

## J.B. MURRAY

b. 1908 in Sandersville, Georgia; died 1988 in Sandersville, Georgia

John Bunion ("J.B.") Murray (often spelled "Murry") was born in 1908 in a remote community in Glascock County in central Georgia. He worked as a tenant farmer in a small shack with his wife and eleven children. When he was in his fifties his wife left him, and with his children already grown and gone, he found himself alone in a very remote area. It wasn't until years later in the late 1970s, that Murray began his artistic career.

Murray suffered from hallucinations, which for a brief time caused him to be institutionalized. He was also fervently religious and inherently distrustful of those who did not believe in God—he felt that evil spirits inhabited the world, spirits that could be destructive to those who were not watchful. These factors may have been the impetus for his original creations. He started out creating different structures and protective devices designed to shield himself from the dangers of the outside world. These pieces most likely began as small mysterious piles of rocks and other found materials that could be seen scattered across his property.

As time went on, he moved toward drawing and painting. Everything that went into these pieces, from the colors used to the materials they were painted on, had a specific message and meaning for Murray. For example, in Murray's system of colors, red represented torment or evil forces, blue represented positive strength and good, yellow indicated a divine presence, or energy embodied by the sun. White represented otherworldliness and spiritual purity relating to death or the afterlife, and black denoted imperfection or impurity. Frequently Murray would paint out spiritual forms that he visualized existing in the world, sometimes opposing one another, sometimes existing in harmony.

The pieces would frequently incorporate an illegible calligraphic script. Murray received very little formal education and was most likely illiterate, but following a vision in 1978, he began to formulate his own cursive script which he alone was able to decipher. He kept a bottle of what he called "holy water" on a table beside his bed which he often would raise skyward in prayer. Murray believed that reading the script while looking through this clear vial would produce "readings" or holy messages.

In the early 80's, Murray was diagnosed with prostate cancer, an illness that further influenced his artistic temperaments. After years battling this condition, it finally took his life in 1988. Cavin-Morris is proud to be able to show and study the prolific collection of work that he left behind.

### Solo Shows:

- 2022: J.B. Murray: This Well is Deep & Never Go Dry, Texas Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2018: Eagle Crossed the Sun: Visionary Works by J.B. Murray, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY
- 2017: J.B. Murray: Visions from the Sun, Shrine Gallery, New York, NY
- 2001: 33 Drawings by J.B. Murray, Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York City, NY

### Group Shows:

- 2023: Southern Somebodies, The Gallery of Everything, London, England  
Death of an Outsider, Shrine, Los Angeles, CA

