

Welcome to the Art of Frank Calloway.

I'm Dr. Alan Blum, a family physician and professor of family medicine at the University of Alabama College of Community Health Sciences. I first heard of Frank Calloway in the early 2000s from a patient of mine, Tom Hagood, a chaplain at Bryce Hospital, an expansive psychiatric facility built in the 1850s adjacent to the University of Alabama. "You told me you like art," Tom said. "You ought to meet Frank, who's over 100 years old and making art every day."

I found out that Frank had been a patient at Bryce since 1952. Hospital staff had pieced together that he was born in Montgomery in 1896 (though a gerontology research group would find that he was born in 1915), that he grew up in a 2-room wooden house with no electricity or running water, that he was orphaned by age 11, had a third grade education, and spent 40 years as a laborer doing farm chores, laying railroad tracks, digging ditches, assisting a blacksmith, cutting lumber, and hauling logs. He was committed to Bryce after being found wandering in Montgomery.

On the 200-acre hospital grounds, patients tended the vegetable gardens, fruit orchards, and livestock until the 1970s when a federal judge ended the system of putting patients to work. Moved indoors, Frank languished until the staff had the idea to provide him with color markers, pencils, crayons, and 30-foot long rolls of butcher paper.

Frank's imagination took off as he began spending entire days seated at a table by a window drawing scenes of circus trains, steam tractors, workmen, farmhouses, and animals in vivid and surprising colors—red horses, orange bulls, and yellow, purple, pink, and red cows. Initially, his artworks were discarded, but to help pay for his art supplies many of the pieces were sold for \$50. Articles about him appeared in the *Birmingham News* and the *Tuscaloosa News*, and in 2006 some of his works were featured in exhibitions at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and the Kentucky Museum and Gallery in Northport, Alabama. The hospital staff stopped selling his works in 2006 after I suggested that they ought to be photographed, catalogued, and hopefully preserved. I also contacted the director of the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, Rebecca Hoffberger, who came to Tuscaloosa and returned with 18 of Frank Calloway's scrolls as the centerpiece of an exhibition in 2008 entitled, "The Marriage of Science, Art, and Philosophy."

"I make a mark and then add some others to it—the way you build a house," he told writer Dudley Clendinen for an article in the museum's magazine, adding that the lines of multiplied numbers at the bottom of some of the scrolls are "how many bricks I need to build the house."

Because Frank Calloway never took an art class, his work have been put in any number of categories. The most well known of these is outsider art—a term coined in 1972 by art historian Roger Cardinal of the University of Kent, to mean outside the precinct of academically trained artists. Other terms include folk art, visionary art, untutored or self-taught art, primitive art, art of the developmentally impaired, obsessive art, art of the economically marginalized, and raw art--a translation of the French "art brut," coined by French painter and sculptor Jean Dubuffet, who was inspired by the art of the mentally disabled, collected and championed in the 1920s by Austrian psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn.

Another category is African-American vernacular art of the South. And in this Frank Calloway certainly fits. Alabama has produced several such noteworthy artists: Thornton Dial, whose mixed media narrative paintings and sculpture were created from such things as tree branches and wire rugs; Charlie Lucas, whose sculptures of people and animals are made of welded recycled bicycle and automobile parts; Lonnie Holley and his found-art assemblages that have been compared to those of the artist James Rosenquist; and the quilters of Gee's Bend.

But in my opinion, the Alabama artists with whose works Frank Calloway's art fits most closely are three other painters: Bill Taylor, Jimmy Lee Sudduth, and Mose Tolliver.

