

Outsider... deconstructing art from the outside

Epistemology of marginal art as an expressive visual practice

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An epistemological essay in which assumptions on the current condition of outsider art are examined and revived by clearing up and systemizing concepts on its essence. The spectre of outsider art artistic production shows the postmodern condition from the points of view and characteristics of postmodernism, which reconsiders the sense of elite and special nature of art, reveals its scepticism, and upholds the fostering of diversity and cultural difference with an emphasis on the market and consumption. Outsider art presents itself as an alternative of real and innate aesthetic activity in human beings, “Homo Astheticus”, which neuroscience, the new biology of the mind, is beginning to understand as a phenomenon of artistic realization and appreciation stemming from the biological roots of art. The new field of Visual Studies should integrate these concepts as meaningful visual production. A review of the artwork and artists that make up the exhibition, analyzed by characteristics of the creative process, will confirm how these visual practices can be considered the foundation of all expressive art.

One day twenty-five years ago I was in Madrid at the studio of Juan Antonio Criado, a colleague from the San Fernando Fine Arts School. He showed me a drawing that was not his own, made by colored markers, with the calculated idea of prompting a debate on the consideration of this work as art. Juan Antonio was a sculptor of incomparable skill and talent, with an oeuvre that evoked the creative conception of Auguste Rodin. His knowledge of human anatomy – not in vain did he give up a medical career in order to develop as an artist – together with material and graphic mastery, enabled him to create a discourse of figures in which he extolled the enjoyment of the figurative concurrence with the model, created a sculptural self-deception whose reality of volume becomes a premise of truth and used the paucity of the medium to amplify the work’s expressiveness in the luminous surface fluctuations, apparently unfinished with traces of its modelling on the clay. He emulated as much as admired Rodin, and looked down on abstract or conceptual approaches as a means of expression. His average grade while at university was a 10 out of 10, outstanding with honors, with which he defended his ideological position as a valued creating artist, legitimized and appreciated while disdaining other expressive outlets removed from that aspiration for realism and figurative expression.

The drawing that he was showing me and hoping I might frown on looked, with its bright colors and naïve style, to be that of a child. I immediately guessed who the author was, since I had been in touch with him some time ago and recognized his style, in addition to his circumstances being difficult to forget. Juan Antonio was not aware that I knew of Manuel Aragón, affectionately known as Manuelo and not a conventional artist. Since childhood he had been affected and limited in his motor skills by spastic muscular contractions and convulsions caused by an anomaly of the cerebellum. He

devoted himself to drawing pictures with a marker on paper as the only medium in which he could evolve. The articulation of his words was faltering and stammering and made him seem somewhat mentally deficient, yet his thought process was completely unaffected. But the constant movement and lack of control of his limbs made a normal life impossible for him, and less still for carrying out artistic activities as he was unable to make normal brushstrokes. His appearance ranged from embarrassing to pathetic, and he had to work with enormous difficulty by grabbing his right arm with his left hand and pulling it toward himself in order to keep a minimum control over the incessant trembling of his limbs. He could not even sketch on the upper part of the page by contracting his body to stifle its movements so that he had to turn the page around and finish the drawing upside-down. In spite of all this, the colors and spontaneous, assured shapes stand out in his drawings where the emphasis is on a peculiar portrayal of everyday scenes and landscapes. Their two-dimensional space is full of shadings, spots and overlapping strokes that form a distinguished and singular product.

Manuelo's tenacity and love of life were laudable under these tough conditions. He survived with the help of his relatives who adapted a garage for him in their house in the city of Villanueva de la Cañada in the province of Madrid. When I met him he was already in his fifties. Nothing could slow him down in his agitated gait in which, walking without crutches, he bumped and bounced from wall to wall to reach his destination. He had no qualms about taking part in a soccer game as the goalkeeper, to the disbelief of the other players. His entire life was like that, without any self-imposed limitations. It was society that imposed restrictions on him. Perhaps he enjoyed a longed-for freedom of movement in his world of stippled colors, broken lines and dense atmospheres of graphic strokes that gave shape to his unusual landscapes. About ten years ago, I heard that he had passed away naturally.

The disagreement originated by the drawing that Juan Antonio Criado showed me only reaffirmed our opposing views on the value of technique and expression in art through figurative and abstract embodiment. Juan Antonio came from an enviable socio-economic background and was handsome and attractive to women. He stood out in martial arts when I trained and competed with him in karate. His intelligence, outgoingness and ability, besides his artistic production, forged a talented figure and augured a brilliant artistic career in the initial exhibitions and trips to New York in 1984. A real personage overflowing with characteristics that anyone might desire, except for the emotional fragility that led him one day in 1985, owing to amorous disillusion, depression and narcissism, to take his own life.

Two artistic figures possessed of a completely opposite value and tenacity in their view of life and reality. One who had everything including a promising artistic ability, succumbs to a depression that robs him of the will to live. The other, faced with complete adversity in his living conditions, persists in his situation, creating in spite of obstacles and shackles that were not only physical. His artistic output, which was produced over the last decades of the 20th century, was never given consideration nor he himself as an artist. He did not fit in with the creative figures who make up the art institutions led by museums, critics, journals, curators and the currently expanding art market. The drawing under consideration revealed the stylistic traits of Manuelo's artwork and contained many of the general elements that stand out in outsider art. A direct immediacy in the execution of the image as the predominance of an impulse to capture a mental impression; A brainstorm of ideas that needs to be seen and visually

thought. This direct stamp is best transmitted by materials that are easily handled and do not require layers of paint. The use of more complex material results in a treatment of the items themselves.

Another notable element in these works is the elaboration of a hallucinatory visual narrative held in a non-Euclidean source of representation, charged with perspectives of symbolism and emotional hierarchy. Likewise, compositions lacking a focus of attention and a stable regular structure prevail in the pieces. The structure is based on progressive additions of juxtaposed areas that do not conform to a general structure but rather to a precise interest in resolving the narrative dialog.

Outsider art in the postmodern situation

Among the diverse characteristics that define the postmodern situation there are several that concur with the circumstances of the propagation of outsider art. One is that the postmodern situation brings together these creative expressions called outsider art (which could fall under the heading of low art or popular art) with high art or the fine arts. Secondly this art, which is often a by-product of an occupational activity, an art therapy or one's own psychic sublimation, reveals its aesthetic *raison d'être* through an activity with a certain purpose. That is to say, it casts doubt on whether the absence of a purpose is inherent to the appreciation of beauty. And thirdly, outsider art "deconstructs" art with its influence contributing to the dismantling of elitist suppositions and postulates of art while at the same time fully incorporating current artistic and theoretical exchange.

