

ART BEYOND THE MAINSTREAM

# RAWVISION

OUTSIDER ART • ART BRUT • CONTEMPORARY FOLK ART

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**PHYLLIS KIND**  
**DANIEL MARTIN DIAZ**  
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**SURVIVORS**  
**LITTLE PEOPLE**

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# FOR OUTSIDER ART, THE END OF AN ERA

Edward M Gomez reports on the closing of New York's Phyllis Kind Gallery and recalls its founder's trail-blazing career



**top**  
Phyllis Kind in her gallery,  
2007, photo: amazon pixels.

**below**  
Phyllis Kind at art events in  
New York and Chicago in the  
1980s, photos: Phyllis Kind  
Gallery archives.

**opposite**  
Carlo Zinelli  
*Untitled (side A)*  
1971, gouache on paper  
19.75 x 27.5 inches  
50.16 x 69.85 cm  
courtesy Sam and Betsey  
Farber.

Collectors, curators, artists and other dealers who know Phyllis Kind, an indefatigably inquisitive, irrepressibly free-spirited mainstay of the New York art world and head of a gallery there that had long borne her name, were surprised to learn this past summer that her high-profile venue for cutting-edge contemporary and eye-opening Outsider Art had closed, and that its legendary founder had announced her retirement.

The 76-year-old Kind had suffered a mini-stroke late last year and had been convalescing. As the veteran dealer realised she could not return full-time to her gallery, she reluctantly decided to close the space she had occupied in Manhattan's Chelsea district since 2006 (after many years at another location further downtown), wrapping up an art career that had spanned more than four decades.

Kind had long championed the work of innovative contemporary artists and was also a pioneering figure in the outsider/self-taught art field. She was a founding member of *Raw Vision's* editorial board of directors and, since its inception in 1992, had served as an advisor to Sanford L. Smith & Associates' annual Outsider Art Fair in New York. Beginning in the 1970s, along with a handful of other dealers in the USA and Europe, she effectively helped create a market for a genre of art that did not fit easily into the art establishment's curatorial categories or marketing niches.

Robert Storr, a former curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and current dean of the Yale University School of Art, notes: 'What Phyllis managed to do over many years of advocacy was not only to introduce art unfamiliar to the general public but also to challenge













and ultimately break down some of the prejudices that were arbitrarily imposed upon both her well-schooled and her unschooled artists.'

Born in New York in 1933, Phyllis Cobin attended the city's Bronx High School of Science and, in the 1950s, the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, where she studied chemistry and met her future husband, Joshua Kind. From there, the Kinds returned with their first child to New York, where Phyllis taught at an elementary school while her husband pursued a doctorate in art history. Later, the Kinds moved to the Chicago area, where, in 1967, they opened a Chicago gallery specialising in Old Master prints. Phyllis earned a master's degree in English literature from the University of Chicago.

For Phyllis, the 1960s and 1970s in Chicago were a formative period for her evolving aesthetic outlook, which she sharpened by attending contemporary-art exhibitions to find out what artists were thinking about and creating close to home. In later years she would routinely observe that, when it came to examining any artist's body of work, 'I look for a strong, original vocabulary of form and for evidence that artists are making art not because they might want to but instead because they have to.'

The Italian artist Domenico Zindato, whose richly patterned, abstract drawings Kind began showing in 2000, notes: 'Phyllis first has to feel some passion about whatever she looks at, then she will get close to a work and really study it.' The British-born sculptor Gillian Jagger, who showed her mixed-media works at Kind's New York gallery in the early 2000s, says: 'Phyllis goes by her intuitive passion. She lives for what she calls 'the art of necessity,' meaning art in which it is evident that the people who make it do so because they are absolutely compelled to do so. She seems to have an instinctive

sense for what is unique and significant.'

At Chicago's Hyde Park Art Center in the late 1960s, Kind saw paintings by artists of the 'Hairy Who' group. With a mixture of fantasy and surrealism, and a handcrafted quality, the works of such group members as Jim Nutt and Karl Wirsum were the antithesis of the era's slick, East Coast-style pop art. Kind also saw the work of local painters such as Ed Paschke and Roger Brown. All of these artists, along with several others, became known more broadly as the Chicago Imagists and, over the years, Kind showed their works. From some of them, Kind learned about the self-taught American artist Joseph Yoakum (1890-1972), who had created imaginary landscapes in coloured pencil and ink on paper. Recognising in such works (which she would later collect and sell herself) the essential qualities she sought in all art, Kind began promoting self-taught artists' works.

