

ORLANDO MUSEUM OF ART

Floridiana: Material Culture from The Sunshine State

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Weyand Gallery Guide

Floridiana: On Collecting Treasures and Oddities

By Coralie Claeyssen-Gleyzon

Floridiana: Material Culture from the Sunshine State presents over 130 works from the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art, painstakingly collected, researched, and expanded upon over the course of many years. While these works offer a unique insight into the act of collecting, they also provide a portrait of a bygone Florida and prompt us to reflect on the stories and histories they convey.

Floridiana tells “a” story of Florida. Not “the” story, because it is through a continuous and consequential process of selection via the manufacturing, preservation, collecting, and eventually curation of these objects, that only a specific part of these items is on view in the gallery today. This exhibition therefore attempts to draw a portrait of the Sunshine State through a plethora of disparate objects: from Florida’s cultural roots anchored in the land of Seminole ancestry and heritage, to its exoticization via citrus and theme park memorabilia, tourist souvenirs, commercial photography and roadside ephemera; to the “melting pot” character of a land in constant ebb and flow via cherished familial, devotional and spiritual items; and finally its creative output with self-taught Outsider art and other fragments of popular culture.

These objects are anchored in reality, because they testify to actual times, places, industries, people, and histories—some joyful and some more complicated. Yet these objects are also somewhat untethered from the real world; they float in the collective imagination of what Florida is “supposed” to be, since many were created to sell and preserve an image of Florida as a perfect land of leisure, sunshine, and exotic nature—an Eden on the U.S. Mainland, an endless escape. This Floridiana collection therefore transcends merely gathering traces and remnants of material culture, to instead assemble the portrait of a state suspended between memory and desire, myth and reality.

Cultural Sensitivity Notice

Several objects in this exhibition—including ceremonial Vodou flags, milagritos, and the Star of David, among others—remain sacred within living religious or spiritual traditions. They are presented with the understanding that they continue to serve spiritual and ceremonial purposes beyond the museum and within many communities. Visitors are invited to approach these works with the same respect they would extend to objects of worship in any faith tradition.

1. Gleason Waite Romer (b. Berlin, NY, 1887 – d. 1971, Coral Gables, FL)

Parrot Jungle

Undated

Promotional Photograph

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Gleason Waite Romer's (1887–1971) deep visual documentation of Miami during a transformative period in its history is a premier photographic archive. Romer's work stands out not just for its scale—17,500 large-format photographs taken between 1924 and 1964—but for its intention, formal acuity, and emotional depth. Unlike purely commercial photographers, he seemed driven by something more personal. His images capture a city “coming alive,” emphasizing its people, local culture, and the evolving urban landscape with a sense of care and curiosity. One example mentioned is Parrot Jungle, a classic Old Florida attraction where visitors posed with parrots for souvenir photos. Romer's hand-painted promotional photograph from this site reflects both the playful tourism culture of the time and his artistic touch—blending documentation with visual enhancement.

Importantly, Romer believed his work would matter in the future. That vision proved accurate: his archive, now housed

at the Miami-Dade Public Library, serves as a rich historical record. The “Romer Collection” is not just documentation—it’s an artistic and cultural chronicle that captures the spirit behind Miami’s nickname, the “Magic City.” Romer’s photographs transcend simple record-keeping. They preserve the atmosphere, ambition, and personality of a growing city, making his collection both historically invaluable and artistically meaningful.

2. Artist of the Seminole Tribe of Florida

Seminole Doll

Undated

Palmetto fiber and cotton fabric

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



During the 1940s and 1950s, Seminole tourist villages along the Tamiami Trail and other highways bordering the Everglades became popular roadside attractions. These villages emerged as important economic centers for the Seminole people after environmental destruction, colonial expansion, and development in Florida disrupted their traditional ways of life. The drainage of the Everglades beginning in the 1910s, along with restrictive hunting laws, significantly reduced access to natural resources. The Great Depression further deepened economic hardship by causing a decline in the hide trade, which led to an increasing reliance on tourism for income.

To meet tourist demand for souvenirs, Seminole artisans began producing and selling handcrafted items, particularly dolls and clothing. While Seminole children traditionally played with simple rag dolls, the dolls created for sale were far more elaborate. These market dolls were often constructed from dried palmetto fiber and dressed in garments that reflected Seminole fashion.

Early doll clothing featured colorful striped designs made with appliquéd ribbons sewn onto shirts—predating the widespread use of patchwork. Over time, these ribbon designs were incorporated into more complex patchwork patterns. By the mid-20th century, ric-rac—a zigzag trim originally intended as a fabric edge finish—became a

popular decorative element, often replacing appliqué ribbons. Both ric-rac and ribbon were typically sewn above or below patchwork panels onto solid fabric strips to emphasize the overall design.

These dolls not only served as souvenirs but also as cultural representations, reflecting the clothing styles and hairstyles of Seminole people during the periods in which they were made.

3. and 4. Artist Once Known

Carved Seminole Portraits

Undated

Painted wood

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



These carved and painted portraits may have been made by a Seminole artist, though it's more likely they were not. Since the early 20th century, non-Seminole artists have portrayed Seminole subjects, selling their works to tourists along roadside stands. This diptych fits into that tradition.

Islands of trees surrounded by the shallow waters of the Everglades the name's translation as a "sea of grass." The profile views depicted here, strip individual identity while drawing attention to hairstyles, beaded necklaces, and coiffures suggesting that the piece was created during the 1930s or 1940s. The capes, however, are the least faithful detail. Curator Tara Backhouse observes, "Most capes are plain—no stripes—in any decade. Maybe this is meant to suggest patchwork, but I don't think a Seminole artist would have depicted clothing this way." Despite these inaccuracies, the work captures a vivid sense of place and

style, offering a glimpse into how Seminole life was imagined—and marketed—to outsiders.

5 and 6. Seminole Tribe of Florida

Seminole Patchwork Jacket

Undated

Cotton Fabric

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Voyeuristic tourists from the North, eager to experience what they saw as “authentic” Native life, could simply pull over while driving through the Everglades and find themselves in a Seminole tourist camp or village. During the tourist season, these camps catered to visitors, but when the season ended, many Seminole people returned to their primary homes—although in some cases, the tourist villages were also their residences.

As Tara Backhouse, Curator at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, explains, “Jackets like this one were worn by Seminole men at the time, and the tradition has continued to this day, but they were also made for tourists.”

Seminole clothing has long been known for its bright colors and distinctive patchwork designs. These patterns are not merely decorative; they have names such as Rain, Lightning, Thunder, Fire, Broken Arrow, Man on Horse, Telephone Pole, Bird, Four Directions Medicine Colors, Crawfish, Tree, Diamondback Rattlesnake, Disagree, and Bones. Some designs carry cultural significance, including associations with particular clans, and are worn only by members of those groups. While not every design holds deep symbolic meaning, none are arbitrary—many reflect the aesthetic choices of the maker. Backhouse notes that the most meaningful patchwork garments were created by Seminole people for their own community rather than for tourists, and

the deeper meanings and stories behind these designs are generally kept private.

Over time, Seminole clothing evolved in response to both cultural change and outside influence. Jackets became increasingly colorful, which attracted tourists and boosted sales, especially during the 1950s and 1960s—the peak period for patchwork clothing as a commercial product. Traditionally, Seminole men wore big shirts and long shirts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As non-Seminole populations grew in Florida, men began wearing trousers in town and tucking in their shirts. To accommodate this shift, the lower portion of the shirts gradually shortened until it disappeared altogether, giving rise to the modern jacket.

Like other cultural items, these garments continued to change over time. In the 1980s and 1990s, shiny and sparkly fabrics became popular. Patchwork patterns, which were especially intricate in the 1960s, gradually became simpler, with wider rows and fewer overall designs. This shift reflected broader changes in daily life, as reduced dependence on tourism and busier modern schedules left less time for the labor-intensive process of making traditional clothing.

7. James Myers



Seminole Children with George Osceola

Okeechobee, Florida

1948

Press Print with Caption Mount

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

The Brighton Reservation flooded in the fall of 1948 following heavy rainfall from a hurricane. In response, the American Red Cross provided emergency aid, and Seminoles from Brighton established temporary camps in Okeechobee,

where this photograph was taken. A typed caption, taped to the print—a standard practice in the analog era—supplied essential information for picture editors and layout designers preparing the image for publication. It credits photographer James Myers. Although the caption attributes the construction of the tent shelter to the Red Cross, it is likely that the Seminoles themselves played a central role in building and organizing the encampment. Such collaboration would have been both practical and culturally important, allowing the camp to reflect familiar spatial arrangements.

The tone of the image and its caption reflects the sentimental humanism associated with *The Family of Man*, the influential exhibition presented at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955. This approach emphasizes shared human experience and emotional connection while largely sidestepping more difficult historical contexts, in this case including the Seminole Wars and U.S. Indian removal policies. Even so, the photograph functions as a compelling human-interest image, underscoring both the humanitarian efforts of the Red Cross and the circumstances of Seminole displacement.

In the photograph, George Osceola reads comic books to children in the temporary camp. Such camps were not used exclusively in emergencies; they were also part of long-standing Seminole lifeways, constructed for seasonal movement, hunting, and other activities. It is possible that the Red Cross supplied the comic books. The name Osceola carries deep historical resonance, honoring Osceola, a prominent leader who was controversially captured under a flag of truce during the Second Seminole War. Today, the name endures among Seminole families as a tribute to his legacy.

8. Herb Richter

Relief Seminole Indian Painting

Undated

Paint on wood

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



The origin of this relief painting is unknown, and it remains undated. The artist, Herb Richter, cannot be identified through standard art references and he is distinct from the English painter Herbert Davis Richter (1874–1955), known for still lifes, interiors, and architectural compositions. The work depicts two Seminole men poling a dugout canoe, an image that may have functioned as casual decoration in a lounge or backyard tiki bar in the 1950s–60s.

Yet, beyond its decorative surface, the painting participates in a visual discourse that warrants scrutiny. By reducing Seminole identity to a static, picturesque scene, the work perpetuates a narrow stereotype that distances viewers from the lived realities of the people it depicts. Such imagery frames Indigenous lives as timeless curiosities, frozen in place for aesthetic consumption, rather than as dynamic and evolving communities navigating a changing world. In this way, the painting exemplifies how decorative art can unconsciously enforce cultural simplifications, shaping perceptions in ways that obscure historical and contemporary truths.

9. Esmond Grenard (E.G.) Barnhill
(b. Saluda, SC, 1894 – d. 1987, Gainesville, FL)



Untitled (Florida Landscape)
ca. 1913

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

10. Emmett Fritz
(b. Kansas City, MO, 1917 – d. 1995, St. Augustine, FL)

Untitled
Undated
Watercolor on paper

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Emmett Fritz (1917–1995) stands as one of the most devoted interpreters of St. Augustine, a painter whose life's work became inseparable from the city's identity. From 1950 until his death, Fritz immersed himself in the historic district, painting tirelessly and producing hundreds—ultimately thousands—of scenes that captured the spirit of what is often called the nation's oldest continuously inhabited city. There is little doubt that Fritz's images helped define how visitors understood and remembered St. Augustine.

Working out of his studio in the Riberia House on St. George Street, at the very heart of the tourist trade, Fritz occupied a unique position. He was not removed from the crowds but embedded within them, creating art in the same spaces where visitors wandered, shopped, and absorbed the atmosphere of the old city. His paintings, marked by an impressionistic sensibility and a consistent use of one-point perspective, offering viewers inviting, harmonious scenes.

Streets seem to draw the eye inward, architectural landmarks appeared gently idealized, and horse-drawn carriages added a nostalgic rhythm to the compositions. Alongside these more iconic views, Fritz also produced quieter, more intimate portrayals, giving a sense of both the public and private faces of St. Augustine.

What made Fritz especially significant was his ability to bridge the worlds of fine art and popular culture. In a setting filled with souvenir shops selling trinkets and novelties, his paintings became something more meaningful—keepsakes that carried both aesthetic value and emotional resonance. Over the course of his career, some 10,000 works found their way into the hands of residents and tourists alike. Each painting served not only as a personal memento but also as a subtle act of promotion, extending the image of St. Augustine far beyond its physical boundaries.

Fritz arrived long after the era when the Florida frontier had been romanticized by wealthy patrons and visiting artists drawn by Henry Flagler's grand Ponce de Leon Hotel. Painters such as Martin Johnson Heade, Thomas Moran, and Frank Shapleigh had once catered to an elite audience, producing traditional landscapes for affluent vacationers. By the time Fritz began his work, artistic tastes had evolved, and the cultural landscape had shifted. Yet rather than being deterred, he adapted. His art was less about grand, formal landscapes and more about accessible, repeatable visions of place—images that ordinary people could connect with and take home.

Late in his career, Fritz experimented with an especially evocative technique in his so-called "Mud Paintings." Using dirt unearthed from excavations of one of the city's oldest streets, he incorporated material from the past directly into his work. These paintings were more than visual representations; they were physical extensions of the city's history, embedding centuries-old earth into contemporary artistic expression.

In the end, Emmett Fritz did more than document St. Augustine—he helped shape its modern identity. Through persistence, accessibility, and a deep attachment to place, he transformed everyday scenes into enduring symbols, allowing countless visitors to carry a piece of the city with them long after they had gone.

11.

Clay Marbles

Undated

Fired clay

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



During the mid-1980s, an elderly man sold pencils outside the popular Biscayne Cafeteria along Coral Gables' Miracle Mile. He also offered clay marbles, claiming they were made by Native Americans and found at the mouth of the Miami River. Because the marbles were neither excavated from an archaeological site nor scientifically dated, their origins cannot be confirmed. Yet the fact that approximately 800 members of the Tequesta tribe lived in villages near the river for centuries into the 1800s gives some plausibility to the man's story.

Marble aficionado Larry Garrett notes that the perfectly round red marble at the center, along with six other nearly perfect marbles, are most likely machine-made marbles from the 19th and early 20th centuries, produced in massive quantities—one company alone could manufacture three boxcars of marbles per day. Nevertheless, it is possible that such marbles could have ended up in the river a century ago.

The central red marble may not have originally been dyed, suggesting it was made of terra cotta. The white-gray marbles, on the other hand, are almost certainly handmade

from marl, a type of soil natural to Miami. These marbles would have been shaped by hand from wet clay and fired at a low temperature. Garrett explains, “Most Native American tribes and bands depended on materials and foodstuffs that were close at hand. The Tequesta were hunter-gatherers, and food was plentiful, so they had time to make useful—but not absolutely necessary—items. Marl was abundantly available.”

The darker marbles may also be handmade from marl. Locations where Native Americans lived, such as middens, often have darker soil due to organic matter left over centuries. This organic matter could have stained the marbles, or it may have been incorporated into the clay during their creation.

