

Mose Tolliver, Folk Painter Of Outsider Art, Is Dead

MONTGOMERY, Ala., Nov. 2 (AP) — The folk artist Mose Tolliver, whose self-portraits and vivid images of nature, people, animals and the female form were done with humble house paint and made him one of the leaders of the modern-day Outsider Art movement, died here on Monday. He was in his 80s.

The cause was pneumonia after years of declining health, family members said. Various dates have been given for his birth, with 1920 listed by some collectors.

A self-taught artist, he signed his work Mose T. He began painting in the 1960s after being severely injured while working in a furniture factory. He was said to have gained notice when he hung his paintings on trees in his front yard and sold them for a few dollars to passersby.

"Mose Tolliver's lyrical visions of birds, flowers and women are sometimes nightmarish," a Washington Post critic wrote in 1982, when Mr. Tolliver's work was included in "Black Folk Art in America: 1930-1980" at the Smithsonian's Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington.

Anton Haardt, author of "Mose T from A to Z: The Folk Art of Mose Tolliver," was an early admirer and began buying his work and reselling it, getting it noticed by dealers.

"Mose and I became very close friends," she told the New Orleans publication Gambit Weekly. "I'd give all the money from the sales to Mose,

and he would give me two paintings in return."

His works were among those that helped create interest when the Corcoran held its landmark exhibition.

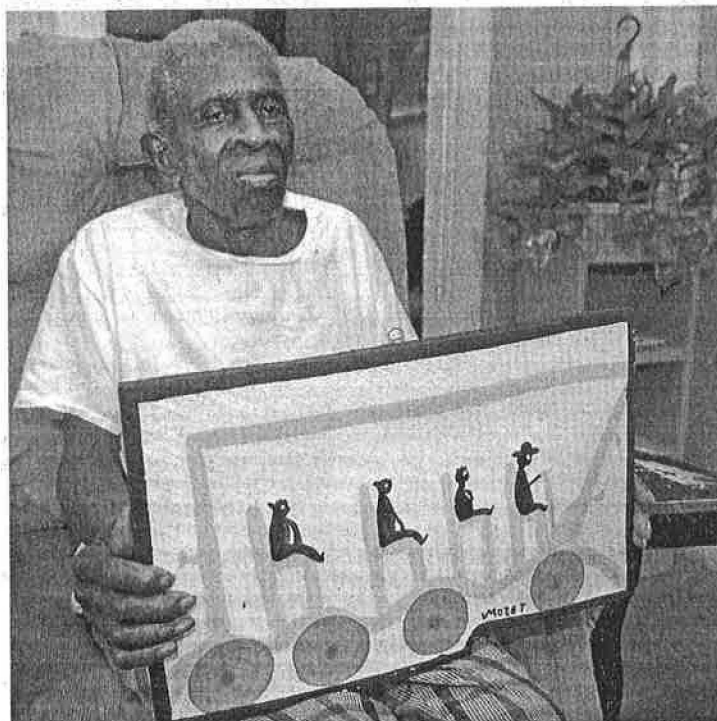
"His work was influenced by what he drew from his life," said Micki Beth Stiller, a Montgomery lawyer and collector of Mose T and other outsider artists. "He painted in a simple, naive, direct style of things from his life."

His self-portraits over the years conveyed a range of emotions, she said, from the early years when he painted himself with a pipe to the later years when he included a crutch.

She said his handling of color was superb, especially in his early years. Later he would often paint for the marketplace. "He did a thousand watermelons," she said.

Mose T's paintings can sell for thousands of dollars today and are in many museum collections, including those of the American Folk Art Museum in New York, the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, the Milwaukee Art Museum, the Smithsonian Institution, the New Orleans Museum of Art and the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore.

But collectors say it can be hard to find an original since his relatives adopted a similar painting style and signed "Mose T" to their art as his fame grew. His daughter, Annie Tolliver, is an artist who uses a style similar to her father's.



David Bundy/Montgomery Advertiser, via Associated Press

Mose Tolliver in 2005, with one of his paintings. Various dates have been given for his birth, with 1920 listed by some collectors.