



Callan Park Gallery

For Self-Taught and Outsider Art

The Enigma of Albert Louden

In 1981, Albert Louden wrote a speculative letter to Victor Musgrave, an important London contemporary art dealer and lover of Art Brut. Never much of a writer, Albert came straight to the point, asking Victor to visit him and give an opinion on his work. Musgrave beat a path to the compact house in East London where Louden lived with his now-deceased mother and where he still lives today. Musgrave's partner, Monika Kinley was clearly in tow, for a subsequent letter mentions her buying a picture for £50. Musgrave was highly impressed with what he saw. Albert reports in the second letter that he had trodden on a dog turd at some point.

Born in the seaside town of Blackpool in England's Northwest where his Londoner parents had gone to escape the Blitz, Albert had already been making art for two decades when he was 'discovered' by Musgrave. Like all true artists, Albert's creativity has been uncontaminated by influence or fashion. His path has been unswerving through the ups and downs of anonymity, fame and fortune. Musgrave promised Albert he would 'move heaven and earth' to make him a success in the artworld. Through the combined efforts of Musgrave and Kinley, a one-person show was secured at one of London's prime contemporary art spaces, the Serpentine Gallery in 1985. Five or six years of stellar commercial interest followed. Then, it all went dead again. Kinley, one of the main architects of his success, dumped him because she reckoned he had lost his 'outsider' aura. The fickle contemporary artworld moved on.

Did any of this phase Albert? Of course not! He hadn't changed. More to the point, the compulsion that had driven him to make art for two decades before he met Musgrave was the same, and as strong as ever. He continued to draw and paint. When the opportunity arose, he sold work. When he had a few extra pounds in his pocket, he indulged his love of

travel. In spite of everything, people from all over the world who were interested in his art somehow beat a path to his door. A few years ago I was one of them. Louden is a convivial host. We ate lunch, talked and spent a few hours looking at the work that fills his house and the same, rather damp wooden shed that George Melly mentioned in the catalogue for Albert's Serpentine exhibition.

Louden's celebrity as an artist lies primarily in his large pastel drawings of people in urban environments, followed by spare landscapes, usually consisting of a single geometric dwelling set in rolling hills that remind the viewer of his ample female figures. The figurative pastels have also been revisited in oil paintings over the years. In all of these images, Louden brings to life an unconscious, often dark, urban state of



nature. Conjured entirely from memory, the images literally grow out of the process of drawing and painting. The city works out of him and speaks through the works.

Louden is also, and always has been, an abstractionist, though until recently this aspect of his work has been almost unknown. These works are a mass of jostling shapes that have an all-over intensity that performs a kind of assault on the senses on the first encounter. A bit like going up close to the Australian bush. They are very physical objects; works that one has to enter, so to speak. Viewers must be brave and engage. In fact, the maelstrom of parts settles into a whole of sorts. Forms coalesce. Getting acquainted with the picture brings with it the surprise of the presence of figuration. Buried in all of Loudén's abstractions are human figures. Their presence ebbs and flows. But they are there, struggling for recognition in a universe that threatens always to envelop them and reduce them to helpless invisibility in the cosmic chatter of existence. The Enigma of Albert Loudén brings together all three elements of the artist's practice in an exhibition that allows viewers to seek out similarities and contrasts, and to engage directly, for the first time in Australia, with the work of an 'outsider' already well-known in Europe and the USA.



Professor Colin Rhodes, April 2009

Select Bibliography

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Colin Rhodes, 'L'Univers d'Albert Loudén', *Création Franche*, no.30, January 2009, pp.33-36

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The Enigma of Albert Loudén continues to Saturday 6 June, 2009.

Gallery hours: Saturday 11am to 4pm. By appointment on other days.

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Images: Albert Loudén, installation views, *The Enigma of Albert Loudén*, 2009.



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