

## **OUTSIDER ART – BETWEEN RECOGNITION AND EXCLUSION**

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Since the discovery of the art works of exceptional quality of the mentally ill and not trained lay people, in the first half of the twentieth century, it is still difficult to find an appropriate handling with the diverse aesthetic forms of expression that are admired today as the "outsider art". But what does mean outsider art exactly?

For this question is not just one answer but several. In the same way as the art and tastes changing, every time developed her own relationship to the outsiders, always putting other priorities, was also the assessment of art of outsiders very different. In the course of a century it has been discussed as often as formulated and repeatedly redefined. And so, there was a whole variety of terms including Artistry of the mentally ill, Art Brut, zustandgebundene Art, psychopathological art, Self-taught Art, Raw Art, Vernacular Art, Visionary Art and Art singulier. The most commonly used Term is "Outsider Art", which was introduced in 1972 by the English art historian Roger Cardinal, as the Anglo-Saxon equivalent for the Term "Art Brut", postulated by French painter Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) in 1945. The confusing variety of terms shows that there still is no definition that could describe the essence of the art of outsiders exhaustive. All of these definitional constructs, which document a certain term uncertainty, lead to misunderstandings and some are controversial.

The only certainty is that beyond the art history and tradition and beyond the official art, exists an abundance of artistic expression, with a wealth of fascinating colors, shapes and content-whatever even we call them.

The creators of these works are mainly people who are in extreme emotional situations, deviate from the norm to live, break out, in selfimposed

or enforced isolation, or on the margins of society. All are outsiders! So it is their art! It takes place, away from the established art world. The Outsiders differ in terms of their personal background and social origin, far from each other. One thing connects them all, however: The originality, authenticity and immediacy of their art, which is associated with the unsophisticated handling. They create their art, usually without the control by the intellect, merely out of a strong need for expression, with their spontaneity and candor.

From the general public and the "official art" hardly noticed, apart from the big attention, often under difficult conditions, they create artworks of very own nature and apart from a few exceptions, without ever having any real art training. Most of them see their own work not as a work of art and himself not as an artist, do not pay attention to the consent or approval of others. They are singular phenomena without any academic conventions and characterized by the uniqueness of individual expression but not by stylistic consistency.

In retrospect, the historical roots of the outsider art to go back to the beginning of the 20th Century. The first evidence comes from the archives of the psychiatric hospitals, where the artistic skills of mentally ill and their works were discovered and used for diagnostic purposes. Already in 1907 published the French psychiatrist Paul Meunier (1873-1957) with the pseudonym Marcel Reja his monograph of "The art of the insane." The psychiatrist Walter Morgenthaler (1882-1965) from the asylum Waldau near Bern published the book, "A mentally ill as an artist," about artistic work of Adolf Wolfli, the most famous outsider 1921. released the Heidelberg psychiatrist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933) documented the results of his historical work of more than 5,000 artworks by about 450 patients in the book "Artistry of the mentally ill" ,in 1922 and triggered a broad discussion.

Since then, psychiatrists, artists and art historians devoted this form of artistic expression as different.

The so-called "art products of the insane" became soon very popular among the modern artists, like Max Ernst, Klee, Kandinsky, and Schlemmer, who were inspired by them. Psychiatrists on the other hand saw the artworks of patients directly related to their illnesses and they settled their art in the field of pathology. From this view they deduced the very term "Psychopathological art"(7). This narrow view has set a Trend,with the far-reaching consequences for these artists. Namely: The discrimination and exclusion, with a stigma of the outsider, that made their access to the art world impossible.

According to current knowledge, we know that there are no more a "sick" as a "healthy" art and the early, short fingered views, as it were dealing with an "art of the sick " were not true. Nothing illustrates this better than the much-quoted saying of Jean Dubuffet, "Our opinion on this question is that there are no more an art of the insane as an art of the stomach - or knee patients"(4).

Thank to the concept of art theory associated with the Art Brut of Dubuffet the Art of mentally ill could be freed from the corset of psychopathology and treated in a manner related to the art context,. Despite this, the art of outsiders stayed a long Time hidden for the public eye. Also from the official art world, it was hardly noticed, even overlooked, or seen rather as a curious side issue of minor importance,. However recently based on the enlargement of the concept of art and the aesthetic horizon, and Parallel to the change of understanding of art, the interest in the art of outsiders is gradually growing, especially in the U.S. but also in other countries, which is supported by numerous large and small exhibitions, publications and reports in the mass media (3). Despite many observational to revive interest in the art of outsiders have to say one that has the situation of these artists who are not able to assert their artistic self-identity, hardly improved. It is shown not least by the fact that, with very few exceptions, they are still not represented in museums and established galleries.

This is because that the outsider art is still dismissed by the art world as insignificant. Those who claim the sovereignty of interpretation of art in

itself find the creations of outsiders not artistically valuable(6). They see the art in an art-historical, cultural context, argue that the works of outsiders stand outside the art tradition and complain that their creators don't reflect on their time and world.

At present voices are increasing, that do not share these views and say, that these are the art products of outsiders, even if their authors are not anchored in the context of art history and without recourse to traditional concepts, without intellectual control, without reflection images. For example the curator and journalist from Vienna, Angelika Baumer writes: "The conditions under which art is created are just as unimportant as the consciousness of the artist is for the result"(1).

Similarly, also expresses the art historian Hans Gercke, Heidelberg: "Whether the author of a work understands his work as an artwork or himself as an artist and reflects accordingly, may not be the decisive factor"(5). What matters is the aesthetic quality, the aura, the authentic mode of expression and the formal and substantive message of the artworks themselves (2).

At the background of this very scarce outlined arguments, raises the question whether the current parameters of the traditional conception of art, are sufficient for a final evaluation of the work of outsiders. It must also be questioned, whether the adherence to the exclusionary and pejorative distinction between "established art," and "outsider art" still makes sense and whether a change of perspective with a fundamental reassessment of the art of outsiders is urgently needed.

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