

MELVIN WAY: The Cocaine Files Dossier (1989 - 2017)  
**Curated by Andrew Castrucci**  
**February 23 - March 25, 2018**

Hi Melvin, we have some show titles to go over with you. What do you think of Melvin Way: Between the Stars?

I like it.

Or Melvin Way: Keys to the Universe?

That's good.

So, which do you prefer?

Let's just call it The Cocaine Files Dossier.

The same way other artists use figurative or abstract forms as the building blocks of their compositions, Melvin Way uses mathematical equations, chemical formulas and mechanical diagrams. He has also developed his own formula for cocaine that appears throughout his drawings. Elements are combined to create configurations that seem to push science into a realm of what could be termed quantum metaphysics or pure alchemy. When Way's handling of science becomes art, a third thing is created that is both the essence of art and science, yet points beyond them both to the realm of the transcendent. By nature, such a realm is mysterious and ineffable, and so these works are redolent of that which cannot be known or explained.

Way's process is private and portable. He carries his drawings with him for days, weeks, or years, working on them when time or inspiration allows. He draws on found pieces of paper with ballpoint pen, often wrapping his work in Scotch tape—probably to preserve them as they are transferred among books, magazines, pockets, bags, and drawers. He keeps many of them in the pocket over his heart, talismanic renderings that offer a comforting and protective element. Way's drawings are perplexing and even intimidating in a way that a chalkboard filled with complex mathematical equations and diagrams can be to those who do not understand algebra or trigonometry. As a self-taught systems artist, he can be said to be part of a specialized subgroup of visionary masters that include Robert Gie, Grant Wallace, Paul Laffoley and George Widener.

Despite some conflicting accounts and timeline gaps, it is clear that Way has lived and traveled between South Carolina, where he was born in 1954, in Ruffin County, and New York City since he was a child. In the early 1970s, he attended a technical college and played bass in various bands. He has struggled with mental illness and spent periods of time homeless, or in and out of city shelters and programs.

This exhibition, unlike those that have preceded it, additionally includes a series of works made while the artist was hospitalized, drawings rendered in unusually soft colors which could suggest a medically induced creative shift. Another series of paintings, made on canvas and created with the encouragement of Andrew Castrucci, an artist and educator that Way met in 1989, is also on view for the first time.

Way's work will also be featured at the gallery's booth at the Independent Art Fair, New York, from March 8 – 11th.

Way's work is included in many private and public collections including the American Folk Art Museum, New York; the American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Transformer, Washington, D.C.; Collection abcd, Paris; Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne; His work has been exhibited at the American Folk Art Museum, Artists Space, On Stellar Rays and Galerie Christian Berst and international art fairs including the Outsider Art Fair and Art Basel Miami Beach. Other group shows include the Gregg Museum of Art and Design, Raleigh, NC, as well as The Hayward Gallery, London. Way was recently awarded the Art Absolument Prize for Outsider Art in Paris and in 2016 was a winner of the Wyn Newhouse Award that recognizes excellence in the achievements of artists with disabilities.