MAGNIFICENT OBSESSIONS

October 27 to December 20, 2016

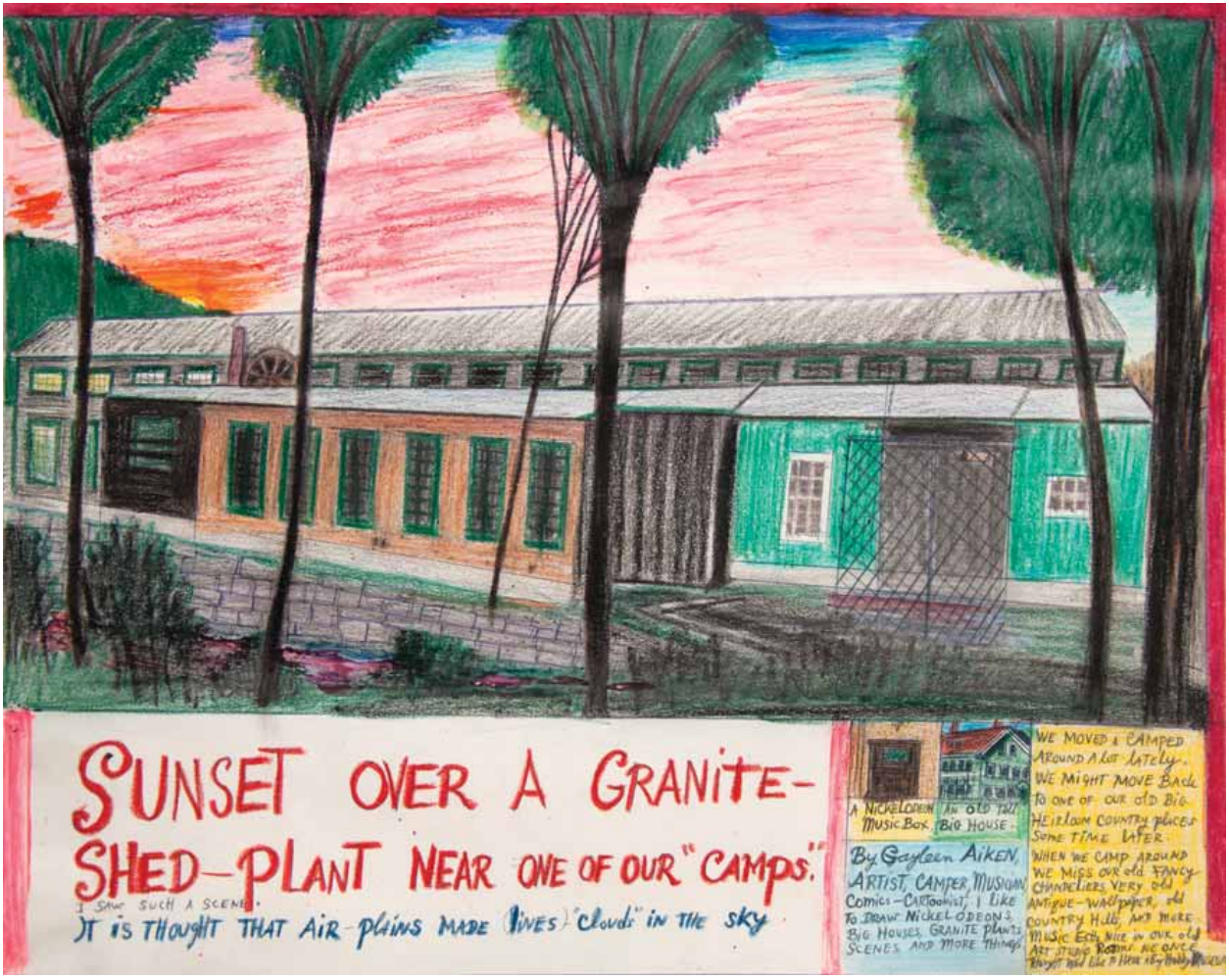
Curators: Lorri Berenberg and Stephen De Fronzo

