



STOARC

Self-Taught and Outsider Art Research Collection

Self-Taught & Outsider Art is art produced by people somehow excluded from 'the art game' – not by choice, but by circumstance. The field is made up of a mixture of socially and culturally marginal figures; almost inevitably embracing or inhabiting unconventional or eccentric views of the world, usually under-educated, and often with diagnosed mental health conditions. In Outsider Art we are witness to a conceptual space containing work by a varied group of practitioners marginalised from the 'mainstream'. It is an international phenomenon, first described in France and Germany a hundred years ago. Self-taught art was shown at New York's Museum of Modern Art before the Second World War. As 'Art Brut', it was championed by the French painter Jean Dubuffet. And the term Outsider Art was coined in 1972 by the British academic Roger Cardinal. In spite of its long history, it has been largely ignored by the academy until now.



Led by Professor Colin Rhodes, an internationally acknowledged expert in the field, Self-Taught & Outsider Art Research Collection (STOARC) has been established at Sydney College of the Arts, the Visual Arts Faculty of the University of Sydney. It is a unique international centre for the academic study of, dissemination of knowledge about, and promotion to the wider community of Self-Taught and Outsider Art in Australia and internationally. It acts as a hub attracting scholars and others interested in the field, through its gallery, activities and online publication.

Works of art and archival materials will be at the core of STOARC. Recognising the importance of physical artefacts for study and the often precarious future of work in the field, STOARC will collect internationally significant art, concentrating especially on those artists not already represented in existing public collections. Selected artists will be collected in depth, whilst a study collection will be formed through a broad range of examples of canonical and less well-known figures.

STOARC will be trans-disciplinary. Its members will range across disciplinary specialisms, from art history through social sciences and medicine.

Though international in its scope, in view of its location, STOARC will have a special mission to study and promote Outsider and Self-Taught Art from Australia and New Zealand. Both nations have a rich store of work, which deserves study and much higher visibility internationally.

The Callan Park Gallery for Self-Taught and Outsider Art is based at Sydney College of the Arts, fronting directly onto Callan Park. Its mission is to showcase Self-taught and Outsider work of the highest quality in an ongoing series of exhibitions, beginning with the work of José dos Santos in March 2009.

In the coming year STOARC will launch an online, refereed journal devoted to Self-taught and Outsider Art, host a national symposium, present a series of exhibitions, and develop a research library and archive.

José dos Santos

STOARC came into being in mid-2008 with the acquisition of a highly significant collection of work by the Portuguese artist, José dos Santos (1904-96) thanks to the philanthropy of Sydney curator and collector Peter Fay. The collection was assembled by Rogelio Vallejo and Hugh Adams from the artist and his heirs. Dos Santos spent his entire life close to Arega, the small village in which he lived and worked. He could neither read nor write and was completely self-taught as an artist. Yet, in the last years of his life he produced amazing, powerful sculptures. Vallejo has said: 'I believe that José dos Santos teaches us all much about the nature of creativity, particularly when exercised in adversity. Although knowing nothing about art, he freely and inventively used found materials, giving his creatures expression in a way that is an example to everyone. His achievements rank him with art's greatest practitioners. His electrifying opinions on human sexuality and the social position and the gifts of women, as opposed to men (of whom he had a fairly low opinion), rendered him a challenging thinker. Certainly his kind of creativity has been an inspiration to me in my teaching and my students too. It is good that they learn how possible it is to be inventive and creative in adversity or with minimal resources.'

Significant pieces from the collection were shown last year in a major exhibition, 'Without Borders: Outsider Art in an Antipodean Context' in Melbourne and Campbelltown, curated by Peter Fay and Glenn Barkley. In his review of the show John McDonald said: 'for a truly eye-catching exhibitor it is hard to go past Jose Dos Santos, a Portuguese peasant who claimed that God had told him how to release forms hidden in hunks of wood.'

Callan Park Gallery is currently showing 30 pieces, including a group of five musicians and an amazing janus-faced hermaphrodite figure.

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José dos Santos
Installation views, Campbelltown Arts Centre, 2008
Photos: Ian Hobbs