Garrett concludes that “the marbles do not [all] seem unique to the provenance; they have to be kept with the provenance for them to make sense.” Since the Miami River drains from the Everglades into Biscayne Bay over about six miles, it is plausible that lost marbles from people living along the river for centuries eventually accumulated at its mouth.

In the end, while some marbles could plausibly be handmade Native American artifacts, others are clearly machine-made imports. Their historical significance depends heavily on provenance, illustrating the delicate balance between local legend, archaeology, and the careful analysis needed to separate fact from folklore.

12.

Citrus Reamer

Undated

Painted metal and ceramic

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Citrus reamers extract juice from fruit placed over a tapered mandrel, then ground and squeezed by hand. In places like Florida, with its once prodigious orange groves, using one was simple, almost primal fun—rewarded by a refreshing, healthful “glass of sunshine.” As ever, form follows function, and the results were often models of elegant, sculptural efficiency.

The first hand-held reamer was patented in the United States in 1867. In 1907, the California Fruit Growers Exchange introduced Sunkist-branded reamers as promotional items to boost fruit sales on the East Coast. Alongside their “Drink an Orange” campaign, orange juice surged in popularity, and reamers became standard kitchen tools.

They were produced in a wide variety of shapes, colors, and designs, using materials such as wood, metal, glass, ceramics, and porcelain. High-end makers like Limoges and Meissen created refined versions for affluent consumers, while whimsical animal and clown forms appealed to children.

The heyday of reamers lasted through the 1930s, when their bright colors offered a small visual lift during the hardships of the Great Depression. Trade agreements in the mid-1930s brought an influx of inexpensive imports from Japan, reshaping the market rather than ending it outright. Reamers remained widely used into World War II, but the rise of frozen orange juice and later electric juicers

gradually rendered them obsolete. By the 1960s, they had largely disappeared from store shelves.

13. Boone Bait Company, Winter Park, Florida

Salt Water Fishing Lure

Undated

Carved and painted wood, metal

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



The intersection of form and function is beautifully embodied in this vintage hand-carved saltwater trolling lure. Produced by the Boone Bait Company of Winter Park, Florida, founded in 1951, this rigged wooden teaser was designed to attract pelagic game fish—large, fast-moving species that roam the open ocean far from shore. Skimming and splashing across the water's surface, the bird-shaped lure imitates the frantic movement of fleeing baitfish, triggering the predatory instincts of offshore species drawn to signs of feeding activity.

Both an effective fishing tool and a handcrafted example of maritime folk art, the lure reflects the ingenuity, craftsmanship, and distinctive aesthetic that characterized much of mid-century design. As such, it stands as a compelling example of the successful union of utility and artistry.

With more than 1,350 miles of coastline bordering the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, Florida has long been recognized as a premier destination for offshore deep-sea sportfishing, making innovations such as this lure an important part of the state's maritime heritage.

14. and 15.

Herty Turpentine Pots

Undated

Earthenware

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



The Herty cup, designed by Charles Herty and introduced in 1903, revolutionized the way sap was collected from pine trees for turpentine production. Unlike earlier, more destructive methods, these cups were placed at the base of an incision to catch the resin, reducing damage to the tree. Today, the only visible reminders of those turpentine camps are the distinctive “cat face” scars left where bark was chipped away and cut at angles to induce sap flow.

Crews would travel through the forests, collecting sap from the cups and pouring it into wooden barrels. These barrels were then transported by wagon to turpentine stills, where the sap was boiled to produce pure turpentine. From the late 1800s through the early 1900s, turpentine was considered Florida’s first natural resource and drove a bustling local industry.

Many of the original terra cotta gum-collection cups still exist, though they are often mistaken for ordinary clay plant pots. A small hole near the rim, used to hang the cups on nails in trees, is the key feature that distinguishes these historic artifacts from modern pottery. It’s likely that people at yard sales in north and central Florida pass by them, unaware of their connection to a once-thriving industry.

16. Florida Postcard



Gathering Rosin Gum for Turpentine in Florida

Offset lithograph on textured paper stock

ca. 1910 - 1930

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

17. Artist Once Known

Untitled (Snake)

Undated

Wood and pinecone

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Unsigned and undated, the maker's identity has been lost to time. Such anonymity is not uncommon in folk art, where the notion of authorship often held little importance. Many self-taught makers did not consider themselves artists, but rather worked out of necessity, curiosity, or habit.

Who created this object—and why—remains unknown. Was the maker a tinkerer, shaping materials at hand, or someone guided by time and contemplation? Did the form emerge from biblical associations with the serpent, or did the natural contours of the tree root suggest the figure waiting within it?

Whatever its origin, this work stands among the most compelling examples of vernacular sculpture. Its power resists easy explanation: an ordinary material transformed into something that feels animated, even sentient. Like much great folk art, it possesses an ineffable presence.

DEVOTION AND MULTICULTURALISM

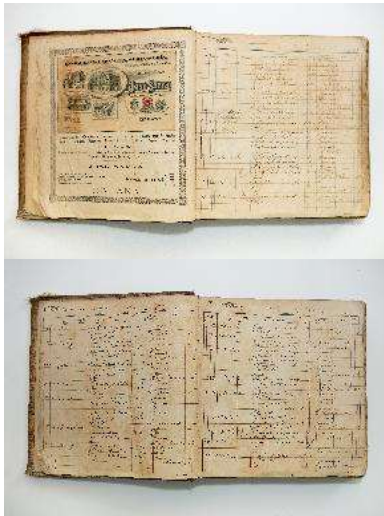
18. and 19. Pharmacist Once Known

Pharmacy Logbooks

Havana, Cuba

Undated

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



The large pharmacy logbook from La Reunión Pharmacy, discovered among dusty stacks in a warehouse in Havana, offers a remarkable window into the medical, commercial, and social life of the early twentieth century. Dating to 1915, the logbook meticulously records prescriptions filled during a time when pharmacies functioned as vital centers of both healthcare and community interaction. Founded by José Sarrá, La Reunión was far more than a prescription dispensary; it was a sophisticated establishment that blended science, elegance, and everyday life.

Each page of the logbook reflects an extraordinary level of detail, documenting prescription numbers alongside the names of physicians, the identities and addresses of clients, and precise listings of substances required for each preparation. These entries also include the weight and volume of ingredients, their intended uses, and their cost, forming a comprehensive record of pharmaceutical practice at the time. Such documentation not only highlights the rigor of early twentieth-century pharmacy but also reveals the personal nature of medical care, where patients and practitioners were closely connected within the fabric of the city.

La Reunión distinguished itself through its breadth of offerings and its forward-thinking approach to medicine. It was among the first pharmacies to provide both allopathic

and homeopathic treatments, reflecting a period of transition and experimentation in medical science. In addition to fulfilling prescriptions, the establishment sold perfumes, paints, photographic supplies, and laboratory equipment, underscoring its role as a multifaceted scientific and commercial hub. The pharmacy was particularly renowned for its magnesia-based remedies and cod-liver oil products, which contributed to its reputation for quality and innovation.

Equally significant was the physical environment of La Reunión, which embodied the elegance of its era. Its interiors featured towering mahogany display cabinets, intricate stained glass, and refined architectural details that elevated the experience of visiting the pharmacy. These surroundings encouraged patrons to linger, converse, and engage with one another, reinforcing the pharmacy's role as a social gathering place as much as a site of medical care.

Widely regarded as one of the most important establishments of its kind in the Americas, and perhaps even the world, La Reunión remained in operation until the upheaval of the Cuban Revolution, which brought profound changes to Cuba's economic and social landscape. Decades later, in 2004, the pharmacy was reborn as a museum, preserving its legacy and allowing visitors to step back into a time when medicine, commerce, and culture were seamlessly intertwined.



20.

Haiti Travel Poster

Undated

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

The Haiti now so often described in terms of collapse and crisis was, within living memory, imagined very differently—

a place of arrival rather than departure, where cruise ships docked and flights brought visitors seeking not only climate but culture, history, and refinement. In the north, the city of Cap-Haïtien—second only to Port-au-Prince in scale—still carries the architectural cadence of its colonial past, its streets and facades echoing an earlier era when the city functioned as a gateway to a more expansive national narrative. From there, the road inland leads to Milot, and to the remains of a royal vision both improbable and imposing: the Sans-Souci Palace and, rising above it, the Citadelle Laferrière.

These structures are inseparable from the figure of Henri Christophe. A leader in the revolution that culminated in Haitian Revolution and the establishment of Haiti as the first free Black republic in 1804, Christophe later crowned himself king, transforming revolutionary victory into monarchical ambition. His great citadel, constructed by tens of thousands of laborers over nearly two decades, stands less as a functional fortress than as an assertion of sovereignty, permanence, and power projected against both real and imagined threats. The enemies it was built to repel never came; the structure's meaning lay in its very existence.

Even the stories that surround it—such as the oft-repeated legend of soldiers marched to their deaths to prove loyalty—contribute to its aura. Whether apocryphal or not, they reinforce the sense of a regime defined by spectacle and severity, where authority had to be demonstrated as much as exercised. Like the palace below, now in ruin, the citadel embodies both triumph and excess, vision and fragility.

In this way, Haiti's historical landscape parallels, in a more tragic register, the dynamics seen elsewhere: the creation of powerful national myths, the building of monumental forms to sustain them, and the eventual erosion of both under the pressures of time and circumstance. Natural disasters—most notably earthquakes and hurricanes—have played

their part, but the deeper attrition has come from historical exploitation, entrenched political corruption, crippling international debt, and social fracture. Together, these forces have reshaped Haiti's global image.

Yet the physical and historical remnants endure. The citadel still rises above the mountains, massive and improbable, a structure conceived for a future that never arrived. And in that persistence lies a complicated truth: Haiti's grandeur has not vanished so much as it has been obscured, its meanings layered over by successive histories of aspiration, struggle, and survival.



**21. and 22. Gary Monroe
(b. Miami Beach, FL, 1951)**

Krome Camp
1980 – 1981
Photograph



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

23. Wilson

Untitled (Krome Resettlement Camp Painting)

Undated

Paint on Cut Paper

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



In 1980, the waters off South Florida became a crossroads of hope and desperation. From Cuba's port of Mariel, thousands of families fled, carrying little more than dreams of freedom. They were welcomed with open arms, celebrated as political refugees, and quickly granted legal status—a gesture shaped as much by Cold War politics as by compassion and Miami's strong Cuban population. Not far behind, Haitian people braved the same treacherous journey, fleeing poverty, repression, and the shadow of Duvalier's authoritarian regime. But their arrival told a different story. Labeled economic refugees, their cries for asylum were met with indifference; the law offered them little protection, reserving political recognition only for those escaping totalitarian regimes. Cubans stepped onto American soil with hope; Haitians stepped into uncertainty. The stark difference in treatment reveals how ideology, not just humanitarian need, shaped who was welcomed and who was turned away.

Cuban and then Haitian arrivals were processed at the Immigration and Naturalization Service's Krome Resettlement Camp, near Miami at the edge of the Everglades. Overcrowding and uncertainty shaped Haitians' daily life, yet these detainees built a vibrant communal spirit. Camp director Cecilio Ruiz worked alongside them—carrying cots, organizing soccer games, and supporting church services and social activities. Behind the barbed wire, people played cards and dominoes, painted, and found ways to connect and express themselves. This

painting was created at Krome. Though signed, the artist is unknown, it reflects the resilience, creativity, and sense of community that thrived within the camp's walls.

24. Mario Mesa
(b. Güira de Melena, Cuba, 1928 – d. 2016)

Untitled
Undated
Acrylic paint

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Mario Mesa was an Outsider artist, one whose creativity emerged from deeply personal, often intense inner experiences rather than formal training.



His life trajectory—fleeing Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift and later beginning to paint after a psychological crisis—suggests that art became both a coping mechanism and a sense of purpose. Many outsider artists describe a similar turning point, where making art feels less like a choice and more like a necessity.

What stands out most is Mesa's belief that he was channeling external forces. His description of spirits showing him images aligns with a long tradition of artists who saw themselves as vessels rather than originators. This idea echoes André Gide's quote about art being a collaboration with something beyond the self: "Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does the better."

In Mesa's case, that "something" was very literal—he felt directed by unseen presences. The artist believed that "all that has happened has happened before." His experiences and sensitivities tapped into something primal.

His recurring imagery—jungles, feminine faces, and watchful feline creatures—feels symbolic rather than purely representational. Jungles often suggest the unconscious, while hybrid or animal figures can represent instinct, danger, or protection. Whether or not one accepts his explanation of spirits, it's clear his work was driven by visions that felt real to him, which is why he insisted that “almost everything is real.”

His rejection of the Catholic Church is also significant. Rather than structured religion, Mesa seems to have developed a personal cosmology, where spirituality was direct, immediate, and sometimes unsettling. That tension—between the divine, the unconscious, and the unknown—gives his work its “dreamy but edged” quality.

In short, Mesa wasn't just painting scenes—he was translating experiences that he believed came from beyond ordinary perception. Whether interpreted psychologically, spiritually, or symbolically, his art sits at the intersection of vision, belief, and survival.

25. Artist Once Known



Untitled (Haitian Vodou Flag)

Undated

Sequins, beads, and faux pearls on fabric

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Note: This is a sacred ceremonial object and should not be understood as a curiosity or evidence of superstition, but as an expression of faith, artistic skill, and community tradition.

This antique ceremonial Haitian drapo Vodou (Vodou flag) is distinguished by its original staff, fringe, and hand-sewn sequins. Such flags were ritually carried and displayed by the altar in a hounfor, a traditional Vodou temple, where they honored a specific lwa (spirit). The flags feature each spirit's unique vévé—a symbolic design traditionally drawn on the ground with cornmeal, flour, ash, or other powdered materials during rituals to invoke the spirit's presence and blessings.

Haitian Vodou is a syncretic religion that blends spiritual traditions from West and Central Africa with elements of Roman Catholicism. During the colonial era, when enslaved Africans were forbidden from openly practicing their ancestral religions, they preserved their beliefs by associating Vodou spirits with Catholic saints. This process of religious adaptation enabled African spiritual traditions to survive under French colonial rule.

This flag appeals to Ogou Ferraille, one of the most revered lwa in Haitian Vodou, and Ogou Badagri, the powerful warrior spirit, strategist, and healer. As lwa of iron, warfare, labor, and political power, they embody strength, courage, justice, perseverance, and disciplined resolve. These qualities resonate deeply with Haitian history, recalling the struggle that culminated in the Haitian Revolution and the establishment of the world's first independent Black republic in 1804. Often described as a nation whose history was "written in blood," Haiti's hard-won independence reflects many of the virtues associated with the Ogou spirits.

Practitioners invoke Ogou Ferraille for protection, fortitude in times of conflict, success in difficult endeavors, and the strength to overcome adversity. Ogou Badagri complements these attributes with his fiery temperament, strategic intelligence, and unwavering defense of the innocent and the oppressed, making the pair enduring symbols of resilience, justice, and righteous power.

