

May 15, 2006

Ms. Carol Presley
Director, Social Services
Alice M. Kidd Center
Bryce Hospital
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Dear Ms. Presley:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet Frank Calloway and to view his gifted artwork. You, Steve Black, and the Bryce administration are to be commended for facilitating this remarkable endeavor.

As we discussed, I have a longstanding interest in the work of untrained artists, which has been variously described as "visionary art," "outsider art," and "art brut." In Frank Calloway's case, it's simply raw talent. Unlike much of the art of the mentally ill, which was first systematically collected about a century ago by Dr. Prinzhorn in Austria, Frank Calloway's is uniformly delightful and bursting in color, and as untroubled and engaging as the artist himself. I found myself wanting to see every one of his pieces. In terms of the size of each artwork, only the collages and drawings of the outsider artist Henry Darger, a reclusive Chicago janitor whose works were discovered in his apartment after he died, come to mind.

I would very much like to contribute my time and money toward the preservation and exhibition of Frank Calloway's pictures. As I mentioned, a model for such an effort exists at the New York State Psychiatric Institute at Creedmore, where Dr. Janos Martin runs The Living Museum. This exhilarating center brings together truly exceptional artists who are also patients at Creedmore. I have visited The Living Museum and would love to show Jessica Yu's award-winning videotape documentary about it, which originally was aired on HBO.

I hope that consideration would be given to convening a meeting of those with an interest in Frank Calloway and his artwork, including Dr. Richard Powers and Bryce Hospital Director David L. Bennett. I know of several other individuals who might also be interested in helping to create and develop an exhibition of Frank Calloway's art. These include Rebecca Hoffberger, founder and director of the American Visionary Art Museum; Dr. Robert Mellow of the University of Alabama Department of Art, who has written a book on the history of Bryce; Dr. Lowell Baker of the UA Department of Art; Mark Hughes Cobb, arts editor of The Tuscaloosa News; and Pam Pennick, executive director of the Tuscaloosa Arts Council.