The designation 'outsider art' originally stems from Jean Dubuffet's interest in 1945 in Hans Prinzhorn's book of artistry created by the mentally ill. It inspired him to form the *Collection of Art Brut*. The terms 'outsider' or 'marginal' are used primarily to refer to the creations of the mentally handicapped or, as they are referred to these days, of differentiated abilities. Outsider art has been developing as an entity that has acquired its own standing and is becoming more mainstream in the art world. This evolution in itself reveals a tendency toward the disappearance of the very concept, although it maintains its peculiarity. The term outsider art refers primarily to the visual production of persons interned in psychiatric institutions or that have been declared mentally ill and are affected to some degree in their normal behaviour. Marta Miró and Pedro Lavado¹ call it *arte lunático* (lunatic art) in Spanish. With the term 'outsider art', Lyle Rexer² tries to characterize the confusing terminology that is used interchangeably with 'folk art' and 'self-taught' and is often promoted by marketing mechanisms that also include 'visionary art', '*neuve invention*' and the original 'art brut'. The parameters of this production are denoted by marginalization and a lack of consideration as art that extends to many others: persons with a functional or even social disability, not precisely mentally ill but who do not form part of creative, elitist circles and whose identity is linked to the marginal, the self-taught and that which "supposedly" is not art. I will use the term outsider art in a general sense to take in the works and artists that are found outside of standard creation. They are, of course, dominated by these individuals with schizophrenia, psychoses, autism, and manic depression as well as those that suffer from altered states of consciousness.

¹ "*Nuevos horizontes en el arte outsider hispano*" Editorial Enokia, SL. Madrid 2005. pg. 41, the article "*La otra cara de la luna*", by Marta Miró and Pedro Lavado.

² Rexer, Lyle. "*How to look at Outsider Art*". Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York, 2005. Pág. 32

The extensive recognition and attention that is being bestowed on outsider art is indicative of one of the determining central tenets of postmodernism – **multiculturalism, or the policy of acknowledging differences**. With the advent of postmodernism and its encouragement of diversity and cultural differences, the “others”, those who have been excluded from any intellectual consideration, are incorporated as members into the collective. In modern society, this figure of the Other extends to groups of immigrants and anyone who breaks into a social setting but is not assimilated. According to Michel Foucault’s idea, the Others are those powerless people who have often been victimized and consequently deprived or unaware of their political rights: homosexuals, persons of color, prostitutes, prisoners and the insane. Outsider art turns out to be part of this “other” that society looks down on due to the individuals themselves, as well as the cultural disparity displayed in their artwork. According to Marta Miró and Pedro Lavado³, outsider art is precisely defined as “the development of an entire series of creative forms of expression that lie outside of the cultural norms”. These creative expressions do not fit into the expectations of art as an exercise in skill, conscious and controlled, professionally made and managed, seeking compensation and not as a “hobby”. These creative expressions are rooted more in sentiment and symbolism than in the elite lucubration of high art. The postmodern situation brings these creative expressions of outsider art together and could place them under the label “low art” along with “high art”. Low art, or popular art, is identified with mass culture and the manufacture of popular taste dominated by kitsch realism. Many visual practices such as design, decoration and advertising are found here and in today’s postmodernism fuse with so-called high art, or cultured art, which corresponds to what is known as the fine arts, of universal transcendence and artistic achievements founded on noble sentiments and educated tastes. This merging and intertwining of the two visual orientations is carried out as an acknowledgement of activities that were previously regarded as marginal and as a rise to the sphere of the institutional art circuit. At the same time artistic practices are taken up that were previously understood as high art by the extensive system of electronic as well as home-produced image reproduction and dissemination used as a meaningful circulation of information in mass culture.

One of the reasons that further influences why these productions are not considered works of art is that they are often the by-product of an occupational activity; the material rendition of an art therapy. The making of a visual product with a predetermined purpose prohibits the consideration of its artistic purity, therefore lowering it to another category similar to that of “decoration”. When a visual practice is carried out and an image is created in order to look for solutions to problems of the mind and to recover mental health, art has a curative and an educational function that is called “artistic experience” and is distanced from the concept of art and acknowledges its relativity. José María Barragán puts it this way when he defines the objective of a research study on the topic of art pedagogy; *“This way we avoid the controversial designation of ‘art’ applied to the carrying out of symbolic abilities – child art, adolescent art, etc. We would rather speak of artistic experiences that include conduct linked to reception as well as to production without having to characterize them as art. Whether or not, the results (objectives, works...) of these artistic experiences receive the*

³ *Nuevos horizontes en el arte outsider hispano*” Editorial Enokia, SL, Madrid 2005. pg 50, in the article “*La otra cara de la luna*”, by Marta Miró and Pedro Lavado..

aforementioned designation is a relative question, as we have already said, of socio-cultural legitimacy”⁴.

When art descends to an utilitarian function it is lowered from its elevated status. A great deal of the aesthetic criteria used by Western society derives from Kantian idealism. The old concept of art linked to technical ability gave way to a more modern one linked to the production of beauty. In his “*Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*”, Kant in the 18th century establishes that from a qualitative point of view, *taste* is the faculty with which to judge an object or representation by means of a totally interested satisfaction or discontent and that, the object of such satisfaction is called *beauty*. So *beauty* is a form of the purpose of an object insofar as it is perceived in that object without representing an end. The absence of a purpose is inherent to the appreciation of beauty. This has been the prevailing inclination since then and has marked the development and ideas of the fine arts and their distinction from crafts and all other forms of expression that have evolved in society, as in the case of graphic illustration in design which is up till today conceived as a lesser graphic art.

The concept and practice of art as it is primarily conceived today has its origins in the cultural development of the last 200 years. It is assumed that the painters and sculptors of days gone by thought in the same way as we do today. But this is a narrow and limited cultural vision. Plato did not discuss art but rather beauty, poetry and the forming of an image. The writings of Aristotle speak of poetry and tragedy. They used the term *techné*, which has been translated as “art”, but this word was equally applied to fishing, the driving of carts and other mundane activities. *Techné* meant having a correct understanding of the principals involved, something akin to what is done today in the command of “culinary art”. In medieval times the arts were at the service of religion and were relevant only insofar as they revealed the divine. During the Renaissance artists gradually replaced the eschatological concerns with anthropomorphic ones, giving rise to an “art” that sought the precise representation of a theme by using compositional harmony and technical performance supported by symbolism and the application of scientific theory.