26. Artist Once Known

Untitled (Milagritos, Cuba

Undated

Stamped Metal

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

This set of milagritos, or “small miracles,” was acquired in Cuba in the late twentieth century, where such objects are commonly sold by artisans outside churches. These small forms are offered in gratitude for, or in anticipation of, divine intervention and are often deposited within sacred spaces as ex-votos, a part of longstanding devotional practice.



The examples shown here exhibit a striking simplicity. Each is stamped from thin metal and minimally defined by small punctures and low-relief design. This pared-down aesthetic reflects their accessibility as vernacular expressions of faith.

Milagritos belong to a broader votive tradition across Europe and the Americas, addressing concerns of health, safety, and prosperity. Their forms correspond to specific needs: limbs signify injury or illness; genital forms relate to fertility and reproductive health; and full-body figures represent individual wellbeing. Images of houses, vehicles, and animals extend these meanings to protection, livelihood, and stability.

While devotional in nature, ex-votos often accompany practical efforts such as medical care, study, or employment. They may also commemorate significant journeys, including migration, marking the fulfillment of vows through acts of offering and remembrance. At times, they also commemorate significant life journeys, such as migration. For instance, one might vow to leave an offering

upon safely crossing a border, marking both gratitude and the fulfillment of a deeply personal promise.

27. Healing Center, Cassadaga, Florida

Untitled (Sign)

Undated

Enamel paint on metal

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Spiritualism is a religious movement grounded in the belief that the soul survives physical death and continues to evolve within a universal life force. Practitioners hold that communication with those who have passed on is possible through mediums—individuals believed to be especially sensitive to spiritual presence and capable of receiving and interpreting messages from the spirit world.

In the 1870s, medium George Colby of New York followed the guidance of a spirit he called Seneca to central Florida. Traveling by riverboat from Jacksonville along the St. Johns River to the area near Blue Spring, Colby was led inland to a secluded site where he experienced heightened spiritual awareness. There, he established a camp that would become Cassadaga, formally incorporated on December 18, 1894. Today, Cassadaga is known as “America’s Oldest Spiritualist Community.”

In the 20th century, individuals such as Gladys Reid contributed to the community’s enduring traditions. A former welder during World War II, Reid later served as a healer at the camp’s gazebo, where she and others practiced the laying on of hands. Through this ritual, practitioners seek to channel a divine force—often described as “Infinite Intelligence”—to support physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

**28. and 29. Florian Ludwig
(b. 1916 – d. 2005, Miami, FL),**

Untitled (Lovisionism Crown and Crucifix)

Undated

Mixed media

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Florian Ludwig (1916–2005) devoted his life to creating art as a gift of love and a force for peace. He believed that visual beauty could awaken dormant qualities in the human heart, inspiring responsibility, compassion, and inner harmony. To capture his unique vision, he coined Lovisionism, a philosophy blending creativity, love, and spirituality to promote goodwill and personal transformation.



After retiring from the Berks County Vocational Technical School in Pennsylvania in 1976, Ludwig met his future wife, Terry, three years later. They settled in DeLeon Springs, a quiet town with a serene artesian spring, where he envisioned a future home of a museum for his works. There, he crafted copper crucifixes, crowns, and turquoise necklaces, each piece being a prayer and an offering. Generously, he shared his creations with strangers, embodying the principles of Lovisionism in everyday life.

Ludwig's art and philosophy reflect a profound belief in the power of creativity to inspire love, peace, and personal growth. Through his work, he left a lasting vision of a world where art nurtures humanity, uplifts the spirit, and fosters harmony with both self and planet.

30.

Untitled (Old World Couple)

Undated

Photograph

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

This photograph—a portrait, presumably, of a devoted old-world couple—surfaced in a thrift shop in Miami’s South Beach in the early 1980s. At the time, the neighborhood was home largely to Jewish retirees who had migrated from communities in the American Northeast, seeking to spend their final years in a place that reflected familiar cultural and religious traditions. Many belonged to a generation shaped by war and survival, some carrying the tattooed numbers of the Holocaust on their forearms.



Yet the couple in this photograph seems to belong to an earlier generation, predating those who were elderly in South Beach at the time. The image was likely carried across generations, preserved for decades before eventually becoming separated from the family that had once held it close.

There is something haunting in that trajectory: a photograph once treasured, carefully preserved through time, ultimately rendered anonymous. It feels like an echo from a deeper past, suggesting a lineage that may have stretched across continents, upheavals, and migrations before ending quietly on a thrift-shop shelf. In its journey are hints of all the unseen breaks in history—families dispersed, names forgotten, and stories lost or made impossible to tell.

Almost nothing can be known about who these people were or what their lives represented. Photographs are inherently incomplete. They offer no beginning, middle, or end, only a

single moment suspended in time. Removed from their original context, they become speculative objects, open to interpretation, and untethered from certainty. They exist both within time and outside it: preserved, yet somehow lost. They possess the authority of evidence while withholding the context necessary to understand what they record.

Without names or stories, we inevitably project onto them. We imagine who they were, what they believed, how they loved, and what they endured. But perhaps that uncertainty is precisely what gives the photograph its power. It is not empty because its story is missing; it is open because the story can no longer be known. The photograph becomes as much a mirror as a window—a fragment of history that invites us to search for meaning even as it reminds us of everything history can quietly take away.

31-33. Abe Horowitz



Untitled (Photograph and Two Stars)

Undated

Aluminum

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Abe Horowitz lived in South Beach when it was a vibrant community of elderly Jewish retirees. Social activities and services were plentiful, and synagogues were everywhere—even in hotels, where cardrooms were often converted into shuls. The community was colorful, and Abe Horowitz stood out among its more memorable characters.

He was a folk artist of sorts, creating patriotic American stars to express his allegiance to the United States and Stars of David to proclaim his support for the Jewish homeland of Israel. Zionism was a rallying cry for the residents of South

Beach; this was the generation that had survived the Holocaust. Horowitz often placed the Hebrew word Chai—meaning “life”—at the center of his Jewish stars. The common toast L’Chaim! translates as “To life.”

34.

Untitled (Wedding Collage

Undated

Photograph

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



This photographic collage is large, proud, and artful—full of promise, like freshly spoken “I dos.” It is also a masterclass in early photographic technique, a laborious process that brings form to feeling. Multiple negatives were projected at once onto photo paper under the amber glow of a darkroom lamp. Each image had to be carefully positioned and blended in near darkness before the paper was slipped into the developing tray. Test prints were necessary to achieve the proper exposure; each attempt a skilled negotiation between light and time. Then it was airbrushed; dreamy hues transforming it from gray tones to a burst of colors.

The result is both technical and tender. The wedding party floats at the center, flanked by windows that open onto distant seas, sailboats carrying the eye—and the imagination—still further. The bride is elevated at the top, her image doubled, a heart suspended between the two portraits. Below, the newlyweds appear together, fixed in their first shared frame. A warm hue unites the composition, binding the images to one another and, in turn, drawing us into their orbit.

But the collage offers only this: an arrangement of hope, a careful illusion of permanence. Did the marriage last as long

as the chemistry that fixed their images to paper? Did their days unfold as seamlessly as these exposures, or did their edges blur in ways they could not control? Were they married in Florida? The photograph surfaced in an antiques store in Holly Hill, so perhaps they wed nearby, in Daytona Beach when its tourist trade was in full bloom. Or perhaps they brought the collage with them later, carrying it south as they chased the promise of a new life in the Sunshine State. At some point, it slipped from their keeping—set down, sold, or simply left behind—until death, or distance, or time itself parted them from this careful record of beginning. What remains is the image: luminous, composed, and certain in a way life rarely is.

35.

Untitled (African American Woman)

Undated

Photograph in design frame

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



The hand-colored photograph presents itself as an act of devotion. Every element suggests deliberate care: the frame is cut to impart a sense of monument, the double lines drawn on the mounting board both soften and structure the surrounding space, and at the top their convergence forms quiet triangles echoed in the faux-gold photo corners. A rose decal, affixed to the photograph and trailing onto the mount below, extends the composition with a tender, almost ceremonial touch. Through these gestures, the image is lifted beyond mere likeness, granted dignity, permanence, and a place of honor.

Its visual language is clear. Symmetry, repetition, and ornament confer a sense of solidity, as though this small object might stand in for something lasting—a private monument to a life held dear. The woman depicted is not

simply shown but cared for, preserved through the attentive labor of another's hands. The photograph becomes less an object than an expression of attachment, its embellishments quietly testifying to admiration and love.

That intention, however, exists in tension with the photograph's present circumstance. For all its careful making, the keepsake was in a small antiques shop on the outskirts of Gainesville, set among mismatched frames and other abandoned heirlooms, its origins unspoken. What was meant to endure within the intimacy of memory has been displaced, its meaning loosened from the lives that once sustained it. The monument it aspires to be feels suddenly fragile.

And yet, it does not lose its significance entirely. The drawn lines, the imitation gold, the delicate decal—these are not failures of permanence but traces of an earnest attempt to resist forgetting. They suggest that memory, like the materials used to preserve it, is inherently provisional. What remains is evidence: that this woman was, at some point, regarded as special, and held with care.

To look at the photograph now is to participate in a different kind of preservation. Though the chain of personal memory is broken, attention restores, however briefly, the intention embedded within it. In the dim light of the shop, the faux gold caught and held a faint glimmer, and the image, for a moment, regains something of the dignity it was made to keep.

36.

Untitled (Fotoescultura, Mexican Man)

Undated

Photograph on carved wood



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

This portrait is mounted and carved from a single block of wood, creating a proscenium-like setting that frames the sitter in a sculptural tribute. Details such as the raised tie lend a subtle dimensionality, while hand coloring enhances the lifelike quality of the image.

Known as *fotoescultura*, this hybrid art form merges photography and relief carving. As scholar Laura Addison notes, it is “an art form characteristically found in Mexico and Mexican American communities, especially in Texas.” Produced primarily from the early 1930s through the late twentieth century, these works often commemorated loved ones and were displayed on domestic mantels or at family mausoleums.

Although this example bears no identifying marks, it likely emerged from a semi-commercial practice. Orders were often solicited door-to-door and fulfilled in specialized workshops, where artisans transformed photographic portraits into carved and painted objects. Techniques varied but could include incised lines to define hair, applied color to animate facial features, and the addition of ornamental details such as jewelry.

How this object came to Florida remains unknown, as does the identity of the sitter. Like many examples of *fotoescultura*, it endures as both a personal memorial and a testament to a distinctive, once-widespread vernacular tradition.

37.

Untitled (Father and Daughters)

Undated

Lighted photograph in wooden box frame

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Photography has changed immensely since its introduction in 1839, yet in many ways it remains the same. Modern cell phone cameras still record reflected light, just as bulky view cameras did in the mid-nineteenth century. Early photographic processes were laborious, especially when light-sensitive emulsions had to be coated onto glass plates in total darkness. Today, digital image “captures” (the technical term for taking pictures electronically) require little physical effort. While camera types and processes have evolved, they still produce essentially the same result: a singular image.



This piece is almost furniture-like in its construction. Its original negative was contact-printed to create a film positive—what might be called, in Photoshop terms, an inverted file. This transformation allows the image to appear as a positive when illuminated. A recessed light bulb sits within the deep shadow-box frame, backlighting the photograph so that the portrait appears radiant rather than reflective, as it would in a traditional frame.

We are left to wonder about the man and the two young girls, who we might assume are his children. The image comes from a time, long before divorce was as common or socially accepted as it is today, prompting further questions: Where is the mother? Who was she? What was this family’s story? We cannot know. We can only speculate about their lives and relationships, or about how such a finely crafted object came to be discarded—eventually ending up in a Salvation Army thrift store in St. Petersburg.

38. Aurelia “Mama” Johnson (b. Tampa, FL, 1918 – d. 2011, Tampa, FL)

Untitled
Undated
Marker on Paper

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Aurelia “Mama” Johnson, a doodler all her life, did not consider herself worthy of being called an artist. Yet she was the quintessential Outsider artist—free wheeling, untrained and more interested in faith than aesthetics. What stands out most is the tension between her humility and the unmistakable originality of her visual language. She dismissed her creations as “ugly,” grounding her modesty in her faith, yet everything about her process suggests a powerful, intuitive creativity. Transforming everyday plastic bottles into her “missionary girls” reflects both resourcefulness and a symbolic worldview—objects repurposed into figures with moral purpose.

Her drawings mirror that same instinctive energy. The looping, spiraling circles and lines that extend beyond forms feel almost meditative, as if the act of drawing mattered more than any finished image. There’s a sense of motion without destination—marks that “go nowhere and everywhere”—which aligns with many self-taught or outsider artists who prioritize expression over formal composition.

Her subjects—missionary girls, “aliestos” (aliens), flowers, animals—suggest a blend of spiritual imagination and everyday observation. Even her affection for flowers “no matter how they look” echoes her broader philosophy:

beauty isn't about refinement or convention, but presence and sincerity.

In a way, her work challenges traditional ideas of artistic value. She didn't seek recognition, yet her pieces embody qualities often celebrated in modern and contemporary art: repetition, abstraction, improvisation, and personal symbolism. That contrast—between her self-perception and the richness of her output—is what makes her story and work so compelling.

39. Susanne Blankemeier (b. Winter Park, FL, 1953)

Untitled

Undated

Crayon on Paper

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Susanne Blankemeier's trauma-informed art exemplifies autobiographical expression, in which symbolism, intuition, and the physical act of drawing become tools for confronting the past and transforming suffering into visual form.

Her drawings are a deeply personal exploration of childhood trauma, particularly the abuse she endured at the hands of her stepfather and others connected to a cult-like network in Southern California. For Blankemeier, creating art is both a process of remembering and a means of healing. She describes drawing as a way of allowing buried emotions and memories to surface, enabling her to engage with unconscious material rather than becoming overwhelmed by it.

Her artistic process reflects the fragmented and uncertain nature of traumatic memory. By dragging, blurring, and partially erasing pastel marks, she creates images that feel elusive and incomplete, echoing the way traumatic

experiences are often recalled. As she works, unexpected figures emerge—what she calls "surprise actors"—that help shape and communicate her story. Instead of assigning meaning to symbols in advance, she discovers their significance through the act of drawing itself.

Over time, several recurring motifs have acquired deeply personal meanings. Devilish girls represent emotional states she experienced during periods of abuse. A transcendent Black man symbolizes spiritual strength, wisdom, and healing, while distorted ears evoke secrecy, hidden knowledge, and overheard conversations.

Susanne Blankemeier's work suggests that visual imagery is central to how humans construct meaning from experience. It embraces the idea that truth and beauty can emerge through painful experiences rather than in spite of them. Completing a drawing that captures this complexity brings her a sense of relief, illustrating how art can function not only as personal testimony but also as a means of emotional integration and healing.

