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25 YEARS OF OUTSIDER ART

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ARTE BRUTA

The co-founder of a new museum for Art Brut in Portugal explains the motivation and development of the concept

By RICHARD TREGER

My partner, Antonio Saint Silvestre, and I have been collecting art together for over 40 years. I began visiting the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne from an early age, as my parents were living in Switzerland, and it left a deep impression on me. Antonio, being a self-taught sculptor and having exhibited in a number of galleries, later helped me to understand the art market. Twenty years ago we decided to open our own gallery in Paris as we shared the view that the artists we were interested in were not being correctly represented at the time. We both possess similar tastes and so selecting works for our collection has been a fairly smooth process.

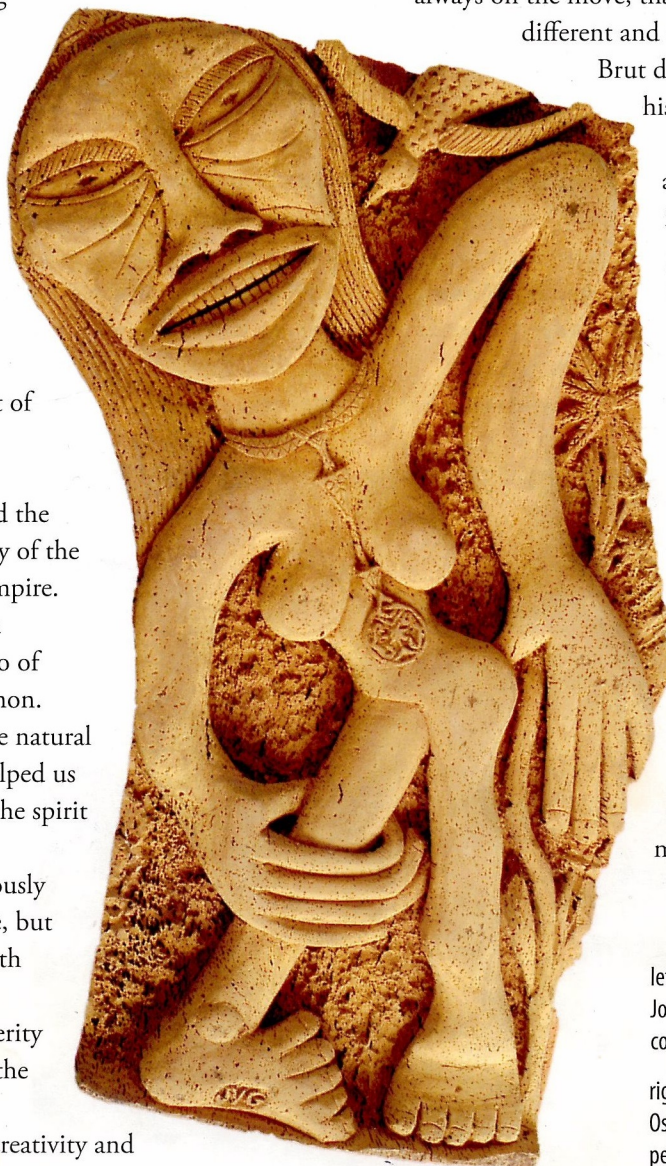
We come from very different backgrounds: I am an Ashkenazic Jew, raised in the Victorian tradition in the fading light of the British Empire, while Antonio is a Latin Roman Catholic who grew up amid the charm and cultural diversity of the nearly intact Portuguese Empire. Being a Zimbabwean and a Mozambican though, we do of course have Africa in common. Africa gave us a taste for the natural and the primitive. It has helped us to appreciate mystery and the spirit of inanimate objects.

