

JAMES CASTLE

Born 1899, Garden Valley, Idaho; died 1977, Boise, Idaho

Opinions vary as to whether James Castle was born deaf or autistic. He never learned to speak, read, or write and refused to be taught to communicate in any of the accepted forms of signing or finger spelling. What physical signaling he did was a highly personal expression of home signing used within his own family. Language, letters, numbers, and symbols apparently meant something to him and often appear in his work, but it is unclear on what level he perceived them.

Castle's eloquent means of expressing what he felt about the world around him was through drawing and exists as works on paper he made for nearly 70 years until his death in 1977. Whether sketching the domestic interior scenes of his home and family or rendering the rustic architecture and pastoral terrain of rural Idaho, Castle tried to place the viewer within his own idiosyncratic world.

His drawings and collages are as beautiful as they are enigmatic. Drawing with a sharpstick dipped into a mix of soot and his own spit, he conjured the people and places he knew well with consistent simplicity and integrity that marks the entire scope of his oeuvre, from the smallest sketch to more complex, inventive constructions. He used paper and materials like packing tape and cardboard made available to him by his parents, who worked as postmasters, as well as images culled from packages, magazines and other print sources. Despite the rudimentary materials and eccentric technique, Castle achieves an astonishingly varied sense of light and shade in each work with powerful lines and brilliantly nuanced textures that enliven the surface. By all accounts, Castle's mastery of perspective drawing was self-taught from observation and mimicry. This ability became more assured as his work progressed over the 70 years in which he made art.

Castle is primarily known for his work as a draftsman, but recent solo shows have facilitated a more complete look at his accomplishment as a maker of intricate, precious objects that implicitly challenge everything we believe about artmaking. His assemblages reveal an artist constantly in conversation with the visual language of advertising and popular culture. Castle's marvelous sense of humor emerges in small facsimiles—such as his tiny books made of matchsticks. Although critics and historians have attempted to gauge his worth by comparing his more complex compositions to modernist and postmodernist practices of collage and assemblage, this fails to honor his unique Outsider genius, for which there is no precedent or rival.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *James Castle*, Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2014 *Untitled: The Art of James Castle*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
- 2013 *The Encyclopedic Palace*, 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
- 2011 *James Castle: Show and Store*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain
- 2010 *James Castle: Drawings*, Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco
- 2010 *James Castle: A Retrospective*, Berkeley Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, CA
- 2008 *James Castle: A Retrospective*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
- 2006 *Inner Worlds Outside*, traveling exhibition, Sala de Exposiciones de la Fundación "La Caixa," Madrid, Spain; WhiteChapel Gallery, London, UK; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland
James Castle/Walker Evans: Word Play, Signs, and Symbols, Knoedler & Company, New York, NY

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- Silent Satire: The Political Cartoon Appropriations of James Castle*, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2005 *One Man's Vocabulary*, Muse Gallery, Jackson, WY
James Castle: Drawings, Constructions, and Books, Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID
- 2002 *James Castle: Structures*, Knoedler & Company, New York, NY
James Castle: Works on Paper, Galerie Bernd Kluser, Munich, Germany
- 2001 *James Castle*, James Mayor Gallery, London, UK
James Castle: Drawings and Works on Paper, Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle, WA
- 2000 *James Castle*, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, GA
James Castle: The Common Place, Knoedler & Company, New York, NY
An Individual Approach: The Art of James Castle, Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID
James Castle: House Drawings, The Drawing Center, New York, NY
A Room of His Own, J Crist Gallery, Boise, ID
Reputedly Illiterate: The Art Books of James Castle, American Institute of Graphic Arts, New York, NY
- 1998 *A Silent Voice: Drawings and Constructions of James Castle*, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 1997 *Images in a Silent World: The Art of James Castle*, Intuit—The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, Chicago, IL
- 1996 *James Castle*, Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID
An Amazing Luminous Fountain: The Work of James Castle, J Crist Gallery, Boise, ID
James Castle, Idaho Center for the Book, Boise State University, Boise, ID
- 1994 *James Castle*, Albertson College, Caldwell, ID
- 1989 *Works by James Castle*, Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID
- 1984 *James Castle Retrospective: A Voice of Silence*, University of Arizona, Tempe, AZ; Paris Gibson Square Gallery, Great Falls, MT; MSU Fine Arts Gallery, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT
- 1983 *James Castle Retrospective: A Voice of Silence*, Cheney Cowles Memorial Museum, Spokane, WA
- 1982 *James Castle Retrospective: A Voice of Silence*, Boise Gallery of Art, Boise, ID
- 1981 *James Castle: A Primitive Artist*, Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, TX
James Castle, Visual Arts Center, Anchorage, AK
- 1980 *A World Without Words*, Los Tres Gallery, Longview, WA
- 1976 *James Castle's Drawings*, Boise Gallery of Art, Boise, ID
- 1974 *James Castle*, Foster/White Gallery, Seattle, WA
- 1967 *James Castle*, The Gallery, Seattle, WA
- 1965 *A Voice of Silence: Drawings by James Castle*, California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, CA