40. Purvis Young **(b. Miami, FL, 1943 – d. 2010, Miami, FL)**



Untitled
Undated
Mixed media paint on canvas

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Purvis Young is recognized as one of the most significant twentieth-century Outsider artists. Working outside conventional art systems, he developed a distinctive visual language shaped by his experiences in Overtown, a historic Black neighborhood that was demolished for the

construction of interstate systems adjacent to downtown Miami.

Young's paintings depict revelers and protestors, hovering insects, and pregnant women balancing padlocks on their heads. Like a cryptographer encoding his world, he fused memory, observation, and imagination to capture the rhythms and tensions of a specific time and place.

His imagery often carries pointed social meaning. Swarming insects suggest the destructive impact of drugs on individuals and communities, while padlocks atop pregnant women's heads evoke the "locking out" of knowledge. Anonymous figures appear with halos—earlier rendered as helmet-like forms marked by an all-seeing eye—signaling both sanctity and surveillance. In response to the refugee migrations of the early 1980s, boats at sea became a recurring motif.

Improvisational and urgent, Young's approach has been likened to jazz: spontaneous, layered, and ephemeral. His fragmentary compositions resist fixed interpretation, inviting viewers to find meaning within his coded and deeply personal vision.

41. Eddy Mumma **(b. Milton, OH, 1908 – d. 1986, Gainesville, FL)**



Untitled (Double Sided)

Undated

Acrylic on panel

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Eddy Mumma (1908–1986), who called himself “Mr. Eddy,” was a “hobo” for part of his youth, farmed for a living, and was a junk dealer. After his wife died, he enrolled in a



painting class. When the instructor criticized his work for being sloppy, Mr. Eddy dropped out and never returned. He was unemployed due to alcoholism and ill health; diabetes would necessitate the amputation of both of his legs.

Homebound, he tried to paint a picture a day on his own terms. Mr. Eddy painted the same face with hands-on-chest, in many variations, while confined to his home. The images were zealously realized, with bold lines and thick painterly brush strokes. His freewheeling use of color made each one a distinct portrait. “A magician in color,” the artist Lennie Kestl, said about him. It’s estimated that Mr. Eddy made 500 such pictures. At the time of his death, they covered the walls and floor of his small home and were discarded as trash. Folk art collector Josh Feldstein happened by and salvaged them.

42. Bryant “Bubba” Gowens (b. 1918 – d. 2002, Sanford, FL)

Untitled

Undated

Acrylic on panel

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Bryant “Bubba” Gowens (1918–2003) made sign-like images of guns that blur the line between personal expression and functional object. There was no attempt at conventional artmaking or narrative; instead, he drew as many guns as he could fit onto pieces of scrap plywood, creating a sense of visual insistence through repetition and accumulation. The guns were crudely outlined, their symbolism more potent than pictorial artifice, emphasizing presence over technique. Glitter was added to give the guns additional presence, not as refinement but as amplification, lending them a heightened, almost talismanic quality. He was not a

violent man, but he loved guns. “I wouldn’t want to live in a house without a gun,” he said. “Need it for protection.” Placed in the yard or visible through a window of his Sanford home, these works likely functioned as both declaration and deterrent—objects that projected security, identity, and belief, and perhaps served to ward off potential intruders.



43. Purvis Young
(b. Miami, FL, 1943 – d. 2010, Miami, FL)

Untitled
Undated
Paint on wood

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



44. Aurelia “Mama” Johnson
(b. Tampa, FL, 1918 – d. 2011, Tampa, FL)

Untitled
Undated
Marker on cut paper

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



45. Robert Roberg
(b. Spokane, WA, 1943)

Untitled
Undated
Paint on glass

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Having lived much of his life on society's margins, Robert Roberg (b.1943) developed a deeply personal artistic vision shaped by faith, conviction, and lived experience. As an independent street preacher unaffiliated with any church, Roberg devoted himself to warning passersby of the spiritual consequences of turning away from God. Convinced that his message of beauty, peace, universal love, and salvation was largely ignored, he believed many were on a path toward damnation. Despite frequent ridicule, verbal abuse, and even physical harassment, he remained steadfast in what he understood to be a divine mission from Yahweh.

While religious belief has inspired many Outsider artists, Roberg's work is distinguished by its uncompromising commitment to Christian morality and evangelical purpose. Throughout his artistic career, he feared that public recognition or financial success might compromise the integrity of his calling, believing that his art should exist solely in service to the Lord.

A pivotal transformation occurred after years of rejection as a street preacher, when Roberg began illustrating biblical passages in chalk on sidewalks. For the first time, people stopped to look—and to listen. This unexpected response revealed the persuasive power of visual imagery and inspired him to turn to painting. His works address what he understood to be the moral failings of contemporary society, including alcoholism and other behaviors he believed departed from biblical teaching. Each painting concludes with a handwritten text functioning as a direct moral exhortation, reinforcing the spiritual message of the image.

Robert Roberg's paintings are immediately recognizable for their vivid colors, occasional use of glitter, and intricately handcrafted frames, all of which heighten the emotional intensity of his imagery. He signs his name in the form of a cross and inscribes every work with the phrase "Talent by Y'Shua," attributing his artistic gifts entirely to Jesus rather

than to himself. His paintings embody the profound urgency of an artist who believed his message was unmistakably clear, yet remained troubled by what he perceived as humanity's persistent failure to understand—and live according to—God's will.

THE FLORIDA HIGHWAYMEN AND TOURIST ART

46. Harold Newton

(b. Gifford, FL, 1394 – d. 1994, Gifford, FL)

Untitled

Undated

Oil on board

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



A group of painters, who later became known as The Highwaymen, emerged as a remarkable and unconventional force in Florida art during the 1960s and 1970s. These 26 self-taught African American painters produced vivid, idealized landscapes—palms bending in coastal winds, radiant sunsets, and untouched wetlands—that captured a vision of Florida both real and imagined. Their works met the appetite of a rapidly growing postwar population eager for affordable, decorative images of their new home. When they were formally recognized in 1994, the name “The Highwaymen” helped spark widespread appreciation, fueled in part by nostalgia for a vanishing Florida landscape.

Two central figures shaped the group’s artistic direction: Harold Newton (1934-1994) and Alfred Hair (1941-1970). Newton’s work reflected a careful, skill-driven approach, aligning more closely with the established traditions of artists like A. E. Backus. His paintings emphasized finish, structure, and verisimilitude, representing a continuation of academic landscape conventions.

By contrast, Hair brought a radically different energy. Charismatic and entrepreneurial, he encouraged speed, boldness, and innovation. His approach rejected the slower, more meticulous methods of traditional landscape painting in favor of rapid production and expressive, gestural

techniques. This allowed the group not only to produce large quantities of work (possibly up to 250,000 paintings) but also to develop a distinct visual language: dramatic color contrasts, rhythmic compositions, and an almost cinematic sense of atmosphere.

Hair's influence effectively transformed the group into what might be described as an informal, decentralized atelier. Without formal training or institutional support—amid the constraints of Jim Crow laws and the tensions of the Civil Rights Movement—these artists forged a new path. They sold their paintings door-to-door, from car trunks, and along highways, stopping at offices and businesses.

What makes The Highwaymen especially significant is not only their story of perseverance but also their place within the broader trajectory of modern art. While their work remained representational, it diverged from tradition in execution and intent. The speed, improvisation, and material experimentation in Hair's approach align them—perhaps unexpectedly—with aspects of modernist practice, where process and medium become central concerns.

In that sense, The Highwaymen's paintings operate on two levels: they are accessible, decorative landscapes, and they are also part of a broader evolution in painting—expanding what “modern” could mean outside elite art institutions.



47. Petrenella “Madame” Zikmund

Untitled

Undated

Paint on wood panel

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

In the early 20th century, St. Petersburg transformed itself from a quiet fishing village into a thriving tourist destination, carefully crafting an image of sunshine, and leisure. Alongside outdoor recreation, art was promoted as both entertainment and enrichment.

Between 1939 and 1941, Petrenella “Madam” Zikmund contributed to this vision through lively advertisements and public demonstrations. Working at Robert Lewis Galleries, she offered private painting lessons with a guarantee of success and captivated audiences by creating custom oil paintings in minutes for just one dollar. Promoted as an award-winning “Bohemian artist,” Zikmund turned painting into a performance—accessible, affordable, and engaging.

Her work reflects how art in St. Petersburg was not only displayed but actively staged and sold, becoming part of the city’s broader effort to present itself as a vibrant and carefully curated paradise for visitors.

48. Walter Channing Addison **(b. Beverly, MA, 1876 – d. 1950, St. Petersburg, FL)**



Untitled

Undated

Paint on wood panel

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Walter Channing “W. C.” Addison was a “tourist artist” who produced small, inexpensive landscape paintings of Florida, selling them as souvenirs to visitors. Like many artists of his time, he spent his winters in Florida, drawn by both the climate and the growing tourist market.

Addison followed the path of photographer E. G. Barnhill when he arrived in Florida in 1914, initially settling in

Daytona Beach before relocating to St. Petersburg, where Barnhill operated his shop. Barnhill, an entrepreneur as well as a photographer, frequently traveled back to Daytona to collaborate with the painter J. R. Wilcox. From Wilcox, he acquired hand-colored gravure prints based on the artist's original paintings, which he then marketed and sold.

Recognizing the commercial potential of Florida's booming tourist trade, Addison moved to St. Petersburg to work with Barnhill. There, he joined other artists, including Albin Baranowski, in producing miniature paintings. These small works were strategically created to appeal to visitors who, upon collecting their photographic snapshots, might also purchase an original painted keepsake.

Addison was a skilled painter, and his works reflect a refined sensibility. He rendered Florida's landscapes in oils using subdued, atmospheric tones characteristic of Tonalism, capturing the region's scenery with both subtlety and artistry.

49. Albert Ernest (A.E.) Backus **(b. Fort Pierce, FL, 1906 – d. 1990, Fort Pierce, FL)**

Untitled
Undated
Oil on Canvas



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

A. E. "Beanie" Backus occupies a singular place in the history of American Regionalism and Florida art. Though his name rarely appears in surveys of twentieth-century American painting, his contribution to the visual construction of Florida's identity is profound. Backus's luminous landscapes of the Indian River region not only captured the subtropical light and topography of his native

Fort Pierce but also established a painterly vocabulary that shaped the cultural imagination of Florida for generations. His work bridges local intimacy and universal resonance, the empirical precision of observation, and the transcendence of place through color and mood. In the evolution of Florida's modern visual culture—from the isolation of its frontier communities to its emergence as a state of mythic allure—Backus's art stands as both mirror and catalyst.

While identified as a regionalist, Backus was more than a chronicler of place. His paintings, imbued with humanism and a reverence for nature, speak to enduring themes of belonging, transformation, and community. Through his mentorship of younger artists—most notably the African American painters Alfred Hair and Harold Newton—Backus's studio became a crucible for a movement that would later be known as the Highwaymen, a group whose energy and entrepreneurial spirit democratized artmaking in mid-century Florida. To understand Backus, therefore, is to understand not only an artist but a regional ethos—a confluence of geography, culture, and conscience that transformed a small coastal town into a site of American artistic renewal.

50. Alfred Hair (b. Fort Pierce, FL, 1941 – d. 1970, Fort Pierce, FL)



Untitled
Undated
Oil on board

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

MIAMI & SOUTH FLORIDA

51. Yippie Poster

Miami Beach, FL

Ten Days to Change the World

1972

Printed poster paper

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



It has often been said that if you remember the Sixties, you weren't truly there—that too many memories dissolved into a haze of smoke, sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Even so, certain figures and moments remain sharply defined. You might still recall Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, among the most visible leaders of the Youth International Party—the Yippies—whose brand of protest fused politics with theater and spectacle. The Hippies who came before them had already reshaped the cultural landscape. With their bell-bottom jeans, long hair, and ethos of peace and love, they rallied around the slogan “Make Love, Not War,” a direct rebuke to the conflict in Vietnam. They challenged authority, rejected convention, and promoted a more open, liberal social order. The Yippies, inheriting that spirit, turned up the intensity—trading passive resistance for confrontational, often outrageous acts designed to provoke and disrupt.

That escalation came to a head during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. When police moved to enforce a curfew and clear protesters from the parks with force and tear gas, demonstrators responded in kind, hurling back whatever they could. The clashes, broadcast across the nation, marked a turning point—revealing deep fractures in American society that could no longer be ignored.

What unfolded in Chicago carried forward. Four years later, both major parties convened in Miami Beach under the shadow of that earlier unrest. The atmosphere remained tense, though more tightly controlled. Yippies gathered at Flamingo Park, just a half mile from the convention center, using the space as a staging ground for their signature political theater. Their poster declared, “Ten days to change the world.” It was a bold and defiant vision—part protest, part performance, and part dream. Yet like so much of that era, it was a dream edged with confrontation, spectacle, and the lingering sting of tear gas.

52.

Villa Vizcaya embroidery

undated

Wool, canvas and paint

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



This folk-art piece, as plush as a rug, depicts the south side of the Mediterranean Revival mansion at Villa Vizcaya as one would see it while walking back from its formal gardens. Built by industrialist James Deering on 180 acres of tropical hammock along Biscayne Bay in Coconut Grove, the estate boasts 70 rooms and was completed for occupancy on Christmas Day, 1916. Today, as Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, it is owned and operated by Miami-Dade County and stands among the city’s premier cultural hubs and tourist destinations.

The artwork contrasts strikingly with the mansion’s restored formality, offering a humble yet affectionate homage to Vizcaya’s Renaissance and Gilded Age splendor. Crafted on a woven canvas base, the mansion and its grounds emerge through wool thread embroidery, using chain stitch to outline key features. Victorian tufting brings texture to the

bushes, while the sky, building, and lawn are highlighted with paint. Roses are rendered with French knots, adding delicate dimension and charm.

This piece is both a tribute and a tactile delight, celebrating the estate in a medium that will captivate fabric artists, embroiderers, and seamstresses, transforming Vizcaya's grandeur into a richly textured, handmade treasure.

53. George Voronovsky

(b. Klepaly, Ukraine, Russian Empire, 1923 – d. 1982, Miami, FL)

Untitled

Undated

Watercolor on Paper

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



George Voronovsky was an Outsider artist whose memory paintings stand as vivid testaments to a charmed youth in Kiev, Ukraine. Surviving the devastation of World War II and the horrors of a Nazi labor camp, Voronovsky carried the fragments of his past with him, translating them into intricate, fantastical images. In his final decade, living in Miami Beach, he painted on scrap cardboard scavenged from the alleys behind Ocean Drive, carefully drawing complex scenes and bringing them to life with bright, water-based paints purchased from Woolworth's Five-and-Dime.

