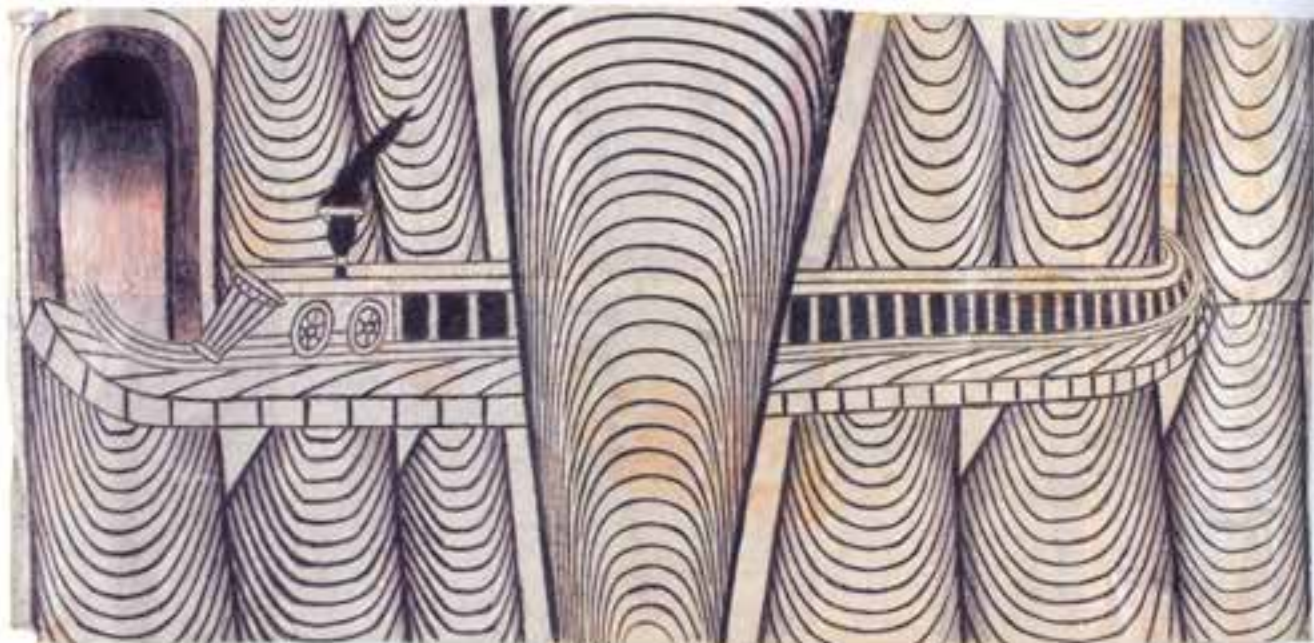


SENSATION AT DISCOVERY OF 140 DRAWINGS BY MARTIN RAMIREZ

**Edward Gomez reports:**

In California, a hitherto unknown cache of 140 works by the Mexican-born outsider have been found.

The news that broke late last October shook the international Outsider Art world—its market and the scholarly side that supports it—to its foundations.

From Auburn, a city in northern California, former public-school teacher Peggy Dunievitz made it known that 140 pencil-on-paper and mixed-media drawings that were assumed to have been made by Martin Ramirez, which had been stashed away in her garage for many years, had been authenticated as the genuine works of the legendary, Mexican-born Outsider artist, and that she had decided to bring them to market. Ramirez (1895-1963) immigrated to the United States in 1925 and spent the last half of his life in psychiatric hospitals in California, during which time he created the exquisitely drawn, dramatically composed images for which he has become known as one of the most inventive art-makers ever in the Outsider field.

Dunievitz's late father-in-law, Dr. Max Dunievitz, had served as the director of DeWitt State Hospital, the psychiatric-care facility in Auburn where Ramirez had resided for many years and where he died. During the last three years before the artist's death, Dr. Dunievitz routinely provided him with art supplies, and Ramirez gave the hospital director dozens of his distinctive drawings in return.

During the run of the American Folk Art Museum's historic Ramirez exhibition in January of last year, Peggy Dunievitz contacted the New York museum's curator, Brooke Davis Anderson. She informed Anderson that she believed she had some original Ramirez works to show her. Anderson travelled to California, examined the drawings and confirmed their authenticity. 'I was in awe,' she says of her encounter with the hitherto unknown artworks, several of which turned out to be nearly five metres long.

Peggy Dunievitz's son Phil had rescued all of the drawings from the trash after Dr. Max Dunievitz died in 1988, at which time his adult children divided up his possessions. (One of the doctor's sons, William, was Phil's father and Peggy's husband; William died in 1992.) After his grandfather's death, Phil rolled up and stored the drawings in his mother's garage. Phil recalls: 'Once I wrapped a gift for somebody in one of them; I also used to think they would look cool as wallpaper in a restaurant.' Of Dr. Dunievitz, Phil notes: 'Max had collected pottery, Japanese silks, kilim rugs and more; for years, like a packrat, he had held onto the Ramirez drawings.'

To date, the few experts who have seen the Dunievitz Ramirezes say they are distinguished by a sometimes looser drawing

style and by the use of abstract motifs. Those characteristics suggest that Ramirez's art had evolved dramatically right up until his death. Considering that a single Ramirez work can now fetch up to \$500,000 or more, together, the newly discovered drawings could be worth millions of dollars in today's market. Frank Maresca, of the New York gallery Ricco/Maresca, which will work with the Dunievitzes to bring the newly discovered Ramirez works to market, says of the drawings: 'They're in excellent physical condition and, because of their more abstract elements, they have a contemporary feel. In some, the guns of Ramirez's horsemen are now trumpets. Overall, they knock me out.'

The public will have an opportunity to be knocked out later this year, too, when the American Folk Art Museum presents an exhibition of many of the newly discovered Ramirez works. (Dates to be announced.) At that time, AFAM will publish an accompanying, well-illustrated catalogue.