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSIONS

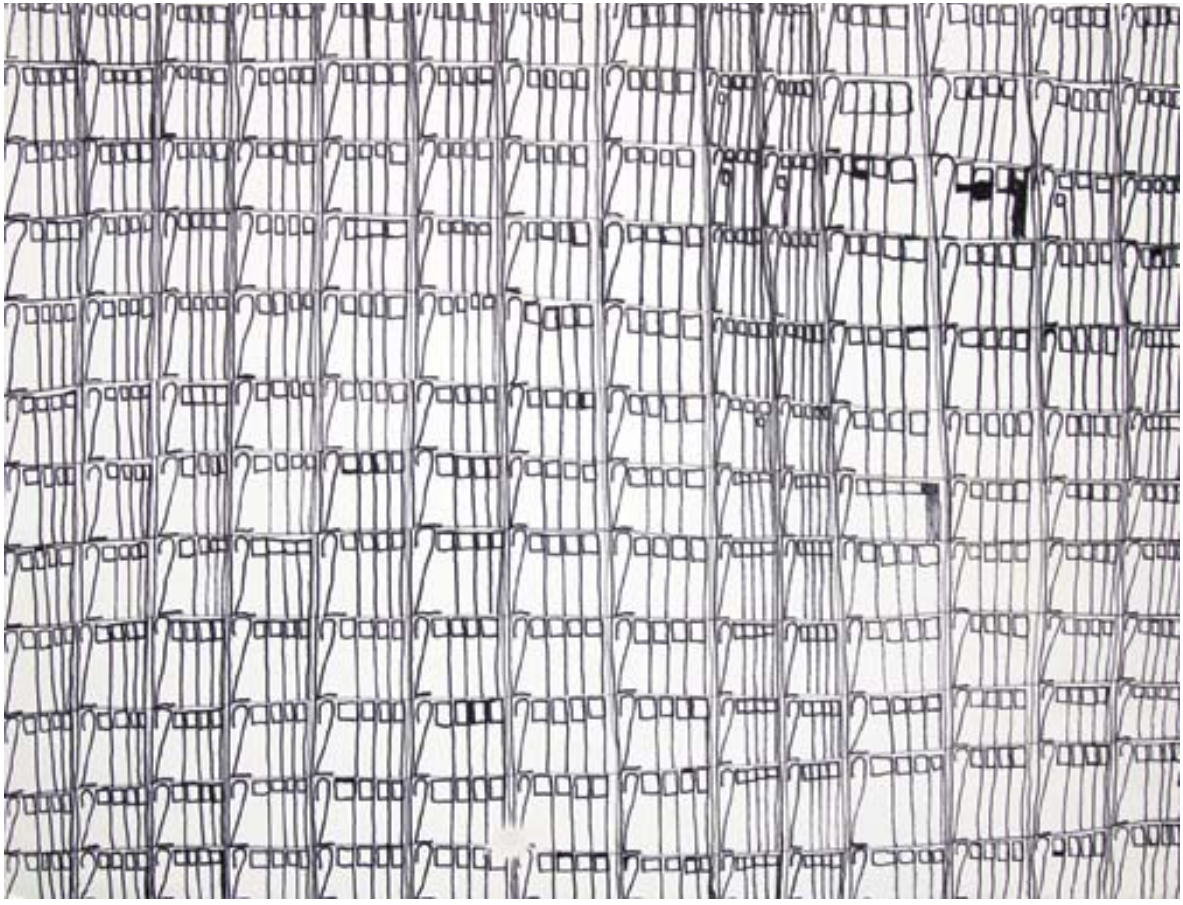
OBSESSIVE PREOCCUPATIONS with words, numbers, patterns, color systems, and details that on closer inspection reveal more details hidden within—these are the fascinations explored by the so-called "outsider artists" featured in the exhibition, **Magnificent Obsessions**. The label "outsider" generally refers to those artists working in isolation from and uninfluenced by the mainstream art world, either by choice or by circumstance. Some of the artists in this exhibition do not self-identify as artists, nor do they consider that their creations are works of art. For others, their artwork serves as the primary vehicle for communication with and connection to the world at large. Though from varied backgrounds and situations, these artists share a dynamic visual language. Their works are charged with compulsive mark making, collisions of color, repetition of text and numerals, hyper patterning, and a perseveration with the intricate mechanisms of the body, mind, and spirit.

In today's art world the lines between "outsider" and "insider" have become blurred almost to the point of irrelevancy. The current tendency is to refer to artwork made now as contemporary, regardless of the status of the art maker. **Magnificent Obsessions** presents the work of both emerging and established artists, some of whom are represented in museum collections and galleries, nationally and internationally.