Voronovsky's art was intensely personal. Alone among a sea of elderly retirees in South Beach, no one saw the paintings tacked across his hotel room walls. Alongside them, a myriad of decorations fashioned from refuse—stars from aluminum cans, flowers from candy wrappers—covered every surface, creating a kaleidoscopic sanctuary of memory and imagination. His work was a conscious

reclamation of the past: an idealized vision of Kiev that contrasted sharply with the world he faced after the war. Plain white walls allowed his thoughts to wander into painful terrain, and it was through art-making that he found solace, not answers, directing his mind toward beauty and wonder even amid solitude.

"When we presented Voronovsky's first major solo exhibition at the High Museum of Art in 2023, we subtitled the exhibition 'Memoryscapes,' connecting Voronovsky's work to the trope of "memory painting" that is associated with self-taught artists, who often bloom creatively in the last years or decades of their life," says Katherine Jentleson, Senior curator at the High. "This felt very appropriate because as we conducted visual analysis of Voronovsky's painting, we came to understand that although many of his scenes have a fantastic quality to them, nearly all of them feature flora, fauna, architectural landmarks, and cultural traditions that index the specific places and experiences of his life."

Resourceful, imaginative, and untrained, Voronovsky exemplifies the spirit of Outsider art. His paintings and decorations transform discarded materials into vivid narratives, bridging memory and imagination, loss and resilience. Each brushstroke, each carefully cut shape, becomes a testament to survival, a way to preserve the past, and a celebration of the human capacity to create meaning and joy even in the wake of trauma. In George Voronovsky's world, the boundaries between memory and invention, reality and fantasy, collapse—leaving behind a dazzling portrait of a life lived fully, if quietly, in the shadow of history.

54. Conni Gordon

(b. 1923 – d. 2017, Miami, FL)

Lincoln Road

Undated

Oil on Canvas

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Conni Gordon was an art pioneer who bridged television, mass media, and accessible creativity. In 1948, she bought time on a New York City television station to demonstrate her colorful painting techniques to a vast audience, even though television at the time was black-and-white. Despite this limitation, her performances captured viewers' imaginations and sparked the emergence of a new breed of art hobbyists eager to follow the Conni Gordon Method of Speed Painting. Known as the “World’s Fastest Painter,” she specialized in rapidly creating recognizable landscapes, seascapes, smiling clowns, happy babies, parrots, lions, and flowers, making art approachable and enjoyable for everyone.

In 1954, Gordon moved to Miami Beach and opened an art school on Lincoln Road, which at the time was considered “the Fifth Avenue of the South.” The street was a posh shopping destination where people dressed for the occasion, and perfume wafted from Saks department store with every opening door. In 1960, famed architect Morris Lapidus transformed Lincoln Road into a glitzy tropical pedestrian mall, complete with lush foliage, pools, fountains, and playful architectural motifs designed for movement and enjoyment. Gordon’s painting captured the essence of this environment, depicting familiar landmarks like the Miami Beach Federal Bank Building, which displayed the time and temperature, and including details such as the

open-air tram that ran along the three-quarters of a mile from Washington Avenue to Lincoln Road.

Gordon's work was never about creating "great art" in the traditional sense; it was about fostering self-esteem and joy through artistic achievement. She believed that making a picture that was recognizable gave people confidence in themselves and opened the heart and mind to creative expression. This philosophy was realized through her teaching, which reached millions—15 million copies of her books and fifty years of instructional classes helped countless people learn to paint while experiencing the pleasures of the arts.

Through her colorful demonstrations, her speed painting, and her commitment to accessible instruction, Conni Gordon left a legacy that went beyond technique or critical acclaim. She democratized art, showing that the act of creation itself could bring joy, build confidence, and connect people to their communities. Her paintings captured not only the physical beauty of places like Lincoln Road but also the energy, optimism, and spirit of a culture embracing leisure, media, and self-expression.

55.

Map of Miami

Undated

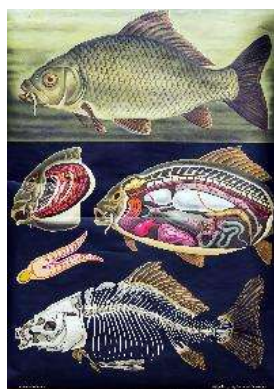


Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

This hand-drawn pictorial bird's-eye-view map of Miami and Miami Beach, published in 1944, captures the city at a pivotal moment in its history. The map's coverage extends west to Red Road and the beginnings of the Everglades, showing areas that were largely undeveloped at the time, long before the urban expansion that now skirts the River of

Grass. Prominent landmarks such as Biscayne Bay, the iconic Art Deco hotels along Ocean Drive, and the bustling downtown core with its early skyscrapers are illustrated in vivid detail, offering both geographic and cultural context. Surrounding the map are advertisements from local merchants, providing a fascinating glimpse into 1940s Miami commerce and everyday life. A notice marked “Open to Civilians” reflects the wartime environment, when many of Greater Miami’s hotels and apartments were requisitioned to house soldiers and military personnel during the Second World War. The combination of artistic perspective, historical detail, and commercial context makes this map not just a guide, but a vivid snapshot of Miami during a transformative era.

56. Hagemann



Educational Charts

ca. 1960

Print on rolled linen canvas, wood, metal

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



There was a time when classrooms had no air conditioning, when air circulated only through open windows and transoms. It was also an era of duck-and-cover drills—the atomic age—when fear lingered in the air, especially in South Florida, so close to Cuba during the Cold War. Teaching was disciplined, rooted in the basics: “reading, ’riting, and ’rithmetic,” drilled into students, day after day.

The alphabet stretched across the classroom on dark green charts with white lettering—script and block, upper and lower case—running the width of the room above the chalkboard. Penmanship was practiced with care. Wall clocks ticked steadily in the background.

Yet beyond memorization, imagination played an essential role. The sense of possibility that wonder inspires may well have been nurtured by beautifully rendered and expertly printed instructional charts. Produced for educational use from the 18th century through the modern midcentury period, these charts combined artistry with pedagogy. The examples displayed here are later reissues: the German firm Hagemann continued reproducing its designs long after many other educational chart manufacturers had gone bankrupt.

With the rise of new media—such as slide projectors shining light through diapositives (positive photographic transparency) onto a screen—and an increasing emphasis on measurable educational outcomes, these pull-down charts gradually fell out of favor. Replaced by facts, tests, and standardized methods, they were removed from classrooms and decommissioned. Many were relegated to public school warehouses, where they were stored, sold off, or ultimately discarded.

57. Robert Rauschenberg
(b. Port Arthur, TX, 1925 – d. 2008, Captiva Island, FL)



Cover for Tropic, The Miami Herald
December 1979
Edition of 600,000

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Robert Rauschenberg was known for blurring the boundaries between fine art and everyday life, often incorporating found imagery and mass media into his work. His collaboration with The Miami Herald for the December 30, 1979 issue of *Tropic* magazine exemplifies this philosophy. By transforming a newspaper cover into a large-scale, widely distributed lithograph, Rauschenberg

challenged traditional notions of originality and exclusivity in art. Rather than producing a limited-edition print for a select audience, he created what was described as the “world’s largest edition of an original lithograph,” reaching hundreds of thousands of readers simultaneously.

A particularly compelling aspect of the project lies in the decision to randomly sign approximately 150 copies. This gesture introduced an element of chance and rarity into an otherwise mass-produced object, effectively disrupting expectations about value and ownership. Ordinary readers, who might otherwise have simply discarded the newspaper, suddenly found themselves in possession of a potential collectible, transforming a routine act of consumption into an encounter with art. In doing so, Rauschenberg further blurred the line between fine art ownership and everyday experience, reinforcing his longstanding interest in collapsing distinctions between high culture and the ordinary world.

The project is widely recognized as an early and influential example of the democratization of art—bringing it directly into people’s homes without the traditional barriers imposed by galleries or museums.

58.

Miami Beach

Undated

Photographs



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

A stack of fifty-five high-quality 5×7 large-format negatives, accompanied by postcard-sized prints, surfaced without attribution. A few bear handwritten hotel names; fewer still include locations. None are dated. The automobiles

captured in their frames—models from the late 1930s and early 1940s—offer the only reliable temporal anchor, coinciding with the construction of many of the depicted hotels.

The work is unmistakably that of a highly skilled, likely professional photographer. The large-format camera alone suggests deliberation, but it is the precise control of perspective—lens movements employed to maintain vertical lines—that confirms a practiced hand.

These orphaned images represent a near-lost archive. Their story is a familiar one: detached from authorship, stripped of context, and left to time. Yet their value persists—and grows—as memory fades and façades evolve, provided the buildings themselves survive the steady pressures of progress.



59. and 60. Christo and Jeanne-Claude

(b. Gabrovo, Bulgaria, 1935 – d. 2020, New York, NY)

(b. Casablanca, Morocco, 1935 – d. 2009, New York, NY)

Surrounded Islands Hat

Fabric Sample Keepsake

1983

Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

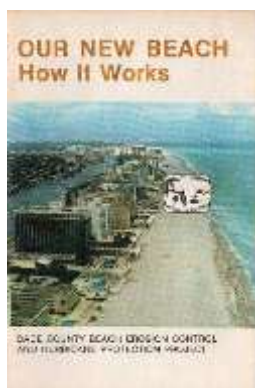
Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Surrounded Islands* (1983) played a major role in elevating Miami's global cultural status, alongside the popular TV show *Miami Vice*, which portrayed the city as crime-ridden but cool. The artwork transformed Biscayne Bay by surrounding eleven islands with 200 feet of bright pink polypropylene fabric, creating a striking visual effect that lasted two weeks beginning May 7, 1983. The installation harmonized with the natural

environment and captivated viewers, especially from vantage points like the Julia Tuttle Causeway, where the vivid pink outlines contrasted with the green islands in the shimmering waterway. Despite its serene appearance, the project required significant effort, involving 430 workers and 6.5 million square feet of fabric, with staff equipped for the sun with these hats and given fabric keepsakes.

61.

Miami Beach Restoration Brochure 1979

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



By the late 1970s, Miami Beach faced a crisis that threatened its very foundation. Decades of shoreline erosion, driven by storms, tides, ocean currents, and rising sea levels, had steadily stripped away the sand that defined the city's coastline. Human development compounded the problem: seawalls, jetties, and dense construction disrupted natural sediment flows, leaving behind a narrow and unappealing strip of beach. At high tide, waves pressed directly against seawalls, erasing any buffer between ocean and infrastructure. In 1979, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers undertook an ambitious \$62 million restoration project, dredging offshore sand to replenish the 9.3-mile stretch from Government Cut to Bakers Haulover Inlet.

Though essential, the intervention initially felt unfamiliar. The imported dredged sand was lighter and coarser, its texture and color distinct from the original shoreline, and the widened beach created a longer, more strenuous walk to the water—particularly challenging for the city's largely elderly population at the time. Yet this engineered landscape ultimately restored Miami Beach's most precious resource, laying the groundwork for its future as a revitalized coastal

destination. This publication explained the process and offered assurance.

62. Henri Cartier-Bresson

(b. Chanteloup-en-Brie, France, 1908 – d. 2004, Céreste, France)



Life Magazine

1957, published in 1958

Magazine prints

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004) fundamentally transformed photography through his pioneering use of the 35mm Leica camera. In the early 1930s, he developed a method of unobtrusive observation by wrapping the camera strap around his wrist and capturing fleeting moments on the streets worldwide—a practice he called “The Decisive Moment.” This approach emphasized the perfect alignment of composition, timing, and human expression, defining modern photojournalism and influencing generations of photographers seeking to interpret life visually.

In 1957, Cartier-Bresson traveled to South Florida, photographing Miami and Palm Beach for Life magazine. These images were published in the January 20, 1958 issue. His observations reveal a keen eye for social contrast: in Miami Beach, he noted the conspicuous display of wealth, remarking, “The hotels show all the wealth, one after the other...Miami is a city that lets you pay \$60 a day to say, ‘I’ve succeeded. Let’s spend it.’” In contrast, Palm Beach struck him as more reserved and dignified, akin to the British royal family, where joy is private and publicity avoided.

Cartier-Bresson also captured the social dynamics at the Hialeah Park Racetrack, which he considered one of his

most memorable photographs from the trip. He observed an international fraternity among racing fans, emphasizing the universality of human behavior and the subtle stories found in everyday life. His South Florida work exemplifies his ability to combine formal elegance with candid insight, illustrating why he remains a central figure in the history of photography.

64. Bunny Yeager
(b. Wilkinsburg, PA, 1929 – d. 2014, Miami, FL)

Bettie Page
1954
Photograph

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Perhaps Margalit Fox wrote the most concise and insightful biography of Bunny Yeager (1929–2014). Describing the naïve eroticism of Yeager’s 1950s–60s photographs, Fox observed that her “vibrant, natural-looking models...exuded a confident female sexuality that—at the moment the shutter clicked, at least—did not appear destined for the male gaze.” This was a time when the term had yet to be coined, even as the attitude itself remained pervasive and condescending.

Yeager left the dreary cold of Pennsylvania for the sun and playfulness of Miami, where she transformed from a shy teenager into a beauty pageant winner—and soon after, the queen of pin-up photography. Born Linnea Eleanor, she adopted the name “Bunny,” inspired by Lana Turner’s character in “Weekend at the Waldorf.” After attending modeling school, she began printing her own photographs to save money, developing technical skills she would refine at Lindsey-Hopkins Technical College. She had the right tools and instincts: a medium-format camera, a flash to soften the hard shadows of tropical light, and an eye for placing

just-nude-enough young women in the vibrant settings of South Florida. It was a moment when glamour photography thrived across a wide range of men's magazines. Yeager insisted her aim was not to arouse but to express beauty. Still, her images became iconic—distilling an era's mix of innocence and desire into scenes of what might be called armchair longing.

She also helped popularize the modern bikini and pioneered a playful form of self-portraiture with a buoyant, beachside sensibility. Yeager had a gift for soft-sell imagery, work that felt innocent yet unmistakably suggestive. Her reign waned in the 1970s as men's magazines declined and cultural tastes shifted.

Although she gained increasing recognition for her photography, Yeager also helped launch the career of the legendary pin-up model Bettie Page. One of her most famous photographs, taken in 1954 at the Africa USA wildlife park in Boca Raton, captures Page at the height of her charisma—playful, poised, and emblematic of Yeager's distinctive vision.



Robert Bruce Mozert
(b. Newark, OH, 1916 – d. 2015, Ocala, FL)

63. *Untitled*, Undated, Photograph

65. *Untitled*, Undated, Photograph

66. *Carpet Ride*, Undated, Photograph



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Starting in the 1940s, Robert Bruce Mozert (1916–2015) was the photographer at Silver Springs. Bruce Mozert photographed attractive young women performing everyday activities underwater to promote the theme park. His striking images were widely distributed by wire services during the post–World War II boom in auto tourism, helping



establish Silver Springs as Florida's premier attraction. Families flocked to see life beneath the crystal-clear waters through glass-bottomed boats, where the fish seemed suspended in midair. In Mozart's photographs, even the most mundane scenes appeared startlingly real at first glance, leaving viewers awestruck by both the underwater reality and the carefully staged compositions.

