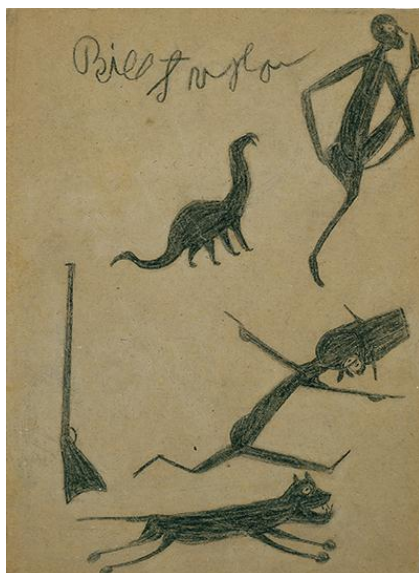


Seeing Stars: Visionary Drawing from the Collection

On View at the Menil Collection September 23, 2011 – January 15, 2012

Rarely seen works by “outsider” artists



Houston, August 15, 2011 – Mining the Menil Collection’s archives of works on paper, ***Seeing Stars: Visionary Drawing from the Collection*** showcases rarely exhibited drawings by artists who largely had no contact with the mainstream art world. This “outsider art,” as the work came to be known, enchanted and inspired the Surrealists, who believed artists with no formal training, or those who drew in altered mental states, could more successfully access the subconscious, achieving greater clarity and authenticity of expression.

The drawings highlighted in ***Seeing Stars*** (more than 50 in all) defy traditional and academic methods of representation and mark-making. Instead, experiments with chance, automatism and psychoanalysis – along with constructions of imaginary landscapes, creatures and machines – characterize the work. In 1949, Jean Dubuffet invented the term “Art Brut” to define this kind of art-making. The artist went on to champion these creators who “draw everything (subject, choice of material, expressive means, rhythms, spellings, etc.) from their own inner selves and not from the commonplaces of classical or currently fashionable art.”

Seeing Stars brings together artists who can be called visionary, folk, naïve or self-taught, boasting an eclectic mix of backgrounds, influences and processes. The exhibition features works by Charles A.A. Dellschau, a Prussian-born saddler and butcher who lived in Houston in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Originally salvaged from a dump, and then from a Houston junk shop, Dellschau’s collages and paintings of fantastical flying machines bound in handcrafted notebooks evidence the mysteries that enveloped scientific phenomena during the time.



Also on view are two drawings by German author and artist Unica Zürn, who was part of the Surrealist circle in Paris. These drawings, many of which were completed while Zürn was institutionalized, depict distorted creatures and body features that reflect her lifelong struggle with mental illness. In addition, **Seeing Stars** presents a nine-foot-long scroll by Henry Darger who lived and worked in his one-room Chicago apartment for forty years. The double-sided scroll depicts a magical universe that the artist called the “realm of the unreal.” It is among the 30,000 pages of unpublished manuscripts and 300 accompanying watercolors discovered by the artist’s landlord following Darger’s death.

Seeing Stars also offers the chance to see lesser known prints by Hungarian photographer Brassai, drawings by Bill Traylor, Adolf Wölfli, and Joseph Yoakum, tattoo sketches by I.E. Requier, early drawings by Jackson Pollock and work collected by John and Dominique de Menil from the Prison Museum in Huntsville, Texas.

The exhibition’s title, taken from the familiar experience of “seeing stars” refers to the physiological anomaly in which the stimulation of the retina by the brain creates the illusion of flashes of light, colors and shapes. Evoking this phenomenon, the works on view suggest that creative vision is perhaps most interesting when one’s eyes are shut to the outside world and inspiration is allowed to well from within.

Organized by Michelle White, associate curator of the Menil Collection, **Seeing Stars: Visionary Drawing from the Collection** challenges our notions of artistic achievement and expands our understanding of the creative process beyond orderly categories and movements. The exhibit opens September 23, 2011 and will remain on view until January 15, 2012.

Captions: Bill Traylor, *Figures, Animals, Guns (Exciting Events)*, ca. 1939-1942. Crayon on cardboard. The Menil Collection, Houston. Photo: Paul Hester. C.A.A. Dellschau, *Aero Doobely, Deck*, Plate 2451 from *Press Bloom*, artist named, hand-bound aeronautical scrapbook, 1911. The Menil Collection, Houston. Photo: Hickey-Robertson, Houston.

This exhibition is generously supported by Courtney and Christopher Sarofim, Mark Wawro and Melanie Gray, and the City of Houston. Exhibition underwriter United Airlines is the Preferred Airline of the Menil Collection.

For more information

please write to press@menil.org, call 713-535-3170 or visit www.menil.org