



HIGH MUSEUM OF ART ATLANTA

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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**HIGH MUSEUM OF ART TOURING EXHIBITION TO EXPLORE  
THE RISE OF SELF-TAUGHT ARTISTS IN AMERICA**

**ATLANTA, July 15, 2021** — The High Museum of Art exhibition “Gatecrashers: The Rise of the Self-Taught Artist in America,” debuting this summer (Aug. 20-Dec. 11, 2021) and set to tour nationally, will celebrate more than a dozen early-20th-century painters who fundamentally reshaped who could be an artist in the United States. Featuring more than 60 works, “Gatecrashers” will investigate how artists including John Kane, Horace Pippin and Anna Mary Robertson “Grandma” Moses overcame class-, race- and gender-based obstacles to enter the inner sanctums of the mainstream art world, exhibiting their paintings widely and paving the way for later generations of self-taught artists. Following its presentation at the High, the exhibition will travel to the Brandywine River Museum of Art (May 28–Sept. 5, 2022) and The Westmoreland Museum of American Art (Oct. 30, 2022–Feb. 5, 2023).

“As one of the first American museums to establish a department dedicated to the work of self-taught artists, the High has spent decades studying, presenting and honoring their contributions to art history,” said Rand Suffolk, Nancy and Holcombe T. Green, Jr., director. “With this exhibition, our audience can see how they broke barriers of access to take their rightful place among the 20th century’s most celebrated contemporary artists.”

After World War I, artists without formal training began showing their work in major museums, “crashing the gates” of the elite art world, as the newspapers of their day put it. Benefiting from rebellions against academic artistic styles and an ongoing search for national character in American culture, Kane, Pippin and Moses became the most widely recognized self-taught artists of the interwar period. These three artists will be featured prominently throughout “Gatecrashers” and will be joined by other self-taught artists, including Morris Hirshfield, Lawrence Lebduska and Josephine Joy, who represent the breadth of the art world’s attraction to self-taught painters in the first half of the 20th century. Despite their lack of formal training, these artists’ paintings of American life in the cities and rural communities where they lived, as well as fantastical scenes derived from their imaginations, were celebrated by fellow artists, collectors and taste-making museums such as New York’s Museum of Modern Art, especially in the 1930s and early 1940s.

“Gatecrashers” is curated by the High’s Merrie and Dan Boone curator of folk and self-taught art, Katherine Jentleson, and is based on the book she authored of the same name, which published in 2020.

“‘Gatecrashers’ — both the book and the exhibition — establish an origin story for how self-taught artists first succeeded within the mainstream art world,” said Jentleson. “Kane, Moses, Pippin and the other artists in the exhibition deserve to be reconsidered not only because of how their work intertwined with major cultural and social change of their day, but also because of how their gatecrashing set the stage for the vital role that self-taught artists still play in the 21st century, greatly diversifying our cultural canons across race, gender, class, ability and other important markers of identity that are all too often underrepresented.”

“Gatecrashers” will be organized in thematic sections that explore how these self-taught artists were embraced as examples of a uniquely American creative excellence and the role that their occupational histories played in advancing their reputations against the backdrop of Depression-era populism. The works on view also will demonstrate how alignments in style and subject matter led to exhibitions at major museums that integrated the artists’ work with that of their trained peers, foreshadowing how many museums today promote self-taught artists within their American and contemporary art displays.

In 1927, Kane succeeded in placing his oil-on-canvas painting “Scene From the Scottish Highlands” in the Carnegie Museum of Art’s contemporary art international thanks to the jaunty painting’s embodiment of the stilted realism of historical folk art, which was gaining popularity among artists and collectors in this era. Many of the self-taught artists who would go on to be celebrated in the subsequent decade were first-generation immigrants like Kane, whose painting shows the Scottish American heritage festivals he attended in Pittsburgh. Brooklyn-based Jewish artists from Eastern Europe such as Morris Hirshfield and Israel Litwak also found audiences for their work, demonstrating how the art world slowly became more inclusive of who qualified as “American.”

As African American artists struggled to find recognition in the largely segregated national arts scene, Pippin achieved great success with paintings like “Cabin in the Cotton” (ca. 1931-1937), a work set in the American South. In many of his works, including “Outpost Raid: Champagne Sector” (1931), Pippin recorded his experiences fighting in the trenches of World War I, where he was shot by a German sniper, resulting in an arm injury that he rehabilitated by painting. He lived in the part of Pennsylvania associated with the Brandywine River artists such as Newell Convers Wyeth, an early advocate of his work, and became a fixture in exhibitions of self-taught artists and in the first major surveys of African American artists that emerged by the end of the 1930s.

