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Outsider Art in Paris During the FIAC

New York gallery owner Andrew Edlin is one of the friendliest, most passionate supporters of outsider or self-taught art in the world today. He purchased the U.S. Outsider Art Fair, which took place in New York, last January and is bringing the successful fair to Paris next week October 24-27 at the Hotel A. In the past, the Salon des Refuses would exhibit works by artists who were not accepted into the major collective shows in Paris. In this Salon were found works by some of the most important and valuable works that exist, but at the time, they were not accepted by the mainstream.

What Outsider Art has managed to do during the past decade is find its way into major collections, not only in Folk Art Museums and Outsider Collections, but into major institutions such as the museum of Modern Art. Artists such as Henry Darger, George Widener, Adolph Wolfli and others see prices going up and collectors coming from many different parts of the world. One of the most important art critics in the world, Hans Ulrich Oberst, head of the Serpentine Gallery in London, made it clear a few years ago that the most interesting thing happening during the Frieze Art Fair there was not at Frieze itself but next door at The Museum of Everything, which has been traveling, to Paris, to the Venice Biennale (where even the title of this year's Biennale is taken from a work of Outsider Art).

The thing is to actually locate this artwork in the first place, as these artists are not looking to be part of the art market and produce for reasons which have more to do with therapy at times than selling anything. That is what I now attempt to do as I travel, to rural out of the way parts of the South, and the grey North of England... hunting out these artists. While in Paris during the FIAC, stop by the Halle Saint Pierre to see the show "Raw Vision: 25 Years of Outsider Art," one of the best shows I have seen. This past year alone in London, both the Wellcome Trust with its Japanese Outsider Show and the Hayward Gallery at Southbank Centre with its Alternative Guide to the Universe, celebrated these artists.

Outsider Art is no longer on the fringe, but it still takes a special soul and wanting to see and understand to truly stand in front of these works and grasp what is often beyond straightforward aesthetic understanding. There is simply something authentic about these works, and in a world where authenticity is often missing, it these expressions of creativity can be as healing for the observer as for the creator who made them.