

# PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

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## NEWS RELEASE

### **"GREAT AND MIGHTY THINGS" OUTSIDER ART FROM THE JILL AND SHELDON BONOVIKZ COLLECTION**

**March 3–June 9, 2013  
Dorrance Galleries**

This spring, objects from one of the United States' finest private collections of works by American self-taught artists will be on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. *"Great and Mighty Things": Outsider Art from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection* will present drawings, paintings, sculptures, and other objects by twenty-seven artists who worked outside the boundaries of the mainstream modern and contemporary art world.

"For over three decades, Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz have assembled this extraordinary collection, and with this exhibition have promised it to the Museum. A collection-transforming gift such as this—which includes more than 200 works of art—is a rare thing and the Bonovitzes' remarkable generosity will greatly enhance our collection by increasing our holdings in the field, and establishing the Museum as one of the primary centers for the study of outsider art in the country," said Timothy Rub, The George D. Widener Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. "We are delighted to be able now to share with the public the creative achievements of artists who have hitherto rarely found a place in the collections and galleries of American museums."

Operating without academic training and outside traditional artistic discourse, "outsider" or "self-taught" artists create works which vary remarkably in style, content, and execution. Often produced in remote or rural places with unconventional methods and with materials such as reclaimed wood, sheet metal, house paint, and stove soot, the genre often draws upon the artists' own experiences, their immediate surroundings, and the abundant imagery of popular culture, resulting in highly personal and intensely compelling works.

Many of these artists, whose works range from the 1930s to 2010, have achieved considerable reputations. Important artists such as William Edmondson, Martín Ramírez, and Bill Traylor are represented in the exhibition. These three practitioners are iconic figures among self-taught artists and have also been recognized as significant figures in the broader field of American twentieth-century art.

William Edmondson (1874–1951) was a retired hospital worker from Nashville, Tennessee, who, using an old railroad spike for a chisel, took up carving tombstones and outdoor stone ornaments from found pieces of limestone. Masterful in their simplification of form and almost geometric in their near abstraction, these works are considered among the finest achievements of this art form in the United States.

Mexican-born Martín Ramírez (1895–1963), who was hospitalized for a good part of his life, worked within the confines of the DeWitt State Hospital in Auburn, California, using rudimentary materials to bind together various used pieces of paper into large drawing surfaces. He employed thick crayon and graphite lines to create remarkable compositions featuring images of trains, tunnels, Madonnas, horsemen, animals, and landscapes, often adding collaged elements from popular books or magazines.

Bill Traylor (about 1853–1949), born a slave on an Alabama plantation, created graphite and poster paint drawings on found pieces of paper or cardboard, and depicted flattened and silhouetted animals, objects, and people—sometimes calm and dignified, but often disorderly and debauched. In his late eighties, while living on the streets of Montgomery, he ingeniously composed scenes of figures running, climbing, shooting, fighting, yelling, drinking, poking, chasing, pointing, or sitting, often within or on top of strange, unidentifiable geometric structures. Storytelling made manifest, these works likely narrate a long-gone African American culture of the Deep South.

Ann Percy, the Museum's Curator of Drawings said, "This exhibition will demonstrate how works of art of enduring interest and quality can be created by people without formal training, who have limited or no connection to art dealers, critics, galleries, museums, and schools. In this exhibition, I believe that visitors will discover new and surprising aspects of the art of the 20th and 21st centuries in the United States."

Sheldon Bonovitz said, "We are pleased that this important collection will become a part of the Museum's permanent holdings and thereby contribute significantly to the future study of outsider art. It is equally important that the public will be able to view these works that we consider integral to the history of American art in the context of other great works in the Museum's collection."

## **SPONSORSHIP**

*The exhibition is sponsored by Comcast Corporation and Duane Morris. Generous support for the exhibition is also provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts, Capital Solutions, Credit Suisse, William B. Dietrich Foundation, Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation, Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation, Christie's, PNC Bank, Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest, Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer and Joe Neubauer, Ralph and Suzanne Roberts and Brian and Aileen Roberts, Erik and Tammy Bonovitz, Christopher Bonovitz and Kate Dunn, John Alchin and Hal Marryatt, Steve and Gretchen Burke, Christina and Lance Funston, Lynne and Harold Honickman, Dr. Sankey V. Williams and Constance H. Williams, Catherine R. and Anthony A. Clifton, Marjorie and Jeffrey Honickman, John J. Medveckis, Mrs. J. Maxwell Moran, Lisa S. Roberts and David W. Seltzer, Peggy and Ellis Wachs, Margie and Bryan Weingarten, and other generous individuals. Support for the catalogue is provided by Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz.*

## **Social Media:**

Facebook: philamuseum; Twitter: philamuseum; Tumblr: philamuseum; YouTube: PhilaArtMuseum; Instagram: @philamuseum

## **Exhibition Hours:**

Tuesday–Sunday: 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Wednesday (beginning February 13) and Friday: 10:00 a.m.–8:45 p.m.

The exhibition will be open during normal hours on Memorial Day.

**The Philadelphia Museum of Art** is one of the largest museums in the United States, with a collection of more than 227,000 works of art. The Museum's many galleries present painting, sculpture, works on paper, photography, decorative arts, textiles, and architectural settings from Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States. Its facilities include a landmark main building; the Ruth and Raymond G. Perelman Building; the Rodin Museum, and two historic houses in Fairmount Park, Mount Pleasant and Cedar Grove. The Museum offers a wide variety of activities for public audiences, including special exhibitions, programs for children and families, lectures, concerts, and films.

**For additional press information and images, contact the press office at [pressroom@philamuseum.org](mailto:pressroom@philamuseum.org) or 215-684-7860.**

**For general information, call 215-763-8100, or visit the Museum's website at [philamuseum.org](http://philamuseum.org).**