It is during the 18th century that a series of social and intellectual changes give rise to what is identified as “modernity”, promoting technical and industrial development in a society based on monetary exchange and an emphasis on reason. All of this would devalue the poetic and visionary dimension of thought and foment a new discipline that would shed light on taste and beauty as universal concepts - the aesthetic. Aesthetic categories focused the consideration of an authentic aesthetic experience in a disinterested attitude that disdains any personal interest in the object, its use or its social and religious ramifications. Until then, no society had considered art as an entity in itself, removed from its use. Over the course of the 19th century artists lost their traditional patrons, the Church and the ruling class. Artwork was turned into a world unto itself, conceived primarily within this disinterested aesthetic experience. Art came to be considered one of the highest forms of mental activity. Artists were at the mercy of the public, at what has become the art market, the Institution-Art that encompasses art academies, galleries and art dealers, critics, curators and publications that link the

⁴ Alberto López, Fernando Hernández and José M^a Barragán “*Encuentros del arte con la antropología, la psicología y la pedagogía*”. Editorial Angle. Barcelona, 1997. pg 154.

public to the artists. Art transformed into, as Ellen Dissannayake affirms: “*if not a religion, at least an ideology whose principals were articulated by and for the few who disposed of enough free time and enough education to acquire it*”.⁵

Postmodernism questions two centuries of assumptions concerning the elitist and special nature of art without advocating a return to the previous premises, and declares the linking together of modernist “ism” movements as finished by accentuating a pluralist vision, a consumer society, invaded by images and information under a globalize capitalist economy. This society is dominated by a nihilist attitude in which any “truth” or “reality” is actually only a point of view, a representation mediated and conditioned by our language and our social institutions. And the artist, just as any other individual, interprets according to his sensibilities and cultural idiosyncrasies. All so-called high art is a narrow vision of a standard set by a dominant elite, the white race of Western Europe. Art is not universal but rather conceptually elaborated by individuals whose perceptions are necessarily limited and restricted. Everything that is claimed as high art is a creation that expresses a class interest.

So, can what art is be distinguished from what art is not? The complex variety of art and its rebellious nature butt up against the very definitions that identify art within a structure or content. A recent book by Stephen Davis, “*The Philosophy of Art*”⁶, tackles the problem with analytical sharpness and clarity by grouping and outlining the various definitions of art into three variants that are distinguished according to how they address the relational and intrinsic properties of a work of art. In *aesthetic functionalism* the product is art when it generates an aesthetic experience; *historicism* if it appears in the appropriate historical relationship with its predecessors and *institutional theory* if it bestows the statute of “candidate for appreciation” upon a work of art when the *art world*⁷ commercializes it, writes about it and exhibits it, thereby validating it as art. (An extensive and recommendable source of bibliography and references on outsider art can be found on the Internet in the Public Broadcasting Services website: www.pbs.org/independentlens/offthemap/html/resources.htm.)

The trend of looking for new models of creativity in the primitive and popular sphere that was evident in exhibitions at New York’s Museum of Modern Art at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 90s (*Primitivism and 20th Century Art* and *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*) validated the attention outsider art was drawing as it was no longer limited to those with psychiatric disabilities or the institutionalized but rather to any eccentric or social misfit, the self-taught, and to folk art⁸ and its

⁵ Dissanayake, Ellen. “*Homo Aestheticus: Where art comes from and why*”. University of Washington Press. Seattle, 1999. pg. 197

⁶ Davies, Stephen. “*The philosophy of art*” Blackwell Publishing Ltd., Oxford 2006. See also by the same author: “*Definitions of art*” Cornell University Press. London, 1991.

⁷ The idea of the ‘art world’ was introduced by Arthur Danto in 1964. A work of art must be placed within its social and historical context, and this context or atmosphere is dictated by the changing practices and conventions of art, the heritage of the pieces, the artists’ intentions, the artists’ writings, etc. All of this together constitutes the ‘art world’.

⁸ A form of Mexican folk art, the *Exvoto*, has been practiced for more than 200 years. It represents a thanksgiving, an expression of public faith for some favor done by a divinity. Although the practice has diminished, it is still performed and incorporates new strategies. While previously a painter-writer carried out these scenes accompanied by a text on a sheet of metal, today relieves with collages of items and photographs are used. In an exhibition at the now-defunct Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Televisa in the mid-nineties, its continuing practice was shown and its validity as a practice of popular or low art was certainly pointed out.

parallel expressions. The kinship between these marginal expressions and the protagonists of modern art is receiving more and more recognition. The 1992 exhibition “*Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*” in the Angeles County Museum and the more recent “*Mundos interiores al descubierto*” (Interior worlds exposed) exhibited in La Caixa in Madrid in March 2006 are an indication of the reflection these expressions are causing. Both exhibitions coincided in showing relevant pieces of modern art along with unknown pieces by persons with psychiatric disabilities, and contributed to erasing the borders between the two sides of art as well as pointing out their growing interconnection. Currently, the visual production of outsider art is being progressively dispersed within the theoretical and commercial activity of the art world, as can be witnessed in the art fairs devoted exclusively to exhibiting this production and in auctions and interest shown by museums. An example is the inclusion in the selection of the Whitney Museum of American Art in the Biennial 2006 of the manic-depressive artist Daniel Johnston, a prolific underground singer-songwriter who has developed a graphic language of forceful ingenuousness, full of figurative symbolism in which human desire and effort are condensed. This broadening of the view of what was considered marginal art is grounds for foreseeing the end of outsider art in its dispensable or contemptible sense, as Lyle Rexer points out; “*There is no doubt that art products by marginal artists have found their way into the core of the art market, as well as on occasion the artists themselves*”.⁹

The critical deconstruction to which outsider art contributes is provoking a backlash in art’s established spheres. The critical position of postmodernism has used the concept of “deconstruction” postulated by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. His idea has a bearing on various areas of the humanities and social sciences. The term was initially employed to point out the conceptual oppositions in Western philosophy by examining the philosophical language and logic within literature and has spread to popular use to indicate the critical destruction of tradition and traditional ways of thought. Deconstruction does not examine the individual work of art as a self-sufficient artifact but rather as a product of relationships with other texts, debates and visual practices. It exposes the inconsistencies, inequalities and hierarchies that are expressed or repressed in a text, a speech or a system of beliefs. Therefore, this visual production by marginal artists has been exposing inconsistencies, ideological restrictions and subjection by elitist art by opening new ways of expression for the emotions and feelings and vindicating the essential characteristics of valid art.

The influence of outsider art contributes to the dismantling of elitist suppositions and postulates about art, while at the same time fully incorporating the current theoretical and artistic exchange. Its hidden actions have been deconstructing the assumed notions of art although ironically, it continues to be looked down on by elements of the Institution-Art that presume to be more advanced. A recent exhibition in London that analyzed the influence of outsider art on dominant art was greeted in the press by a wave of caustic criticism bandying an exasperated terminology that evoked the rash criticisms of the incipient impressionistic art in Paris in 1874 or the criticisms levelled at modern European art in New York in 1913. This dismantling of the predominant values of art when contemporary art has already assimilated the transgression, the merging of disciplines and the reconsideration of its representations,

⁹ Rexer, Lyle. “*How to look at Outsider Art*” Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York, 2005. pg. 162

provokes a reluctance to accepting art that stems from an obsession or a compulsive need to depict and that is not limited by formal norms or aesthetic restrictions.