I don't think we consciously chose Art Brut as our niche, but when we started dealing with Art Brut galleries we were deeply touched by the sincerity and magic in the works of the artists who we met; they demonstrated astounding creativity and

independence. Being completely immersed in the unique worlds they created, often working in secret, we saw their works as monuments to intelligence, sensitivity and freedom. We have mixed with academically trained artists, but we often found that their goals were a little too organised for us. We prefer the chaotic and the unpredictable. The result of uprootedness, discontent, madness, obsession or solitude can crystallise the unconscious desires of the creator in the most unique ways. Perhaps it is because we are both immigrants, always on the move, that we feel drawn to these unstable, different and eccentric artists. We feel that Art Brut deserves a prominent place in the history of art.

Artists such as Gironella, Monsiel and Oskar Voll are a few of the artists in our collection whose work we particularly admire. We were initially interested in Gironella because his sculptures and reliefs were created from cork. Portugal is the world's biggest cork producer and cork is found wherever you go, from utilities and buildings, to fashion and folk crafts. Gironella manages to reach a dimension that is far beyond conventional art, producing work that is simultaneously very personal, medieval, iconic and sensual.

Oskar Voll, a tailor by profession, shows us his experience of the agitated daily life of soldiers in military barracks via his ten drawings



left:
Joachim Gironella, *Untitled*, 1960,
cork, 29.5 x 17.3 ins., 75 x 44 cm

right:
Oskar Voll, pages from untitled sketchbook, n.d.,
pencil on paper, 8.4 x 10.9 ins., 21.5 x 28 cm



in a sketchbook, which we were able to acquire for the collection. We were astonished when we discovered this self-taught artist, whose progression of images was like a comic strip with the soldiers' profiles drawn in a typically Egyptian graphic and pure style. We are very proud to have this in our collection as it is one of only two of Voll's books outside the Prinzhorn Collection.

Edmund Monsiel is one of the most refined artists. An obsessive draughtsman who only worked on small surfaces where he would fit hundreds of faces of Jesus Christ with staring eyes. During years of hiding from German soldiers in Poland during World War II, the mystic, cloistered Monsiel created more than 500 drawings, embellished with prayers and words of wisdom.

Over the years we have collected some more conventional artists with strong links to the marginal. Beginning with a French artist, Robert Combas, we went on to collect work by Miodrag Djuric, aka Dado, a fantastic painter from Montenegro who astonished us with his strange and wonderful paintings and who is well represented today at the Pompidou Museum in Paris. In the beginning we were collecting for our own pleasure, but as our collection grew we realised that it would be very selfish to keep these works to ourselves and we decided that it should be shown publicly.