In Chicago, her classic-prints business gave way to the first Phyllis Kind Gallery. In the early 1970s, Kind regularly traveled to New York where, in 1975, she first showed her Chicago artists' works in a shared space. She then opened her second gallery under her own name in Manhattan's SoHo district in 1979 (by now she was a divorced mother of four). With her focus having shifted to New York, she closed her gallery's Chicago branch in 1998. In New York, Kind became known for her wit and for hosting such events as her 1982 'Ship of Fools' fancy-dress party, which she attended in costume as the biblical Eve. Ingrid Sischy, a former editor in chief of *Artforum* and *Interview* and current international editor at *Vanity Fair*, says: 'Phyllis is a true bohemian, a true eccentric. The art world had a narrow view of what 'important,' 'progressive' or 'avant-garde' was in the 1970s, when she came out swinging. She was unwavering in her support of artists with very unique, independent visions.'

## 'UNWAVERING IN HER SUPPORT OF ARTISTS WITH UNIQUE, INDEPENDENT VISIONS'

opposite page  
Jim Nutt  
*Da Creepy Lady*, 1970  
acrylic on Plexiglas  
72 x 48 inches  
182.88 x 121.92 cm.  
courtesy Jim Nutt.

above  
Roger Brown  
*Burners, Burglars and Beaters*  
1992, oil on canvas  
48 x 72 inches  
121.92 x 182.88 cm.  
courtesy The School of the  
Art Institute of Chicago and  
the Brown family.

overleaf  
Adolf Wölfli  
*Der Oederburg-Skt. Adolf-Ring*  
1918, pencil and coloured  
pencil on paper  
19.5 x 27 inches  
49.53 x 68.58 cm  
courtesy Audrey Hedler.











In the early 1970s, Nutt, his wife ('Hairy Who?' artist Gladys Nilsson) and Kind acquired nearly 300 unusual drawings by the still widely unknown Mexican-born Outsider artist Martín Ramírez (many more surfaced in California in 2007, during the run of a historic Ramírez exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum in New York). Kind brought her Ramírez pictures to market in shows which, along with those of the works of Swiss outsider Adolf Wölfl, Italian Carlo Zinelli, Chicago recluse Henry Darger and other autodidacts, established her gallery as a leader in the Outsider field. She also represented such contemporary artists as Robert Colescott and Alison Saar and, in the 1980s perestroika era, she traveled to the USSR to bring back works by Soviet artists. Richard Flood, chief curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, notes of Kind's talks with visitors to her gallery about the works she showed: 'Her seminars got you within inches of the surface of the work and eliminated any sense of hierarchies in the creation of images, so that Ramírez was given no less of a consideration than was Mondrian. Through Phyllis, I learned to fall in love with the work of Ramírez, Darger, Robert Delford Brown and the extraordinary William N. Copley ('Cply').'

Russell

Bowman, a former director of the Milwaukee Art Museum and now a private art adviser in Chicago, met Kind when he was a student in that city. He recalls: 'For Phyllis, an artist's background made no difference to her. She was one of the first to challenge the categorical difference between 'fine art' and 'self-taught art.' With Kind's famously feisty manner of arguing in support of 'her' artists in mind, dealer Frank Maresca of New York's Ricco/Maresca Gallery, points out: 'Even when we shared the same opinion, it seemed there was always some sort of a heated discussion that revolved around a topic. Our discussions were like chess matches, but there was rarely a winner or a loser. When it comes to art banter, Phyllis is an Olympian.'

The closing of Kind's gallery comes at a time when competition among dealers and collectors in the self-taught field for hitherto unknown work of high quality is keener than ever. Kind began showing work by Japanese autodidacts (such as Hiroyuki Doi and Katsuhiro Terao) several years ago; now, the rush is on to find similar work in East Asia, India and Africa. Kind is also retiring at a time when

