

# Many A Definition of



# art



By Elizabeth Dillon

Where can you find Elvis, Jesus, Buddha and maybe dogs, cats and flowers all on the same wall? One of the country's largest collections of outsider art includes all of this and can be seen hanging, and some of it for sale, at the House of Blues in Myrtle Beach.

Outsider art is closely related but sometimes defined differently from folk art.

"Dedicated to children, the insane and the self-taught," was Jean Dubuffet's definition of outsider art, according to Alan Levinson who is an artist and knowledgeable guide employed at the House of Blues. Levinson says it differs from folk art which is light spirited, whimsical and appealing to more people, whereas outsider art is deeper, possibly mystical and sometimes edgy in that it can be disturbing.

"Kids naturally draw. Crayons are unique to childhood, and much of the art represents qualities of childhood." He emphasizes the self-taught theme in that budding artists pick up whatever is convenient and open themselves to allow the outcome.

"It's not always pretty," he said of outsider art. "It sometimes comes from a need to express the self

from within. Artists are sometimes troubled and display darkness in their work."

The varying themes of outsider art may range widely and might be created with any medium or combinations. Some at the House of Blues appear to be rants or series of words painted or drawn on slabs of board. Some are made with markers. Levinson's own work is created with layers upon layers of crayon, glue or paints, sometimes placed on unique strips of wood or discarded table tops which he scavenges for their intrinsic beauty.

Much of the art displayed at House of Blues is by African Americans who were self-taught. One popular example is Jimmy who created primitive pieces on his farm by splashing a mixture of mud and molasses on wood. Jimmy Lee Sudduth paints with house paint and mud. Billy S. is a musician whose primitive art reflects his well-developed musical interests.

Ron Causey is a collector who is well acquainted with many of the Carolina area artists. He describes Richard Burnside, a diminutive 63-year-old, one of the only remaining artists who works as regularly as he can despite a decades-old

drug addiction which defines his life today.

Art for sale can range widely. "Gullah Women" by Kim Dawn-Clayton is \$90. A square of wood painted in acrylic to resemble tile is Glenn Fox's "Muffin Brain" at a list price of \$160. Both are well known in the area for their work and their specific styles. Many are considerably more pricey, and those in the House of Blues collection make an important statement about the concert hall and restaurant in each of its 18 locations. In addition to Myrtle Beach, southeast locations are New Orleans and Orlando.

The House of Blues itself represents tolerance with its theme of "Help Ever, Hurt Never" widely displayed and the God wall showcasing the deities of many different nations.

Folk and outsider art also are popular in Beaufort, SC where more than 50 galleries throughout the county include a handful featuring folk art, many with pieces depicting the Lowcountry lifestyle or Gullah culture. Among the noted galleries exhibiting folk or outsider art are House of Ahhs, Red Piano Too, the Ly Benson Gallery and DeGullah Creations.



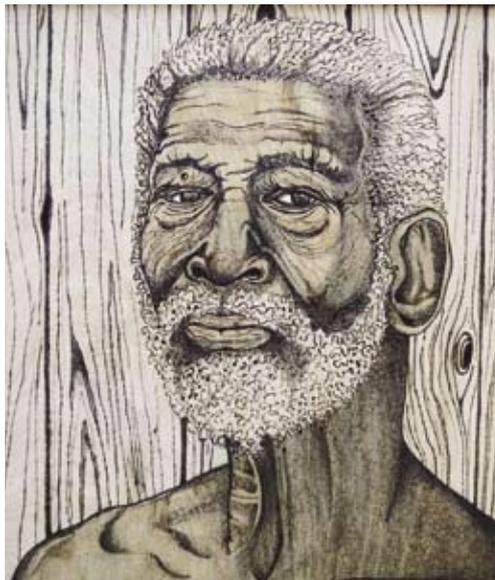
Fran Sobieski, owner of House of Ahhs, thinks of herself as a “jack of all trades” rather than as an artist although she paints, builds unique tables and writes plays for the kids of her church. She began drawing Revelations to accompany her minister-father’s teaching. Fran believes outsider and folk art are interchangeable terms although admitting that she was appalled when first introduced to the primitive outsider art.

The work of many regional artists is exhibited in her gallery. Fran notes Richard White as one of those who “has stepped out and made an impact.” She describes Richard’s signature wrinkles in faces and hands which make a profound statement of character in his paintings and wood carvings.

A self-taught artist, Richard believes many who are self-trained also are somewhat self-conscious. Beginning to draw in first grade, he drew and sold comic books for lunch money. He tells the story behind many of his works.

“I lived with my grandmother a lot growing up and cared for her when she was sick. She was a bootlegger, and many people came to the house. The faces come back into my art today.”

After an accident when he could no longer work as a truck driver, he had no money and no canvas. Watching the history channel, he saw a



wood carving and began drawing a face and a palm tree, then carved it and painted it. He is best known for his large painted carvings. His work now retails for as much as several thousand dollars, although he often is reluctant to part with it.

“I get attached to my art. I love it and keep it at home as long as I can to look at it,” he said.

Diane Dunham, Cassandra Gillens and James Denmark are among the well-known folk artists exhibited at Red Piano Too.

Whether amusing, mysterious or simply beautiful, outsider and folk art bring stories of their makers to life in homes throughout the world as collectors crave the unique cultural representations. ■

*All art images by Richard White except Elvis which is courtesy of Myrtle Beach House of Blues.*

SEE THIS ART:

<p><b>Red Piano Too</b> 870 Sea Island Parkway St. Helena, SC (843)838-2241</p>	<p><b>DeGullah Creations</b> Shelter Cove Mall Hilton Head Island, SC (843)686-5210</p>	<p><b>Citadel Mall</b> Charleston, SC (843)556-3943</p>	<p><b>LyBenson Gallery</b> 211 Charles Street Beaufort, SC (843)525-9006</p>	<p><b>House of Ahhs</b> 1109 Boundary Street Beaufort, SC (843)379-1800</p>	<p><b>House of Blues</b> Barefoot Landing North Myrtle Beach, SC (843)913-3731</p>
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