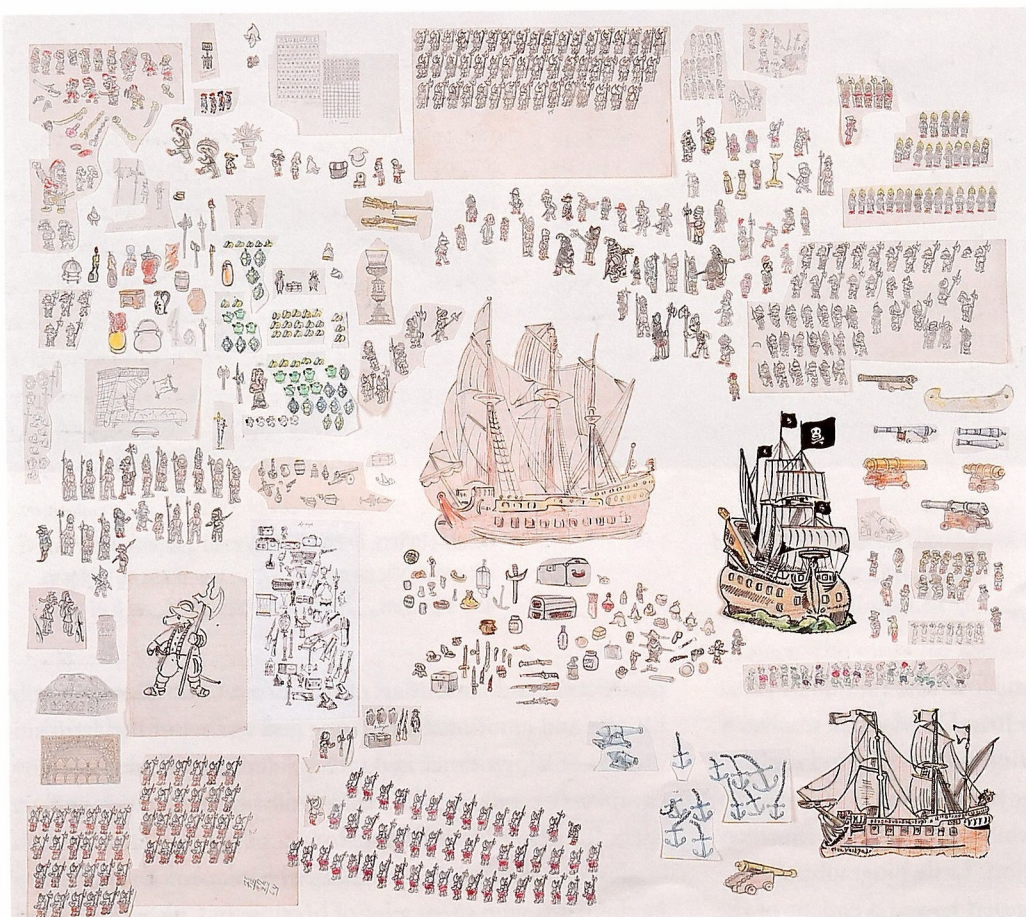
We believe that the greatest pleasures in life are experienced in sharing good things with others. We also could not imagine the collection being split up after our departure.

In 2012 we held an exhibition of the collection at the Museum Viera da Siva in Lisbon which was a great success. We met the mayor of São João Da Madeira, near Porto, Manuel Castro Almeida. He invited us to visit the town and to see the project he was developing at The Oliva Factory, an old sewing machine factory with astonishing architecture. The town is the biggest industrial centre in Portugal and we were very pleased with the interest that the mayor expressed in our collection. He was so keen to learn more about Art Brut that he took a plane the following day to Lausanne to see the Collection de l'Art Brut. He came back determined to have our Art Brut collection at The Oliva Factory. It is situated on the outskirts of the baroque city of Porto, a fabulous place, and one of the most visited cities in Europe. We hope it will attract many more tourists to São João da Madeira.

