

The New York Times

A Groundbreaking Show Presents a New, Inclusive Vision of American Art

OUTLIERS AND AMERICAN VANGUARD ART

NYT Critic's Pick

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FEB. 15, 2018

1968-1992: Commensurables and Incommensurables



Works from the 1968 to 1992 period include, forefront, John Outterbridge's "Captive Image #1" from 1971-72. And clockwise from far left: Mr. Outterbridge's "Captive Image #4" (circa 1974-76); Betye Saar's "Sambo's Banjo" (1975); and "Untitled" (1976) from Senga Nengudi. Credit Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

The second section gives the show a combustible center; its title alludes to the debate over whether self-taught artists could be compared to trained ones or are incomparable. "Outsider art" supersedes "folk art," connoting a more jarring, free-range aesthetic usually from outside the Northeast, as demonstrated here. Starting in an almost too spacious gallery this section contains the most intense visual conversations between taught and self-taught.

First, it's between the idiosyncratically figurative Chicago Imagists (Roger Brown, Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson) and some of the outsider greats they discovered, recovered or championed: Ramírez, Joseph Yoakum and P.M. Wentworth. The back and forth between Brown's meticulous landscape forms and Yoakum's is especially rewarding.

Next, there is also a dialogue regarding visceral materials and sometimes painful themes between self-taught and taught African-American artists. The first group gained wider attention with "Black Folk Art in America: 1930-1980," [a landmark exhibition](#) at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1982. They included David Butler (1898-1997), who fashioned animals, angels and people from cut and painted tin and other found items; the religious painter [Sister Gertrude Morgan](#) (1900-1980); Steve Ashby (1904-1980), who made raw figurative assemblages out of scavenged materials; and Elijah Pierce (1892-1984), whose carved and painted wood reliefs depict biblical scenes and national figures like the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Then the show turns to work by the second group, an imposing cadre of trained artists working in Los Angeles like Betye Saar, John Outterbridge, Senga Nengudi and Noah Purifoy, who worked for decades at the margins of the mainstream, exploring aspects of assemblage and found materials as well as political expression in often abstract forms.

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Through May 13 at the National Gallery of Art, Washington; 202-737-4215, nga.gov.

The show will be at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta from June 24 to Sept. 30, and the Los Angeles County Museum from Nov. 18 to March 18, 2019.

For full article please visit: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/arts/design/outliers-and-american-vanguard-art-review-national-gallery-of-art.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fdesign&action=click&contentCollection=design®ion=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=sectionfront>