Mozert laughed at the notion that he was an artist, insisting that "a good photograph is a salable one." Yet his work clearly anticipated the postmodern fascination with directorial photography. Indeed, his innovative approach became the foundation for later generations of artists who staged or synthesized images.

SOUVENIRS AND SELLING THE DREAM

67. Fontainebleau Miami Beach, FL

Cigarette Lighter

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Promotional souvenirs once served as proud keepsakes—small emblems of identity that doubled as declarations of allegiance. They were, in a sense, logos of their time: a kind of wearable advertisement not just for a place, but for a lifestyle. In mid-century Miami Beach, no name carried more cachet than The Fontainebleau hotel. It stood apart from its competitors, grand in design and in every exuberant detail. The hotel drew high rollers and major stars, among them members of Rat Pack, whose presence only heightened its allure. Conventions and lavish receptions filled its ballrooms, while a mix of clubs and restaurants kept the energy flowing well into the night. Along the lower level, chic boutiques invited guests to browse and linger. Indoors and out, by day and by evening, the Fontainebleau pulsed with activity—an enduring symbol of glamour, ambition, and the spectacle of its era.

The Fontainebleau's logo adorns this sleek cigarette lighter, an object at once practical and suggestive of another time. For some, it evokes an era when smoking was synonymous with sophistication—when style was effortless and cool seemed second nature. It may even summon the image of Sean Connery as James Bond, pausing to light a cigarette before delivering his iconic introduction, the gesture as deliberate as his gaze. In this way, the lighter becomes more than a tool; it is a small vessel of memory, charged with the

glamour and confidence of mid-century life. For others, of course, it remains simply what it is: a lighter that does its job.

A similar sense of place emerges in memories just a few miles south along Collins Avenue from the storied hotel of Wolfie's. Neon lights flickered against the night as cars streamed past rows of hotels, but inside there was refuge. The deli's booths, upholstered in red Naugahyde, seemed to glow under the bright lights. Menus were sprawling affairs—large enough to require both hands, like a morning newspaper. An efficient, sharp-witted waitress would arrive with water, danishes, and bread—onion rolls among them—along with stainless-steel bowls brimming with sauerkraut and crisp dill pickles. The pastrami on rye demanded equal attention: a sandwich so generous it, too, required both hands, and was eaten with unrestrained satisfaction. The souvenir tie pin that remains is understated by comparison. It does not call attention to itself, yet it carries the weight of that experience. Less an accessory than a quiet emblem, it serves as a reminder of a particular moment in Miami Beach.



68. Wolfie's
Miami Beach, FL

Tie Pin

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



69. Loudon Underhill (L.U.) Dodge
(b. Bayside, NY, 1839 – d. 1887, Rochester, NY)

Illustrated Florida
1882

Chromolithographs



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

L.U. Dodge (1839–1887) was an illustrator and publisher in Rochester, New York, who produced popular souvenir images sold as frameable prints and view books. His portfolio, *Illustrated Florida*, features 19 chromolithographed images, each measuring 4¾ by 7½". At the time, "Florida" generally referred to central and northern parts of the state, as the southern region remained largely undeveloped wilderness. The town of Enterprise on Lake Monroe—part of the St. Johns River system—served as a premier destination, something like the Miami Beach of its day.

That geography and pattern of travel soon shifted. As Henry Flagler's railroad extended down Florida's east coast from Jacksonville, it supplanted the St. Johns River as the state's main transportation artery and accelerated coastal development. Dodge's portfolio, copyrighted in 1882, captures this transitional moment. It includes views of Jacksonville, Fernandina, St. Augustine, Palatka, the Ocklawaha River, Silver Springs, Orange Lake, and scenes along the St. Johns River, alongside more romanticized titles such as "The Sunny Land of Fruits and Flora" and "Way Down in Dixie."

70.



Relief Photograph of a Couple

n.d.

Photograph and wood

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

An early advertisement by Eastman Kodak Company proclaimed, "Remember with Pictures," a slogan that reflected the growing cultural importance of photography as

a means of preserving personal memories. These remembrances took many forms—often small enough to fit in the palm of one’s hand and were carefully arranged in albums to commemorate meaningful moments.

This relief photograph was created from an 8 x 10 inch print. Mounted on a board, the figures of the couple were meticulously cut out and layered in front of the background, producing a dimensional effect. The result is a distinctive souvenir, designed to preserve not just a place, but a specific experience—perhaps a cherished vacation moment.

The piece commemorates visitors to the Biltmore Hotel, a landmark in Coral Gables. When the hotel opened in 1926, it stood as Florida’s tallest building and featured what was then the largest swimming pool in the world. A symbol of luxury and prestige, the Biltmore quickly became a premier destination for elite travelers, hosting an array of notable guests including gangsters, royalty, politicians, and film stars. Its vibrant social scene included gala balls, fashion shows, golf tournaments, and elaborate aquatic performances, drawing large crowds and cementing its reputation as a hub of glamour and entertainment.



71. AND 72.

Miami Souvenir Cup and Saucer

n.d.

Porcelain



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Souvenir porcelain held a special place in the early decades of Florida tourism. Much of it was produced in Germany through the 1920s, before the onset of the Great Depression

curtailed such imports. As railroads opened the state to travelers, finely decorated cups and saucers appeared in hotel gift shops, catering to a growing class of affluent visitors eager to bring a piece of their experience home.

The Biscayne Drive cup captures a sweeping view of early downtown Miami from what was then the shoreline—an area later dredged to create Bayfront Park—stretching north toward what is now known as Edgewater. The century-old scene is strikingly unfamiliar today, lending it a powerful sense of nostalgia. In the distance rise the then-new Venetian Causeway and MacArthur Causeway, early links between the mainland and the barrier island of Miami Beach.

Another cup depicts Fisher's Casino, one of several early seaside pavilions that helped define Miami Beach's identity as a destination for leisure and recreation. These "casinos" were not gambling halls but social and bathing complexes, places where visitors gathered for swimming, dining, and entertainment. The first opened in 1901 at the island's southern tip. Cook's Casino, located on Fifth Street, included a shop selling suntan oils, sunglasses, and locally made souvenirs. By 1920, developers John S. Collins and Russell Pancoast introduced the Everglades Cabana Club on 22nd Street. When acquired by Carl G. Fisher, it was renamed the Roman Pools, offering a more elaborate blend of dining and entertainment.

Another porcelain scene features the grand Royal Palm Hotel, developed by railroad magnate Henry Flagler and opened in 1897 along the north bank of the Miami River at Biscayne Bay. According to the Miami Design Preservation League, the resort set a new standard for luxury in the region. It introduced the city's first electric lights, elevators, and swimming pool, and boasted 450 guest rooms and suites, along with parlors, game rooms, a ballroom, and a dining room capable of seating 500 guests. A staff of 300—including sixteen cooks—served its clientele. Though

emblematic of Miami's early grandeur, the hotel was severely damaged in the 1926 Miami hurricane and ultimately demolished in 1930.

Florida Postcards



73. Daytona Beach, FL, 1920s

74. Miami, FL, 1930s

75. St. Augustine, FL, 1920s

76. St. Petersburg, FL, 1920s

77. Miami Beach, FL, 1921



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Florida postcards were once as ubiquitous as hot dogs and apple pie in American popular culture—a cheap souvenir of vacation and a playful way to boast to friends shoveling snow back home. They also hold documentary value, preserving points of interest in dreamy, airbrushed colors that reveal as much about imagination as reality.



Picture postcards reached their peak popularity between 1898 and 1920, the golden age of postcard collecting. Early cards had undivided backs, reserving space for messages in a small area on the front while the reverse was used solely for addresses. In 1908, divided backs were introduced, allowing the entire left half for correspondence and greatly expanding what people could say. By the 1920s, white borders framed the images, subtly shaping how scenes were viewed. From 1930 to 1950, linen postcards—with their lightly textured surfaces and richly saturated colors—became the standard.



These lush, fantasy-infused images gave way around 1950 to more straightforward color photographs known as chromes. The shift marked more than a technical change; it reflected a different way of seeing, moving from

romanticized interpretation to visual realism—a difference that feels like a change in worlds.

The hobby of collecting postcards, known as deltiology, has been ranked as the third-largest collecting pursuit after stamps and coins. More than simple accumulation, it can be understood as a form of curation. Collectors seek and assemble images to create new relationships and meanings, turning small, printed scenes into a broader cultural and historical narrative.

As Tampa deltiologist (a person who collects and studies picture postcard) Bonnie Wilpon writes, “Postcards are time machines... they bring back fond memories and let us imagine the Florida our grandparents lived in and loved.” Each card captures a vanished landscape: when the Tomoka River was a quiet rural backwater, when St. Pete Beach lacked its later development, when roadside orange groves offered fresh juice and even baby alligators to hold, and when Miami’s 1928 County Courthouse, rising 28 stories, stood as the tallest building in the state.

78.

Fischer Family Snapshot Albums

1953-1956

Photographs in paper folios

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

With the advent of consumer photography, picture-taking quickly became an everyday pastime, and family snapshots evolved into lasting records of ordinary life and treasured “Kodak moments.” As cameras became more affordable and easier to use, family albums flourished, preserving birthdays, vacations, graduations, and other milestones. These snapshots also became enduring markers of childhood and memory.

Keith Fischer, born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in December 1952 and raised in nearby Hollywood, grew up surrounded by such photographs. His biological father died when he was one year old, and his mother soon remarried. His stepfather, a jazz singer, owned a nightclub in New Orleans. “That’s why I am like I am,” Keith reflects. Today, Keith no longer knows who took the family's photographs, though he assumes it was not his mother, who appears in many of them. Most of the eighteen surviving snapshot albums date from 1953, with smaller groups from 1954 through early 1956. For his parents, the pictures documented love, family, and belonging. For Keith, they have become windows onto his childhood and reminders of a South Florida that has largely disappeared. He remembers riding his bicycle “all over the place—no people. It wasn't crowded. It was great.” His family lived on the edge of town, where suburban streets gave way to the Everglades. One of his strongest memories is the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. With anti-Castro Alpha 66 volunteers training nearby in the Everglades, he recalls hearing gunfire from their exercises. Like other schoolchildren, he practiced daily “duck and cover” drills beneath his desk, while some neighbors built bomb shelters. Now in his seventies, Fischer sees these photographs as fragments of a vanished world of open spaces, close-knit neighborhoods, and youthful freedom. “I knew everybody. There were no fences around houses,” he says. The snapshots cannot tell the whole story—they omit his surfing, marijuana use, and youthful arrest. “I was a hippie,” he recalls. Yet they preserve something equally true: a loving family recording everyday moments that, with time, have become extraordinary.



69. Loudon Underhill (L.U.) Dodge
(b. Bayside, NY, 1839 – d. 1887, Rochester, NY)

Illustrated Florida
1882

Chromolithographs



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Hans Hannau

(b. Vienna, Austria, 1904 – d. 2001, Miami Beach, FL)

79. *Untitled*, Undated, Photograph

80. *Untitled*, Undated, Photograph

81. *Untitled*, Undated, Photograph

82. *Coronado Hotel*, Undated, Photograph



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



After photographing everyday life in Austria, Hans Hannau (1904–2001) emigrated to the United States and settled in Miami. In the early 1940s, he quickly turned his attention to capturing the picturesque landscapes and atmosphere of Florida.

He brought his portfolio to Hastings House, hoping to secure a commission for a proposed book that would allow him to continue documenting the state. To his surprise, the acquisitions editor remarked that the project already appeared complete. The publisher went on to release *Florida: A Photographic Journey* in 1948.

Hannau subsequently produced dozens of small-format picture books featuring South Florida and the Caribbean, many of which were sold commercially as souvenirs. His photographs were also widely reproduced as postcards. Although relatively little-known today, he was an exceptionally prolific photographer whose work played a role in shaping the visual image of Florida for mid-century audiences.



83. Esmond Grenard (E.G.) Barnhill
(b. Saluda, SC, 1894 – d. 1987, Gainesville, FL)

Untitled

Undated

Uranium dyes on glass

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Esmond “E.G.” Barnhill was a pioneering figure in early 20th-century Florida photography, particularly at the dawn of the state’s tourism boom. In 1913, he established a studio in St. Petersburg, selling cameras and prints to tourists eager for tangible memories of their Florida visits. To stand out, Barnhill experimented with hand-coloring black-and-white prints, transforming standard landscapes into vibrant, one-of-a-kind artworks.



Unlike the typical airbrushed, dreamy landscapes of his contemporaries, Barnhill’s approach was radically experimental. He applied uranium dyes to glass-plate positives, producing otherworldly colors that metaphorically captured the intensity and clarity of Florida’s natural palette. He claimed to be “the only man in America to use the photographic process of uranium dyes on glass.” Barnhill even sourced specialized supplies from Germany, unaware at the time of the radioactive nature of uranium.

His glass-plate photographs remain rare and highly valued, both for their technical innovation and for their unique depiction of Florida landscapes. Through these inventive experiments, Barnhill secured his reputation as an original and left an enduring mark on both Florida’s artistic heritage and the broader history of photography.

84. Richard LeSesne

(b. Clarkesville, GA, 1880 – d. 1946, Daytona Beach, FL)

Untitled

Undated

Photograph

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Richard LeSesne (1880–1946) played a major role in visually documenting the early identity of Daytona Beach and nearby Ormond Beach during a period when automobile racing on hard-packed sand drew international attention. His reputation as the “dean of Daytona Beach photographers” came largely from his close association with these high-speed trials, where he served as the unofficial (and often described as “official”) photographer of record.

What makes LeSesne particularly interesting is how his career blends artistry, entrepreneurship, and the realities of early 20th-century Florida life. He didn’t begin as a full-time photographer. After studying art at the Art Students League of New York, photography was initially more of a creative outlet. His move south was driven by health concerns, a common reason people relocated to Florida before modern medicine and air conditioning made other climates more tolerable. Once in Florida, though, he recognized opportunity. The beaches of Daytona and Ormond weren’t just scenic—they were experimental grounds for speed and technology. Early land-speed record attempts turned the area into a spectacle, and LeSesne’s images helped define how the world saw these events.

His work also reflects a broader photographic trend noted by historian Dick Punnett: the popularity of panoramic images in Daytona. The elongated “double postcard” format was ideal for capturing sweeping beach scenes, long lines of

spectators, and the motion of racing vehicles. By minimizing sky and foreground, the composition pulled viewers directly into the action. At the same time, LeSesne showed a sharp awareness of market diversity. Not everyone wanted race cars—so he created his “Haberle-tones,” named after his family heritage (Habersham). These gold-toned glass plate images focused on Florida’s natural landscapes. They offered a softer, more romantic vision of the region—lush, atmospheric, and appealing to tourists seeking beauty rather than speed.