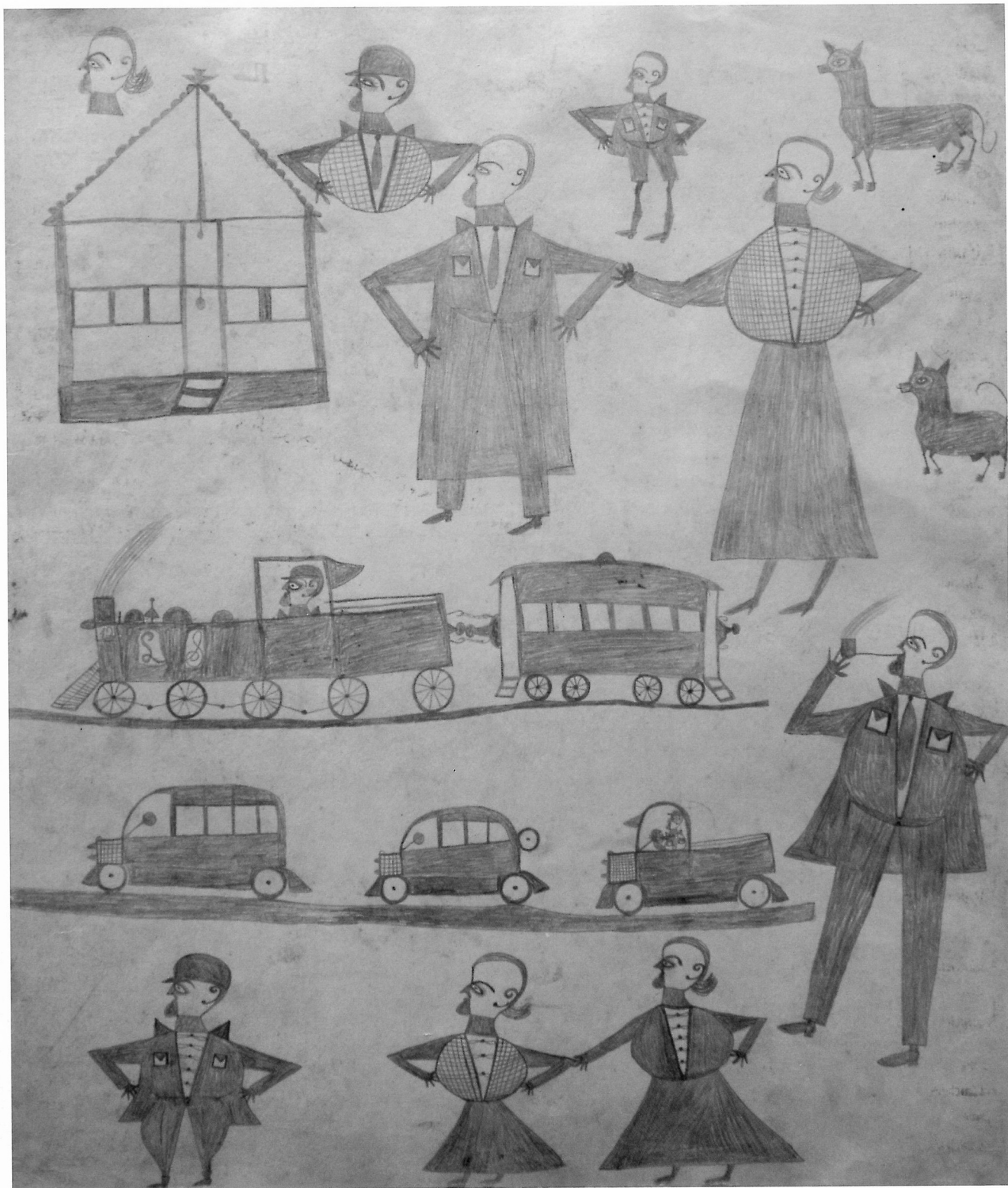
We will be showing special exhibitions in cooperation with Art Brut collectors around the world. We have been greatly helped by Christian Berst who has helped us find works and organise projects. We hope that with his collaboration we will make São João Da Madeira the centre



above:
Henry Darger, untitled, n.d.,
watercolour and graphite on paper,
21.5 x 58.5 ins., 54.6 x 148.6 cm



left:
José Johann Seinen, *Untitled*, n.d.,
pen and pencil on paper,
32 x 34 ins., 81.5 x 86.5 cm



above:
 Evaristo Rodrigues, *Untitled*, c. 1950,
 graphite on cardboard,
 8.9 x 19.4 ins., 22.5 x 49.3 cm

demonstrated obsessive attention in his incomparable works, inspired by mythology and science fiction. From a very young age he began drawing incessantly, meticulously cutting out images which formed his big scenes. When he died his wife discovered 22 boxes filled with thousands of his drawings and cut-outs. We are excited to show some of his brilliant works.

We hope that The Oliva Creative Factory, as the museum is to be known, will continue to grow. The new mayor Ricardo Figueiredo has expressed great interest in the project. The museum will also house, in an adjacent space, a superb contemporary collection from Portuguese collectors Norlinda and Jose Lima. There is still another 70,000-square-metres in The Oliva Creative Factory to be restored, so anyone interested in being involved is encouraged to come forward.

opening June 1 2014. Oliva Creative Factory, Rua da Fundação, 240,
 3700-119 S. João da Madeira, Portugal. www.olivacreativefactory.com