Outsider art gives rise to a deconstructive reflection on the situation of art. It is a critical process that openly affects artists such as Claes Oldenburg who, upon being asked about his relationship to the work of Jean Debuffet, an artist who in 1940 disseminated and worked with this art, responded, "...it influenced me because it made me wonder why art is made and what the artistic process consists of, instead of just trying to adjust to a tradition and carrying it on."¹⁰ It was just this past May 2006 that the Pace-Wildenstein Gallery in New York was exploring the oeuvre of Jean Debuffet intermingled with that of another painter with traits similar to the stylistic expressions of outsider art, Jean-Michel Basquiat, a self-taught graphic artist of Haitian origin who rose from surviving on the streets of New York to a sudden fame in the 1980s. The exhibition *Dubuffet/Basquiat: Personal Histories* showed the recurrent themes, icons and motifs in Basquiat's mature work that coincide with the artistic solutions of Dubuffet's final phase in the series *Théâtres de Mémoires*. As a matter of fact, the return to painting that occurred in the 80s was largely driven by the German neo-expressionistic attitude, the Italian transvanguard and North American expressionism and graffiti. In these abound a narrative imagination and a spontaneous and aggressive character similar to what was called "bad painting", which was not distant from the visual production of outsider art.

Without having pursued it, and as an exponent of a situation of change in contemporary art, outsider art has unveiled the art system's restrictive way of thinking and has seeped into the flow of current artistic production, leading to a reconsideration of the very function of art and creation in the visual culture.

Aesthetic value and outsider art

Having expounded on how outsider art has been integrating into the established art circuits, an approach to establishing its aesthetic value removed from traditional criteria is now called for. An appreciation of the pieces leads to the question; Is every work of outsider art good because it is a display of intuition and spontaneity? How are the parameters of quality established now that they are incorporated into the commercial, collector and exhibitional exchange of the current art scene? There are no easy answers, just as there are none for prevailing art. The widespread stylistic pluralism in postmodern art means there is a lack of references for judgment, thus relegating critical contemplation to one's own intuition and visual experience. Are the simple strokes of color on a page with a symbolic configuration at a child's level a guarantee of aesthetic value? Can the traditional aesthetic categories be applied? Is the aesthetic value guaranteed by the fact that it is simply the product of a disturbed mind?

Given the relativity and nihilism in the current art panorama, in which the previous standards of judgment disappeared for an "anything goes", the incorporation of a popular production to the commercial exchange makes obligatory the defining of the

¹⁰ Quoted in "*Nuevos Horizontes en el arte outsider hispano*" Editorial Enokia, SL, Madrid 2005. pg. 122 in the article "*Hombre mirando a lo abyecto*", by José Manuel Toro.

creative contributions' implicated lucrative elements. A critical approach to the phenomenon represented by these images is needed in the growing number of publications. The distinguished art historian and critic Francisco Calvo Serraller, referring to this type of artwork and artists, also maintains that "*more than the accidental adherence to our time and age is necessary to certify the quality and continuance of an artist*".¹¹ Indiscriminate compilations and valuations at all costs of any product that comes out of a visual activity are counterproductive since it gives the impression of laxness in the treatment and valuation of this art. The aesthetic-expressive values and meaning must be probed in-depth, as well as the author and his development. All of this will determine a hierarchical structure to place the work in a social-historic and conceptual context, appropriate for reflecting on its contributions.

Different disciplines that should not be limited to the contemplation of the mere artistic performance will contribute to the analysis of the artwork. The problem of image in the contemporary social system goes beyond those methodological criteria used until now for the compression, classification and valuation of the visual. Outsider art, like the extensive dissemination of the visual in society, encourages the consideration of images from other disciplines by not limiting the artistic image to the production of a visual object produced for its contemplation. This interstice where visual culture, the idea of art and the iconographic impulse converge fits into the new exploratory direction that the Visual Studies's new discipline is pursuing. It deals with the general study of all types of images, taking into account production, interpretation and their dissemination¹².

This trend of approaching artwork in a more general sense as the production of an image, and within the broader discussion of direction strategies in contemporary visual production, becomes more pressing when one holds Ellen Dissanayake's affirmation that; "*Art is a normal and necessary human behaviour just as any other widespread and universal human occupation*"¹³. The anthropologist Alexander Alland Jr.¹⁴, researching the biological roots of art, maintains that there are certain basic essentials of art that are the same for children and adults, for primitive and modern man and for Asians and Americans, because the real roots of art extend back to mankind's ancestors and it is with them that the search for the meaning of art should begin. Art meets a basic human need to express oneself and to create something special. The social circumstances are what organize the treatment that artistic productions receive in each dimension and social system, but this disposition is hardwired into our biological make-up and has been central to human evolution. Artistic behaviour is imperative and innate to human life and is reflected in the term coined by the philosopher and psychologist Eduard Spranger – "*Homo Aestheticus*"¹⁵, which could well substitute *Homo sapiens*, considering that science corroborates a clear neuronal activation in the area of the left

¹¹ Francisco Calvo Serraller "*Descubrir el arte dentro de sí*". Babelia. Newspaper El País, 18 February 2006

¹² "*Estudios Visuales. La epistemología de la visualidad en la era de la globalización*" publisher José Luis Brea. Ediciones Akal, SA. Madrid, 2005. "*Visual Studies. A skeptical introduction*". James Elkins. Routledge. London, 2003.

¹³ Dissanayake, Ellen. "*Homo Aestheticus: Where art comes from and why*". University of Washington Press. Seattle, 1999. pg. 225.

¹⁴ Alland Jr, Alexander. "The artistic animal". Anchor Books. New York, 1977

¹⁵ Spranger, Eduard. "*Formas de Vida. Psicología y ética de la personalidad*". Revista de Occidente. Madrid, 1972

dorso lateral prefrontal cortex of the brain stimulated by the perception of a work of art. This is precisely the area that has evolved since the *Homo erectus* ancestor.

Likewise, the creative process that takes shape as a central phenomenon to man's cultural-evolutionary process cooperates in the evolutionary process itself, according to Federico de Tavira¹⁶. Mental life is nourished by the imagination just as social life is built on the collective imagination – the unconscious collective – that supports the hopes and unity of its members. Fantasy is the free play of the individual imagination that is produced in the deepest reaches of the human mind. Memory, repression and personal character spurred by imaginative creativity appear in this association of interior images. Another psychoanalyst, Erich Neumann, links creativity with the transformation of the human being, the unconscious breaking into the conscious and considering art, as Freud would do, as the language of the subconscious; “*The archetypes of the collective unconscious are intrinsic psychic components that take on a form in art*”¹⁷. Erich Neumann points out that the tension that is generated between the conscious and unconscious in a society such as the present one, hermetic and egoistical, causes the unconscious irruption to be inopportune. Nevertheless, it is less violent in primitive societies since they are societies whose rituals provide unity with the archetypal powers.

Today's postmodern society has been transforming the figure and behavior of the conventional artist. Many of his characteristics, myths and functional configuration have been modified, even if the artist is still, according to psychology, marked by artistic delight as a transfer of “*his psychic stress from agony and hate in his conflicts toward pleasure and love in the exercise of aesthetic transformation*”¹⁸.

