



HIGH MUSEUM OF ART ATLANTA

1280 PEACHTREE STREET, N.E. • ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30309

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**“OUTLIERS” AND THE AVANT GARDE INTERSECT IN
MAJOR TOURING EXHIBITION COMING TO THE HIGH THIS SUMMER**

Featuring more than 250 works that reveal the impact of American self-taught artists on the evolution of modern and contemporary art over the past century

Artists include Bill Traylor, Jacob Lawrence, Howard Finster, Sister Gertrude Morgan, Cindy Sherman, Lonnie Holley and Kara Walker

ATLANTA, Jan. 30, 2018 – Folk, naïve, vernacular, visionary, outsider, self-taught—over the past century, a range of rubrics has emerged to describe artists who rose to prominence in the mainstream art world despite a lack of formal training. The High Museum of Art’s summer 2018 exhibition “Outliers and American Vanguard Art” (June 24 through Sept. 30, 2018) examines the shifting identity of American self-taught artists and offers an unprecedented overview of their profound impact on the evolution of modern and contemporary art.

Organized by the National Gallery of Art and curated by Lynne Cooke, senior curator for special projects in modern art, the exhibition features more than 250 diverse works from the 1910s to the present by more than 80 trained and untrained artists. Together the works reveal how artists on the margins enabled new paradigms of inclusion and galvanized the mainstream art world to embrace difference and diversity across race, region, class, age and gender. Artists featured range from lesser-known painters like Morris Hirshfield to contemporary art stars like Kara Walker, and the artworks on view vary from classic Americana like Edward Hicks’ 19th-century “Peaceable Kingdom” to contemporary works such as Betye Saar’s found-object assemblage “Sambo’s Banjo,” which exposes and critiques enduring racial stereotypes in America. The exhibition also includes works from the High’s distinguished collection of folk and self-taught art, including significant examples by Southern artists such as Gee’s Bend quilter and abstract artist Mary Lee Bendolph and the visionary preacher and environment builder Howard Finster.

“The High was among the first museums in the United States to make an institutional commitment to folk and self-taught art, so it is fitting for us to bring this exhibition to Atlanta, a community that has a deep relationship with and appreciation for the creativity and vision of artists from all walks of life and backgrounds,” said Rand Suffolk, Nancy and Holcombe T. Green, Jr., director of the High.

“As this exhibition bridges the realm of academic art and concepts of modernity with self-taught work, it further reflects the High’s commitment to exploring perspectives that can provide a richer, more holistic understanding of the range of creative endeavor,” noted Kevin W. Tucker, the High’s chief curator.

“This exhibition is not only a celebration of the artistic breakthroughs and impact of self-taught artists; it is a testament to their history and a foretelling of their staying power,” said Katherine Jentleson, the High’s Merrie and Dan Boone curator of folk and self-taught art. “Through its broad scope, the show demystifies the idea that our present moment of massive interest in self-taught artists is unprecedented. The dynamic between the art world and its outliers is longstanding and continually evolving.”

The exhibition focuses on three historical periods that were marked by powerful interchanges between the avant-garde and its outliers, beginning with the birth of interest in historical folk art that flourished among American modernists between 1924 and 1943. Sculptures and paintings in the opening gallery demonstrate how artists such as Charles Sheeler and Elie Nadelman adapted their styles and subject matter to reflect the bold geometries of Shaker tables and expressive figures of handmade toys in the early 20th century. In the 1930s, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) began collecting and exhibiting the work of living self-taught artists and mounted the major 1938 group show “Masters of Popular Painting: Modern Primitives in Europe and America,” one of several exhibitions whose game-changing impact is a structuring force behind “Outliers.”

Artists featured in that historic exhibition included Henri Rousseau, the famed French tollbooth collector who became a cause célèbre among the turn-of-the-century Parisian avant-garde; the Pittsburgh painter John Kane, who was hailed as the American Rousseau; and Horace Pippin, another Pennsylvania painter who became widely celebrated during the era. Pippin’s work influenced and intersected with that of trained artists, not only in terms of its expressive form and color but also in subject matter, like African-American life in the South, gospel and religious themes, and revivals of folk heroes, including Abraham Lincoln and John Brown. “Outliers” is the first exhibition to demonstrate how the work of self-taught artists like Pippin, Bill Traylor and William Edmondson, the first African-American artist to have a solo show at MoMA (1937), converged with that of their trained peers, both white and black, including Jacob Lawrence, Marsden Hartley, John Flanagan and Henry Bannarn.