Curators, Lorri Berenberg and Stephen De Fronzo

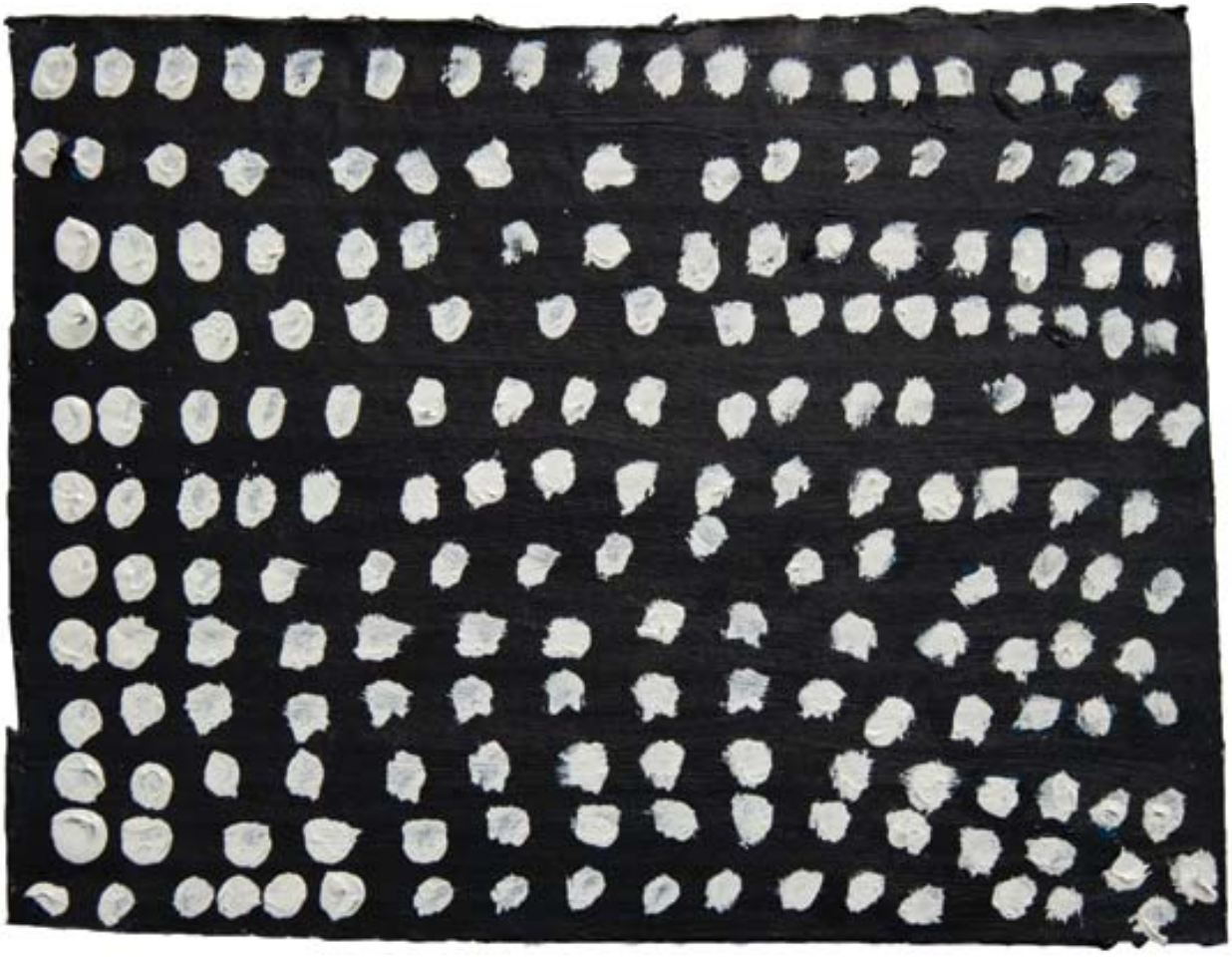


Gayleen Aiken
Sunset Over A Granite-Shed-Plant Near One Of Our "Camps", 1990
Colored pencil, ink on paper, 11″ x 14″



