



Sister Gertrude Morgan
*And Behold a Door Was
Opened*, c. 1970
Mixed media on paper
9¼ × 11⅝ in
(23.5 × 29.5 cm)

And Behold a Door Was Opened: 20th Century Self-Taught Selections

November 21, 2024 – January 4, 2025

And Behold a Door Was Opened: 20th Century Self-Taught Selections

Opening reception: November 21, 6–8pm

Eddie Arning
Consuelo "Chelo" González Amézcuca
James Castle
Miles Carpenter
Henry Ray Clark
Lee Godie
William Hawkins
Frank Jones
Sister Gertrude Morgan
Elijah Pierce
Martín Ramírez
Philadelphia Wireman
Adolf Wölfli
Inez Nathaniel Walker
Purvis Young
Joseph Yoakum
Carlo Zinelli

And Behold a Door Was Opened highlights an important roster of 20th century self-taught artists, all increasingly recognized as important contributors to American and European art history. Many of the artists included in the exhibition are people of color who were marginalized by race, poverty, and displacement, and arrived at art-making later in life. Artists including Frank Jones, Purvis Young, Inez Nathaniel Walker, and

Henry Ray Clark were incarcerated and devoted themselves to art while doing time. Others, like Martín Ramírez and Adolf Wölfli, a Mexican immigrant to the United States and a Swiss, respectively, spent most of their lives in psychiatric hospitals where they came into their own as reputable artists. Despite such hardships, or perhaps as a result of them, each made singular, highly original bodies of work using novel materials and methods, engaging with both personal and socio-cultural narratives.

Several of the artists were assisted by helpful caregivers, psychologists, and instructors during their incarceration or institutionalization who recognized their talent and sought opportunities for them outside of confinement. Martín Ramírez, institutionalized for schizophrenia, was first recognized as an artist of merit by the psychologist Tarmo Pasto, who provided artist materials, cataloged and preserved the artist's work, arranging its exhibition at California university galleries in the early 1950s. Similarly institutionalized, Adolf Wölfli also benefited from the attention of a dedicated resident psychiatrist who provided him with materials, encouraged his creativity, and published a well-regarded book on Wölfli, which brought the artist wide recognition. Inez Nathaniel Walker's figurative drawings were admired by an English teacher with whom she was studying in prison in upstate New York. Soon, Walker's instructor was buying Walker's work and introduced it to art dealer Pat Parsons. Frank Jones was lucky to be on the receiving end of prison reform in the early 1960s where a foresighted Texas state prison director initiated an art-in-prisons program including an art contest that Jones won, drawing the attention of a gallerist who sold and exhibited Jones's work. While it is not known whether prison staff provided support during Purvis Young's three year incarceration as a young man, it was during imprisonment that he began drawing and reading about art. Upon his release, Young dedicated himself to artmaking and bettering his community.

Elijah Pierce and Sister Gertrude Morgan were preachers before they became artists. Pierce carved biblical scenes, important figures from African-American history, and images of American life, displaying his work in his barbershop (barbering was yet another vocation alongside preaching—later came art). Realizing that art could function as a tool for religious messaging, in the mid-1950s, Sister Gertrude Morgan began incorporating painted and drawn images with text to complement her sermons. Morgan had an affinity for white, painting her Everlasting Gospel Mission building white, wearing signature white garb, and depicting herself and others in her paintings and drawings as white-frocked believers.

Our Philadelphia audience will recognize the names James Castle and Philadelphia Wireman as backbone artists of our historical self-taught program. In contrast to many of the artists included in *And Behold a Door Was Opened*, James Castle—who was white, born deaf and never learned to speak, sign, or write—began making art at a young age and continued with prolific zeal until his death at the age of 78. Castle, unlike the featured African-American artists, could afford to devote his entire life to his art through the support of his family. Philadelphia Wireman, whose work was found discarded in the trash in south Philadelphia in the late 1970s, has become a revered, yet mysterious figure in the self-taught pantheon. The works featured here are stellar examples of their practice.