

Andrew Edlin GALLERY

Paul Edlin: Family Business

February 6 – March 15, 2014

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 6, 6 – 8 pm

The truth is that if it hadn't been for Paul Edlin (1931-2008), this gallery never would have existed.

When I first saw his postage stamp art in 1996 at Gordon College in Massachusetts I was deeply moved by the shimmering effect emanating from the room full of mosaic collages. At the age of 65, it was Uncle Paul's first solo show. I knew he'd been making art for a long time but I didn't realize that for the last 15 years he had been almost exclusively using stamps to compose his pieces.

Moved by his talent, I brought some of his work around SoHo where I was told that it was "outsider art", which I had never heard of. I was fortunate to find Aarne Anton of American Primitive Gallery who immediately responded to the work and began to show it regularly. Sales and press ensued and it was a life-changing experience for Paul.

Born in 1931 with a profound hearing loss, Paul Edlin never found a steady career path but had always been interested in art. Finally, in 1972 at the age of 41, he enrolled in art classes sporadically over a period of about ten years at the Art Students League and New School, where he was mentored by renowned American artists Will Barnet and Henry Pearson.

In the early 1980s Edlin began incorporating postage stamps into his artworks and by the 90s was using them exclusively, choosing them from those of many nations for colors and visual texture. He sliced them into tiny pieces, which he used like mosaic tiles, gluing them on museum board until his compositions were finalized. His scenes of people and mythological figures, animals and objects suggest a mystical personal cosmology. His 16 x 20 inch collages could take as long as three months to complete, and he worked diligently every day, alone in his one-room New York apartment.

Edlin always led an isolated life, exacerbated by his deafness and the death of his mother during childbirth, but returned more to the family fold (cousins, nephews and brother) after I began to manage his art career. He was diagnosed with cancer in 1999 and passed away in 2008 at the age of 77. In addition to this gallery and American Primitive, his work has been shown at the American Visionary Art Museum (Baltimore), the Collection de l'Art Brut (Lausanne) and Colgate University's Longyear Museum, where his last solo exhibition took place in 2007.

— Andrew Edlin