In addition to expanding definitions of American art in terms of both race and ethnicity, self-taught artists such as Josephine Joy and “Grandma” Moses also broke through the art world’s gender glass ceiling. Joy became the first woman painter to have a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art when her paintings of flowers, trees and sites near her home in San

Diego were shown there in 1942. By that time, Moses was on a trajectory to stardom that was unprecedented for any artist in the United States — and arguably remains so — after her paintings were discovered hanging in the window of a New York pharmacist in 1938. Her pastoral scenes of life in New England became a potent force as the United States entered the Cold War era. Her paintings even traveled abroad to promote goodwill toward America, much to the chagrin of American critics who were more interested in promoting abstract painting abroad.

“As self-taught artists become increasingly visible within today’s art world, this exhibition takes audiences back to the moment when it all began,” Jentleson said.

“Gatecrashers” will be presented in the Special Exhibition Galleries on the Second Level of the Stent Family Wing.

### **Exhibition Publication**

“Gatecrashers: The Rise of the Self-Taught Artist in America,” is accompanied by Jentleson’s book of the same name, published by the University of California Press.

### **Exhibition Organization and Support**

“Gatecrashers: The Rise of Self-Taught Art in America” is organized by the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Major funding for this exhibition is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and The Dorothea and Leo Rabkin Foundation, Portland, ME. This exhibition is made possible by Premier Exhibition Series Sponsor Delta Air Lines, Inc.; Premier Exhibition Series Supporters Sarah and Jim Kennedy, Dr. Joan H. Weens Estate, and wish foundation; Benefactor Exhibition Series Supporters Anne Cox Chambers Foundation and Robin and Hilton Howell; Ambassador Exhibition Series Supporters The Antinori Foundation, Corporate Environments, Louise Sams and Jerome Grilhot, and Elizabeth and Chris Willett; and Contributing Exhibition Series Supporters Farideh and Al Azadi, Sandra and Dan Baldwin, Lucinda W. Bunnan, Marcia and John Donnell, Helen C. Griffith, Mrs. Fay S. Howell/The Howell Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter Jones, The Arthur R. and Ruth D. Lautz Charitable Foundation, Joel Knox and Joan Marmo, Dr. Joe B. Massey, Margot and Danny McCaul, The Ron and Lisa Brill Family Charitable Trust, Wade Rakes and Nicholas Miller, The Fred and Rita Richman Fund, In Memory of Elizabeth B. Stephens, USI Insurance Services, and Mrs. Harriet H. Warren. Generous support is also provided by the Alfred and Adele Davis Exhibition Endowment Fund, Anne Cox Chambers Exhibition Fund, Barbara Stewart Exhibition Fund, Dorothy Smith Hopkins Exhibition Endowment Fund, Eleanor McDonald Storza Exhibition Endowment Fund, The Fay and Barrett Howell Exhibition Fund, Forward Arts Foundation Exhibition Endowment Fund, Helen S. Lanier Endowment Fund, Isobel Anne Fraser–Nancy Fraser Parker Exhibition Endowment Fund, John H. and Wilhelmina D. Harland Exhibition Endowment Fund, Katherine Murphy Riley Special Exhibition Endowment Fund, Margareta Taylor Exhibition Fund, and the RJR Nabisco Exhibition Endowment Fund.

### **About the High’s Folk and Self-Taught Art Department**

The High began collecting the work of living self-taught artists in 1975 and was the first general interest museum to establish a dedicated department for folk and self-taught art in 1994.

Today, the High boasts one of the most significant collections of American folk and self-taught art in the world, which is especially rich in artworks by Southern and African American artists. Milestones in the department's collection history include the Museum's 1982 acquisition of 30 drawings by the then relatively unknown artist Bill Traylor, the 1994 collaboration with Howard Finster that made the High the largest public collection of his work outside of Paradise Garden, Judith Alexander's 2003 gift of 130 works by Atlanta artist Nellie Mae Rowe, and 2017's gift-purchase with the Souls Grown Deep Foundation, which reaffirmed the High's leadership in Southern self-taught art. Although known for its unparalleled holdings of work by such Southern masters as Traylor, Finster, Rowe and Thornton Dial, the High also has major works by self-taught artists who worked outside of the South, including Henry Church, William Hawkins, Martín Ramírez and Henry Darger.

### **About the High Museum of Art**

Located in the heart of Atlanta, the High Museum of Art connects with audiences from across the Southeast 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 18,000 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 prehistory 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](http://www.high.org).

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### **DIGITAL IMAGES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST**

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