Another telling detail is his seasonal work pattern. Like many Florida photographers before air conditioning, he followed the tourist economy north during summer months. But by 1914, his Daytona business had grown strong enough that he could remain there year-round—a sign of both his success and the area’s increasing stability as a destination. In short, LeSesne wasn’t just documenting Daytona Beach—he was helping construct its image in two parallel ways: as a cutting-edge site of speed and innovation, and as a place of natural beauty worth preserving and visiting.



85. Esmond Grenard (E.G.) Barnhill
(b. Saluda, SC, 1894 – d. 1987, Gainesville, FL)

Untitled
Undated
Uranium dyes on glass

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

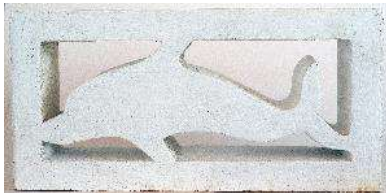
86. Marineland St Augustine, FL

Dolphin Screen Blocks

ca. 1955

Cast concrete

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Marineland began as Marine Studios along the coast south of St. Augustine. Opened in 1938, it was the world's first "oceanarium," designed with large tanks that allowed filmmakers to capture motion pictures of marine life through underwater portholes. Two primary tanks anchored the facility—one holding 400,000 gallons and the other 450,000 gallons of circulating seawater. Visitors were greeted by a large coquina rock inscribed "Marine Studios 1938," which quickly became a popular spot for commemorative photographs.

The park was an immediate success. Between 20,000 and 30,000 people attended opening day, and during its peak years, annual attendance reached roughly 900,000, establishing it as an iconic Florida destination. As filmmaking declined, the attraction evolved into Marineland of Florida, more commonly referred to as Marineland. The park was incorporated as its town and included amenities such as the Marine Village Court Motel, the Dolphin Restaurant, and the Moby Dick Lounge, where the bar subtly rocked in rhythm with the surf outside. Gift shops and snack bars rounded out the visitor experience.

Film production continued intermittently, including the 1954 movie *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. Over time, bottlenose dolphins became the park's central attraction,

performing choreographed leaps that delighted generations of visitors.

By 2019, shifting tourist interests and changing attitudes toward animal entertainment prompted another transformation. Marineland became Marineland Dolphin Adventure, replacing passive spectator experiences with interactive programs such as swimming with dolphins. The park then emphasized conservation, education, and research, moving away from its original “bring the sea ashore” model.

Much of the original site has been demolished, and the new dolphin habitat is enclosed by a glass wall. The earlier experience—walking below deck and looking through portholes at marine life tended by helmeted divers, as if observing another world—no longer exists. Like many zoological institutions, Marineland now operates within ongoing discussions about animal care, captivity, and welfare.

Distinctive architectural elements remain part of its legacy. Specially designed concrete breeze blocks featuring a dolphin within a rectangular frame were used throughout the park. Painted dark blue, these details reflected Florida’s modernist aesthetic and contributed to Marineland’s unique visual identity.



87. Splendid China Kissimmee, FL

Miniature of the Great Wall
ca. 1993

Painted wood, plastic, and mixed media and Photograph



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Splendid China was envisioned as an ambitious cultural showcase—an intricate miniature world where icons like the

Great Wall of China and the Forbidden City were recreated at one-tenth their size. Built for \$100 million and opened in 1993 adjacent to Walt Disney World, it blended architecture, performance, and atmosphere into a carefully curated visitor experience.

But the park's life was short and complicated. While performers dazzled guests with acrobatics and music, protests outside highlighted tensions over China's human rights record—casting a shadow over the attraction. By 2003, the park had closed, and within a year its contents were auctioned off.

What followed was a striking transformation. The site didn't just decay—it was actively dismantled. Vandals reduced detailed replicas to rubble; even the famed replica Terra Cotta Warriors were destroyed. Structures that survived initial looting fell to neglect, graffiti, and time. Vegetation overtook once-manicured grounds, turning pathways into wilderness. The result was something eerily cinematic: a theme park turned ruin, resembling a post-apocalyptic landscape more than a cultural exhibit.

For over a decade, silence defined the space—until 2016, when redevelopment erased nearly all traces of it. Today, the land is home to the Margaritaville Resort Orlando, a bright, leisure-focused destination that stands in stark contrast to what once occupied the same ground. It's a rare case where a place went from idealized history to controversy, abandonment, destruction, and reinvention, all within a single generation. This artifact is a remnant of part of the miniaturized Great Wall of China.

88. Cypress Gardens Winter Haven, FL

Helmscene Illuminated Picture

ca. 1950

Printed plastic, birch, and fluorescent lightbulb

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Television was as life-altering in the 1950s as the personal computer was at the turn of the millennium. Early television programs were broadcast in black and white and with relatively low brightness, making it more comfortable to watch in a darkened room. This environment felt familiar, much like sitting in a movie theater. However, concerns soon arose that watching television in the dark could cause eye strain or even damage eyesight. In response, manufacturers introduced TV lamps—decorative light sources designed to provide soft illumination while viewing.

These lamps quickly evolved beyond simple lighting fixtures. Television sets became surrounded by ceramic backlit figurines, some even incorporating small planters, all intended to reduce contrast between the screen and the surrounding room. Among the more distinctive variations of this trend were Helmscene Illuminated Pictures, which combined the functions of ambient lighting and decorative artwork.

The idea originated with Laurence Helms, who, after noticing a poorly lit photograph in a restaurant, envisioned a way to evenly illuminate translucent images from behind. He developed a process using plastic screens printed with scenic images, mounted in birch frames and lit internally with fluorescent bulbs. The result was a glowing picture that blended the appeal of photography with the practical benefits of soft lighting. From 1952 to 1968, these

illuminated pictures became popular fixtures in homes, offices, and businesses across the United States.

Many Helmscene images depicted well-known and picturesque locations, appealing to a growing fascination with travel and leisure. One such subject was Cypress Gardens, a beloved Florida attraction famous for its botanical beauty and water ski shows. The park symbolized an idealized vision of mid-century tourism and entertainment. Today, the same site has been transformed into LEGOLAND Florida Resort, reflecting the evolution of family entertainment from the early television era to the present day. The Florida-shaped swimming pool was kept intact.

Helmscene illuminated pictures stand as a unique example of mid-century design, capturing a moment when technology, aesthetics, and everyday life intersected in creative and unexpected ways.

89.

Silver Springs TV Tray Set

ca. 1950

Printed metal



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

This is a snapshot of mid-20th century American life—where design, technology, and culture all intersect.

In the 1950s, folding TV trays became a household staple with the rapid rise of television. Families gathered around the TV not just for entertainment, but often for meals. These trays made it easy to eat while watching programs, enabling a shift away from traditional sit-down dinners at a dining

table. While convenient, this trend did reduce opportunities for family conversation and shared mealtime rituals.

The imagery on the trays adds another layer of meaning. Featuring scenes from Silver Springs, they highlight one of Florida's most famous mid-century tourist destinations. Silver Springs was renowned for its glass-bottom boat tours and crystal-clear waters, and it became a symbol of Florida tourism—especially before the rise of major theme parks like Walt Disney World.

90.

Florida Road Map 1963

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Those who remember pleasant Sunday morning drives likely also recall orange groves so plentiful that the air was scented by their blossoms along much of the drive on Florida's Turnpike and Interstates. Stopping along one's way offered savoring the slower pace of life. Today, however, there is hardly such a thing as a "Sunday drive," as backcountry roads have given way to crowded thoroughfares, and few have the leisure time to take them anyway.

The Interstate reduced traffic in towns but also diverted travelers away from scenic routes. Once-main roads such as Routes 441 and 301 and Highways US 1, 19, and 27 lost favor to high-speed alternatives. Interstate 75 along the west side of the state, I-95 running parallel to the East Coast, I-10 skirting towns along Highway 90 across the Panhandle, and I-4 running southwest from Daytona Beach to Tampa offered quick means to traverse the state while avoiding much of what it had to offer. The Florida Turnpike, part of Florida's

Interstate Highway System, connects the Keys to Wildwood over 309 miles of high-speed, nonstop driving, offering passengers glimpses of old Florida through the side windows at 70 miles an hour.

Accessing Florida's expansive coastline requires venturing onto local roads, but the good news is that one is never more than sixty miles from the Atlantic Ocean or the Gulf of Mexico. The opening of Disney World in 1971, followed by SeaWorld and Universal Studios, lured drivers away from the beaches, concentrating traffic around Orlando as though all roads suddenly met there. Countless mom-and-pop roadside attractions and small tourist stops lost favor, becoming out-of-the-way destinations, unable to compete with the glitz and packaged entertainment of mega-parks. Alongside Florida's primary nonstop roadways, this map shows the locations of many pre-corporate theme parks, most now defunct.

Such a map likely hung at an Interstate Rest Area or Turnpike Service Plaza, offering travelers encouragement to lift their road-weary eyes to excited expectations. None of the addresses on the advertised destinations have zip codes, which were introduced in 1963, indicating that the original printing predates that year or that a new edition had yet to be issued by the map printer. Cape Canaveral was renamed Kennedy Space Center after President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, and the map appears to have been updated with a paste-on sticker reflecting the change, confirming the map's approximate date of publication.



91.

Puddinhead Citrus Juicer

Undated

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

92.

Florida For Fun Pictures Photography Sign

Undated

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



In 1839, Louis Daguerre introduced the daguerreotype in France, making photography publicly known, while William Henry Fox Talbot developed the calotype, which allowed multiple prints from a single negative—a foundation of modern photographic practice. Early photographic methods demanded cumbersome cameras, meticulously prepared plates, prolonged exposure times, and immediate chemical development, rendering photography an exacting and highly specialized technical discipline.s

This changed dramatically in 1888 with George Eastman's handheld roll-film camera. Kodak popularized photography with the promise: "You press the button, we do the rest," making image-making accessible to everyday people and transforming it into a cultural norm. Photography became a tool for capturing and preserving personal memories like birthday parties and family vacations. Yet while photographs fix moments in time, memory is constantly being rewritten in our brains—shifting, reshaping, and blending with imaginations. Photographs show a remembered reality.

Kodak's cultural prominence, reflected in its iconic yellow branding and market dominance in the late 20th century, illustrates photography's social impact. Its decline with the rise of digital photography highlights how both images and the technologies that produce them are subject to cultural change and technological development.

93. Grover Koons

(b. Darke County, OH, 1885 – d. 1941, Columbus, OH)

Tin Can Tourists, Sarasota, Florida

ca. 1923

Photograph

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Soon after the Dixie Highway Association proposed its ambitious network of paved roads in 1915, routes began to converge on Florida, ushering in a new era of automobile tourism. By 1919, this growing movement inspired the formation of the Tin Can Tourists in Tampa—a loose community of travelers united by a spirit of adventure, self-sufficiency, and shared values. They promoted wholesome entertainment, high moral standards, and the importance of safe, clean campsites, often living for months out of their cars—much to the dismay of hotel and restaurant owners.

The origin of the name “Tin Can Tourists” remains uncertain. It may refer to the canned food that sustained them on the road, or to the Ford Model T—the affordable “Tin Lizzie” favored by many members. In practice, the symbol became literal: tin cans were soldered to radiator caps as a badge of affiliation. Members developed their own rituals, including secret handshakes and an official theme song, “The More We Get Together,” reinforcing a strong sense of community among otherwise itinerant travelers.

Grover Koons (1885–1941) was the manager of Sarasota’s first theater in 1916, *The Virginian*, and would later become one of the city’s leading photographers, known for his commercial and portrait work. His photograph of *Tin Can Tourists*, Sarasota, February 11, 1923 captures a gathering of these early motorists. Among the group, a man holds a leashed pet raccoon—a small but telling detail that underscores the informality, individuality, and eccentricity of this traveling community.

Together, these elements evoke a formative moment in American mobility, when new roads, affordable automobiles, and a desire for independence reshaped the experience of travel and leisure.

94.

Silver Springs Mileage Meter

ca. 1950s

Cast aluminum, steel, and enamel



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Before GPS and MapQuest, road trips were a more hands-on adventure. Televisions broadcast slogans like “See the USA in your Chevrolet,” while sunburns and mosquito bites were badges of a summer well spent. Florida travelers often planned their routes, aided by tools like this mileage meter. These devices, found at motels, gas stations, or restaurants, let users spin a dial to find distances to cities across the country and even suggested routes. They predated the Interstate system and encouraged visits to Silver Springs, the premier tourist attraction that had made these countertop devices. Silver Springs advertised itself as “Florida’s Underwater Fairyland,” where glass-bottom boat tours offered passengers crystal-clear views of a pristine, surreal-looking world.

The meters were also a source of playful gambling—spinning the wheel fast to see who could land the highest number became an impromptu game for travelers. These small devices captured both the practicality and the whimsy of mid-20th-century road travel.

95.

First Florida Volunteer Regiment

Spanish-American War, Huntsville, Alabama

ca. 1898-99

Photograph

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Since the soldiers in this photograph of the First Florida Volunteer Infantry Regiment are bundled in heavy overcoats, the image likely dates to the winter of 1898–1899. They appear to be standing in a large, well-trodden camp that may have been only sparsely occupied at the time—possibly the encampment at Huntsville, Alabama.

Companies A, C, E, H, I, K, L, and M were mustered out at Tallahassee on December 3, 1898, after having been on furlough since late October. Historian Patrick McSherry notes that these men would not have been issued new heavy overcoats so late in their service. The remaining companies—B, D, F, and G—were mustered out later, on January 27, 1899, in Huntsville. By that point, the camp there would have been in the process of emptying.

This context helps explain the composition of the group in the photograph. The number of men appears too large for a single company, and there is a noticeable proportion of officers. The presence of regimental flags, rather than company colors, further suggests that this is not a company-

level portrait but instead depicts regimental field and staff officers, or a similarly mixed command group.

Additional evidence supports a Huntsville setting. The mount of the print is stamped “Collins” and “Huntsville, Ala.,” indicating it was likely produced by Ira F. Collins (1841–1919), a local photographer known for portrait, landscape, and general photographic work.

Taken together, the uniforms, unit history, group composition, and photographer’s mark all point to a photograph made in Huntsville in January 1899, likely during the regiment’s final days before muster-out (discharge from service).

96.

Patriotic Tribute Flag

n.d.

Knitted fiber and photograph

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



This folk-art homage flag took time and skill to knit. It has thirteen stripes and a crude oval-cut snapshot of the soldier, surrounded by thirteen silver stars, perhaps representing the Thirteen Original Colonies. The stars function as a design element to highlight the man, monumentalizing him. The piece had been tossed into a cardboard box that lay on the asphalt at a rummage sale, buried among things no one had chosen to keep. By then, the man in the photograph was as anonymous as the person who had made it.

At some point, it had belonged to someone who knew his name. Now it didn’t.

