

# RAW REVIEWS

## BOOKS

ヘンリー・ダーガー 非現実  
を生きる

### HENRY DARGER: LIVING THE UNREAL

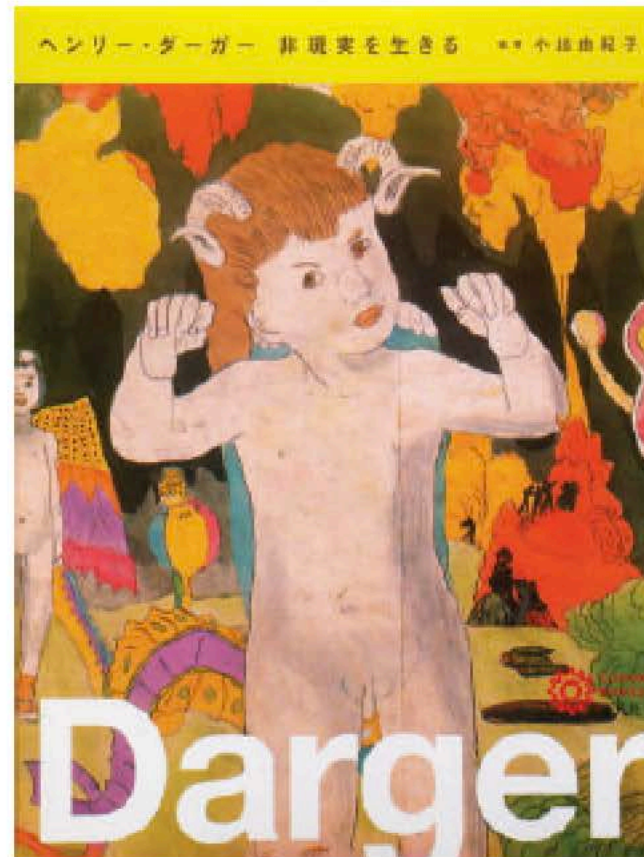
by Yukiko Koide with other contributors

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The only dealer in Japan who primarily specializes in outsider art, Yukiko Koide has played many roles in this area, which, although it has recently boasted much energy in that country, is still quite new there. Koide has worked as a seller, promoter, researcher and curator in the outsider art field in Japan. She has written numerous articles or essays about self-taught artists. Fluent in English (in the past, she lived in Chicago), she is the translator into Japanese of John M. MacGregor's book, *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal*, which was issued in Japan a few years after its publication in the U.S. in 2002.

Now, in Japan, Koide's own book about Darger (1892-1973) has been published. Illustrated with a generous selection of works from the technically innovative, self-taught artist's oeuvre, *Henry Darger: Living the Unreal* offers Japanese readers a succinct



introduction to the life and work of the legendary Chicago recluse who has become a giant in the outsider art field.

Writing in Japanese, Koide backs into the story of his life and that of the creation of his 15,000-plus-page, illustrated story, *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*. She begins by recounting how Darger's voluminous work was discovered after his death in the modest boarding-house room

he had occupied for four decades. She describes Darger as "a collector of images" and pieces of junk, points out that he was a devout Catholic and explains how some of his subject matter, especially depictions of little girls, made its way from magazines and coloring books into his colorful collage compositions. She avoids critical jargon, noting instead that Darger "adopted" or perhaps "abducted" such imagery for his pictures rather than "appropriating" it.

Koide tells *Raw Vision* that her book is "the conclusion" of a Darger exhibition she organized a few years ago. It opened at Laforet Harajuku, an art space in a fashion department store in Tokyo shortly after the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear-power plant accident that occurred in northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011. In a short time, some 30,000 visited that show, especially young people. The eccentric artist's work made a big impression on them, Koide recalls, noting that aspects of the imaginary world Darger portrays in his art echoes certain developments in contemporary Japanese pop culture (for example, a confluence in one style trend of the cute and the frightful), which often seems to thrive on cross-pollinating images and ideas.



Koide notes that, “considering the apparent cuteness of Darger’s little girls and the compelling strangeness of his depicted world,” with this book, she would like readers to gain a sense of “the solitude out of which his *In the Realms of the Unreal* was born”—to understand, that is, that the artist’s motivation was sincere, not sensationalistic. After all, Koide adds, some of art and literature’s enduring, universal themes can be found in Darger’s work, including war, religious belief, discrimination and exploitation. Koide does not psychoanalyze her subject but points out that, in examining the scope and character of Darger’s work, she would like both viewers who are schooled in the making or history of art and also those who are untrained “to consider the source from which [artistic] creativity emerges.”

Koide notes that, after World War II, during and following the U.S. military occupation of Japan, her countrymen were exposed to plenty of American pop-cultural influences, including a deluge of mass-media images. She believes that Darger’s borrowing of images of young girls, in particular, appeals to Japanese audiences. (As a reference point, consider that Japanese art and

advertising have long had their own tradition of the *bijin*, or “beautiful person,” normally a neatly groomed, elegantly attired woman.) Koide also calls attention to the affinities of Darger’s long, horizontal-format, panoramic pictures with such traditional Japanese visual-art forms as painted scrolls, manga (comic books) and anime (animated-cartoon films).

The Japanese architect and writer Kyohei Sakaguchi contributes an essay to Koide’s book. The vocalist-performer Etsuko Yakushimaru offers a poem that somewhat romanticizes the spirit of creativity—and of survival—that pulses through Darger’s big story of the Vivian Girls battling the forces of evil and through the artist’s own life, in such lines as “To fight, dreaming of a revolution,” and “To fight, spurred on by a sense of mission.”

Koide’s book is a valuable addition to the growing international literature about outsider art in general and about Darger’s work in particular. It sets high standards for other researcher-writers in what is still a young field in Japan for future publications aimed at both general and specialist audiences.

**Edward M. Gómez**