Yasmin Arshad
Untitled, c. 2012
Ink on rag paper, 22″ x 30″

Amy Caliri
Untitled, 2016
Acrylic on canvas, 24″ x 36″

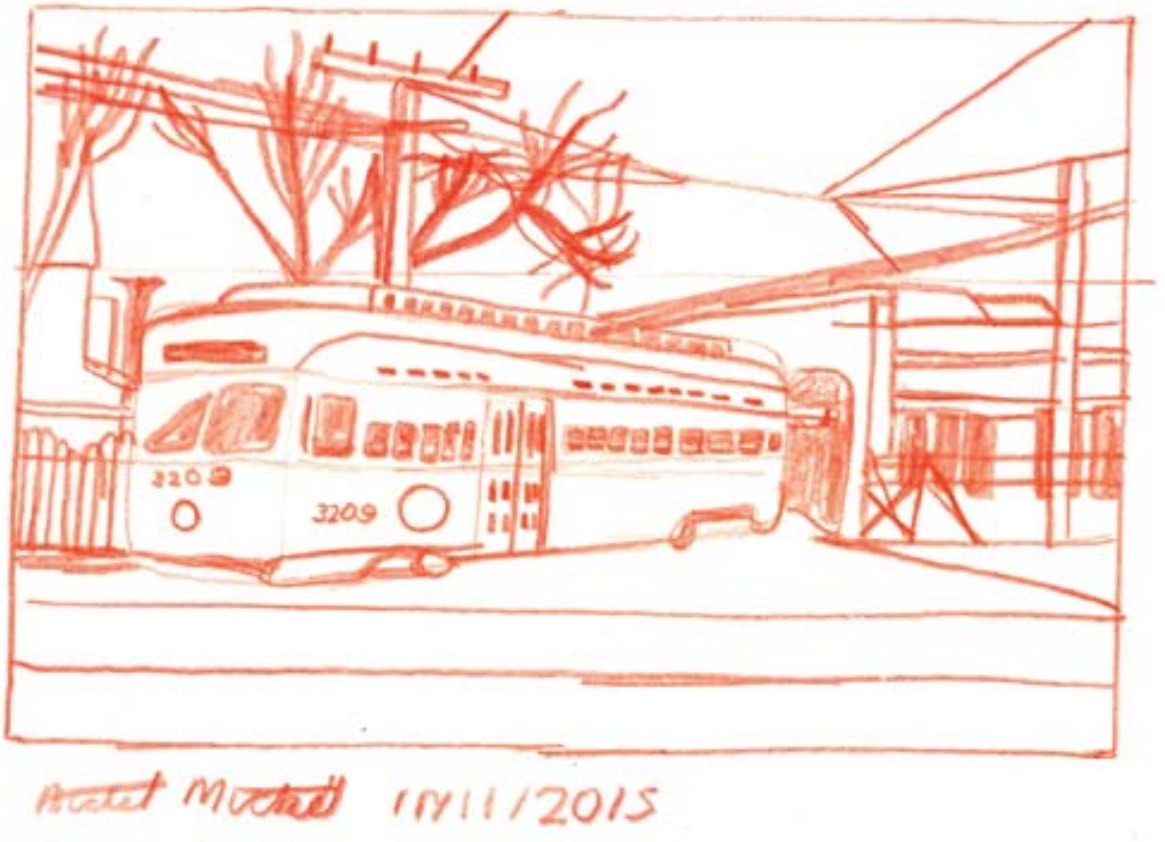


Hugh Cameron
Untitled (#4), 2014
Acrylic on cardboard, 7.75″ x 10″

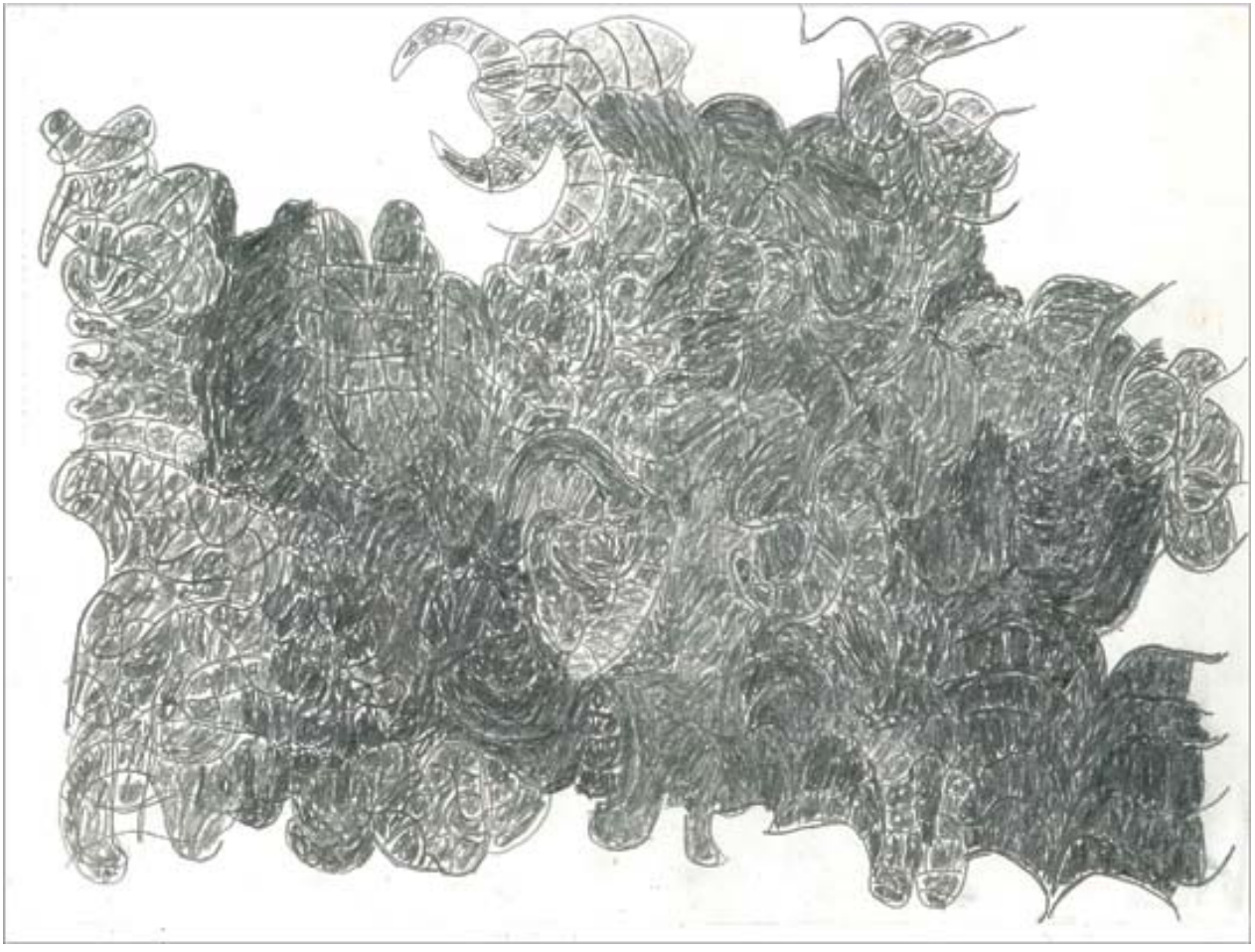
John Colby
Untitled, c. 2010
Colored pencil on rag paper, 11″ x 9.5″

