



"Are you an artist too man?"

The question came innocently enough. That was James, our erstwhile bartender, after learning that I once knew Carri Skoczek, yesterday at Clem's.

"Was, I was an artist."

"What you mean, 'was'? You don't just stop being an artist. Maybe you aren't making any art, but if you're an artist, you're an artist."

"I was a lighting designer," I told him. "You can't just pick that up and do it anywhere, you know. You need a stage, and performers, and lights, and..."

"Ooh, I get it. Yeah, you kinda need a lotta help to get that done, doncha."

"Yeah, you need a lot of help. I make art that needs a lot of help, so I don't make art anymore."

"That sucks, man. Shit."

Okay, that was yesterday, and doesn't really belong in today's gazette, but it's here for a reason. To wit: today we went to the American Museum of Folk Art. This lovely little institution, tucked in next to MoMA and The Modern, hosts one of the nicest collections of naïve, folk and self-taught art around, and although they have precious little space to show it in, they do so in a loving yet erudite manner.

When I look at this kind of art, I find myself always pondering the question of motivation, drive, inspiration... This seems inadequate to my point. Let's try this; when someone grows up and goes to art school and starts to make art and exhibit it, or perform or what have you, it seems that there is a path, a trajectory, that gets them there. The motivation and drive are clear. For the self taught, the naïve, there is no such path. These are just normal work-a-day people who feel some compulsion to, at the end of a long day laboring over a plow or a broom or a stove, they decide to pick up a paint brush, embroidery needle, or what have you, and start making art.

I never "made art" in the sense of making a durable thing - painting, print, etc. - which one could take away from the experience and hang on a wall. I made art which was of its very nature ephemeral, transient, fleeting. My art was formal, in that it sprang from formalized structures and norms, it followed rules, to some extent, and it had a place in history in so far as it was informed by those who came before me, and was crafted with the tools and instruments available to me in my time. The naïve artist, on the contrary, is working out of time. Their work is singular and apart. Or, at least to my uneducated and impressionable eyes, it seems so.

It was thus that I gazed upon the self-made personal art collection of Henry Darger, on display at AMFA, which shows over 80 pieces of this significant 20th century self-taught artist's own works which had hung on the walls of his tiny hovel in Chicago for the 40 years he lived there. It is a departure of a show for this museum, which holds the largest collection of Darger's work in the world. I am used to coming here and being confronted with rooms of his mural sized hallucinatory fantastical ramblings, paint and tracery works, filling the whole of one or two floors of the museum. Not today, now it is these small, 16" x 20" average, pieces. *Why?* I wonder. What led this man, who worked 10 hour days in Catholic hospitals, sweeping and mopping, to then return home and write 4, *four*, 15,000 page epics about his fantasy world, backed by thousands and thousands of paintings?

Anyway, I don't mean to dwell on this anymore than I already have. I just wanted to share that I realize that there are many reasons people make art. I know that people will probably chide me about this post, like, "*Duh?* Don't you get it man, people want to make art!?!?" Yes, I get that. It is just the scale, sometimes, which causes me to ponder this. I guess. Whatever. I can't make my art, or I gave up on doing so, in the face of the challenges I faced. These people, these people whose work fills AMFA, likely never even felt that challenge, they just knew they wanted to make art, and they did so. They likely would have regarded me and said, "Huh? What of it, get off yer arse and express yourself!" The thing is that I do, of course.

I express myself, now, in words rather than stage paintings. I use the tools of metaphor and simile instead of lekos and fresnels. I use a word processor instead of a light palette. I still make art, I guess, but I paint my pictures in words rather than those fields of light and shadow and color and smoke.