

Words & Pictures

Mutterhood profiles a creative artist to peek into their process and find out what influences and inspires them. This issue we're featuring an artist who is gone but not forgotten, as a new park featuring his massive whirligigs readys to open in his honor.

Vollis Simpson

Vollis Simpson was a crafter of whirligigs and sculptures classified as “outsider” or “visionary” art. Mr. Simpson died on May 31, but left behind a tremendous body of work. Here are some excerpts from interviews and personal memories of the artist.

BIO: Growing up in North Carolina in a family of 12 children, he learned to repair things before he learned to read. After finishing the 11th grade, he joined the United States Army Air Force and served in the Pacific during World War II. After his military tour, he opened up a machine repair shop in North Carolina, married and started a family.



HIS START: His first efforts were meant to be utilitarian. When serving in the Pacific during World War II, he made his first windmill from parts of a junked B-29 bomber to wash soldiers' clothes. His second windmill wouldn't be built until the 1970's, as a reaction to the high heating fuel prices caused by the oil embargo. Designed to blow wood-heated air into the family home to save on fuel, it was abandoned in a nearby pasture when his wife complained about the smoky smell. It wasn't until years later, at age 65, that he decided to decorate the abandoned windmill with bits of scrap parts he had amassed from his repair business. With more time on his hands, his first whirligig sparked a passion that would last the rest of his life.

WHAT IS A WHIRLIGIG?: A whirligig is something that “continuously **whirls**, moves, or changes.” It comes from the middle English words “whirl” meaning to spin and “gigg” meaning a top. Although Simpson’s pieces are now referred to as whirligigs, he preferred to call them wind-mills.

THE ART: Beautiful to look at during the day, Simpson covered them in highway signs and vehicle reflectors so they shine at night.

MATERIALS:

IDEAS: Many of his pieces represent his personal history. For example, there are men sawing wood that is reminiscent of his early years working on the farm; one whirligig represents his son’s band; there are miniature airplanes representing his military stint.



Words & Pictures

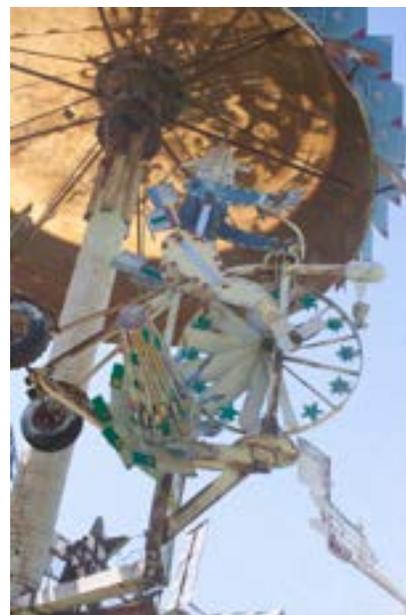
IN HIS OWN WORDS:

In a New York Times article Simpson was asked what he called his art. "Didn't call it nothing," he said. "Just go to the junkyard and see what I could get. Went by the iron man, the boat man, the timber man. Ran by every month. If they had no use for it, I took it." (NY-Times)

PUBLIC ART: His hobby was first recognized as art when the High Museum in Atlanta accepted several pieces into their collection in 1987. For the 1996 Olympic Games, Simpson created four pieces that were placed throughout downtown Atlanta. In 2009, Simpson's windmills were displayed in Bergdorf Goodman's Manhattan store during the Christmas season.

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS: A 55-foot high, 45-foot wide whirligig stands outside the American Visionary Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. Titled "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" the piece was designed specifically for the museum

THE VOLLIS SIMPSON WHIRLIGIG PARK: Slated to open in November 1, 2013 in Wilson, North Carolina, the two-acre park will feature 30 of Simpson's creations as well as a performance stage and interactive water feature. <http://www.wilsonwhirligigpark.org/>



Words & Pictures

CALL OUT: “If you don’t try something, you don’t learn anything.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-jW_MIOXqPc

Definition of Outsider or Visionary Art: His work is classified as “Outsider” or “Visionary” art, labels generally used for pieces that are created by artists who haven’t received formal training **outsider art**, synonymous until the 1980s with **art brut**, any work of **art** produced by an untrained idiosyncratic artist who is typically unconnected to the conventional art world—not by choice but by circumstance. The “classic” figures of outsider art were socially or culturally marginal figures. They were usually undereducated; they almost invariably embraced unconventional views of the world, sometimes alien to the prevailing dominant culture; and many had been diagnosed as mentally ill. These people nevertheless produced—out of adversity and with no eye on fame or fortune—substantial high-quality artistic oeuvres. From the Encyclopedia Britannica at britannica.com

Places to see Outsider or Visionary Art:

Maybe a picture of one of our Finsters????



BY THE BOOK