The projection of feelings (*Einfühlung*¹⁹) acts as an operator of creativity – an artist's sentimental empathy leads him to project his own self into his creations –. This sentimental and emotional symbolism is used by the imagination in artistic ways. And it is in the fantasy, which is “*the imagination with the power of invention*”²⁰, where the difference in level of many of the protagonists of outsider art to more conventional artists is still more strongly articulated. The imagination is an essential faculty of an artist and goes beyond passive recording. “*Imagining is an activity that denies, rejects, distances itself from what it is being offered in order to propose its own elaboration of what is being dealt with*”²¹. To be able to imagine, the conscious must be capable of surpassing what is real in order to establish itself as a world. But not arbitrarily, points out Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Psychology of Imagination*, since an image “*is not simply the world denied, it is always the world denied from a certain point of view*”²². The artist of

¹⁶ De Tavira, Federico. “*Introducción al psicoanálisis del arte*”. Pub. Plaza y Valdés. México DF, 1996

¹⁷ Neumann, Erich. “*Art and the creative unconscious*” Princeton University Press. Princeton NJ, 1974

¹⁸ De Tavira, Federico. “*Introducción al psicoanálisis del arte*”. Pub. Plaza y Valdés. México DF, 1996 pg. 15

¹⁹ An aesthetic theory developed in the second half of the 19th century and based on the conception of art as expression. It considers the projection of feelings as the ability to put a feeling that does not correspond to its nature into a physical object and by way of this identification reveal shapes as symbols of feelings. This way, the aesthetic is understood as a section of psychology. According to Lipps, the theory's main proponent, the aesthetic can be defined as a discipline of applied psychology.

²⁰ Ramos, Samuel. “*Filosofía de la vida artística*” Espasa Calpe Mexicana SA. México DF, 1994. pg. 48

²¹ Noel Lapoujade, María. “*Filosofía de la imaginación*”. Siglo XXI Editores. Mexico DF, 1988, pg. 107

²² Sastre, Jean-Paul. “*The psychology of imagination*”. Citadel Press. New York, 1991. Pág. 268

outsider art gives himself over with unbridled spirit, obsessively, to his inside world. He lets himself be swept uncontrollably away by the energy of a psyche that deeply examines ideas and shapes through the aesthetic transformation of reality. The satisfaction and reward experienced in this operation of creative imagination, which releases internal tensions, drive him to return to this identity-configuring and -affirming experience.

The value criteria for a work of outsider art are not far from similar aesthetic proposals for conventional art, but they must be within their particular framework. The aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment are revealed through the artist's performance itself. Artistic feelings and action are integrated into the form and content reflected by the work. The command of the artistic action in relation to the emotional content of the character and the life of the artist, as well as his situation in relation to his time and his world, set the standards for the analysis of a work. There is no autonomous artwork. All productions are set in a context and respond to an ideological attitude. It must be taken into account when dealing with this artwork that the described aspects are, fundamentally, feeling-act-form which is intermingled and fused with the iconographic, the sociological and the autobiographical.

Creative attitude, dementia and outsider art

An analysis of artists' personalities shows a predominance of certain determined traits, among which can be found depression, that deep affliction that can mobilize or paralyze creative activity. It is, in fact, during the artist's periods of suffering that the emotional springs are looking for equilibrium and painful sublimation through artistic production. The artist is most absorbed in his pain during these periods and they turn out to be his most prolific because of the effort of internal energy levelling. The artist, sensitive by nature, is overwhelmed by feelings of anguish and desolation that drive his imagination, immersing himself in the images to release the emotional pressure.

The experience of the demented artist, who believes in himself to officially have a mental disability, follows a similar pattern. The mentally ill person feels pushed towards the image by the intensity of his emotions. He needs to create images in order to work and dialog with what is bouncing around inside his head. The images form the speaker in the agitated mental conversation in his mind. For this reason, Eduardo Monteverde²³ affirms that schizophrenics are among the mentally ill most representative of madness. Schizophrenics have passed through art galleries and auctions as the archetypes of creativity and truly eccentric reasoning. This duality that is established in the mental and visual experience, projecting the self onto the artistic work, is condensed into the schizophrenic psychosis, manifestly summed up in another person within oneself.

Psychosis and depression often carry with them the last resort of suicide as a mechanism of liberation. Juan Antonio Criado, a sculptor who was mentioned at the beginning of the text, possessed an apparent personal equilibrium and all of the desirable factors for a career, from the talent to the financial backing. He went through

²³ Monteverde, Eduardo. "Los fantasmas de la mente" Colecc. Croma. Editorial Paidós. México DF, 2006

several bouts of depression, perhaps brought on by issues of love, and took his life by jumping off of a balcony one day, overwhelmed by his self-destructive impulses.

There are statistics that indicate that artists commit suicide with greater frequency, especially poets. According to a study carried out by Dr. Jesús de la Gándara and Dr. Virginia García, of the cases of suicide among artists with an average age of 40 years²⁴, more than 50% was either receiving psychiatric treatment or a depressive or psychotic illness could be documented. In the rest, traces of pathological circumstances related to personality, biography or relationships could be found. However, Dr. Eduardo Monteverde believes this to be untrue and that the suicide rate for artists is the same as for plumbers or taxi drivers; “*Dispensable people take their own lives as much as artists or much more even*”²⁵.

Psychiatrists have extensively studied the connection between dementia and creativity. On the one hand, mental and personality disorders as well as psychoses have been associated with creative circles. On the other hand, the extravagance, delirium and eccentricity associated with artistic behaviour have spread and confirmed the myth of the artist²⁶ as a model of identity and behaviour in Western cultural development. Is there an interrelationship between madness and creative genius?. Dr. Eduardo Monteverde affirmed in an interview; “*I am sure that the mentally ill can not create*”²⁷. He maintains in his recent book that psychiatric research considers the mentally ill chained to their hallucinations, deliriums and sorrows. In his opinion, this limits and invalidates one of the creative conditions – freedom over automatic inspiration. Although it is unnecessary to be unbalanced in order to be creative, it is true that all experience is intensified through art. The artist transfigures daily perceptual elements into personal aesthetic experience, and this grants him a distinctive peculiarity.

In psychology, the graphic creations of the mentally disabled have been considered, together with the images created by primitive peoples and children, as pre-logical stages that would respond to a parallelism between individual development and the development of human culture. Consequently these creations of outsider art are the product of a developing or underdeveloped mental stage and therefore cannot be considered art in the sense of an elevated and developed process of human culture. Even less could they be considered art under dominant mentalities such as the Catholic one that sees artists as “*privileged interpreters of the mystery of man*”, and in the words of Pope John Paul II; “*gifted by God with special intuitive and expressive abilities, cultivated by study and experience*”²⁸.

²⁴ “*Nuevos Horizontes en el arte outsider hispano*” Editorial Enokia, SL, Madrid 2005. pg. 94 in the article “*Arte y mente: Una relación creativa y peligrosa*”, by Dr. Jesús de la Gándara and Dr. Virginia García.

²⁵ Monteverde, Eduardo. Interview by José David Cano in the magazine “*El Financiero*”, México DF. Wed. 9 November 2005

²⁶ See the examination of the diverse ideas on the history of thought provided by Neumann, Eckhard in *Myths of the Artist*, a psycho-historic study on creativity... Neumann’s work, published in 1986, still abides by aesthetic criteria of cohesion, skill and correlation when it deals with “psychotic painting” production.

