

Outsider Art Fair as a Model for the Future

By WILL HEINRICH

This year's Outsider Art Fair is a stripped-down and deconstructed one, just seven curated shows spread across four Manhattan galleries and one famous recording studio. (There are also 45 online viewing rooms if you like that sort of thing.)

It's a response to the pandemic, and the fair's owner, Andrew Edlin, and its director, Nikki Iacovella, both predict that dealers will look forward to rubbing elbows again as soon as it's safe to cram them all into one hall. But this isn't the first fair to spread itself across existing New York gallery spaces — Condo and

New Art Dealers Alliance have both done similarly in recent years — and pandemic or not, it's a good idea.

For one thing, the galleries are already paying rent, so using their real estate saves money for everyone. It also fosters cooperation among galleries in different cities, and could be a powerful tool for slowing down the frenetic international sales circuit to match the comparatively humane municipal-stroll version of the art world. I think it's the wave of the future.

Here are the highlights. Please note that one \$15 pass will get you into all shows, but for "Daniel Johnston: Psychedelic Drawings," you must make a reservation — and wash your hands and wear a mask.



OLGA VYSOTSKAYA

Above, at Electric Lady Studios, in New York City, an installation view of drawings by Daniel Johnston, the rock star and artist who died in 2019. Right, Johnston's "Please Adore Me" (2004), ink and marker on paper.

'Daniel Johnston: Psychedelic Drawings'

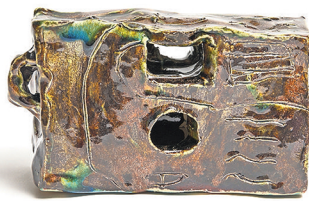
Electric Lady Studios, 52 West Eighth Street, Manhattan. 212-677-4700; electricladystudios.com.

Daniel Johnston was best known as an outsider rock star, a man with mental health struggles who wrote and performed unforgettable songs like "True Love Will Find You in the End." But he also produced legions of strangely intense Magic Marker drawings filled with Captain America, cartoon devils or himself as a bug-eyed frog-like creature. This extensive exhibit, curated by Gary Panter, is the largest show of Johnston's visual work yet, and the first since the artist's 2019 death. To me, the brightly colored letter-size drawings disturb as much as they compel because they so vividly convey the sense of a man locked in an airless room with his childhood demons. Naked female torsos appear in one drawing under the legend "Meet Your Doom," while in another, a snot-yellow head, stirred up like a baseball and dangling a cigarette, asks, "Please Adore Me."



THE DANIEL JOHNSTON TRUST

Outsider Art Fair
Through Feb. 7 at various locations and online; outsiderartfair.com.



An untitled Alan Constable earthenware piece from 2018.

'Semiotic Terrain: Art From Australia and New Zealand'

Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley, Manhattan; 212-979-0001; salon94.com.

This excellent, tightly knit group show uses art from Australia and New Zealand to create a brace of heavy dialogues. Chunky clay cameras by Alan Constable, who is legally blind, look like models of the idea of a camera, while behind them, a row of Julian Martin's colorful biomorphic pastels model ideas that are harder to name. Susan Te Kahurangi King's pencil drawings of waves, birds and cartoon characters use every available square inch of paper — until they don't, stopping with the arresting, asymmetric beauty of an icy peak or tidal wave. Across the room, the majestic, fingerprint-like whorls of four gorgeous paintings by Mantua Nangala, Yukultji Napangati and Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri offer an entirely different treatment of space, one in which foreground and background aren't merged so much as superseded.



JAMES BARRON ART

Vera Girivi's "Untitled" (2019) is an acrylic on canvas.

'To Be Human: The Figure in Self-Taught Art'

Hirsch & Adler, 41 East 57th Street, Manhattan; 212-535-8810; hirschlandadler.com.

A conceit as broad as "the figure" doesn't quite make for a coherent show. That said, this curated exhibit of work from numerous dealers has plenty of eye-catching moments. Two wavy, green-eyed nudes by Vera Girivi go beautifully with Janet Sobel's small gouache of an insect garden. And the simplest of sculptural figures by Hawkins Bolden — little more than a basin overturned on a board — makes an apt companion to an explosive early-1970s painting by the Miami painter Purvis Young, in which an avenging Black figure with shotguns for wings battles a horde of tiny police cars. The real gem is a large new print of a black-and-white photo by Morton Bartlett, who built, posed and photographed dolls in his midcentury Boston basement. Somehow his plaster girl reprimanding her stuffed dog seems more lifelike than many people I know.

'Figure Out: Abstraction in Self-Taught Art'

Andrew Edlin Gallery, 212 the Bowery, Manhattan; 212-206-9723; edlingallery.com.

Like the corresponding exhibit at Hirsch & Adler, this show's premise is much too open — but it's filled with excellent pieces if you take them one at a time. Judith Scott's yarn-wrapped monolith, made of a small colander atop a Louisville Slugger, is an inspiring — and timely — lesson in imaginative problem solving. And several ink drawings by the outsider standard Eugene von Bruenchenhein are precise but ornate, like scientific diagrams of the mythological Thunderbird. A large red painting by Maruch Méndez of Chiapas, Mexico, is a revelation. Dividing a multicolored plane into smaller and smaller boxes with thick black lines, she brings to mind textiles and cartography as well as spider's webs without quite settling on any of them. An incised square of black tin by Tommy May, from Australia, is even more haunting: Drifts of fine white lines form ghostly rectangular shapes, like heaven seen at night through a snowstorm.



GALERIA MUY

Maruch Méndez's "Om" (2019) is an acrylic on canvas.



SHRINE

Hawkins Bolden's "Untitled (scarecrow)," circa 1980s, is made of found objects.

'Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning'

Shin Gallery, 322 Grand Street, Manhattan. 212-375-1735; shin-gallery.com.

The most powerful of the three concurrent shows at this capacious Lower East Side gallery is the Black vernacular art roundup "Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning," simply because its works are so strong. A strange and glorious red-bordered photo collage by Thornton Dial shows Batman rising from a blue-green sea of steel gratings, and a pair of quilts by Allie Pettway and Annie Mae Young from Gee's Bend, Ala., are, as usual, as good as any abstraction in the Museum of Modern Art. But the standout, again, is Hawkins Bolden, a blind artist who, before he died in 2005, made minimal but roughly textured scarecrows in his Memphis backyard. One untitled work, another basin overturned on a rusty metal chair, has bits of rubber affixed for ears and a goatee, and it throbs with spiritual energy. Another, a kind of altarpiece made from a hubcap and scraps of carpeting mounted on a window frame, deserves to be looked at for days.