- 2022: Living Legacies: Art of the African American South, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH  
Off the Grid, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
- 2021: What I Know: Gifts from Gordon W. Bailey, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR
- 2020: ONLINE: Parallel, Whitespace, Atlanta, GA  
'Scrivere Disegnando' (Writing by Drawing), Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland
- 2019: Way Out There: The Art of the Southern Backroads, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
- 2018: Annex, Shrine Gallery, New York, NY  
Duende: Artists Translating Spirits, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY  
Outsider Art Fair NY, represented by Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY  
Outsider Art Fair Paris, represented by Cavin-Morris Gallery, Paris, France  
The Museum of Everything, Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia  
Yard Show, Shrine Gallery, New York, NY  
Self-Taught Genius: Treasures from the American Folk Art Museum, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
- 2017: Outsider Art Fair NY, represented by Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY  
Medium, Zuckerman Museum of Art, Kennesaw, Georgia
- 2016: Cavin-Morris Summer Spotlight, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY  
A New World in My View: Gifts from Gordon W. Bailey, The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY  
Glossolalia, Texas Gallery, Houston, TX  
Art Bruts and Beasts, Luise Ross Gallery, New York, NY  
Group Exhibition, Delmes & Zander, Cologne, Germany  
Galleries for Folk and Self-Taught Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.
- 2015: Rhizome: New Growth at Cavin-Morris Gallery, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY  
Vodun, Vodou, Conjure: Animistic Arts of the African Diaspora, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY  
dRAW, Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, Chicago, IL  
Amen, Amen: Religion & Southern Self-Taught Artists, Jundt Art Museum, off University, Spokane, WA  
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA
- 2014: When the Stars Begin to Fall, Studio Museum Harlem, New York City, NY  
The Visionary Art of J.B. Murray, Museum of African American Art, Los Angeles, CA  
John Bunion (J.B.) Murray: Divine Messages, Yukiko Koide Presents, Tokyo, Japan  
Collectionneur de mondes – Art différencié international, Musée de l'abbaye Sainte-Croix, France
- 2013: Two Transcend: Drawings by J.B. Murray & Melvin Edward Nelson, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York City, NY  
Ashe to Amen: African Americans and Biblical Imagery, Museum of Biblical Art, New York City, NY  
Outsider Art Fair: Paris, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York City, NY  
Metro Show, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York City, NY  
Fully written and therefore complete..., Galerie Susanne Zander, Cologne, Germany  
Outsider Art Fair, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York City, NY  
Group Exhibition, Galerie Susanne Zander, Köln, Germany  
Voodoo Child: Mary T. Smith and J.B. Murray, galerie abcd, Paris
- 2012: HomeGround: Art from the Pan-African Diaspora, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York City, NY
- 2011: Outsider Visions: Self-Taught Southern Artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Boca Museum of Art, Boca Raton, FL  
The Keno Twins 4, Galerie de Stadt Esslingen - Villa Merkel, Esslingen, Germany
- 2009: Approaching Abstraction, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
- 2008: Textacy, Yukiko Koide Presents, Tokyo
- 2005: Coming Home! Self-Taught Artists, the Bible, and the American South, Museum for Biblical Art, New York, NY

- Interior Motives, Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York City, NY
- 2004: Summer Salon, Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York City, NY
- 2001: Group Show [In Conjunction with Elsa Mora Solo Show], Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York City, NY  
ABCD: A Collection of Art Brut, Museum of American Folk Art, New York, NY  
Hands Across the Sea, Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York City, NY
- 1996: Fundamental Soul: The Hager Gift of Self-Taught African-American Art, Krannert Art Museum, IL  
Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Emory University, Atlanta, GA  
Group Exhibition, Cyril Gerber Fine Art, Glasgow, Scotland
- 1993: Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Marginal Art, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Madrid and Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland

Permanent Collections:

American Folk Art Museum  
Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Smithsonian American Art Museum  
Neuve Invention Collection, Collection de l'Art Brut Lausanne  
Souls Grown Deep Foundation  
Outsider Collection, Tate Britain  
Minneapolis Museum of Art  
Museum of Everything  
abcd Collection  
Antoine deGalbert Collection

Publications:

- L. Clifton-James and MS Wahlman. "B. Murray and the Scripts and Spirit Forms of Africa," 2022.
- "Écrits d'Art Brut: Graphomanes Extravagants," by Lucienne Piery, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2020.
- "J.B. Murray: Painting in Signs," Raw Vision # 101, Spring Issue, 2019.
- "L'Art Brut," Martine Lusardy, Citadelles & Mazenod, Paris, France, 2018, pg. 500-501.
- Finley, Cheryl, Randall R. Griffey, Amelia Peck, and Darryl Pickney. *My Soul Has Grown Deep: Black Art from the American South*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018.
- Padgelek, Mary, "This Well Grow Deep and Never Run Dry," Raw Vision #58, Spring Issue, 2007.
- "Hands of the Spirit," stage play by Mary Padgelek. Premiere: Lyndon House Arts Center, Athens, GA, 2007.
- Gundaker, Grey and Judith McWillie. *No Space Hidden: The Spirit of African American Yard Work*. University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, TN, 2005.
- Padgelek, Mary. *In the Hand of the Holy Spirit: The Art of J.B. Murray*. Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 2000.
- "J.B. Murray: Reading Meaning," Outsider Magazine, 2000
- Arnett, William and Paul. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art, Vol. I & II*. Tinwood Books/Souls Grown Deep Foundation, Atlanta, GA, 2000.
- J. B. Murray: Writing in Unknown Tongues*, dir: Judith McWillie. Independently produced. Film, 1986.