²⁷ Monteverde, Eduardo. Interview “*El Financiero*”, México DF. Wed. 9 November 2005

²⁸ Reported in the Mexican magazine REFORMA, summing up a speech by Pope John Paul II before 30,000 listeners attending the prayer of Angelus and owing to the Jubileo de los Artistas.

So this indissoluble and conflicting pairing of madness and reason points up the opposition established by Western cultural values that apparently know no middle ground, exalting the one and scorning the other. You're either crazy or you're sane! Nonconformist, reflexive, critical and creative conduct has hereby earned the title of "mad" or "perverse" as opposed to the "decent" and reasoned guidelines that conform and are subject to society's prevailing standards. Lawrence J. Hatterer maintains that; "*Extraordinarily talented artists are often confused with the emotionally disturbed. Sometimes this confusion stems from a lack of comprehension, other times the talented person's lifestyle and pretensions leads to emotional problems*"²⁹. And in an extensive and interesting review carried out by the psychiatrists Jesús de la Gándara and Virginia García on the personality traits of individual artists, they conclude that "*Artists are and behave differently from others; they are peculiar, odd... 'artists', in a nutshell*"³⁰.

If artistic production is accepted as an ability of all human beings in line with their status as "*Homo Aestheticus*", How can the specific differences and qualities that are found in a person identifiable as an "artist" be tackled? I believe it is a difference of degree and not quality. Emotion and intuition are fundamental components that define, like no other, creation in the arts³¹. Everyone with an average intelligence has imagination, feelings, emotions, creativity, intuition and abilities to express themselves. The fact that they do not develop the necessary faculties for artistic creation is the result of a confluence of several factors: educational, family, social and personal interests. It can be observed, on the other hand, that the imagination and feelings are the most repressed functions in everyday life. They are accepted as impulses but feared as disturbing elements of practical conduct.

The substance of a human being's interior perception is found in the emotions. All of the stimuli that the senses receive are affected by an emotion. The latest neurobiological research³² shows how the emotions influence perception, which in turn induces emotions. And the emotions, linked to memory, are transferred or condensed in the feelings, the fundamental substratum of the aesthetic experience. Artists, due to their developed sensibilities and attention to the emotional impressions generated by their surroundings, notice what the common man does not. The psychologist Jordan Peterson of the University of Toronto found that creative people are in a constant relation to and receive a greater flow of information from their surroundings, an extra that non-creative people cast aside³³.

Science, from psychology to physics, has looked at and explored the creative process. Leonard Shlain³⁴ points out that artistic creations have often preceded past scientific contributions of space, time and light. He postulates that art foreshadows and

²⁹ Hatterer, Lawrence J., M.D. "*The artist in society. Problems and treatment of the creative personality*" Grove Press. New York, 1967. pg. 179

³⁰ "*Nuevos Horizontes en el arte outsider hispano*" Editorial Enokia, SL, Madrid 2005. pg. 89 in the article "*Arte y mente: Una relación creativa y peligrosa*", by Dr. Jesús de la Gándara and Dr. Virginia García.

³¹ García Ranz, Angeles. "*El artista interior. De lo espiritual en el desarrollo artístico*". Plaza y Valdés, SA de CV. Mexico DF, 1999. Pág 172

³² Coloquio "*Art and the New Biology of the Mind*". Italian Academy at Columbia University. New York, Marzo, 2006

³³ Quoted in Monteverde, Eduardo. interview "*El Financiero*", México DF. Wed. 9 November 2005

³⁴ Shlain, Leonard. "*Parallel visions in space, time, and light*". William Morrow & Company. New York, 1991

in, some way, instructs physics. In his book, he explores how artists have prefigured scientific discoveries and how art and physics develop a parallel vision in their description of nature and reality.

Currently, neuroscientific contributions on the connection between recent advances in neurophysiology and the visual arts³⁵ raise doubts about the perceptive principles of Gestalt psychology on which many aesthetic standards have been based and developed. One of these is the one mentioned previously that emotion influences perception, which in turn influences emotion, leaving perceptive relativity to the feelings and memory. Another important discovery shows how the neurons responsible for visual processing are organized into differentiated units, and that each one plays a specific role in detecting the entrance of sensory information – some neurons activate only when they are exposed to horizontal lines and others only to movements or position, while others to color. All of this greatly affects the way in which an image is perceived or reality understood. For example, depth perception is managed by a system in the brain that is blind to color, allowing alterations in an artistic representation that offers, in spite of everything, credible impressions. Or also, since color perception in human vision is low resolution, Margaret Livingstone, a participant in the symposium, demonstrates through pictures in her book *Vision and Art*³⁶ how human vision works and depends, in the end, on the cells in our brains and eyes. Other research locates the ability for metaphors in a certain area of the brain, identifies strabismus in self-portraits or photographs of artists or shows that peoples' brains can be differentiated by one characteristic that may be an impediment or disability in the carrying out of one task but useful for another. This is how it comes about that a mental illness, which incapacitates for a concrete task and gives rise to an altered state of consciousness or an extreme distortion in the perception of reality, can shape artistic actions of notable interest.

All of the recent contributions of the perception and biology of the mind make it possible to see artwork as an indicator of how the brain relates to the outside world, differently from what a phenomenological sense might suggest. Electronic visualization methods like PET scanning and MRI imaging allow the study of brain behaviour at a cellular level. Everything leads to an explanation of how cultural phenomena have a biological base when they were previously thought to have exclusively historical and social reasons. Although scientific explanations do not describe nor reveal the phenomenon itself of the artist, the science of neuroaesthetics³⁷ is pointing the way that, among other aspects, investigates how a change in the brain's neuronal network can modify someone's approach to creativity and how repressed functions or inhibitory and limiting stances that reside in the brain's own structure are stimulated.

Now, with the new possibilities of neuronal visualization, a scientific approach to the creative process of outsider artists is called for. Research that sheds light on the differences and similarities to the "sane" artist is needed, as well as the question of

³⁵ Symposium "Art and the New Biology of the Mind". Italian Academy at Columbia University. New York, 23 March 2006. www.columbia.edu/cu/news/media/06/421_neuroBioArts/

³⁶ Livingstone, Margaret. "Vision and art. The biology of seeing". Harry N. Abrams. New York, 2002.

³⁷ See critic@rte: Almela, Ramón "Actitud del artista. Mitos, rutina y neuroestética" <http://www.criticarte.com/Page/file/art2005/ActitudDelArtista.html>

increased creativity through dementia in which visual perception and expressiveness are linked to the subject's internal process of thought, subjectivity and awareness.

