

In the No

May 14 – June 20, 2009

Reception: Thursday, May 14th 6 – 8 PM

In one sense, Outsider Art is an art of not knowing: a not-knowing as opposed to an unlearning. The best of Outsider Art hits a high note, achieves a raw moment. Once contact with the world of art is made however, this innate state of not-knowing can sometimes morph into a professionalized naiveté. Conversely, trained artists often labor to forget the opinions of their professors and classmates. The expectations of their peers weigh on them, making them reluctant to take chances. Outsider artists don't function within the same kind of community - there is no Outsider "school". Their artmaking is more isolated, and when their work enters the gallery or museum they are forced out of their comfort zones.

Charles Steffen (1927-1995) often wrote about his longing for drawing lessons right on the surfaces of his works. During his last years he made dozens of 5 to 8 foot-tall drawings on brown wrapping paper that have won the acclaim and respect of deeply knowledgeable art insiders, seasoned Outsider Art collectors as well as art first-timers. Would his art have been as compelling had he received formal instruction?

Self-taught artist Brent Green (b.1978), whose stop-motion animated films have been screened at museums across the country, lives and works in a barn in rural Pennsylvania. In the current spectrum of gifted and technically deft video artists, why have art professionals been drawn to Green's narrative fables? Is it because some Outsider Art hits acculturated viewers unexpectedly, as opposed to work which often relies on art historical references and learned techniques? Is real "outsiderness" at times interpreted as highly prized conscious unlearning, and subsequently given entry into the dialogue of contemporary art?

Linda Carmella Sibio (b.1953) is a veteran performance artist with a BFA in painting. Diagnosed with schizophrenia as a young woman, she consciously channels her illness as a source of creativity. Her enormous, meticulously painted self-portrait *Trapped* evokes both the wonder and agony of her condition. In her recent video *St. Pity*, Sibio plays the roles of 4 split-personality versions of herself conducting a round table discussion on the pros and cons of mental illness for an artist.

In the No examines artists who navigate the grey areas between the art-informed and the uninitiated, featuring works by **Thomas Chapman, Brent Green, Albert Hoffman, Linda Carmella Sibio, Charles Steffen** and **George Widener**.