him with high-quality supplies and preserved his work, which otherwise might have been discarded as hospital waste. Pasto organized small exhibitions at colleges and even sent drawings to the Guggenheim Museum, though they were not immediately recognized there.
2. **The Chicago Connection (1968):** A decade after Ramírez's death, Chicago artist **Jim Nutt** discovered the collection while teaching at Sacramento State. Nutt and art dealer **Phyllis Kind** purchased the works from Pasto and brought them to the mainstream art market, significantly raising Ramírez's profile.
3. **Modern Recognition (1990s–Present):** His reputation was solidified by major retrospectives at the American Folk Art Museum in 2007 and 2009. In 2015, he was honored by the U.S. Postal Service with a series of commemorative stamps.

Daniel E. Rohrig

Daniel E. Rohrig (1911–1969), also known as Don Rohrig, was a 20th-century self-taught American "outsider" artist known for mixed-media works inspired by Japanese cinema and culture.

Artistic Background

- **Influences:** He became captivated by Japanese film stars and movie posters while serving in the Pacific during World War II.
- **Style and Subject:** His work primarily consists of realistic and fantasy watercolors, gouaches, and ink paintings on paper. These "mash-ups" often featured Japanese actors in invented scenes, historical military events, and imagery culled from East Asian advertisements.
- **Career:** He never received formal art training. Before and after the war, he held various industrial and agricultural jobs, eventually working as a purser on military ships for the rest of his life.

Discovery

Rohrig never shared his art publicly during his lifetime. His discovery followed a sequence of private inheritances:

- **Initial Inheritance:** After his sudden death from appendicitis in 1969, his niece inherited over 70 works and woodblocks.
- **Private Sale:** In 1995, a family friend purchased the entire collection.
- **Public Debut:** The works remained hidden under the buyer's bed for decades until he contacted **Rago Auctions** in July 2018.
- **Recognition:** The collection debuted at auction in late 2018 and was subsequently featured by art dealer Marion Harris at the **2019 Outsider Art Fair** in New York. Following this, the American Folk Art Museum acquired several of his works for its permanent collection.

Marcel Storr

Marcel Storr (1911–1976) was a self-taught French artist and street sweeper known for his meticulously detailed drawings of visionary architecture and fantasy megalopolises. A major figure in "outsider art," he worked in near-total secrecy throughout his life.

Discovery

Storr's work was discovered in **1971** through his wife, Marthe, who worked as a primary school caretaker.

- **The Meeting:** Marthe met **Liliane Kempf**, the president of a local parent-teacher association, and eventually showed her and her husband, **Bertrand Kempf**, the drawings Storr had hidden.

- **Secret Portfolio:** The works were famously found concealed under the oilcloth of the couple's kitchen table.
- **Storr's Resistance:** Despite the Kempfs' fascination, Storr remained intensely private and refused to exhibit or sell his work during his lifetime.
- **Public Legacy:** After Storr's death in 1976, the Kempfs became custodians of his 63 known drawings. They first exhibited them publicly in 2001 at the Halle Saint-Pierre in Paris.

Eugene von Bruenchenhein

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein (1910–1983) was a prolific, self-taught American artist from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who worked in near-total seclusion for over 50 years. A baker by trade, he produced an expansive body of thousands of works including paintings, sculptures, photography, and poetry.

Who Was He?

Von Bruenchenhein considered himself a "Renaissance man," often referring to himself as an "Artist, Poet and Sculptor, Innovator... and Philosopher". Key aspects of his diverse artistic output included:

- **Photography:** He took thousands of staged, often erotic "pin-up" style photographs of his wife and muse, **Marie** (Eveline Kalka), frequently using his bathroom as a darkroom.
- **Painting:** He created nearly 1,000 vibrant, hallucinatory oil paintings—many of which were apocalyptic or extraterrestrial landscapes—using his fingers, sticks, or brushes made from Marie's hair.
- **Sculpture:** He is well known for intricate towers and miniature "thrones" constructed from dried, gilded **chicken and turkey bones**. He also created ceramic crowns and vessels fired in his home's coal oven.

How Was He Discovered?

Von Bruenchenhein's work remained largely unknown to the public during his lifetime, despite his unsuccessful attempts to interest local galleries. His "discovery" occurred only after his death in 1983:

1. **Friend's Outreach:** Shortly after Eugene died, **Daniel Nycz**, a retired policeman and friend of the artist, contacted the **Milwaukee Art Museum** to help the widowed Marie financially.
2. **Museum Visit:** Nycz brought Russell Bowman, then-director of the Milwaukee Art Museum, to the artist's home, which was found overflowing with art—described by Nycz as "walking into King Tut's tomb".
3. **Institutional Recognition:** While the Milwaukee Art Museum recognized the work's significance, the **John Michael Kohler Arts Center** in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, took on the massive task of documenting, cataloging, and preserving the thousands of pieces.
4. **Public Debut:** The first exhibition of his work was held at the Kohler Arts Center in 1984, just months after his death.