Characteristics of the creative process in the exhibition's pieces

The effort that some organizations put into gathering the works of these artists of outsider art and the support they offer for their dissemination is, on this occasion, in the hands of the National Art Exhibitions by the Mentally Ill (NAEMI; www.naemi.org). It is a non-profit institution headquartered in Miami, Florida and founded in 1988. Juan Martín, a photographer of Cuban origin, is the director. It is devoted to advancing the knowledge of art created outside of conventional circumstances by gathering its pieces and taking charge of its dissemination through exhibitions and publications. A glance at the works of some of the artists selected by Ricardo Viera (professor and director of the gallery at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania), among those that make up his collection that today consists of more than 1,000 pieces, offers access to this agitated and mysterious world. Here the individual's limits are unveiled and displayed in a passionate vision of themselves and their surroundings.

Expressive language is characterized by the transmission of feelings and emotions. Characteristics that stand out in the creative process can be tracked through this graphic communication. The characteristics put forward in a list that Fernando De Tavira compiled in his book "*Introducción al psicoanálisis del arte*"³⁸ (*Introduction to the psychoanalysis of art*) will serve to explore the creative fundamentals of the artwork in this sample. These characteristics can be detected in the psychological environment of expressive creation and appear through the selected works that are exhibited. All of these characteristics of the creative process can be found, to a higher or lower degree, in the different pieces and artists included, but I will move gradually to each artist that makes up the sample and comment each one of the characteristics of the creative process that Fernando De Tavira enumerated and that most stand out in their artistic production.

Self-healing is the result and character of creative action. Focusing on the creation of art from the artist's inside world of experiences and feelings, he looks to repair the losses and desolation, resentments, hatreds and all of the destructive experiences that threaten to throw his psychic apparatus off-kilter. **Boris's** images maintain a consistent competing application on colored areas. The figurative references seem to exalt and dignify the religious and spiritual experiences on which his work is focused. The figures blend into the background through the execution and textural nature that creates an expansive scope and an air of sublime restoration. This execution is employed in a systematic arrangement and creates the model that facilitates the task of projecting troubling experiences, whose representation will, peculiarly, provide some relief.

Cyclic regression The creative process is undulating and sways from agony to ecstasy; from hell to the kingdom of Eros, the classically handsome. Artists experience

³⁸ De Tavira, Federico. "*Introducción al psicoanálisis del arte*". Editorial Plaza y Valdés. México DF, 1996. pg. 150

episodes of adaptive regression in which, by way of their artwork, they access their chaotic and unstructured internal dimensions. From here they rise, with the manipulation of their interior and surrounding reality, to build a harmony that is an emblematic aspiration of order, of the restructuring of their feelings in a cycle that is repeated. The images by **Candice J. Avery**, a North American artist, range from clear elements of tension between the imposition of order to iconographic chaos; from the fear of sinking into the dark currents of water that symbolize internal currents to the yearning for firm ground, as in this piece with the partially-sunken figure and the bridge. Her very biography reveals a restless cyclical activity that has her constantly moving. She has lived in 34 of the United States of America. It would seem that through the action of changing residences, she again looks for chaos and the deconstruction that she needs to manage and organize, so that she can move and seek it out again.

The organization of chaos The artist's destructive and chaotic internal elements are reintegrated into a meaningful whole loaded with symbols by working on an image. This image comprises a life-generating product and stimulation for the artist that is projected onto the spectator who views it. The piece by **Christopher Paul** shows a landscape made up of three trees reflected in a river. The calm that emanates from the painting, the symmetrical arrangement and the formal equilibrium evoke feelings of melancholy. The powerful and simplified figuration harbors life symbolism that organizes the artist's tumultuous experiences. There, concentrated in a cross-shaped sketch in which the horizon crosses the semi-oblong line and in which, the middle tree acts as a hinge to the opening out of the other two trees, a static vision unfolds that, nevertheless, pullulates nervously due to its spontaneous and stroke-sparse composition. A stable structure takes in unstable forms. Tension is achieved in this fragile equilibrium that condenses its own mental instability and conquers with the visual manipulation of its real objective.

One of the traits of creativity resides in **interior awakening**, that introspection and sudden discovery that sheds light on exterior perception. This intuitive moment spawns creative outcomes that organize the disjointed interior forms that thereby begin to make sense and spontaneously organize themselves. Artists are possessed of a strength that causes them to be swept away by this awakening, and they give themselves over completely to their work in a process of absorption through which the artists themselves can be found in their works. By playing with elements of their interior world, handling and molding them through images charged with spontaneous emotionality, a revelation of their own self takes place. In the work of **Echo McCallister** one finds a person tied to his expression. His graphic expression is his communication. The making of the images are brainstorming that act as channels for his mental processes. He is autistic, unable to express himself in a conventional manner. Immersed within himself, his drawings are limited to a number of simple and direct materials. His themes expand as his experience broadens. The peculiar frontal perspectives in which he sets objects in a hierarchy of size and ratio that do not correspond to our optical phenomenology of the world shape the framework of his creations. The texture of the marker and pencil strokes that he uses shows the incision and direct trace on the paper, where the image takes shape by progressively filling in from the contour line. Echo McCallister's pieces display this intuitive awakening of the author in which interior perception illuminates the exterior reality that molds and organizes his interior.

Another noteworthy sign of creativity is **flexibility**. With no predetermined outcome, the author immerses himself in the image, generating and proposing the initial strokes that will mark the phases of his continued work on the piece. The creative moment demands a tolerance for changes to a piece but these changes are the essential reflection of the artist's attitude. The artist sheds his social conditioning, roles, cunning and mask of frivolity to allow the fruitful product to emerge. And in this product the feelings and emotions do their spontaneous utmost. **Eric Holmes**'s paintings condense assurance into their execution. Eric was born in Bogotá, Colombia. Ever since his youth, his path has led him to thinking flexibly when faced with social impositions. His awareness could have driven him to depression but the development of his artistic activity provides him with a way to tackle the issues that concern him: women, religion, peace, fear... Displaying a rich expressiveness that is free of all academicism, he configures physically exuberant countenances, whose distinguishing traits radiate in tandem with traces and bold strokes to reveal the picture's fluidity and flexibility.

The central operation of the creative apparatus resides in **meaningful symbolization**; the construction of meanings from autonomous meanings. That is, the artist makes up a code in which the meanings are extracted from the focus of his thoughts. He loads elements that come from his imagination and surroundings with symbolism. He arranges the components into a new field, integrating a significant space for their representation. The Cuban artist **José Moreno** offers captivating and expressive surroundings full of monstrous and prehistoric figures whose meanings can be associated to a vernacular imagination linked to nature and its hidden forces. The mystery of the transcendental, of vitality, of ancestral rituals... Everything positioned within a marked primitive expressionistic style in which shapes and colors sparkle. On the other hand, **Gary Brewer**, a North American situated in Alabama, synthesizes expressive visions of nature into contoured shapes that he sublimates into symbolic forms that are rooted in the treatment of the materials. His use of acrylic on glossy surfaces provides the image with that identifiable stylistic mark of a white background shimmer that livens up the figures. The represented elements stand out with their wide silhouettes on the colored background, symbolically condensing the strength and irradiation of the light. These meanings run parallel to the energy of his personality and bear the sense and meaning of his internal reality.