The middle section of the exhibition, which covers roughly 1968–1992, explores how interest in self-taught artists, which was initially a predominantly East Coast phenomenon, flourished in other regional centers in the later 1960s as the civil rights, feminist, antiwar and gay rights movements became increasingly powerful forces in society. In the mid-1960s, a group of recent graduates of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, known as the Chicago Imagists, found untrained artists both locally and across the country whose work provided inspirational models for their own boundary-pushing, popular-culture-driven styles. Artists including Roger Brown, Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson began to bring the contemporary art spotlight to the work of their self-taught contemporaries, from the majestic landscapes of Joseph Yoakum to the fantastical

drawings of Martín Ramírez. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the South became recognized as a hotbed of artistic activity as artists like Edgar Tolson, Howard Finster and Elijah Pierce rose to national renown. Pierce was one of 19 Southern African-American artists to be featured in the Corcoran Gallery of Art's 1982 exhibition "Black Folk Art in America: 1930–1980." That landmark exhibition sparked conversations about race, religion and postcolonialism that consumed the art world in the 1980s and brought attention to previously undervalued artistic expressions, including the unfired clay heads of blues musician James "Son Ford" Thomas and the exuberant evangelical painting of Sister Gertrude Morgan. The impact of African traditions on American culture and the legacy of slavery and racism were central concerns that governed the work of a group of assemblage artists working in Los Angeles during this period, including Noah Purifoy and John Outterbridge. Many of these artists will be on view at the High for the first time in "Outliers."

Whereas the first two sections of the exhibition reveal many of the direct lines of engagement between untrained and trained artists, the last galleries explore the intersections and parallels that have emerged in more recent contemporary art, from around 1998 to the present. One gallery focuses on artists who have leveraged the camera as a tool for constructing identity, framing desire and revising history. Works by Cindy Sherman, Lee Godie, Eugene Von Bruenchenhein and Greer Lankton blend performance and portraiture, while Lorna Simpson and Zoe Leonard use staged and found photography to blur the lines between real and fictive personalities. The exhibition continues with a gallery that puts quilting and other textile practices into dialogue with works by New York-based painters who sought to make relevant what they considered a declining abstraction. Multimedia works by Al Loving and Nancy Shaver are presented with textiles by Mary Lee Bendolph, Annie Mae Young and Rosie Lee Tompkins as well as wrapped sculptures by Judith Scott. The exhibition concludes with videos, installations, assemblages and paintings by artists including Lonnie Holley, James Benning, Forrest Bess and Henry Darger, each of whom used art to construct a personal cosmos.

"Outliers and American Vanguard Art" will debut at the National Gallery of Art (Jan. 28 through May 13, 2018) and travel to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) following its presentation at the High.

Exhibition Catalogue

A fully illustrated catalogue, published by the National Gallery of Art, features Cooke's curatorial thesis together with essays on a range of related topics by scholars Douglas Crimp, Darby English, Suzanne Hudson, Thomas Lax, Jennifer Jane Marshall, Richard Meyer and Jenni Sorkin. In addition, the seminal 1982 exhibition "Black Folk Art in America, 1930–1980" is reevaluated in the transcript of a roundtable discussion between Cooke, Jentleson, John Beardsley (co-curator of that exhibition) and Faheem Majeed, artist, educator, curator and community facilitator.

Exhibition Organization and Support

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About the High Museum of Art

Located in the heart of Atlanta, Ga., the High Museum of Art connects with audiences from across the Southeast region and around the world through its distinguished collection, dynamic schedule of special exhibitions, and engaging community-focused programs. Housed within facilities designed by Pritzker Prize–winning architects Richard Meier and Renzo Piano, the High features a collection of more than 16,000 works of art, including an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American fine and decorative arts; major holdings of photography and folk and self-taught work, especially that of artists from the American South; burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, including paintings, sculpture, new media and design; a growing collection of African art, with work dating from pre-history through the present; and significant holdings of European paintings and works on paper. The High is dedicated to reflecting the diversity of its communities and offering a variety of exhibitions and educational programs that engage visitors with the world of art, the lives of artists and the creative process. For more information about the High, visit www.high.org.

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