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- 1963 *James Castle*, Boise Gallery of Art, Boise, ID
- 1962 *A Voice of Silence: Drawings by James Castle*, Image Gallery, Portland, OR
James Castle, Bush Barn, Salem Art, Salem, OR

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *America is Hard to See*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
- 2013 *Great and Mighty Things: Outsider Art from the Sheldon and Jill Bonovitz Collection*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
- 2012 *Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos*, New Museum, New York, NY; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain
- 2008 *Communication Breakdown*, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY; Galerie Impaire, Paris, France
- 2006 *Rock Paper Scissors: American Collage Now*, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Exceptional American Folk and Self-Taught Art, Keny Galleries, Columbus, OH
- 2005 *Looking at Words*, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, NY
scope~Miami, Karen Lennox Gallery, Chicago, IL
150 Works of Art, No Walls, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
- 2004 *Fabulous Histories: Indigenous Anomalies in American Art*, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Art 36, Basel, Switzerland (curated by Fleisher/Ollman Gallery)
American Art Brut, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY
Summer Group Show, PDX, Portland, OR
- 2003 *American Cutout*, New York Studio School, New York, NY
Fifty Years, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2002 *Gifts in Honor of the 125th Anniversary*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA
The Art Books of James Castle, Center for Book & Paper Arts, Columbia College, Chicago, IL
Fast Forward II, Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA
American Vernacular, Ricco/Maresca Gallery, New York, NY
Reputedly Illiterate: The Art Books of James Castle, Library at the Faculty of Art, Media, and Design, University of West England, Bristol, UK
New Year/New Work, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery at John McEnroe Gallery, New York, NY
American Anthem, Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
- 2001 *Rear Vision: The First Ten Years*, Intuit: the Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, Chicago, IL
New Year/New Work/New York, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery at John McEnroe Gallery, New York, NY
- 2000 *Making Choices: The Raw and the Cooked*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
When Reason Dreams, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
New Century, New Venue, New York, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery at John McEnroe Gallery, New York, NY
- 1999 *We Are Not Alone: Angels and Other Aliens*, American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore, MD

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SELECTED COLLECTIONS

American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- 2014 Bell, Nicholas R. and Leslie Umberger, *Untitled: The Art of James Castle*, London: Smithsonian American Art Museum in association with D Giles Limited.
- 2013 *The Encyclopedic Palace*, exhibition catalogue, Massimiliano Giono and Natalie Bell, Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia, Venice.
- 2011 Lynn Cooke, Briony Fer, and Zeo Leonard, *James Castle: Show and Store*, Distributed Art Publishers, Print, 30 September.
- 2006 *Inner Worlds Outside*, exhibition catalogue, Fundación "La Caixa"; WhiteChapel Gallery; Irish Museum of Modern Art; Ediciones El Viso.

SELECTED ARTICLES

- 2014 Laura Tarrish, "Hunter/Gatherer: James Castle," *The Design Observer Group*, Web, 24 September.
Natasha Geiling, "A World of His Own: The Art of James Castle," *Smithsonian Magazine*, Web, 17 October.
- 1998 Tom Trusky, "James Castle and the Burden of Art," *Raw Vision Vol. 23*, Print, Summer.
- 1970 Gregg Nixon Blasdel, "Symbols and Images: Contemporary Primitive Artists," *American Federation of Arts*.