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Book Review. Russell, Charles, Sacred and Profane: Voice and Vision in Southern Self-Taught Art

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present-minded discourses, 'excavate' recollections of the past, and recontextualize them" (316)—a promise he makes good on.

Remembering the Year of the French is a truly engaging read but is too complicated to serve well at an introductory level. This work would function best at the graduate level on the overlapping issues of folklore, memory studies and history. For those teaching advanced courses in Irish folklore, Beiner's folk memory-centered history would complement Henry Glassie's work in treating history through the remembrances of a local community.

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WORK CITED

Glassie, Henry. 1982. *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Sacred and Profane: Voice and Vision in Southern Self-Taught Art. Edited by Carol Crown and Charles Russell. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007. Pp. xxii + 286, acknowledgments, introduction, photographs, color plates, chapter notes, bibliography, contributors, index. \$50.00 cloth.)

The concept for this book developed out of panels convened in 2002 and 2004 for meetings of the College Art Association with the intent of considering "non-schooled" southern artists through an art-historical lens that examined culture as well as biography. Following a perceptive introduction by editors Carol Crown and Charles Russell, eleven additional critics, curators, educators, and theorists interpret a range of artistic responses to social, cultural, and aesthetic fusions of quotidian living in the southern United States, often within surroundings that are profoundly spiritual. The thematic core of these essays, the South, is defined not simply in geographic terms but more conceptually as subject matter and source of artistic inspiration, with a specific focus on artists who were at work during the social, cultural, and political upheavals that changed the Old South, as defined by the Civil War, slavery, and an agrarian economy, into the New South, with its increasingly diverse population and economy, more fluid race relations, and less regional outlook. Included are well-known masters of two- and three-dimensional work, such as Bill Traylor, William Edmondson, Clementine Hunter, and Thornton Dial, as well as artists who were moved to alter their entire working and living environments, such as Howard Finster and Eddie O. Martin, and, perhaps the most famous artist collective in the country, the quilters of Gee's Bend, Alabama.

While reflecting the South's well-documented religiosity, the book does move beyond usual born-again narratives that divide artists' earlier sinful lives from their later spiritual ones; their art-making a result of their wish to communicate their religious inspiration. But the reader will find that some essays focus on a given artist's spiritual outlook while others interpret their subjects' work in more worldly ways; there is no rigorous and consistent exploration of both elements in each artist's oeuvre. An important area about which the volume is ambivalent is the study methodology for work by artists with no formal art instruction vis-à-vis work by academically trained artists and the mainstream art world's reception of untrained artists' work. It is gratifying that the editors as well as a few of the essayists have striven to erase artificial distinctions that have been deployed to segregate the study of self-taught artists, but an equal number of contributors emphasize their subjects' idiosyncrasies, fixing them as outsiders. This tension replicates the "term warfare" that art history and art criticism continue to experience and it valorizes those who seem determined to maintain separate modes of investigation for self-taught and trained artists despite manifest demonstrations of certain concurrences in approach.

This volume is at its best in the essays of such contributors as Jenifer P. Borum and Charles Russell, who do not oversimplify their artists' work on the assumption that it can have but a single source for inspiration. Individual biography, cultural history, mass marketing, music, television programming—all can serve as stimuli for the artistic gesture. A single artist may be affected by all these and more, and may make use of such stimuli in separate works or may juxtapose several sources in a single creation. "Mixing it up" like this would presumably be the prerogative of any artist, but in the present volume certain essayists appear insensitive about it or unreceptive to it. The depth to which different artists are treated by different writers also varies widely. Benny Andrews reflects on his father, George Andrews, in the kind of intimate portrait that a non-family member or non-community member could never achieve; other essayists tick off lists of artists that support their theses with one-paragraph synopses that cram in not only the briefest of biographies but also descriptions of artists' influences and work styles. Certain chapters are painstakingly researched and footnoted; Cheryl Rivers's examination of the Catholic elements in the paintings of Clementine Hunter is an outstanding example. Other chapters seem unfocused by comparison, while still others lack basic documentation (given the constantly evolving nature of art environments, for example, failure to date photographs of these sites is a critical lapse). The absence of uniform copyediting is distracting; in one particular essay we find two different spellings for two different Alabama towns and inconsistent hyphenation of the same adjective cluster.

Despite these irritants—and despite a reader's yearning for more of the photographs to be reproduced in larger format and in full color—this volume is a welcome addition to ongoing efforts to provide scholarship in a field which, perhaps because of its relative youth, has been scarred by sensationalist

metaphors and exaggerated or embellished claims. While not pretending to be the authoritative and final discourse on the topic, the book opens up a range of considerations for future study; endnotes and bibliography help steer the interested reader to additional resources. There is no doubt that students of the genre of self-taught art and artists in particular, and of Southern social or cultural or aesthetic histories in general, will find significant value in the diverse presentations. Overall, *Sacred and Profane: Voice and Vision in Southern Self-Taught Art* will serve as an important resource for a wide range of academic and popular objectives.

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Sing My Whole Life Long: Jenny Vincent's Life in Folk Music and Activism. By Craig Smith. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. Pp. xxii + 175, foreword, preface, acknowledgments, introduction, photographs, bibliography, index. \$19.95 paper.)

Can a labor of love be scholarship? In biography this is a serious question. Authors can be seduced by the object of their gaze. In that moment, critical evaluation of the life and times of the subject becomes difficult. The writer has fallen in love with the subject and there is no turning back. This need not be a complete catastrophe; many readers would rather read a biography that is sympathetic toward its hero than one that is contemptuous, especially if the subject is herself sympathetic. However, in scholarship it is not enough to love thy subject. Craig Smith's loving treatment of Jenny Vincent points to this fact. As a document of one woman's fully lived life in the twentieth century, the book offers many colorful anecdotes. It also sheds light on the urban folk song movement, on mid-twentieth century progressive politics, and on life in New Mexico. With this biography, Smith fills a gap in the history of women's involvement in the political and cultural movements of the mid-twentieth century. Readers already know such figures as Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson in these movements; the addition of Jenny Vincent's life is a true gain.

Jenny Vincent was born in 1913 in Minnesota, the daughter of a Congregational minister and a Providence, Rhode Island heiress. Eight days after graduating from Vassar with a degree in music, Jenny married and set off with her new husband to trace the life of British author D. H. Lawrence in Europe. That trip led them to Taos, New Mexico and the home of Lawrence's wife Frieda. Here, Vincent began her life in New Mexico. She and her husband opened a progressive boarding school on a ranch they purchased at San Cristobal north of Taos. The school recruited students from outside the state