Robert Kirshner
Untitled, 1995
Pencil, crayon on paper, 12.5″ x 17″

Michael Madore
Jacta Alea Est, 2004
Ink, acrylic on paper, 25″ x 19″



Abdel Michel
Untitled, 2015
Colored pencil on paper, 5.5″ x 8″



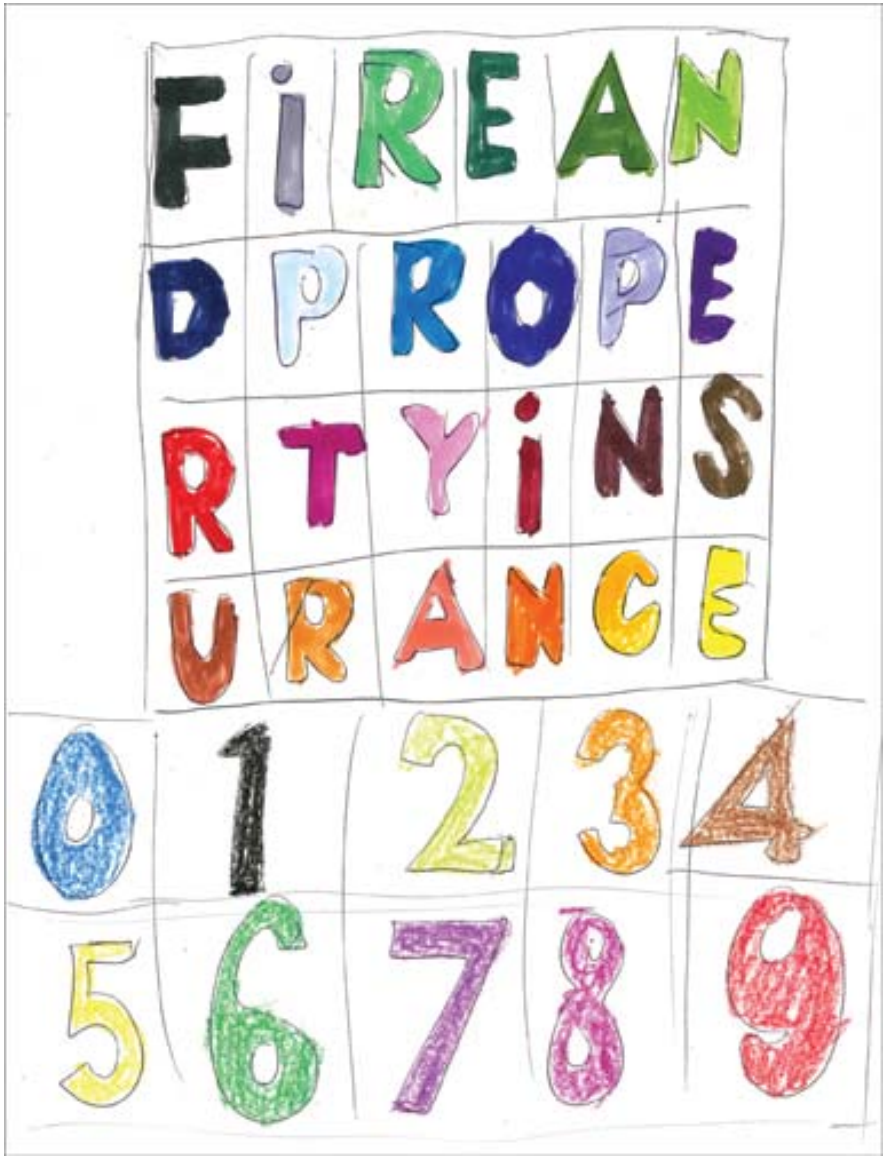
Sidney Perry
Untitled, c. 2012
Pencil on paper, 9″ x 12″

Carl H. Phillips
Untitled, 2015
Marker, ink, pencil on tracing paper, 11″ x 8.5″

Abdellah RamRam
Profile Of Woman (After Picasso), 2016
Ballpoint pen, metallic marker on paper, 30″ x 22″

Carmella Salvucci
Grain Exchange Building and Customs Tower, Boston, 2016
Acrylic on paper, 18″ x 12.5″

Jon Sarkin
Brush, 2006
Mixed mediums on canvas, 24″ x 24″



Roger Swike
Untitled, 2015
Ink, watercolor on paper, 12″ x 9″

Sanford Winslow
Untitled, 1997
Scratchboard, 40″ x 40″

ARTIST BIOS

Gayleen Aiken (1934 - 2005)

Gayleen Aiken was born in Barre, Vermont where she lived her entire life. In the 1980s Aiken participated in workshops offered by Vermont's Grass Roots Art and Community Effort (GRACE). Through GRACE she gained recognition as a prominent American folk and visionary artist. Recurring themes in Aiken's work are her beloved farmhouses, the local granite industry, and Vermont's beautiful country scenery. Her art is in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC; the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Museum of American Folk Art in Williamsburg, VA; the American Folk Art Museum in New York City, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Museum in Philadelphia. Aiken was the subject of Jay Craven's award-winning film *Gayleen* and the recipient of a Vermont Arts Council fellowship. *Moonlight and Music: The Enchanted World of Gayleen Aiken* by novelist Rachel Klein was published in 1997.

