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Aurie Ramirez, *Untitled*, n.d. (detail)

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Outsider Art

January 25 - February 7, 2006

With graduate school becoming an obligatory career move for artists, it's easy to overlook the self-taught creators who toil outside the mainstream. Often concocting imaginative worlds complete with elaborate narratives, these artists have their moment in New York this week at the 14th annual [Outsider Art Fair](#). We detail the fair's offerings — ranging from classic [Henry Darger](#) drawings to new works by lesser-known artists — and interview the Outsider Art proponent [Matthew Higgs](#), curator and director of White Columns in New York. Our featured artist is [Ahakn Arslanian](#), a contributor to the fair who creates enigmatic images of birds and planes. And our exploration of fringe art continues with reviews of [comic art](#), [video](#), and [sculpture](#) exhibits around the globe.



Get in on all the schmoozy, boozy 2006 Sundance Film Festival action with the [Flavorpill Sundance blog](#), the culture vulture's eminent source for exclusive filmmaker interviews, late-breaking news, trendspotting, and all things indie cinema. With DivX-powered daily video posts direct from Main Street, it's as close as you can get to being there — minus the frostbite.

NEWS

Beck's Futures Shortlist Announced

(*Guardian*, January 12)

The [shortlist](#) for Britain's [Beck's Futures Prize](#), an edgier version of the [Turner Prize](#), has been announced. For the first time in its history, the Beck's Futures jurors are all artists, including the [Chapman brothers](#) and [Martin Creed](#). Their taste is reflected in the unconventional selections, which feature the collective [Blood 'n' Feathers](#), pals with band [Franz Ferdinand](#) at art school; [Richard Hughes](#), whose installations confound perception; and [Simon Popper](#), who has reproduced a first edition of *Olysses* with the words rearranged in alphabetical order.

New York's Downtown Revival

(*New York Times*, January 11)

Following [fizzled negotiations](#) for a space at Ground Zero, New York's [Drawing Center](#) has decided to move to the former [Fulton Fish Market](#), pending approval. Lower Manhattan developers support the plan, believing the institution's presence will help revitalization in the area. Other developments downtown include the city's [sale](#) of six buildings near the Bowery to nonprofit art groups for \$1 each. Japanese architecture firm [SANAA](#)'s new New Museum building has broken ground, attracting [critical attention](#). In SoHo, the organization [Location One](#) is a new-media art nexus, with monthly meetings organized by the loose collective [dorkbot](#), discussing works such as [Alyce Santoro's musical fabric](#).

Valencia's Starchitect Stays Home

(*Guardian*, January 16)

[Santiago Calatrava's](#) star is losing some of its shine with a spate of recent [bad press](#). But Calatrava has quietly been putting his stamp on his hometown of Valencia, Spain. His [Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía](#) completed last year, is a stunning performance complex. It is part of the [City of Arts and Sciences](#) a veritable magnum opus 15 years in the making. Valencia also boasts the gravity-defying [Alameda Bridge](#), one of Calatrava's landmark projects.

Art in Paris Fashion

(BBC, January 12)

Louis Vuitton's new Paris flagship store is not only a mecca for handbag-hungry tourists. Espace Louis Vuitton, on the building's top floor, showcases art, including performance documentation by [Vanessa Beecroft](#), who spelled out the [brand's name](#) using nude models. The gallery builds on artworks incorporated into the main retail space, such as [James Turrell's](#) video wall and [Olafur Eliasson's](#) sensory-deprivation elevators. LVMH chairman Bernard Arnault also has [plans](#) for an art center designed by Frank Gehry. Elsewhere in Paris, Cartier sponsors its own art space [Fondation](#)

HEADLINES

Spanish museum loses Richard Serra sculpture » [more](#)

Carsten Höller primed for Tate's next Turbine Hall installation » [more](#)

Condo development becomes new home for LA art scene » [more](#)

Austrian court orders government to return multimillion-dollar Klimt cache » [more](#)

Istanbul Modern has 500,000 visitors in first year of operations » [more](#)

Art stars pack porn for trip to Sundance [more](#)

Arab architect redefines Israel's aesthetic landscape » [more](#)

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Cartier, and trendsetting outlet Colette regularly shows art.

