

The American Folk Art Museum presented its third annual Visionary Award to Sanford L. Smith at the Outsider Art Fair on February 5th. The following is Mr. Smith's acceptance speech.

SANFORD L. SMITH'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE 2010 VISIONARY AWARD:

The Visionary Award:

I would like to thank the museum for the Visionary Award, which I would like to think is not only for the Outsider Art Fair, but also for the unique shows we have created over the last 30 years.

Fall Antiques Show:

In 1979, we produced the first all-American antiques show in the world, The Fall Antiques Show. It ran for 5 days in 90-degree heat at the Park Avenue Armory. Dealers never stopped selling, and clients never stopped buying.

Modernism:

At the Fall Antiques Show, there had been 19th and 20th century dealers exhibiting and from that core we developed Modernism—the first 19th and 20th century design show in the world. That show is now going into its 25th year.

Works on Paper:

Works on Paper followed; the first true art show devoted to every medium on paper—photography, watercolors, drawings, prints, and architectural renderings.

Art at the Armory:

In 1988 we produced the first art show to take place in New York in 50 years, Art at the Armory, which celebrated the 75th anniversary of the landmark 1913 Armory Show.

Outsider Art Fair:

The Outsider Art Fair came about because we had a lot of outsider material in the original Fall Antiques Show.

Two of my assistants—Colin Smith, and Caroline Kerrigan—came to me with the suggestion that maybe we should take the dealers who had that material at the Fall Antiques Show and combine them with others to create a separate fair for outsider art.

We had lunch with Arne Anton, Roger Ricco and Frank Maresca to discuss the idea. They had concerns about it, but eventually they came in with us. The first Outsider Art Fair was born in 1993 and now we are finishing our 18th year.

American Folk Art Museum:

My relationship with the American Folk Art Museum goes back to the days when it was the Museum of American Folk Art. Over the years, I have worked with the museum, on over 40 shows: The Fall Antiques Show, The Great American Quilt Festival, and the Outsider Art Fair.

Many of the people who I started with still work there: Susan Flamm, Stacy Hollander, Lee Kogan, Ann-Marie Reilly, and Marie DiManno. Recently, under the new regime, I've worked with Maria Ann Conelli, Linda Dunn, the trustees Audrey Heckler and Sam Farber, and Brooke Davis Anderson, curator of the Contemporary Center, who has elevated the visibility of the museum with her talent and expertise.

I had never been to the new museum when former director Gerry Wertkin called me some years ago and asked me to please come see it. When I got there, I was especially taken with a Morris Hirschfield painting given to the museum by David Davies. I'm a Hirschfield fan and that was the best one I've ever seen.

I also saw the new library named for a woman who had absolutely nothing to do with the museum. As far as I know, she didn't even know it existed until her son-in-law convinced her to give money for the library.

What I did not see anywhere in the museum was a mention of Robert Bishop.

Robert Bishop:

None of you would be sitting here tonight if it weren't for Bob Bishop.

Not only was he the museum's director, the author of numerous books on folk art, the rainmaker, and the entertainer. He was a great communicator, he was a fabulous showman, and the vision he created of the museum died with him when he passed in 1991.

When the museum only had a shabby physical presence, he created a mystique about the institution by holding quality museum exhibits at the Fall Antiques Show. Because of this, people all over the country thought the museum was far more than it actually was at that time.

For some reason, he seems to be the forgotten man. How can you carry an institution into the future without acknowledging and honoring the past?

Closing Remarks:

Some of your trustees worked with him, most of you did not. A museum or any non-profit organization depends on the leadership of the trustees for its success both financial and visionary. If the trustees don't lead, then the institution is in trouble. Trustees should be there for the organization, not for their own conceits or agendas. I would hate to see this museum disappear, but it needs people to step up with financial support and true leadership. Hopefully some of you will do that.

Thank you and good night.