

# ANTHONY MANNIX

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## THE AUSTRALIAN COLLECTION OF OUTSIDER ART

I was introduced to Anthony Mannix and his extraordinary art in 1997 by Philip Hammial, a noted poet and sculptor who is co-founder, with Anthony Mannix, of the Australian Collection of Outsider Art.

I had never previously given much thought to Outsider Art, regarding it largely as the markings of people undergoing psychiatric assessment and the drawings of inmates of mental asylums—precisely where the original interest and naming of Outsider Art sprang from. Seeing Anthony Mannix's work in 1997 was a revelation, most memorably his extraordinary artist books, together with the art of the other outsider artists participating in an exhibition held at the Oz Artspace Gallery in Katoomba. It opened, with some surprise, the eyes and minds of all those who visited to a very different world—one of madness and obsessive creativity, shocking and yet very exciting.

Philip Hammial's interest in Outsider Art had begun some years before this.

Hammial: 'I first became aware of Outsider Art or Art Brut in the early sixties when, as a young poet and artist, I was reading the work of the surrealists—their poetry and Breton's *Manifestos*. When Max Ernst moved

from Germany to Paris he took with him a copy of Hans Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (published in 1922), a book to which the surrealists took like fish to water, to the point where they were doing exercises in 'simulated madness'.

'However, it wasn't until 1984 that I had an opportunity to see any Art Brut 'in the flesh'. Hitchhiking around Europe in the summer of '84, I was able to visit the Prinzhorn Collection at the Heidelberg Psychiatric Clinic, the Wolfli Archives at the Kunstmuseum in Bern and Ferdinand Cheval's Palais Ideal in Hauterives, France. It was a wonderful experience. I've been completely hooked on Outsider Art ever since.

'Returning to Australia in 1984 I called on an old friend Betty Kelly who had at that time, having worked in several galleries in Sydney, a vast knowledge of the Sydney art scene. She referred me to Terrence Relph and Rosemarie Jeffers, two artists who ran the Outsider Gallery at Studio 79 on Beattie Street in Balmain from 1979 to 1983. Terrence and Rosemarie generously introduced me to Anthony Mannix, Gunther Deix and Elizabeth Parkinson.

'In 1986 Anthony and I founded The Australian Collection of Outsider Art, our purpose to find, preserve, exhibit and

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document Australian Outsider Art (John Blades became a member in 1992 and Melissa Lee and Ambrose Reisch were members for about two years). To date we have curated or helped to organise 28 exhibitions, in Australia, Germany, France, Belgium and the United States.'

Anthony Mannix has held many solo shows over the years and participated in numerous group exhibitions. His most recent one-man exhibition was held at Orange Regional Gallery earlier this year, invited by the gallery's charismatic and widely admired director Alan Sisley. Alan Sisley died unexpectedly just as Mannix's show was due to open, a shock and a great loss to the Australian art community. He had been instrumental in organising an exhibition of Outsider Art in Paris with Hammial and Mannix and has given the art of both of these men a considerable public profile with a number of exhibitions at Orange Regional Gallery

The catalogue essay for Mannix's exhibition in Orange this year was written by another stalwart of the Outsider Art world, Dr. Gareth Jenkins, whose PhD thesis documented and analysed the work of Mannix. Jenkins' focus in his theoretical work is on avant-garde literature and art-makers who have experienced schizophrenia. He has presented his research in Australia, Europe and the USA and is himself a hybrid-media artist which includes poetry, digital media and performance.  
<http://apothecaryarchive.wordpress.com/>

Anthony Mannix was born in 1953 in Camperdown, Sydney. His career spans over 35 years and includes writing, drawing, painting, sculpture, artist books and sound recordings. His work is held in many collections, including the National Gallery of Australia.

Mannix's work centres on the documentation and investigation of his experiences of 'madness' and what is, for him, madness's implicit creativity. By turns visionary, philosophical and erotic, Mannix's creative practice, in all its varied manifestations, is an anthropological documentation of unconscious journeys.

Mannix: 'My artistic output over the last 25 years has had one point and that has been to document the landscape of psychosis and the unconscious. It involves an intuitive invention of cultural anthropology to make some order of the plethora of hallucinations, visions, spirits, ghosts, apparitions and creatures which populate this altered perspective. I have learnt my trade myself: patterns, designs and artefacts I have observed in all worlds go on to form a network of technique.'

Gareth Jenkins writes: Mannix's 'network of technique' has indeed been drawn from the many worlds he has explored, and in his evocative depiction of these realities he has created a vast body of dynamic artworks which powerfully communicate with an audience through bold colouration, assured figurative illustration and abstracted design.

