

GEORGE WIDENER

It is memory that plays a dominant role when considering George Widener, both in his personal life and his artwork. Born in Cincinnati (1962) to uneducated, working class parents, George did show some prodigy traits as a young child by sometimes winning (without coaching from anyone) a majority of the scholastic awards at his elementary school. As he became older, George's mild autism (later diagnosed as Asperger's Syndrome) became a factor as he became eccentric, socially aloof, and often obsessed with arcane subjects.

Not content with displaying the traditional drawings skills that come so easy for him, George has gradually learned to use his amazing memory to create unique contemporary artwork. Numbers have run through his head all his life and he now includes thousands of calculations, calendar dates, census statistics, and historical facts, all from memory. George is living proof that a high-functioning savant is capable of improvisation and creativity. He is by and large a self-taught artist who continues to grow and experiment to improve himself.

Progress has been made in George's life by emphasizing his strengths rather than trying to 'correct' his weaknesses. All his life George has made various drawings and had numbers in his head and so this is what he focuses on today versus trying to have some career with broader interests. He is a lightning calendar calculator with a seemingly unlimited range. In 2004 he easily defeated a former NASA scientist ("What day of the week will June 25th be in the year 47,253?) who was using paper, pencil, and formulas (and eventually a laptop computer) in a 'contest' shown on a Japanese TV science documentary. George's memory has also been presented in several local 'community interest' programs in the US and once in Eastern Europe. George puts his strong interest in calendar numbers into performances where he tells people how many days, minutes, and sometimes seconds they will be on their next birthday ("You will be 26, 297, 280 minutes old and it will be a Tuesday. Don't waste another minute!"). He also has instant recall of thousands of historical trivia, facts, world and US census figures ("Population of Boston, Mass is 589,141 in last census") that has had some sort of interest to him. Mention the 'Powers of Two' to him and he might reel them off in rapid fire progression up to 20 digits (1, 2, 4....1073741824, 2147483648....) or so. George graduated college at age 37 while in a special education program for learning disabled persons at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, eventually earning a general Liberal Arts degree, Cum Laude.

George has drawn all his life and his early artwork was of a more stereotyped savant style, a sort of recording of something he was looking at or had seen in the past. He drew landscapes and portraits. His very talented draughtsmanship gives him a range of technical abilities. He has had to work to overcome his literal nature and visual memory to create original artwork. George's emergence as an expressive, original artist came as he began to place his revered numbers, calculations, calendars, facts, machine parts, and letters into works on found paper, often napkins.

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George's memory habit of converting house and license plates into calendar dates led to a sort of discovery as he glimpsed a Magic Square in a book in the late 1990's. A magic square is a grid of numbers that add up to an identical sum in all directions. George converted the numbers to dates and hence created the 'Magic Time' square. Blending calendar dates with magic squares, George creates his own magic squares. Walter Trump of Germany, a world class magic square mathematician and computer expert, has applied computer analysis to some of George's calendar squares and shown that 'Perfect' (where month, day, year, day of week values in each cell add up to identical respective sums in all directions) magic time squares do exist. Such squares have very interesting symmetrical properties, yet George does not think in such mathematical terms. He simply invents the squares to make 'portraits' about some history whose life facts are in his head or to play around with his favorite day of the week, Friday. George is the only person in the world to blend calendars and magic squares together and perhaps the first savant to be able to turn calendar memory into original art. More of his magic time squares may be seen here. Mechanical parts also have a fascination with him and he sometimes draws odd sleds or ribbed objects.

from savantartist.com

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *The Outsider Art Fair Paris*, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY
System and Vision, David Zwirner, New York, NY
- 2013 *Brazilian Customs Snafu*, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York
The Great and Mighty Things: Outsider Art from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.
The Alternative Guide to the Universe, Hayward Gallery, London
Georges Widener: Secret Universe IV, Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin
- 2011 *World Transformers: The Art of the Outsiders*, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt
- 2009 *In the No*, Edlin Gallery, New York
Dallas Art Fair, Edlin Gallery, New York
Outsider Art Fair, Henry Boxer Gallery, New York
Tension, Invention, Intoxication and Liberty: Victor Hugo to Martin Ramirez, Jan Krugler Gallery, New York
- 2008 *Elegant Obsessions – Outsider and Visionary Art*, Orleans House, London
Orleans Gallery, London
- 2006 Prague City Gallery
- 2005 Outsider Art Fair, New York
- 2004 Henry Boxer Gallery, London
VSA Arts Festival, Washington, D.C.

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

American Folk Art Museum, New York

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Halle Saint Pierre, Paris
Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- 2013 Keats, Jonathon, "Savant George Widener Makes Art For Robots... But You'd Better See His Berlin Exhibit Even If You're Human," *Forbes*, May 22, 2013.
Rugoff, Ralph, ed. *The Alternative Guide to the Universe*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Publishing, London 2013.
- 2011 Gómez, Edward M., *On the Border*, *Art & Antiques Magazine*, February
- 2010 Patterson, Tom, "Art for the Super-Computers (and Other Audiences): The Obsessive Drawings and Calendrical Codes of George Widener," *World Transformers; the Art of the Outsiders*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern, 2010.
- 2009 *The Art of George Widener* by Roger Cardinal and Colin Rhodes (Henry Boxer Gallery)
- 2005 Cardinzi, Roger. *George Widener: An Obsession with Dates and Calendars*, *Raw Vision*, Issue #5 | Smith, Roberta. *Untamed Art From the Fringes is a Gust of Bracing Air*, *The New York Times*, January 28, 2005
- 2004 Boler, Kelly. *George Widener's Art for Art's Sake*, *Rapid River Magazine*, Vol. 7., No. 10