Yasmin Arshad (b. 1974)

Since joining Gateway Arts in 1995, Yasmin Arshad has explored the parameters of her own personal iconography. The substance of her work is made up of grids, calendars, colors, numbers, and words. She is very particular and must have just the right blue paint to work with or just the right size paper. She is fascinated by calendars and the millennium, writing every number between the year 2000 and 3000. She decided that the number 129999 was akin to infinity and made a series of drawings using that number. She became obsessed with the word "yes" and made many artworks covered with that word in many different mediums. Arshad's work has received a great deal of attention and has been exhibited in Massachusetts at the Gateway Gallery, the Berenberg Gallery, Drive-By Projects, and the Fuller Craft Museum. In New York her work has been shown at the Outsider Art Fair, Cooper Union, and the Phoenix Gallery. She exhibited in San Francisco at Creativity Explored and her work is in the collection of the Museum of Everything in London, England. Most recently her work was exhibited at the 21st Century Museum in Kanazawa, Japan.

Amy Caliri (b. 1976)

Amy Caliri is a prolific and profoundly curious artist. Along with American Sign Language she uses her work to communicate with others in the Gateway Arts studios. At times her work is autobiographical, creating calendar-like grids with colors and journal entries. At other times she likes to draw and paint animals with thick black outlines and bright colors, a style that could be attributed to a visual deficit. She also works non-objectively, using bold lines and colors. Her work is highly collectible. Caliri's work has been shown in Massachusetts at the Gateway Gallery, the Berenberg Gallery, Drive-By Projects, and the Fuller Craft Museum. In 2010 she received an award from the Plymouth Center for the Arts in Plymouth, MA. Her work was reviewed in 2015 by Cate McQuaid in *The Boston Globe*.

Hugh Cameron (b. 1945)

For Hugh Cameron, art is second nature. There are artists in his family and he has enjoyed making art from a young age. His vision is simple: He likes to make marks, literally. Cameron can be seen in the Gateway Arts studios absorbed in the process of covering a surface with dots, dashes, and tiny triangles or squares in a variety of mediums. The obsessive compositions are informed by patterns found in nature and woven fibers. In Massachusetts his work has been exhibited in the Gateway Gallery, the Open Door Gallery, and in the windows of Barneys New York.

John Colby (b. 1955)

When John Colby began attending Gateway Arts in 1990, he did not make art at all. He was most comfortable with writing wry poetry. Head injured at the age of 18, Colby was seeking a career. Over time his artwork progressed from making collages with letters to calligraphic brush painting. Eventually he settled on graphic mediums like pencil and ballpoint pen and the lettering slowly transformed into scribbles. Colby's drawings made up of overlapping fine lines have gained him entry into the contemporary art world where his minimalist imagery and obsessive technique are revered. His work is sought after by collectors across the country and around the world. In Massachusetts his work has been exhibited at the Gateway Gallery, the Berenberg Gallery, Drive-By Projects, and the Fuller Craft Museum. He has shown at Creativity Explored in San Francisco, CA and his work is in the collection of the Museum of Everything in London, England. Recently his work was exhibited at the 21st Century Museum in Kanazawa, Japan.

Robert Kirshner (1955-2009)

Robert Kirshner was one of the best known artists to ever work in the Gateway Arts studios. An only child, he suffered from the inability to speak although he read the newspaper daily. He used art to communicate. His drawings often incorporate words, or are made up of only a few words. His work, most often in pencil and crayon, is layered with deep gouges and many erasures which give the surface a feeling of movement and liveliness. He was fascinated by the construction of the urban landscape and by the trucks, cranes, and backhoes that made it possible. He also loved to make drawings about sports, trains, coffee, and bagels. Kirshner's work has been exhibited in Massachusetts at the Gateway Gallery, the Berenberg Gallery, and the Fuller Museum of Art. In New York his work has been shown at the Outsider Art Fair, the Bridges Bodell Gallery, Cooper Union, and the Phoenix Gallery. His work has been reviewed by Christine Temin in *The Boston Globe* and Stacy Soave in *Art New England*.

Michael Madore (b. 1954)

Michael Madore attended Trinity College where he received a BA in English and Art History in 1977. In 1990 he earned an MFA in Painting from Yale University. It wasn't until 2001 that Madore was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and became active within the autism community. Madore writes, "As a person with Asperger's Syndrome, I live in a world subsumed by detail and tenuous protocol... where social and to some extent physical reality is easily bogged down by teratogenic noise, dubious data, and prickly, often remote third parties." Madore's art has been widely exhibited in both galleries and museums in the U.S. and Europe and has been written about in numerous publications including *Artforum*, *Raw Vision*, *Art in America*, *Clinical Psychiatry News*, and *The New York Times*.