All painted and drew 2-dimensional images on unconventional surfaces. Traylor was an emancipated slave, born in 1854 on an Alabama plantation, who worked on farms until moving to Montgomery at age 84, where he lived in a room behind a funeral parlor. Artist Charles Shannon befriended Traylor after seeing him sitting on a box on the sidewalk drawing silhouettes of farm animals, houses, and animated men and women in domestic scenes, often humorous but sometimes ominous...with guns or even a noose. Traylor drew on scraps of cardboard he found in the trash. Shannon provided him with poster paint, pencils, and charcoal and helped arranged for a small local exhibition of his work, the only one Traylor ever saw. Suffering from severe rheumatoid arthritis, he only painted for three years and died in 1947. Shannon preserved hundreds of Traylor's works, and in the 1970s he began photographing and cataloguing them and giving lectures about them. Within a few years, much of Traylor's work was acquired by major museums, and to many he is considered the greatest outsider artist.

As a child in Fayette, Alabama, Jimmie Lee Sudduth began slapping mud or clay in various colors first on tree trunks, then on plywood boards, using his fingers as brushes, and mixing the mud with saliva and either molasses or Coca Cola to make it stick. He eventually identified 36 types of mud he could find near by. He painted churches, water mills, schools, wagons, and flower baskets. When Sudduth's work became recognized and appreciated through the efforts of longtime Fayette art museum director Jack Black, there were exhibitions of his works at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., and the High Museum in Atlanta, among others. As a result, Sudduth began painting the city buildings he had seen. "I didn't have no compass [to] draw these buildings, make these straight lines," he told me on a visit to his studio, a tiny wooden shack. "I did it straight in my head. Drew it in my head before I did it with my fingers." He also played a blues song on his harmonica, then added, "I make soap, too. Put that down." Sudduth died in 2007 at age 97.

After being seriously injured in his 40s while working at a furniture factory in Montgomery, Mose Tolliver began painting both as a hobby and as a way to put bread on the table. He used house paint on pieces of wood he found, from cabinet doors to table tops. His subjects were self-portraits, birds, snakes, fruits, vegetables, and risqué images of women, all signed "Mose T" with a distinctive backward "S." By the 1980s his works were a fixture at Alabama art fairs, and he welcomed visitors to his house in Montgomery, where he sat on his bed painting and commenting on the pieces that people would buy off the wall or right from his hands. He died in 2006 at age 82.

Frank Calloway's work also calls to mind three other artists: Grandma Moses, Anna Mary Robertson Moses (1860-1961), who at age 78 began painting what she called old-timey New England scenes that were first exhibited in the window of her local drugstore in Hoosick Falls in Upstate New York; Harry Lieberman (1876-1983), who took up painting in his late-70s at a Golden Age art class in Great Neck, New York and recreated colorful scenes of his Orthodox Jewish upbringing in a Polish village in the 1880s; and Martin Ramirez (1895-1963), who created scroll-like drawings on paper glued together with a paste of bread or potatoes and saliva while he was a patient from 1948 to 1963 at DeWitt State Hospital in Auburn, California, where he had been committed because of schizophrenia.

Frank Calloway died in 2014, by which time I had been given permission by the county probate judge to have the artworks photographed and catalogued. But when I went to retrieve them from his second court-appointed guardian, she had just three pieces. The rest had last been in the possession of the first guardian, who had been removed from this position and who was now unreachable. Finally, in 2016 after I discovered that over 40 of Calloway's artworks were for sale at a New York City art gallery for between \$5,000 and \$15,000 apiece and relayed this information to Bryce hospital attorney Nancy Jones, she prevailed upon the owner of the gallery to return them to the Alabama Department of Mental Health, where they are now in safekeeping.

15 years after suggesting that these artworks be shared with the world, I am pleased that they are now on view in this website, designed by Kevin Bailey. Tuscaloosa photographer Krystal Joiner and videographer/photographer Greg Randall met the challenge of producing seamless images of Frank's scrolls, which range from 3 feet to 30 feet long. Samuel Blum and Doris Blum provided invaluable advice and assistance in this project.

I hope you enjoy viewing these joyful and wistful artworks by a gentle, quiet, and remarkable artist: Frank Calloway.