One of the fundamental aspects of creativity is found in **empathy** and understood in two ways. On the one hand, as the artist's capacity to project himself onto his object of contemplation, and on the other, his energetic mobility to feel others' emotions. In the creative process, via empathy, artists viscerally comprehend affection and pulsate on the same wavelength as the other. Artists use their empathetic functions to capture this landscape from human surroundings charged with emotional nuance. They subjectively mold it in order to return it with a highly organized and significant structural load. **Jesse Banda**'s drawings present a careful contemplation and extremely meticulous viewpoint of reality. He observes and comprehends the object of his contemplation with proportionate skill and a systematic process. His gaze is held by the emotive appreciation of connecting with the object of his contemplation, as he does with those buildings in his drawings with which he organizes a vision of architectural and urban space onto which he transfers feelings of neatness and detail.

Catharsis is one of the components of the creative process that configures the release of destructive internal tensions inside the artist's being. Freely dealing with a

stream of associations, he relieves his interior burden of painful occurrences and prefers to vent his feelings. It is a basic resource of an artist's emotional expression and becomes a symbolic transfer. In **Kristy Wagstaffe's** photography one can appreciate an unsettling reality through the chosen model. The cloudy eyes and indescribable gaze reveal the interior of the artist who took the photo. She squeezes out those feelings that the quiet torment unfolds on the chosen gaze. Working with art helps to free oneself of the feelings that eat away at and threaten to undo a person's inside world. The photo shooting extracts those aggressive and painful feelings from one's own personal essence.

A **diffuse attention** in artistic creation contributes to an ability for specific contemplation characterized by the faculty to perceive an object in a generalized way, isolated from logical time and space referents that allow the artist to figure out the thematic and significative component. It is a way to fix on something, without turning the attention to a concrete space, which allows one to grasp an undetermined and unstructured whole that clears the path to the unconscious. In **Lisa Chuan-Lee's** artwork there appears an amalgam of elements grouped in such a way that visual reason yields to fantasy, and real space cedes its dominion to symbolic space. With a light material expressiveness emphasized by the use of the watercolor's transparency, the figure and animal symbols unfold, giving a narration without plot that provides a broad feminine sensibility and sensuality. The work of **Mery Eis**, similarly conceived, also constitutes a broad approach to a total description in her use of collage. The figures sketched next to the painted and drawn-on cutouts of paper form a microcosm of visual activity that command the spectator's attention. The whole of the image shows a forceful orientation through the conjunction of the diversity of the elements. Here she condenses a spirit of female gender by abstractly going through the juxtaposition of the objects in a structured organization, yet vague in its apparent meanings.

The artist's special ability to plug in to the internal levels of his psyche, and organize and shape his feelings through the distinct characteristics of the creative process has been established. Within this potential propensity in the creative process the **emergence of the unconscious** is found. Artists can become familiar with the unconscious material of their interior world, the unconscious collective, and transform it in to artwork. Those internal motivations that direct it are revealed in the graphic discourse. Unconscious impulses charged with desire or need that are so often seen in the oneiric environment of dreams are manifested through expressive and symbolic language. A peculiar surrealism nourished by her essence and activity as a writer comes out in the works of Cuban artist **Lucía Ballester**. With a wide technical palette that ranges from painting and engraving to sculpture, she creates a world without referents, locked into its own logic and ruled by color and shape. She has opened the door to her ghosts and puts them into action on the field of fantasy.

The **release of repressions** through the creative process is what contributes, among its diverse characteristics, to a parallel process of awakening to reality. Through a process of signposting, confrontation, interpretation and clarification of one's own essence, artists untie their interior binds in a conflict that is finally resolved or sublimed. The Cuban artist **Mario Mesa**, who came to the United States in the Mariel exodus of 1980, seems to move in this dimension. His practice of art began in 1991 and is today an integral part of his life. Artistic practice allows him to achieve that internal equilibrium, which release what reconstitutes him as he himself confesses; "*It helps me*

feel better". His canvases present a different wildlife, what the author refers to as "*marvels of mother nature*", that show unsettling figures with wicked grins as well as anthropomorphic animal beings. He wraps his shapes in the glimmer of the eternal fire, a transcendent regression that manipulates color in intense and warm reddish hues. The acrylic, done in nervous brushstrokes, lets the lower coats be glimpsed in a mysterious transparency. Mario tackles these features of a shadowy and hidden nature as a sublimation of repressions that release and strengthen his psychic energy.

Artistic creativity deals with **basic language and thought**. That is, that which happens without parameters of time and space, going beyond the conceptual and not obeying the logical laws of rational thought. Artistic representation is essentially an operation of symbolization, and when it resorts to affection and emotion, dominated by the expressive dimension, it enters into the basic processes of perception and distances itself from logical concepts. When an artist is wrapped up in the creative process and is overcome by a regressive sense in his self-reflection, he summons a basic space of representation not ruled by conventional laws. The powerful images by **Mars Tokyo** are a good example. With an unencumbered but, at the same time, committed human figuration, she spins a biographic episode or erotic rumination in which the pictorial build-up underlies like a foundation the meaningful images of a revealing narrative aspect.

Erotic language is an inseparable component of creative development. The urge of the libido seeks an outlet and, in erotic sublimation the artist finds a possibility for releasing this tension, this drive that leads him to make meaningful creations. The creative process is vitally fostered by a fertile mind and erotic lucubration with a sublimatory capability. These two faculties are combined in the Spanish painter **Ramón Losa**, who had to discontinue his artistic studies due to mental illness. His drawings, which have been appreciated in exhibitions shared with recognized current artists, involve a subversion of representational space by the insertion of several superimposed planes between the image and the written element. Using chiaroscuro and a technique of interweaving lines made with India ink, he combines the image with explicit messages that compose an effective and communicative iconography with which he sublimates his tendency and erotic desire.

Graphic language in the creative process materializes in **emotional-symbolic language**, which expresses the singularity of an emotion that cannot be described verbally. The language materializes expressively in a real and concrete object that communicates its internal world through symbols mediated by expressive elements. When technical ability and expression coincide, it manages to capture the essence of what is represented from the emotional perception of the artist. **Roger Sadler** has carried out, among other works that are occupied with the everyday in the city, a series of portraits of mental patients. The characterization he does of these personalities is far from representing persons with psychic alterations. He organizes the faces with a great expressive quality and in a frontal composition, making the adjacent background intervene as part of the expressive field. The quick round strokes, the aqueous vibration of the material, through whose transparency the strokes of the initial pencil can be made out, and the luminous density achieved by the execution of the shadows make these portrait pieces an example of artistic work in which technique and expressive-emotive symbolization go together.

A collection of pieces of outsider art that, without a doubt, match the characteristics of visual production of a large part of current art. Rightfully so, it is rising in status and appreciation as an art product that deconstructs and dismantles the postulates of high art. It is affirming itself with its peculiar differences and is completely incorporating itself into today's theoretic and artistic exchange.

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