Today, his work is held in prestigious institutions worldwide, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the American Folk Art Museum.

Grant Wallace

Grant Wallace (1868–1954) was an American journalist and self-taught visionary artist who produced a vast collection of drawings and writings based on what he termed "mental radio"—telepathic transmissions he believed he received from spirits and extraterrestrials.

Who was Grant Wallace?

- **Early Career:** Born in Missouri, he was a prolific journalist and illustrator for major publications like the *San Francisco Examiner* and *San Francisco Chronicle*. He notably served as a war correspondent during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904.
- **Artistic Shift:** After World War I, he settled in a cabin near Carmel, California, where he shifted his focus to the occult and "psychic research".
- **The Work:** His art consists of intricate portraits, complex diagrams, and celestial alphabets. He claimed to "channel" messages from diverse figures ranging from historical personages (like Thomas Jefferson and Charles Darwin) to intelligent life from the Pleiades star cluster.

- **Philosophical Goal:** Through his work, he aimed to provide evidence of reincarnation, the afterlife, and extraterrestrial civilizations.

How was he discovered?

While Wallace died in 1954, his work was largely unknown to the general public for decades.

- **Family Discovery:** His artistic legacy was brought to light in **2021** when his great-grandchildren discovered a substantial trove of his drawings and writings in storage.
- **Public Recognition:** This discovery led to the first major gallery exhibition of his work, titled *Over the Psychic Radio*, at the **Ricco/Maresca Gallery** in New York in 2022.
- **Curatorial Effort:** The exhibition, which featured 31 previously unseen works, was curated with the help of his great-grandson, Matt Berger, who also authored an introduction for the accompanying catalog.

Abraham Lincoln Walker

Abraham Lincoln Walker (1921–1993) was an African American self-taught visionary artist based in East St. Louis, Illinois. A house painter by trade, he created a massive body of over 800 paintings in near-total solitude, primarily working in his basement.

Discovery

Although Walker participated in a few regional exhibitions during his lifetime, including a 1974 critique by Jacob Lawrence, his work remained largely obscure until more than 30 years after his death.

- **The Trove:** Following his death in 1993, his extensive collection was inherited by his son, Link, who stored the paintings in a **tractor-trailer** on his property.
- **The Breakthrough (2024):** After a near-death experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, Link sought an appraisal for the collection. He contacted a leading art dealer in St. Louis, who immediately recognized the significance of the "major collection".

- **Art World Recognition:** His work was subsequently presented for the first time by the Andrew Edlin Gallery at the ADAA Art Show in late 2024, where it nearly sold out and attracted major collectors.

Artistic Style and Background

- **Visionary Roots:** Walker was an ordained minister and an evangelical speaker from age seven. He often described his paintings as "visions" that came to him in the evening or after periods of fasting.
- **Technique:** He utilized a "frottage" technique and often applied paint with unconventional tools like putty knives, pieces of wood, and plastic wrappers.
- **Themes:** His early works often depicted the aftermath of the 1963 and 1968 East St. Louis race riots. His later, more famous style features **surreal, elongated, and masked figures** in desolate or celestial landscapes.

Frank Walter

Frank Walter (1926–2009) was a prolific self-taught Antiguan artist, writer, and philosopher who is now recognized as one of the Caribbean's most significant creative figures.

Who was Frank Walter?

- **Background:** Born in Antigua, he was the first person of color to manage a sugar plantation on the island at age 22. He was a descendant of both enslaved people and European plantation owners, a complex lineage that deeply influenced his identity and work.
- **Artistic Output:** He produced an immense body of work, including over **5,000 paintings**, 1,000 drawings, 600 sculptures, 2,000 photographs, and roughly 50,000 pages of writing.
- **Style and Materials:** Walter often used found materials like cardboard, wooden crates, and the backs of Polaroid film boxes. His subjects ranged from lush Antiguan landscapes and portraits to abstract explorations of nuclear energy and the cosmos.

- **Later Life:** After experiencing systemic racism during travels in Europe in the 1950s, he returned to Antigua and eventually became a semi-recluse, living in a self-built home and studio on Bailey's Hill until his death.

How was he discovered?

Frank Walter's work remained virtually unknown during his lifetime as he created it in secret, intending it for a large-scale exhibition that never occurred while he was alive.

1. **Posthumous Archive:** Following his death in 2009, his family and his close friend, art historian **Barbara Paca**, recorded and conserved the massive trove of art and writing found in his home.
2. **Initial Exhibitions:** His work first gained public attention in 2013 through shows at the Ingleby Gallery in Edinburgh and the Douglas Hyde Gallery in Dublin.

Global Recognition: He was "discovered" on the world stage in **2017** when he posthumously represented Antigua and Barbuda in their inaugural pavilion at the **Venice Biennale**. The exhibition, titled *Frank Walter: The Last Universal Man*, turned him into an international art world sensation.