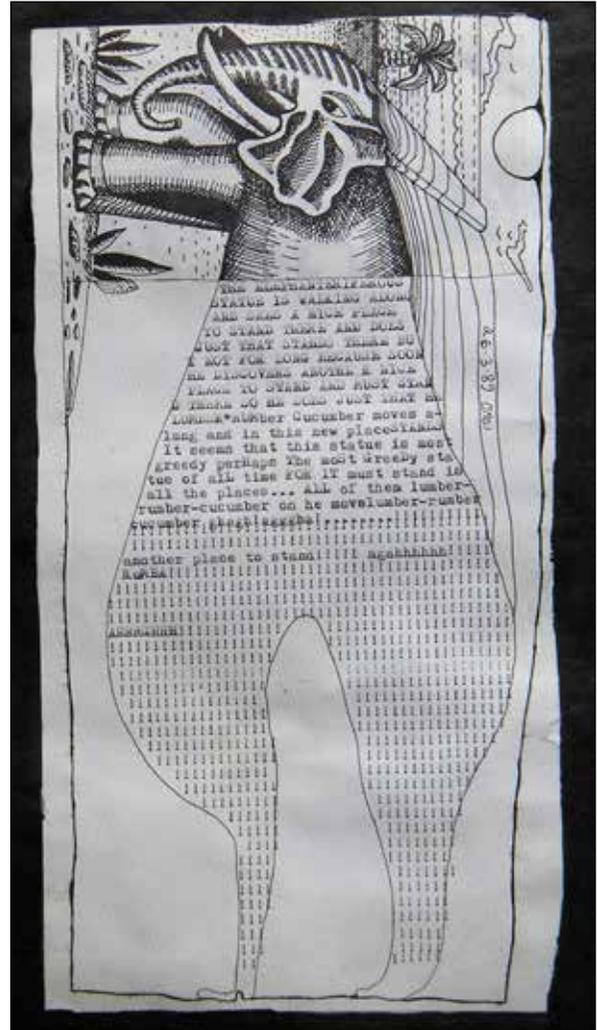
The true scope of Mannix's creative production has only recently become available to the public when in 2013 the

Sydney College of the Arts Self-Taught and Outsider Art Research Collection (STOARC) began hosting 'The Atomic Book' online digital archive. Here are housed over 4,500 works created by Mannix primarily as part of his 35 year-long artist book practice.

Jenkins explains: 'Mannix's work is dominated as he says by a 'plethora of hallucinations' and the multi-various creatures in them. Collectively referred to as 'appearances' by him, they are his friends, collaborators, lovers and enemies. They imbue his images and writings with an animate intensity befitting of the names he gives them: Rosey, Spite, The Obstacle, The Beast of the Unconscious, Mordrol – bloody dark fish, Ageless Horse of Psychosis, Luminous Lighthouse, The Lotus, Ghosts of the Eternal Suicides, The Terror, The Tyger with No Eyes, The Thin Ball-Bearing Man, The Giant Pink Fish, Gruesome, The Honey-Eater and The Magnificent Oscillating Vision.

'As these creatures draw Mannix's work towards the surreal, the materiality of his practice grounds it in the everyday: in colouration, via tea, in books bound by builder's thread, in the decorative use of solder, metal, varnish, found objects, resin, ink, glass, wire, leather and wood. This robust materiality makes all of Mannix's works, whether they be drawings, paintings, books or sculptures, into powerful objects capable of housing the multiple figures and presences with intertwined heads, limbs and





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eyes that pulsate within the picture plan.

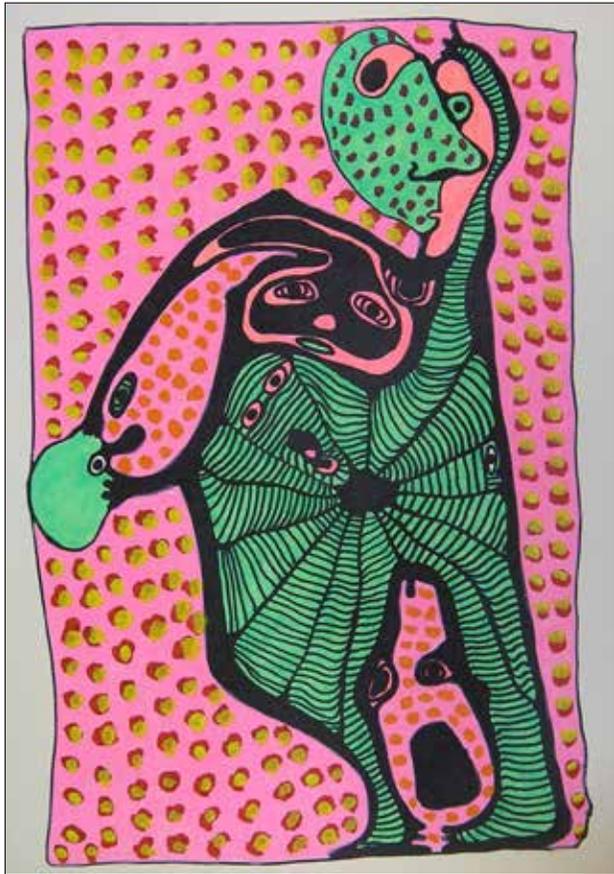
'In many of Mannix's works a further layer of communication comes to the viewer via text, telling of the humorous or poetic, the touching or explanatory. Text is skillfully integrated to at once narrate and embellish his images, at times written with calligraphic design, or dashed-off functionality, typed with a typewriter or ink-stamped.