Abdel Michel (b. 1986)

Abdel Michel is a collector and chronicler of information about urban transit systems. In the Boston area he travels from station to station, observing and picking up transit maps and other paraphernalia. He is dedicated to documenting the history of the MBTA, its subway lines, stations, and buses. He arrives at the Gateway Arts studios daily with a bag full of inspirational materials from which he creates drawings in pencil and 3D paper constructions of buses. Another of Michel's passions is the animated character Sonic the Hedgehog. In pencil drawings he creates stories and situations for Sonic and his friends. In Massachusetts his work has been exhibited at the Fuller Craft Museum, the Gateway Gallery, and the Open Door Gallery. His work is in the collection of the Museum of Everything in London, England.

Sidney Perry (b. 1943)

Sidney Perry was born in Alabama and began attending Gateway Arts in 1983. A quiet man, Perry produces his drawings in many mediums and on a variety of surfaces from paper to pottery and fabric. His style is fanciful with meandering lines, curlicues, and all-over patterning. His work can mimic foliage, landscapes, constructions, or a faraway view of the cosmos. He is a dedicated artist and seems always to be working. Perry's work has been exhibited in Massachusetts at the Gateway Gallery, the Lincoln Gallery, the Zeitgeist Gallery, the Fuller Craft Museum, and the Star Center at Brandeis University. In Virginia his work was shown at James Madison University and at the Very Special Arts Gallery in Washington, DC. His work was also shown at Bottisham Village College in Cambridge, England.

Carl H. Phillips (b. 1980)

Carl H. Phillips is consumed by popular media. This affable young man can be found in the Gateway Arts pottery studio rendering in clay 3D commercial icons such as the Energizer Bunny. The images he creates have to be exactly as they exist in the world. He appropriates comic book characters using tracing methods to configure new situations with other characters in his "crossover" drawings. He carries a notebook of lined paper in which he stores hundreds of tiny images that he has drawn which he will later use to make artworks. The influence of contemporary branding and advertising informs the subject matter of his work. Phillips' artwork has been shown in Massachusetts at the Gateway Gallery, the Berenberg Gallery, Drive-By Projects, and the Fuller Craft Museum.

Abdellah RamRam (b. 1966)

A native of Morocco, Abdellah RamRam has been drawing his entire life. He moved to the United States in 2000 and currently lives in the Boston area. Ballpoint pen serves as RamRam's primary drawing tool. Thousands of tiny circles the size of a sesame seed are used to form lines and shapes. He later enhances the drawings with colored markers and pencils. It is not uncommon for him to stain the paper with coffee in order to achieve an antique look to the image. RamRam's intricately detailed drawings are a celebration of life, humanity, spirituality, and nature. Combining image and text, which is calligraphically scripted in many different languages including his native Arabic, he calls for peace and understanding between different cultures and religions.

Carmella Salvucci (b. 1951)

Using images she finds in book and photographs, Carmella Salvucci paints the urban landscape and interiors of well-known Boston landmarks. The photos she uses are often black and white, but she transforms the images into highly detailed colorful works which belie her quiet unassuming demeanor in the Gateway Arts studios. Color is what she likes most about making art. She is the consummate observer and draws from life as well as from her imagination. She has enjoyed considerable success and has completed many commissioned works. Images of her work have been reproduced as posters, cards, mugs, and other objects. Her work has been exhibited and collected throughout the United States and abroad. In Massachusetts her work has been exhibited at the Fuller Craft Museum, the Berenberg Gallery, the Gateway Gallery, and Drive-By Projects. In New York her work has been exhibited at the Outsider Art Fair, the Bodell Gallery, and the Cork Gallery in Lincoln Center. In 1995 she was the Massachusetts representative in the "Once Around America" exhibition sponsored by Very Special Arts in Washington, DC. Her work was recently exhibited at the 21st Century Museum in Kanazawa, Japan.

Jon Sarkin (b. 1950)

Jon Sarkin is a contemporary self-taught artist living in Gloucester, MA. The neurological effects of a stroke in 1989 led him to be wildly prolific. This condition, known as "sudden artistic output," profoundly affected his perception of the world, a change that is reflected in his art. Popular culture, comics, literature, movies, and music influence Sarkin's work, which is crowded with words and images. He has been featured in numerous publications and documentaries including *GQ*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *ArtNews*, Primetime Live, The Discovery Channel, and the BBC. Sarkin's work has been exhibited in New York, London, Los Angeles, and Boston. His biography, *Shadows Bright as Glass*, was written in 2011 by Pulitzer-prize winning author Amy Ellis Nutt.