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FEATURE [Outsider Art Fair]



Josef Wittlich / Minnie Evans / Yumoto / Henry Darger

In the contemporary art world, the MFA mafia reigns supreme, often determining an artist's career before it has even begun. Buzzwords like [Yale](#), [Goldsmiths](#), and [Columbia](#) fly off the lips of curators, dealers, and critics, and it can seem as though there is nothing of value outside the insular world of art's elite.

Thank goodness, then, for the [Outsider Art Fair](#), which brings together a vast array of works by self-taught artists from around the world, reminding us that good art doesn't need a diploma. Continuing in the tradition of legendary outsiders such as [Henri Rousseau](#), [Adolf Wölfli](#), and [Henry Darger](#), the artists featured exemplify creative diversity across international borders, revealing the sadness, humor, and pathos of contemporary existence.

Arguably the godfather of American outsider art, Henry Darger is known for his fantastical, epic narrative paintings and drawings featuring the [Vivian Girls](#) — seven young, blond heroines of scenarios that are at once funny and sinister. Like many outsider artists of the past, Darger lived a traumatic life plagued by mental illness and neglect, and he died a complete unknown. His [state](#) was recently pulled from the venerable [Galerie St. Etienne](#), New York, and [Carl Hammer Gallery](#), Chicago — the gallery that first sold Darger's work — and entrusted to the young, energetic New York dealer [Andrew Edlin](#).

Visitors to the fair have the unique opportunity to view works by established outsider masters alongside art by the latest crop of creative innovators. [Wasserwerk Galerie Lange](#) presents the US debut of renowned German artist [Josef Wittlich](#), while New York's [Ricco/Maresca Gallery](#) features works by [Bill Traylor](#), an African-American artist who was born a slave. [Luise Ross Gallery](#) offers newly discovered architectonic drawings by [Thomas Burleson](#); London's [Henry Boxer](#) brings work by the American savant [George Widener](#); and [Grey Carter Objects of Art](#) displays the contemporary visions of [J. J. Cromer](#). As a special show highlight, Art + Community exhibits

works by artists living with disabilities who come from five local and national programs, including [Bangleworks](#) in Maine, [Signature Studio XI](#) in North Carolina, and [Fountain Gallery](#), New York.

These artists excel outside of the art world's ivory tower, proving that aesthetics abound in the everyday. Sometimes the untrained eye sees most clearly. (AK)

The Outsider Art Fair takes place at the Puck Building in New York, January 27-29.

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REVIEWS/PREVIEW



Masters of American Comics
Los Angeles
 UCLA Hammer Museum and MOCA
 Now through March 12

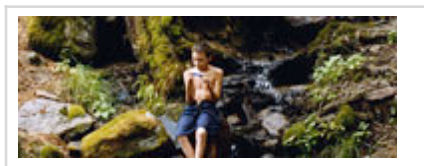
Highlighting 15 of the most influential artists in American comics, this extensive, two-part exhibition is a long-overdue celebration of the visual splendor of comic art. The contemporary greats — such as [R. Crumb](#), [Chris Ware](#), and [Art Spiegelman](#) — and the mid-century masters of action strips are well represented with original drawings and comic books, but the surprising stars are the early 20th-century draftsmen. Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905) steals the show with its elegant, *art nouveau* style and whimsical dream sequences, and Lionel Feininger's *Kin-der-Kids* (1906) depicts the adventures of some oddball youngsters. The long arc of this show — from 1905 to 2002 — follows comic art from its playful pulp origins to its emergence as a recognized art form. (BR)

Note: The UCLA Hammer Museum is exhibiting the first half of the show — comics from 1905 to 1940 — and [MOCA](#) is showing comic books from 1940 to the present.



Tony Feher
Marfa
 The Chinati Foundation
 Now through May 31

Donald Judd's Chinati Foundation, the Lone Star home of numerous minimalist [installations](#), hosts a [temporary exhibition](#) of new work by the everyday materialist [Tony Feher](#). Semi-derelict ruins contrast with Feher's garishly hued weed-whacker-line nests, while his signature suspended plastic bottles filled with colored liquid dangle from the ceiling of a former Army gymnasium. Feher's families of imperfect, truncated concrete cones riff on [Roni Horri's](#) permanently installed copper casts. A construction of [whitewashed crates](#) creates a ramshackle visual inversion of Dan Flavin's well-known [Monument sculptures](#). Feher's work eventually snakes out into the Texan landscape via a curve of [fellow shopping bags](#), like so many consumerist tumbleweeds. (CK)



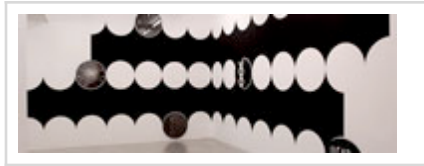
Sharon Lockhart: Pine Flat

[Sharon Lockhart's](#) latest work employs photography, film, and audio in order to address the presumption of truth behind the documentary impulse. *Pine Flat* presents still and moving images that Lockhart took over a three-year period of [children](#) in a small mountain town in northern California — casual studio portraits and [plein-air pictures](#) in idyllic surroundings. While there is a strong anthropological current in her juxtaposition of children alone at play and interacting with each other, the true subject of the piece is a timely

Bilbao
 Sala Rekalde
 Now through February 12

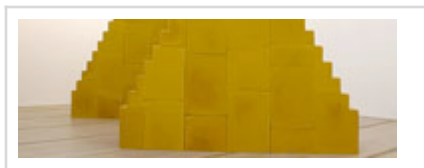
meditation on the nature of the [artist's gaze](#). Lockhart's hauntingly simple landscapes and [portraits](#) ultimately expose less about her subjects and more about the struggle between fact and fiction that has raged since the invention of photography. (SND)

Note: *Pine Flat* is also being screened at the [Sundance Film Festival](#) and will be exhibited at [Blum and Poe](#), Los Angeles, from May 20-June 24.



Philippe Decrauzat
 Paris
 Praz-Delavallade
 Now through February 18

Working in an [op-art](#) tradition, this young Swiss painter knows how to make your retina vibrate with [concentric motifs](#) and shaped canvases. But there's more to [Philippe Decrauzat](#) than meets the eye. Inspired by graphic forms drawn from film, literature, and even music, his work makes subtle [references to popular culture](#). In *Komakino* — a black-and-white mural painting named after a hypnotic Japanese dance — a giant roll of film seems to unravel across the wall. In *Process* Decrauzat recasts a '20s-era [Moholy-Nagy](#) bench designed for viewing artwork into a flattened, seemingly two-dimensional sculpture. Distorting time and space, this powerful show trembles like a seismic wave. (MS)



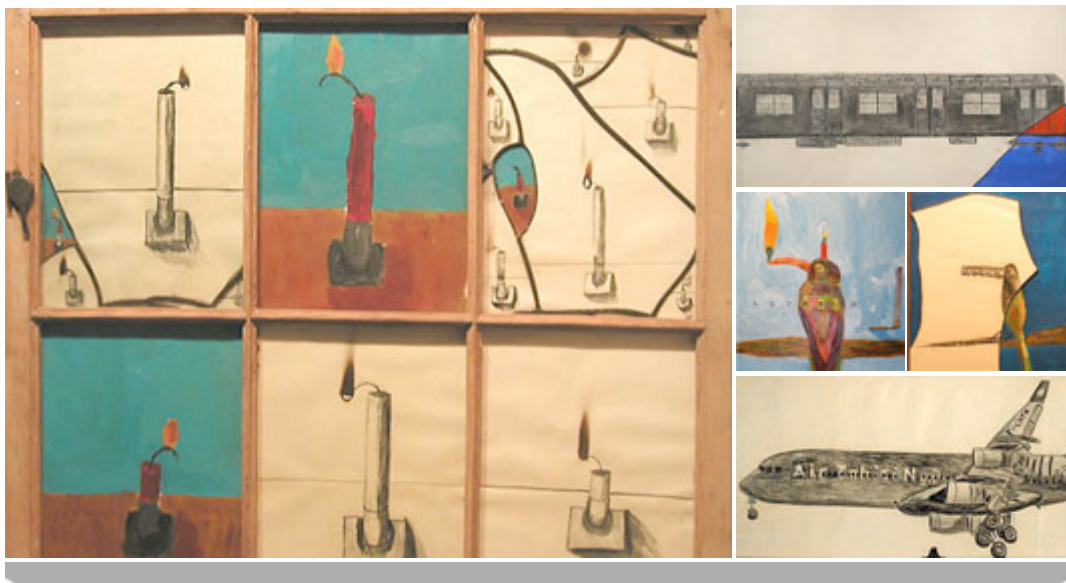
Wolfgang Laib: *The Ephemeral Is Eternal*
 Basel
 Fondation Beyeler
 Now through February 26

The youngest artist to have a solo show at this esteemed foundation, [Wolfgang Laib](#) rises to the occasion with this display of 20 installations and 30 drawings. Laib's minimalist art blends his twin loves, nature and spirituality, transforming the Beyeler's white cubes into a playground for the senses. From the overwhelming aroma of beeswax emanating from the claustrophobic *Wax Chambers* to the dazzling yellow of *Dandelion Pollen*, Laib's art is a celebration of natural materials and a joyous fusion of influences drawn from East and West. *Milkstone* flawlessly combines milk with white marble so that the elements are indistinguishable from one another, the dichotomous pairing magically transforms familiar elements into a meditative whole. (HV)

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ONE TO WATCH [[Vahakn Arslanian](#)]



Vahakn Arslanian

When he was a child, Vahakn Arslanian's mother tried to rein in his destructive habit of shattering glass. In the early '80s, when he was five years old, he visited Julian Schnabel's studio; Schnabel gave the child a hammer to break pots for a work in progress, and the painter immediately recognized a fellow artist. Deaf since birth, Arslanian has developed his cathartic destruction into a distinctive oeuvre. His prolific output of mixed-media works, made with the benefit of very little formal art training, was featured in a retrospective at Andrew Edlin Gallery in 2003, when the artist was not yet 28.

Arslanian captures everyday objects with straightforward strokes. Airplanes, birds, candles, and subway cars are recurring subjects — sometimes becoming visually intermixed — while light bulbs, Coke cans, and flowers also catch his fancy. Every work is presented in a finished form that incorporates a found picture frame, discarded window, or piece of old furniture. *Window Candles*, is a wooden sash with six panes that he transformed into a stage for a troupe of drawn candles, burning at different lengths. *Boeing 747* uses a shattered airplane window as the sculptural frame for a suspended drawing of a jet.

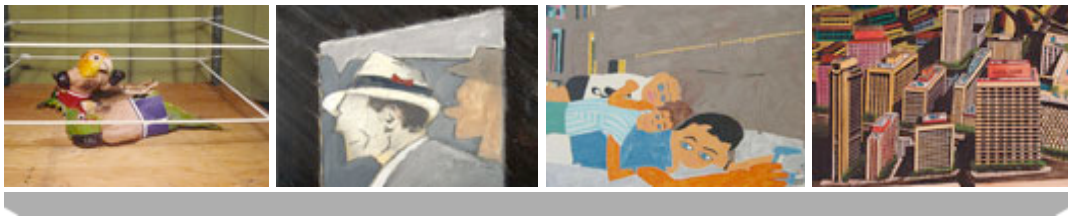
Born in Belgium in 1975, Arslanian brings to mind two of that country's most famous artists. His symmetrically arranged objects in multipanel frames are pictograms to the unconscious, relating to similar works by René Magritte, while his transformation of found furniture recalls the poetic works of Marcel Broodthaers. In Arslanian's sensitive hands, archetypal objects become luminous talismans and foreboding symbols of an unheard world. (JK)

Andrew Edlin Gallery presents Arslanian's work at the Outsider Art Fair at the Puck Building in New York January 27-29.

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INTERVIEW [Matthew Higgs]



Alba Ballard / Donald Baechler / Christopher Knowles / William Scott

Paul Laster interviews [Matthew Higgs](#), an artist, curator, and director of *White Columns*, an alternative art space in New York, about outsider art and self-taught artists.

AK: When did you first develop an interest in outsider art and self-taught artists?

MH: I first became seriously interested in art — of all kinds — as a teenager in the late '70s. This interest developed directly out of my interest in the independent music scene that emerged in the aftermath of punk. At that time — around 1978-1981 — I doubt whether I was able to formally distinguish between what was "fine art" or what was "outsider" or "self-taught" art, or even what was "design." I wasn't able to make any categorical distinctions between, say, a drawing on the front of a record sleeve by [The Fall](#), a collage by [Linder Sterling](#) for a [Buzzcocks](#) record or a [Joy Division](#) flyer, or something by [Marcel Broodthaers](#) (I came across the catalog for his 1980 [Tate Gallery](#) retrospective around this time). To me it was simply all interesting, and certainly I didn't make any hierarchical distinctions between one kind of work in relation to another. Also I didn't understand the role an art education might have in determining how an artwork was categorized, privileged, or understood. (It was probably significant that Broodthaers was "self-taught" as an artist, even though I wasn't really aware of this fact at the time.) Anyhow, by the mid-'80s (by which time I had started art school) it was clear that such hierarchical distinctions — "outsider," etc. — were, in fact, firmly established in our culture. This rigidity struck me, even as a somewhat naive 18-year-old, as counterproductive, and certainly didn't dovetail with my concurrent interests in music, art, design, etc. — which I saw as having a kind of equivalence.

AK: What was your first experience working with an outsider artist?

MH: By the time I started organizing exhibitions — in the very early '90s — I wanted to reflect my ongoing interests in material and ideas that didn't emerge from a formal or traditional art education. Consequently, one of the first projects I organized (along with the artist [Steter Doig](#)) — in 1992 — was an exhibition of paintings by [Billy Childish](#), a maverick English artist, musician, and writer, who, over the past 25 years, has recorded more than 100 albums, published 30-odd books of poetry and stories, and painted more than 2,000 pictures. Billy's work couldn't have been more different than the art that was starting to receive a degree of attention at that time in London — e.g., the conceptually based, post-minimalist work associated with [Goldsmiths College](#). Billy had managed less than a semester at art school — in the late '70s — before he was expelled, so he would certainly fall into the "self-taught" artist category: His art is untidy, visceral, and sometimes simply crude . . . but it is also disarmingly honest and direct, which seemed to act in direct opposition to some of the highly mannered and conceptually convoluted art that was being celebrated at that time.

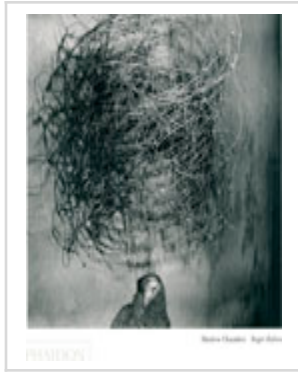
AK: Last spring *White Columns* presented the first solo show of [Urie Ramirez](#), an artist associated with the [Creative Growth Art Center](#) in Oakland. How did you discover the artist, and what motivated you to exhibit her colorful work to a contemporary-art audience?

[keep reading the interview »](#)

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MEDIA [BOOKS : MULTIPLES : DVDS]



Roger Ballen: Shadow Chamber

Robert A. Sobieszek
Phaidon

Dark and bizarre, Roger Ballen's black-and-white images conjure the spirit of Diane Arbus and then kick things up a nasty notch. Photographing an assortment of misfits, animals, and objects in derelict settings, the New York-born, self-taught artist presents an edgy, nightmarish realm straight off a psychiatrist's sofa. His subjects interact with surreal props and pose in front of walls scrawled with drawings. Trained in psychology and geology, Ballen uses the camera to address the human condition of poor rural and suburban white folks in South Africa, where he has lived for more than 20 years. His large-format pictures fill the pages of this nonograph with eye-catching yet disturbing tales. (PL)

Roger Ballen's photographs from Shadow Chamber are on view at the Fotomuseum Provincie Antwerpen in Belgium through May 28.

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