'Like Mannix's presences, he too has been called many things over the years: schizophrenic, explorer of the unconscious, locked up lunatic, displaced shaman, builder of psychotic cosmologies, creator of mental sculpture, Outsider. He may be all these things, but additionally he is simply one of Australia's finest living artists. Outsider or In, Mannix's work has for over three decades now, continued to traverse strikingly original ground, another place, as aesthetically captivating as it is intellectually intriguing.'

Mannix calls Blackheath in the Blue Mountains home and Philip Hammial and I visit him on a sunny winter's day.

I'm in good company. Philip and Anthony have known each other since the early 1980s; they have been through a lot together. The cottage is a wonderful old Mountains house, typical of those you find in this part of the upper Blue Mountains, Mannix's art lying in heaps here and there, the work of a friend pinned up, a glass case with something interesting inside it (absorbed in our conversation, I forgot to take a closer look).

It's just a short walk to the railway station and the village centre, ideally located. Very few in this region's art community know of Anthony Mannix; he likes to keep a low profile and in any case Outsider Art is way outside the mainstream art which absorbs the local community. Today the house is a mess because, as Mannix says,



his once-a-week cleaner has personal problems and couldn't come. Mannix understands personal problems, although his life has been comparatively orderly and smooth-flowing in recent years. With the advent of slow release medication sufferers are mostly free from the madmanic episodes of the past. Anthony's past experience had much in common with the shocking images we have of those with mental illness: sleeping rough, belligerent, all-too-frequent encounters with the police, having trouble with the medications which meant that you could be lucid for half a sentence and then simply just lose it. But with lows come the highs and Mannix clearly takes delight in his demons.

He is an articulate and pleasant conversant. Mannix is an Irish name—he is descended from an Irishman by that name who arrived here in 1813 and now there are seven hundred and something Mannixes, so he tells me. He does have the gift of the gab. Outsider Art doesn't have genres, styles recognisable as coming from a certain time, or a certain school and place. Those who are very familiar with a particular Outsider Artist will recognise his work when they see it, but there is no Australian Outsider Art and there is no Outsider Art in a Modernist style or from a particular time, such as the 60s—it is all entirely individual.

Mannix's great blessing has been to have Gareth Jenkins write a PhD thesis based on him and his work. Jenkins' work has been meticulous and has created a huge

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repository of material and given Mannix a voice and a profile which would normally be unimaginable for an outsider artist, especially one in Australia where there is so very little appreciation of this off beat art form.

Philip Hammial understands and relates to Outsider Art in a way which most of us never could. He is a sculptor and a poet. With his eccentric scrap sculptures (which have been widely exhibited, including at a major exhibition at Orange Regional Gallery in 2008 and with another planned for early next year) and his vast output of poetry, in many published volumes and receiving recognition, mostly overseas, he has taken on the role of spokesperson for an eclectic group of Australian Outsider Artists of which Mannix is probably the leading name. Europe and America are the places they look to when they dream of where they would like to show their work and receive recognition. Hammial tells that the fascination with Outsider Art is spreading like fire. There are now collections, large and small, public and private, throughout the world, including in Japan and Brazil.

Mannix is a chain smoker, everything inside the house is stained and scented with smoke. I decide that I don't mind this, even as a non-smoker—it is reminiscent of the days when we worked in smoke-filled offices and had lovers who smoked in bed, but it isn't of course doing Mannix's health any good. He and Phil are especially relieved to know that all Mannix's work will be secured for the future, stored at the Sydney College for the Arts. I wonder if, when opened there some time in the future, you will still be able to smell those cigarettes.

Going home I find myself thinking about Rosalie Gascoigne, Jackson Pollock and about Aboriginal Art, and the magical way our human brains seek to order knowledge and experience.

**Carolynne Skinner**



## ANTHONY MANNIX & THE AUSTRALIAN COLLECTION OF OUTSIDER ART

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