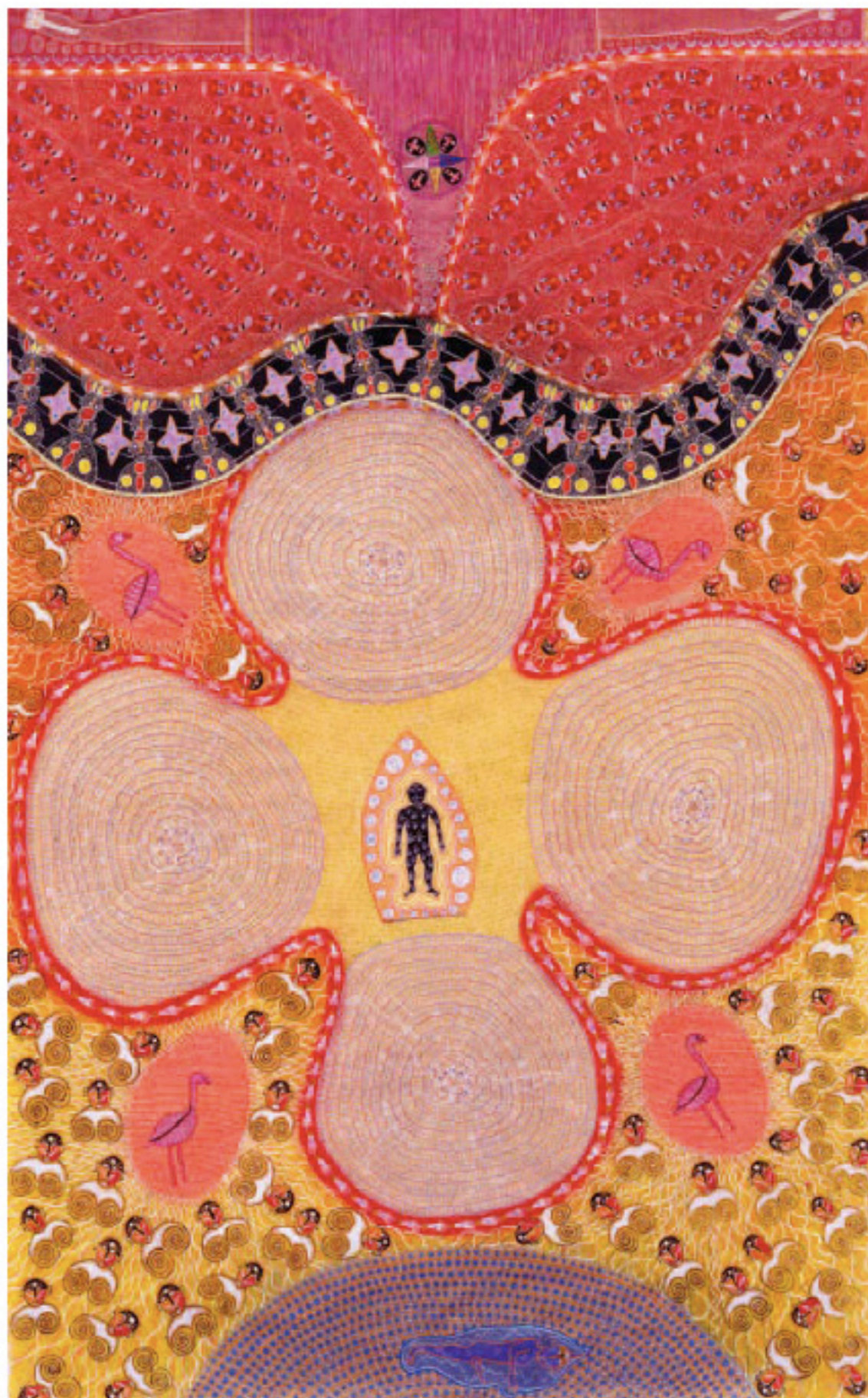
the long-held dream of many Outsider Art proponents has finally come true: this art is now appreciated by many contemporary-art collectors and even hangs in mainstream museums. Still, even as this art has won mainstream praise, in recent years Kind emphasised: 'Let's remember that this work is special and not throw the baby out with the bath water.'

The New York-based artist and film-maker Scott Ogden (Make, 2009), who worked as an art handler for Kind's gallery in the 1990s, recalls: 'While it undoubtedly pleased her that self-taught artists were receiving acclaim from contemporary critics and artists, she definitely felt we should never forget how truly different the worlds from which these two kinds of artists come really are. No matter how many times their worlds come together in galleries or museums, in her mind, they will always be completely separate.'

At the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Lisa Stone is curator of the Roger Brown Study Collection, where the photo archives and papers of Kind's galleries will be deposited. Stone says: 'By following her acute instincts, which led her into some uncharted territories, Phyllis made a deep impact in the art world. It will be a duller scene without her intense curiosity, verve and discoveries.' The Houston-based collector Stephanie Smither, who has assembled one of the most diverse collections of self-taught artists' works in private hands, recalls: 'It was always with eager anticipation that I visited Phyllis's gallery. I knew there would be exciting art to discover and very seldom did I leave empty-handed. The best

part of a visit, however, was always Phyllis herself. She is a witty, outrageous, brilliant woman with an unerring eye.' With regard to Kind's intense interaction with the innovative art she handled over the years, Zindato muses: 'At a certain point, as she became more deeply involved with the art she showed, was she looking for something in it? Was she looking for a greater truth about life or the world in these artists' works or in their lives?'

In New York, the gallery's longtime director, Ron Jagger, has opened a new operation under his own name. He will continue to work with several artists and consignors who were associated with the Phyllis Kind Gallery and bring to market selected works from Kind's personal collection.



above  
Domenico Zindato, *Untitled*, 2000  
mixed media on paper, 34 x 24 inches  
86.36 x 60.96 cm

opposite below  
Henry Darger, *Untitled*, n.d.  
mixed media on paper  
courtesy Kiyoko Lertler

opposite above  
Joseph Yoakum, *Mt Dore of Auvergne Mtn Range Near Clermont France OCT 5 - 1964*, 1964,  
black ballpoint pen and coloured pencil, on manila wove paper, 12 x 17 inches, 30.48 x 43.18 cm  
courtesy Roger Brown Study Collection, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago



