



NEW YORK FOLKLORE

newsletter

Vol. 4, No. 3
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RELIGIOUS FOLK ART EXHIBITED

Religious experience expressed in folk art is the theme of a new exhibition sponsored by the Museum of American Folk Art. The exhibit, titled "Reflections of Faith: Religious Folk Art In America," will open at the IBM Gallery of Science and Art on December 9, 1983 and remain on view until January 21, 1984. It includes over 100 examples of 19th and 20th century folk paintings, textiles, sculpture, and decorative arts.

"The works of art have been described as 'reflections of faith' because they embody personal religious beliefs or cultural values," according to guest curators C. Kurt Dewhurst and Marsha MacDowell. Mr. Dewhurst is Acting Director and Ms. MacDowell is Curator of Folk Art at The Museum, Michigan State University. They are authors of a new book which accompanies the exhibit.

NYFS SPONSORS MUSIC PERFORMANCES

"Music from the Islands: Puerto Rico, Cuba and Manhattan" is the title of an afternoon event sponsored by the New York Folklore Society. It is last in the 1983 series "Folk Art In New York" presented by the Society's New York City Chapter.

Participants, Latino music experts René López and Louis Bauzó, will discuss the music and its traditional forms. Los Pleneros De La 21 will demonstrate and perform the Puerto Rican dances, *Bomba* and *Plena*. Kubatá will perform the Cuban *rumba* and ritual music, *Abakuá* and *Lucumí*.

The event will be held Saturday, November 19, 1983, from 12-4:30 p.m. at El Museo del Barrio, 1230 5th Avenue at 104th Street. There is no charge, but contributions are welcome.

For further information, contact program coordinator Dr. Roberta Singer, (212) 673-1102 or Dr. Nancy Groce, (212) 744-0212.

Folk art from throughout the United States will be on display. Included are: Bultos of New Mexico; a trade sign portraying the angel Gabriel; a painting by the Quaker Edward Hicks; and a "Samson" table carved by Iowan Henry Washington Crouse.

Educational Events Scheduled

The folklore of American religious and ethnic groups will be the subject of a three-day symposium sponsored by the Museum of American Folk Art. It will be held January 12-14, 1984. The symposium is open to the public. Registration is required.

Four performances by folk artists are scheduled for December and January. They include traditional religious music from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Haiti, and the United States. (See "Calendar Notes" in this issue for dates and times.)

For further information about the exhibit and its related events, call the Museum's Education Department, (212) 581-2474.

NYSCA FUNDS APPRENTICESHIPS

"Ham" Ferry is well-known in New York's north country for his legends, ballads, poetry and tall tales. Bill Smith, a young hunter, trapper, guide and basketmaker, wants to study Ferry's stories so that he, too, can carry on Ferry's storytelling traditions. After the hunting season is over this winter, Smith will meet with Ferry for 20 study sessions. Smith will study Ferry's manner of delivery, his story variations, and the texts and tunes of his songs and tales.

Ferry and Smith are part of the new Folk Artist Apprenticeship program established by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The apprenticeships provide opportunities for individuals to

(Continued on page 2)



MARTHA COOPER

NYC FOLK ARTIST RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD

"Papa Manteo" is the fifth in five generations of puppet-makers. His Manteo Sicilian Marionette Theatre preserves the traditional *opera dei pupi*, a unique form of marionette theater dating to the early 19th century.

The Sicilian-American resident of Staten Island is the recipient of a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. The awards are presented to outstanding folk artists who have contributed to America's artistic heritage and cultural diversity. Manteo is one of 16 folk artists to receive a certificate and the \$5,000 award this year.

Manteo and his family use life-size puppets to perform "Orlando Furioso," a 16th century chivalric epic written by the Italian poet, Ludovico Ariosto. It depicts a medieval saga of Charlemagne and his knights.

Papa Manteo's real name is Miguel Manteo. His great-grandfather started the theater in Cantania, Sicily. In 1919, Manteo's grandfather, Agrippino, brought the theater to New York City. There, the family performed all 394 episodes from the "Orlando" cycle, enacted over 13 months.

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NEW EDITOR CALLS FOR PAPERS

Phillips Stevens, Jr. is the new editor of *New York Folklore*, the quarterly journal published by the New York Folklore Society. The editorship is sponsored by the State University of New York at Buffalo, where Stevens is a professor of anthropology. He succeeds Elizabeth Tucker, professor of folklore at SUNY, Binghamton.

Stevens has announced a new editorial policy for the journal: "Articles submitted to the Editor should represent original contributions to folklore studies. While maintaining an emphasis on the folklore of New York State, the Editor welcomes articles based on the folklore of any area of the world. Articles contributing to the theory, methodology, and geography of folklore are especially welcome, but the journal also publishes purely descriptive articles in the ethnography of folklore and provides a home for "orphan" tales, narratives, songs, etc. Contributors of the latter are urged to provide as much contextual information as possible."

Articles should be typed, double-spaced, and not exceed 7,000 words. An original and two copies of the article and an abstract should be submitted. Footnote style follows that used in the *Journal of American Folklore*. A guide to style is available from the Editor. Articles and correspondence should be sent to the Editor, *New York Folklore*, Department of Anthropology, State University of New York at Buffalo, Ellicott Complex, Buffalo, NY 14261.

New York Folklore Newsletter
North Country Community College

20 Winona Avenue
Saranac Lake, NY 12983

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EDITOR

Paula Tadlock Jennings
116 Pinehurst Avenue
New York, NY 10033

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PRESIDENT REPORTS ON FALL MEETING

At its annual meeting on October 8, the New York Folklore Society elected a new slate of officers:

President: Lee Haring, Brooklyn
Vice-President: Lydia Fish, Buffalo
Western Regional Representative: Mary Kate Brennan, Buffalo
Eastern Regional Representative: Catherine Schwoeffermann, Binghamton
Representative-at-Large: Nancy Groce, New York City
Representative-at-large: Kelsie B. Harder, Potsdam

As the New York Folklore Society's new president, I greet all friends of folklore in New York state. If you are not yet a member of our society, perhaps you should consider joining. Two new issues of our journal are just off the press. Interest in folklore in the state is at an all-time high.

Dues are now \$15 yearly. A membership form is printed on the back of this issue.

The Society's spring meeting will be held in April in New York City under the direction of the Society's New York City Chapter. The 1984 annual meeting will be held in Saratoga County on September 28 and 29.

Do try to come and participate in our activities.

Lee Haring

AWARD

(Continued from page 1)

Today, the Manteo Sicilian Marionette Theatre is the last surviving production of its kind. Papa Manteo continues to make and repair the dragons, ogres and knights in shining armor. He proudly states: "You know, you can call me a very good tailor, but not in textiles—metal! And I can make a beautiful suit."

Papa Manteo also creates the dialogue for the marionettes, speaking in *il dolce idioma*, a rare form of theatrical Italian. His sister, Ida, paints the sets and sews the silk and velvet gowns for the marionette heroines. Brothers, sons and daughters help to operate the several hundred marionettes used in the "Orlando" cycle.

Papa Manteo says of his father and the marionettes, "That was his life, and it seems to me that he left that tradition to us. We love our marionettes."

APPRENTICESHIPS

(Continued from page 1)

study intensively with an experienced folk artist. Twelve apprenticeships were awarded for 1983.

"Support for folk arts apprenticeships provide traditional artists with assistance in maintaining and perpetuating a tradition which they embody as the exponents of a community's shared cultural values and sense of beauty," according to Robert Baron, NYSCA's Folk Arts Coordinator.

In the past young people learned traditional skills and entertainment from family and community. Contemporary lifestyles have broken many of these patterns. Apprenticeships help to perpetuate these traditional arts.

New York's cultural diversity is reflected in the wide range of the apprenticeships.

1983-84 Apprenticeships

Akwesasne Cultural Center, Franklin County: Myron Clute will teach Iroquois wampun bead and belt-making to Harold Thomas; Mary Leaf will teach black-ash splint and sweet-grass basket-making to Sheree Bonaparte.

American Authentic Jazz Dance Theater, Manhattan: Pepsi Bethel will teach traditional jazz dances, such as the slow drag, the mooche and the lindy-hop to Kevin Ramsey.

Basement Workshop, Manhattan: Sahomi Tachibana will teach Japanese dances, such as Oni Kembang and Ayako mai to Theodora Yoshikami.

Capoeira Foundation, Manhattan: Jelon Vieira will teach Brazilian dances and songs of the Capoeira tradition to Herbert Kerr.

Chenango Council of the Arts, Norwich: Dudley Frasure will teach ash splint basketmaking to Timothy Wimmer.

East Hampton Historical Society, Suffolk, Suffolk: James Sprinter will teach wooden boat building to Edward Twaskas.

Echofa Folk Arts Center, Niagara: Father Chester Krysa will teach the art of pisaniki, Polish decorated eggs, to Theresa Zielinski.

Lefferts Gardens Community Music Center, Brooklyn: Frisner Augustin will teach Haitian ritual drumming to Franck Sylvain.

New Muse Community Museum, Brooklyn: Edward King will teach Panamanian dances, such as the quadrille, lancers, Caledonian and basket cotillion dances to Reuben Davis.

St. Lawrence County Historical Association, Canton: Hamilton Ferry will teach stories and songs from northern New York to William Smith.

Western New York Society for the Preservation of Italian Folklore, Buffalo: Charles Cordone and Angelo Fioerello will teach Sicilian work songs to Sam and Josephine Giengreco.

For further information about NYSCA's support for folk arts, contact Robert Baron at (212) 587-4612.



MARTHA COOPER

I see myself as a Tom Sawyer, wanting to seek adventure in every day I live.

—Mare

The schools have courses in art. How about the mothers and fathers of this city saying, "That's the wrong thing to do. You're ruining our subway. Why don't you do a little homework?"

—Mayor Edward Koch

Don't put no brown there. Red, orange and yellow. You want it to stand out. Yellow and orange around the whole thing. And then we'll put browns and beiges in the 3-D.

—Seen

They found that they can just freely destroy and deface property.

—Mother of writer

I'm an artist. I've always been an artist. We're beating the system. We're getting our names up.

—Zephyr

What you've got is a whole miserable sub-culture.

—Mother of writer

The No. 2 subway line runs through three New York City boroughs: the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. The millions of people who ride these trains every day are largely unaware of the art gallery passing before their eyes while they wait on the platform.

Few people, in fact, consider graffiti "art." It is difficult to see a pattern in the seemingly random scribbling that has defaced public property throughout the city. Most people do not know that graffiti is created in a highly competitive contest to attract teenage attention.

The young people who steal into the subway yards each weekend have created a unique, urban sub-culture. For the student of folklore and folk art, graffiti writers are far from the more comfortable personages of ballad singers and basketmakers who connect us with our rural past.

Like many other modern folk groups, however, the teenagers share a vocabulary, an oral history, ethical rules, artistic conventions, acknowledged leaders and informal apprenticeship program. There is even a graffiti marketplace, of sorts, in which a writer's style, drawings and photographs of trains may be bartered, sold or given away as gifts.

Ephemeral Art Form

Martha Cooper, a professional photographer and anthropologist, and Henry Chalfant, a sculptor, have spent hundreds of hours in the last several years photographing subway graffiti. Last year they began collaborating on a book, *Graffiti Art*, to be published by Thames and Hudson in early 1984. The book combines stunning color photographs with detailed information about graffiti writers, their social organization and history.

"Our book represents only a tiny fraction of what has been created," says Ms. Cooper.

"What is so incredible, is that with the hundreds of photographers in New York, nobody else has been systematically photographing this stuff. I think that nobody ever watched or knew that graffiti means something."

Mr. Chalfant first began photographing subway cars in the mid-1970s: "Because the graffiti was evolving at such a pace, and because the Transit Authority was using every means at its disposal to destroy it just as fast, it seemed to me to be a particularly ephemeral art form that was quickly passing into oblivion. I wanted to make a photographic record and began to spend many hours on the platforms of the el waiting for the finest paintings to roll by."

The act of carving initials into wood or stone has an ancient heritage. Spanish explorers left carvings in the Grand Canyon during their early explorations. George Washington carved his initials under the stone arch at Natural Bridge in Virginia.

It was in New York City, in 1970, that a teenager nicknamed Taki, who lived on 183rd Street in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, began to gain fame. "Taki 183" was seen everywhere. Newspapers, magazines and television stations reported on him. Young graffiti writers took note and the era of graffiti began.

Commercial Culture Provides Style

Graffiti writers in New York City generally range in age from 12 to 20, although most are between 15 and 18. They come from all ethnic and economic backgrounds and live in all boroughs of the city. Most are boys, although there are a few girl writers.

All writers share certain conventions. The heart of graffiti is the name. Each graffiti writer selects a nickname, such as Seen, Midg, Dez, Crash and Zephyr. Each competes to get his or her name up and keep it up on as many train lines as possible. Those who



UNDERGROUND

ART

by

Paula Tadlock Jennings

demonstrate persistence and talent get "fame." The best and most prolific writers become "king." "It's just like a commercial or an advertisement. You like to see your name in front of the store or up in lights, you know," explains Kase II.

Every writer has "style," a form, shape and way of connecting letters unique to an individual graffitist. Writers go to great lengths to develop style, inventing such fashions as wild style, computer style, straight letters, and micro style. An individual's style may be traded, sold or given away to a younger apprentice. More often, less talented graffitists will "bite," or steal, another's style if it proves popular.

The stylistic forerunners of graffiti are comics Vaughn Bode and Frank Frazetta, according to Mr. Chalfant. Frazetta is a science fiction illustrator. Bode is an underground cartoonist for magazines such as *National Lampoon*. Other sources for imagery are Saturday morning cartoons, comic books, advertising, characters from television programs and commercials.

"There is a whole barter system for paint and style. You can give somebody your own style. They have these black books or piece books, and they collect everybody's pieces



HENRY CHALFANT

and signatures in these books. They have photo albums of their stuff. They go to great lengths to get pictures of their pieces," says Mr. Chalfant.

The photographers became friends with many of the best writers. Their names began to show up in dedications on painted cars. Mr. Chalfant specialized in photographing whole cars, devoid of any background. His large collection quickly became a museum, of sorts, and hundreds of writers across the city began to visit his studio.

Ms. Cooper, on the other hand, wanted to document the graffitists in action — in the train yards, in their homes, with their friends, and practicing their sketches. She often stole into the train yards to photograph writers at work. She was never caught by the police: "I never could make up my mind whether I would run with the kids or just confront the cops and say I was a photographer."

Some forays into the train yards require diligent planning. Sketches are drawn and the amount and colors of paint are determined. The writer gathers 20 or 30 cans of spray paint (often stolen) of the right colors and brands. A train and location is chosen. Once in the train yard, the writer works in almost total darkness in a space approximately 3 feet deep. A train car measures 60 feet long and 12 feet wide. To reach the entire train, the writer hangs out the window, or climbs up the car and hangs on with one hand while painting with the other. It is impossible to stand back and see the entire car from a distance. Some pieces take more than 8 hours to complete.

Creative Era Passed

Ms. Cooper believes that the innovative era of graffiti has passed: "I think that graffiti was destroyed from within. About a year ago, a writer named Cap started going over

others' big pieces and wrecking them. And he got a tremendous amount of fame from that."

Writers, too, find that keeping fame is time-consuming and hard work. Many pieces never get out of the train yard. Few pieces seldom last more than a couple of days. And once a graffitist stops writing, fame is quickly lost.

Other writers share Ms. Cooper's belief. Lee, who Ms. Cooper dubs one of New York's all-time great writers, has written the following epitaph:

*There was once a time,
When the Lexington was a beautiful line
When children of the ghetto
Expressed with art, not with crime.
But then as evolution past
The transits buffing did its blast.
And now the trains look like rusted trash
Now we wonder if graffiti will ever last?*

Information for this article was collected from interviews with Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant. Mr. Chalfant's article, "New York Underground," published in *Craft International* in May, 1982, provided valuable information. The author gratefully acknowledges permission to quote from the book, *Subway Art*, by Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, and the film, *Style Wars*, produced by Tony Silver and Henry Chalfant.

Style Wars, a film about graffiti, will air on PBS on January 18, 1984.

CALENDAR NOTES

WINTER FOLK FESTIVAL SCHEDULED

Greek, East European, Jewish (klezmer), Romanian, and Yugoslav-Albanian music will be featured at the 16th annual New York Winter Folk Festival, sponsored by the Ethnic Folk Arts Center. Dance workshops, lecture-demonstrations and films are planned. The festival will be held December 2-4, 1983. A gala concert and dance party will be held at 8:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 3, at Hunter College, 695 Park Avenue, in Manhattan.

For further information, call (212) 691-9510.

ECHOTA FOLK ARTS CENTER OPENS

The newly restored home of the Echota Folk Arts Center, located in Niagara Falls, will open on December 17. An exhibit of Christmas tree ornaments, demonstrating folk artists and music will help to celebrate the day. The Center is also planning a series of classes taught by visiting folk artists. Polish wycinanki (paper cut-outs) and pisanki (egg decoration) will be taught each Saturday beginning November 19. For further information write the Echota Folk Arts Center, 5622 Buffalo Avenue, Niagara Falls 14304.

TREATIES EXHIBITED

A new exhibition titled "Iroquois Treaties and Allied Documents" opened October 28 at the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum in Salamanca, NY. It will remain on view throughout 1984. Featured are original treaties, maps, documents, quotations about the treaties, correspondence, and photographs. For further information call (716) 945-1738.

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

La Cantata Dei Pastori ("The Shepherd's Cantata"), an adaptation of a 17th century Neapolitan Christmas play by A. Perrucci, will be presented on December 16 at the Alternative Museum. In the play, dancing demons duel with ethereal archangels in a classic clash of Good versus Evil. The story is told in music and dance by masked characters and puppets. Southern Italian bagpipes are featured. The play will be held at the Museum, 17 White Street, New York City. Admission is charged. For further information, call (212) 966-4444.

PERFORMANCES HIGHLIGHT EXHIBIT

Haitian ritual music, Black gospel, Cuban and Puerto Rican music are featured in a series of religious music performances sponsored by the Museum of American Folk Art. The performances accompany the Museum's new exhibit, "Reflections of Faith: Religious Folk Art in America," which opens December 9. (See story on Page 1.) Each event will be held at St. Peter's Church, 619 Lexington Avenue, at 7 p.m. A schedule follows:

December 14: Haitian ritual music and dance, performed by Lavinia Williams.

January 13: Black gospel music, performed by composer and pianist L. D. Frazier.

January 16: Afro-Cuban music and dance, performed by Roberto Borrell and his group, Kubata.

January 19: Puerto Rican religious music, combining Catholic, Protestant and African influences, performed by Pepe Castillo.

The Museum is also organizing a series of visits to sites of religious folk culture in New York City.

December 11: Attend worship service at Institutional Church of God and Christ, Brooklyn. Bus leaves Museum at 11 a.m.

January 7: Walking tour of Trinity Church graveyard with Miriam Silverman, cemetarian.

January 8: Walking tour of Lower East Side with James Shenton, Columbia University.

January 15: Lecture on the stone carvers of the National Cathedral, presented by Margie Hunt, Smithsonian Institution and tour of St. John the Divine with the Rev. Jonathan King. Bus provided from Museum.

For further information about the performances and tours, contact the Museum's Education Department at (212) 581-2474.

MUSIC SAMPLER HONORS OLDER

Traditional musicians from upstate New York will perform in honor of Lawrence Older on Saturday, November 19 at Middle Grove Methodist church. The Lawrence Older Memorial Sampler will feature dulcimer playing, fiddling, Franco-American accordion music, ballad singing, bluegrass and storytelling. George and Vaughn Ward, who spent many years interviewing Older and learning his music, will

perform. Members of the Older family will also participate.

Older, who died last year, worked for many years in the lumber camps in northern New York. He was an accomplished storyteller and singer of lumber camp songs. In the 1950s he began traveling and performing in folk festivals throughout the United States. The Wards have recorded more than 50 hours of his songs, stories and reminiscences.

The concert will begin at 7:30 p.m. Middle Grove Methodist Church is located west of Saratoga, and north of Rt. 29. The concert is a benefit for the church building fund and admission is charged.

For travel directions and information on accommodations, phone (518) 399-0315.

SARATOGA COUNTY REMEMBERED

More than 80 people have participated in the Saratoga County Folklife and Oral History Project during the past year. The project is a year-long study of the communities of Rexford, Eastline, and Edinburg. Project Director Vaughn Ward has trained 10 local citizens in folklore interviewing techniques. They, in turn, have collected stories and information about work, community life and folkways of the county.

To celebrate the first phase of the project, two November events are planned. The newly-formed Rexford Historical Society will present "Rexford Remembers," a program of local stories and reminiscences on November 17, 1983. It will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the United Methodist Church, Main Street, Rexford, NY.

On Sunday, November 20, "Edinburg Remembers" will be held at Edinburg Town Hall from 2-5:30 p.m. Local storytelling, a display of artifacts and photographs, and a slide presentation, "Edinburg Today," will be presented.

The project is funded through a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts and sponsored by the Saratoga County Historical Society. Taped interviews and transcriptions collected during the project will form a permanent archive. It will be open to the public at the Saratoga County Historical Society in Ballston Spa.

For further information phone (518) 399-0315.

MARE AND FOAL CHOSEN AS LOGO

The mare-and-foal emblem has long been associated with the New York Folklore Society, appearing in many publications and meeting programs over the years. Now, it has been chosen as the logo for the Society's newsletter, journal, and stationary.

The photograph shows our logo's progenitor, a weathervane dating from the mid-19th century. According to Phillips Stevens, editor of *New York Folklore*, the weathervane is carved of wood and is 31" long, 19 1/4" high and 3/4" deep. It was originally painted red, with manes and tails incised and painted black.

Collectors Howard and Jean Lipman first obtained the weathervane in Rhode Island.



Its creator is unknown. The Lipman collection was acquired by the New York State Historical Association in the early 1950's. The weathervane is currently on exhibit in Fenimore House.

NOTES AND QUERIES

Articles about New York folklore are sought for possible inclusion in an anthology of the state's folklore. Unpublished and published historical items are welcome. Send copies of articles or bibliographic references to Varick A. Chittendon, Professor of English and Folklore, State University of New York at Canton, Judson Street Road, Rt. 4, Box 409, Canton, NY 13617.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The New York Folklore Society is a non-profit, membership organization founded in 1945. It is devoted to the study, preservation and presentation of folklore in New York State.

Members of the New York Folklore Society receive *New York Folklore*, a quarterly journal, *New York Folklore Newsletter*, a quarterly newsletter, announcements about conferences, festivals, and performances produced by the Society, and reduced admission charge to selected Society events.

Membership dues are \$15.00 per year.

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Please mail to:
NEW YORK FOLKLORE SOCIETY
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