Roger Swike (b. 1962)

Roger Swike is an identical twin and one of fourteen children. He spent his childhood drawing on the living room walls. When he is not drawing on paper, he is drawing in the air with his finger. Swike's obsession with drawing brought him to Gateway Arts in 1995. His artworks exist on a number of levels. One layer is the system derived from the ten digits, 0-9, with colors ascribed to each of the numbers. Another layer is the specific image that accompanies each of the numbers and colors. Other layers are comprised of grids or lists superimposed on structures filled with names, dates, television programs, trivia, and minutiae. His work reflects a complex realm where an inscrutable mind is at work. He has been featured in the blog *Disparate Minds* and has been curated into an exhibition at the Good Luck Gallery in California. His work has been shown in New York at the Outsider Art Fair, Cooper Union, the Bridges Bodell Gallery, and the Phoenix Gallery. In Massachusetts his work has been shown at the Gateway Gallery, the Berenberg Gallery, the Open Door Gallery, and the Fuller Craft Museum.

Sanford Winslow (1950 – 2002)

Sanford Winslow lived his life in Newton, MA. While attending Boston University, Winslow had a schizophrenic episode that led to years of residence in psychiatric hospitals and halfway houses. Managing his illness through medication and creating art, Winslow was eventually able to live independently. A life-long musician, references to rock and roll and other musical themes recur in his art. Beginning with writing and drawing in the 1970s, he developed his bold painting style in the 1980s and was introduced to scratchboards in 1990. Winslow's work has been included in exhibitions at the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, MD and the Fuller Museum of Art in Brockton, MA. He has been represented at the Outsider Art Fair in New York City and galleries in New York and Boston. Winslow was featured in the traveling exhibition and major publication, *The End is Near!: Visions of Apocalypse, Millenium and Utopia*, curated by Roger Manley.

CURATOR BIOS

Lorri Berenberg, Co-curator

Lorri Berenberg is currently the Vice President of the Board of Trustees of the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, MA where she chairs the Strategic Planning Committee and serves on the Learning and Engagement Committee (which she chaired for six years), Curatorial Programs Committee, Development Committee, and Trustee Executive Committee. She also served on the Fund for the Future Committee and the Search Committee for the deCordova's new director.

Ms. Berenberg is also the Chairperson of the Advisory Committee for Gateway Arts in Brookline, MA, where she has been involved for over a decade. She is a member of the Lesley University Friends Group. She is a member of the Arlington Public Art Committee (a volunteer Town Committee) and serves on their steering committee for a major public art initiative to be launched in the Fall of 2016. She is a former member of the Board of Trustees at VSA Arts, Massachusetts where she currently serves on their Gallery and Exhibitions Committee. She has guest curated exhibitions at The Arsenal Center for the Arts in Watertown, MA; The Groton School in Groton, MA; VSA Arts in Boston, MA; Gateway Arts in Brookline, MA; and Art Rocks Spy Pond in Arlington, MA.

Lorri was the owner and director of the Berenberg Gallery from 1999 to 2009. The Berenberg Gallery was the first and only gallery in the Boston area exclusively dedicated to showcasing the work of contemporary folk and self-taught artists, specializing in the work of artists with disabilities. She collaborated with studio art centers for artists with disabilities throughout New England, California, and the Midwest, obtaining the finest work by established and emerging artists. The gallery regularly participated in the International Outsider Art Fair in New York City.

Prior to opening the gallery, Ms. Berenberg worked at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where she served as the Associate Director for Outreach in Division of Education and Public Programs. During her twenty-two year tenure at the MFA, she developed some of the museum's most popular and innovative programs, designed with the mission of making the museum more accessible to children, families, members of Boston's inner city communities, and visitors with disabilities. She helped to raise several significant endowments for these programs. Ms. Berenberg is an experienced educator as well as arts administrator.

Lorri earned her M.Ed. from Lesley College and her B.A. from Tufts University. She lives in Arlington, MA with her husband, Rob Wilstein, who is a visual artist and writer.

Stephen De Fronzo, Co-curator

Stephen De Fronzo is currently the Artistic Director of Gateway Arts in Brookline, MA, a studio art center for artists with disabilities. For the past 30 years, he has been a key member of a team that has created this model center comprised of art studios, a gallery, and a store, which serves more than 100 artists through the non-profit human service corporation, Vinfen.

Mr. De Fronzo is an artist and teacher and was a founding member of the Jamaica Plain Arts Council. He received an MFA from Pratt Institute in New York and a BFA from Massachusetts College of Art in Boston.

Mr. De Fronzo has curated over 100 exhibitions for the Gateway Gallery in Brookline. He has worked with museum curators and gallerists across the country and around the world promoting and placing the work of Gateway artists in exhibitions and collections.

For the past 17 years Stephen De Fronzo and Lorri Berenberg have at times collaborated in an effort to present the work of so-called "outsider artists" to the general public. They have worked together on exhibitions for the Gateway Gallery, the Berenberg Gallery in Boston, the Outsider Art Fair in New York City, VSA Arts in Boston, and the Arsenal Center for the Arts in Watertown, MA.

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Mission:
To promote and advance
the visual arts and artists,
and to enrich and sustain
our cultural community.

above, Jon Sarkin, *Untitled,* 2013
Mixed mediums on found album cover, 12.25″ x 12.25″

front cover, John Colby, *Untitled,* c. 2010
Ink on paper, 16″ x 17.5″

All artwork photographed by Gary Batty.