Later, veterans sitting around the bar at an American Legion post, studying the photograph. offered:

“The belt says Navy,” one man said.
“The tie says Army,” another replied. “Navy ties hang straight.”
“There’s no nameplate,” someone added. “No insignia either.”
They debated in fragments, each detail pulling in a different direction, until a World War II vet in a wheelchair—said to be the post historian—rolled up and took a brief look.
“Army,” he said. “The tie’s the giveaway.”

No one argued. It wasn’t about being right. The object had lost its history, but not its pull. Passed from hand to hand, it still did what it was made to do—gathering strangers into a small, shared act of remembrance.

97. Richard E. Thompson
(b. Oak Park, IL, 1914 – d. 1991, Truckee, CA)

Blue Angels Illustration
1982



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Since 1946, the U.S. Navy’s iconic Blue Angels squadron has called Florida home, except for a brief relocation to Texas in 1948. Renowned worldwide for their striking blue-and-gold aircraft and jaw-dropping precision flying, the Blue Angels have become a symbol of patriotic skill and aerial excellence. Among the aircraft they have flown, the single-seat A-4 Skyhawk, depicted in a painting by aviation artist Richard Thompson, stands out as a favorite for air show performances. Used by the squadron from 1975 through 1986, the A-4 was smaller and lighter than other team aircraft and boasted a tighter turning radius, making it particularly well suited for tight maneuvers and high-impact demonstrations.

Thompson's painting bears only the inscription "Orlando, Florida '82", offering a tantalizing hint at the location. The exact site, however, remains uncertain. The artwork was discovered in a thrift store in Titusville, near the Kennedy Space Center, and the orientation of the land and sea offers a coastal vantage point. It may represent one of several sites where the Blue Angels performed in central Florida during that era, even perhaps performances near the Cape Canaveral coastline. Through bold strokes and vivid detail, Thompson's work conveys the heart-pounding excitement of the Blue Angels as they trace tight loops and daring maneuvers over Florida's coast. The painting is both a tribute to the pilots' skill and a celebration of their home state, capturing the thrill, patriotism, and spectacle that has made the Blue Angels an enduring American icon.

98.

Bottlecap Lounge

Undated

Photograph



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Folk artists have long used bottlecaps to make artworks, but in the 1930s, Joe Wiser turned bottle caps into environmental art. He took this craft to an extreme with The Bottlecap Inn in North Miami, where he covered nearly every surface of the bar—walls, ceiling, bar, stools, tables, piano, doors, even ashtrays—with 600,000 bottlecaps. He washed, varnished, and meticulously affixed each one, transforming the space into an immersive experience.

After the building was sold to a church in the 1990s, most of Wiser's bottlecap-covered interior was discarded. This Men's Room Door is one of the few salvaged pieces, preserving a fragment of this uniquely whimsical creation.

99.



Bottlecap Inn, Men's Room Door

1930s

Wood, paint and bottle caps

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

100.

Hav-A-Tampa Cigar Display Stand

ca. 1955

Painted wood

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



This countertop open display stand once showcased Hav-A-Tampa cigars—a brand at the heart of Tampa’s legendary cigar-making tradition. Even empty, it tells the story of Ybor City, once known as the “Cigar Capital of the World,” where a million hand-rolled cigars were crafted daily by skilled Cuban artisans.

Cigar factory owners originally came from Cuba, first working in Key West before discovering that Tampa offered the perfect environment for their trade. By 1910, more than 200 cigar factories dotted the Tampa Bay region, filling drug stores, newsstands, boardrooms, and fine restaurants with the aroma of freshly rolled cigars. Tampa-made cigars became world-renowned, with production surpassing that of Cuba itself.

This stand is more than a relic—it is a window into a vibrant industry that shaped the city’s culture, economy, and identity long after the factories closed in the 1950s and the Cuban embargo took hold in 1962. The two-tier painted wooden display construction reflects the rise of branded countertop advertising and self-service retail in the mid-20th century, particularly during the boom in roadside stores and gas stations around 1955.

101.

Airbrushed Men's Tie

ca.1940-1950

Silk and Paint



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

After the austere wartime years, fabric rationing no longer constrained manufacturers, allowing bold colors and eye-catching patterns to flourish in men's neckties. Ties also became noticeably wider. This example, with its distinctive "fat boy" width, was likely produced as a novelty between the late 1940s and early 1950s. During this period, ties surged in popularity—tie-swapping clubs emerged, and many men began amassing sizable collections.

102. – 106.



Olive Commons' Jewelry

n.d.

Painted porcelain, metal



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Olive Commons lived and worked in Sanford, along the St. Johns River. She developed a distinctive artistic voice through her miniature porcelain paintings, set into jewelry, that captured the atmospheric beauty of Florida's St. Johns River. Her work balanced extraordinary technical precision with a remarkable sense of fluidity, allowing her to render moss-draped oaks, palms, and pines with clarity while still conveying the softness of the region's light. The warm, diffused glow of sunrise and sunset became a defining element in her compositions, expressed through subtle



gradations of color. As Larry Roberts, a premier purveyor of souvenirs from Florida's Golden Age, observed, her paintings seemed to "flow out of her paintbrush," a testament to their effortless appearance despite the challenges of such a small scale. This combination of control and spontaneity enabled Commons to create pieces that were not only finely crafted objects but also evocative, transportive scenes, embodying the mood and natural charm of Florida's landscape. These examples are among Commons' tiniest brooches.

107.

Cohen Brothers Souvenir Tray

ca.1900-1920

Brass-plated metal

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Cohen Brothers, founded in 1867 in Jacksonville as a small dry goods shop, had grown by 1912 into a retail powerhouse—the ninth largest department store in the United States. Among its many offerings were distinctive souvenirs aimed at tourists. This brass-plated tray marked "Souvenir of Jacksonville, Florida," was sold in the store's jewelry department, likely during Florida's 1900–1920s tourism boom.

The tray features a dramatic alligator scene: one reptile dominates the foreground on a riverbank, jaws agape, while another lingers in the distance. The raised border and repoussé design give depth to the composition, with decorative foliage framing the scene. Age has given the

surface a soft patina; where the brass has worn thin to copper, the coloration creates the uncanny illusion that the alligator is breathing fire.

That accidental effect echoes much older visual traditions. Early European depictions of Florida—emerging after Ponce de León’s expedition to Florida—often portrayed the region’s wildlife in exaggerated and fantastical ways. In 1564, French artist Jacques Le Moyne traveled to Florida, and in 1591 the engraver Theodor de Bry published Le Moyne’s images in his *Grand Voyages*.

These works, though influential, were fraught with inaccuracies and controversy regarding both authorship and authenticity. European audiences were presented with a distorted vision of the New World: alligators were depicted as oversized, almost monstrous creatures, often with anatomically incorrect features such as misplaced ears and oddly rendered digits. Scenes of their capture—such as forcing a pole into the animal’s mouth and attacking its vulnerable underside—blended observation with sensationalism. Florida was built on image and imagination.

In this way, the Cohen Brothers tray does more than commemorate a place; it perpetuates a long tradition of dramatizing Florida’s wildlife. Even its unintended “fire-breathing” effect feels like a distant echo of those early, imaginative engravings.

108.

Alligator Purse
ca. 1940-1950s
Alligator Hide

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Alligator handbags and clutches were produced in Florida and Cuba during the 1940s and 1950s, becoming highly sought-after souvenirs for tourists. These items allowed visitors to take home a tangible reminder of the subtropical wilderness—a vestige of a place that felt both exotic and untamed. It was easy to overlook that these large, carnivorous reptiles are ancient creatures, their lineage stretching back to the age of dinosaurs. Despite their often-peaceful motionless appearance along riverbanks, alligators are formidable predators, capable of killing with the violent force of a death roll.

Alligator purses and clutches came to symbolize a kind of timeless elegance. Beyond handbags, their hides were fashioned into belts, boots, wallets, and briefcases. At the same time, a wide range of novelty items emerged: standing alligator lamps with bulbs set in their open mouths, ashtrays encircled by small gators, and letter openers or necklaces incorporating preserved baby alligator heads. Lower-end souvenirs included keychains and even backscratchers adorned with miniature specimens. Some designers of women's handbags incorporated parts of—or in some cases nearly entire—baby alligators into their creations. At the luxury end of the market, houses such as Hermès used only the soft, supple underbelly skin of the alligator, producing finely crafted goods of exceptional quality.

Modern Florida's development as a tourist destination began in the mid-nineteenth century with steamboat travel along the St. Johns River, carrying passengers south to Palatka and onward toward the interior. Routes extended up tributaries such as the Ocklawaha River to Silver Springs, offering visitors access to Florida's interior waterways, though marshy floodplains often limited travel farther south. For many Gilded Age tourists, these journeys included the casual destruction of wildlife. Birds were shot for their feathers to adorn fashionable hats, while sportsmen fired at basking alligators from the decks of passing steamers.

As a result of widespread hunting and commercial harvesting, alligator populations fluctuated dramatically and at times neared extinction. Early conservation efforts proved ineffective, but stronger federal protections enacted around 1970 ultimately allowed the species to recover. Today, with an estimated 1.3 million alligators in Florida, they are once again a common presence—inhabiting nearly every freshwater body across the state.

109. Ruth K. Beesch

Florida Visionaries: 1870-1930

1989

Exhibition catalogue

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



The exhibition *Florida Visionaries: 1870–1930* (1989, University Galleries at the University of Florida), curated by Ruth Beesch, stands as a decisive turning point in the understanding of Florida’s place within American art. More than a regional survey, it reframed the state as a generative landscape of imagination—one in which myth, environment, and inherited artistic traditions converged into a distinct and enduring visual language. The modest catalogue that accompanied the exhibition has since become a touchstone, not only for its rarity but for the clarity with which Beesch articulated this convergence.

As she observed, artists were drawn to Florida by more than climate alone. The state functioned as a kind of promised land—a tropical Eden—shaped as much by travel writing, sporting culture, and narratives of recuperation as by direct experience. This imaginative preconditioning mattered. By the time painters arrived, they were already predisposed to see Florida as restorative, mysterious, and outside the ordinary flow of American life. Their works, in turn, did not

simply document the landscape; they interpreted and amplified these expectations.

Within this framework, the legacy of the Hudson River School is unmistakable, yet transformed. Where that earlier movement found the sublime in mountainous scale and dramatic vistas, Florida offered something more elusive. Its flat expanses, dense vegetation, and saturated atmosphere resisted traditional compositional hierarchies. Light dissolved edges rather than clarifying them; water mirrored and fragmented space; distance became uncertain. The sublime, in this context, shifted from grandeur to immersion. Rather than confronting nature, the viewer is absorbed into it—an experience at once romantic and faintly disorienting.

This altered sublime aligns with the psychological undercurrents Beesch identifies. The same myths that drew artists southward—healing, isolation, renewal—infused the imagery itself. Human figures, when present, are often diminished or contemplative, secondary to an environment that feels sentient and enveloping. Florida is not depicted as conquered terrain but as a space that resists possession, inviting instead a kind of reflective surrender.

At the same time, these paintings emerge from a moment of profound transition. The waning of the steamboat era and the rise of the railway expanded access to the region, bringing artists, tourists, and settlers in increasing numbers. Yet this growing accessibility produced a curious visual counterpoint: the more reachable Florida became, the more insistently it was depicted as remote, timeless, and untouched. The imagery can be read, in part, as a subtle resistance to modernization—a way of preserving the illusion of an unspoiled Eden even as it was being irrevocably altered.

Seen alongside contemporaneous depictions of other “edge” geographies—the American West or the

Caribbean—Florida occupies a uniquely liminal position. It is both domestic and exotic, familiar yet estranging. This tension animates the work of the period and helps explain its continued resonance. The landscapes feel at once knowable and just beyond comprehension, grounded in place yet suspended in imagination. It is perhaps this quality that has made collectors of such paintings “visionary” in their own right.

110. Anna Elizabeth Allen
(b. Worcester, MA, 1881 – d. 1959, Orange City, FL)

Untitled
Undated
Oil on canvas

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



In 1911, Anna Elizabeth Allen moved to Orange City, Florida, where she began painting the landscapes and everyday life around her. Only about twelve of her Florida paintings are known today. Some were preserved through the efforts of Harley Strickland, a former president of the local historical society and later mayor. He remembered Allen’s home as being “full of azalea paintings,” reflecting the flowers that grew outside her door.

One surviving painting shows Blue Springs, with three Black men sitting in a rowboat. The scene is simple: the men appear to be fishing while Allen captures the light, water, and surrounding landscape. Like many of her works, the painting shows an ordinary moment rather than a staged event. What the painting shows is that Black Floridians were part of the recreational life of Florida in the early 1900s, even though they are often missing from visual records of the time. Created before the mid-century segregation policies of the Jim Crow era, the painting captures a moment when Blue

Springs appears as a shared public space, with three Black men enjoying the natural surroundings. Allen portrays them with the same care and attention she gives to the Florida landscape.

111. William James Harris
(b. England, 1868 – d. 1940, St. Augustine, FL)

Ocklawaha River, Florida

ca. 1900

Hand-colored photograph

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



The rapid development of photography in the mid-nineteenth century transformed how people encountered the world. For the first time, images of distant places were inexpensive, reproducible, and widely available. As tourism expanded, photographs introduced audiences to unfamiliar landscapes and “exotic” destinations, allowing viewers to experience them visually with unprecedented clarity.

Among the most influential photographers working in Florida in the early twentieth century was William James Harris (1868–1940). After relocating to St. Augustine in 1898, he established the Acme View Company, where he sold photographic equipment while producing images that catered to a growing tourist market. Traveling extensively throughout the state, Harris documented Florida at a moment when it was emerging as one of the nation’s most desirable destinations.

Harris’s photographs are notable not only for their subject matter but also for their artistry. He frequently hand-colored his prints, creating richly hued landscapes that blur the boundary between photograph and painting. His practice also embraced manipulation: he combined elements from

multiple negatives and occasionally introduced artificial props—such as stuffed birds or alligators—to enhance the visual impact of a scene. The resulting images present an idealized vision of Florida, shaped as much by imagination as by observation.

This photograph, taken along the Ocklawaha River, exemplifies Harris's approach. Lush, atmospheric, and carefully composed, it reflects both the natural beauty of the region and the constructed allure that drew visitors from across the country. As scholar Michael Ivankovich has observed, Harris's work did more than document Florida—it played a central role in popularizing it, helping to define the state's image for a national audience.

112. James Ralph Wilcox
(b. Worcester, NY, 1866 – d. 1915, Seabreeze, FL)

Untitled

Undated

Watercolor on Paper



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

James Ralph “J. R.” Wilcox (1866–1915) was a noted watercolorist celebrated for his evocative scenes of the Tomoka River and its surrounding swamplands. Working in the early 1900s, he developed a distinctive technique that allowed washes of color to flow and blend organically, creating soft, atmospheric compositions with a dreamlike quality.

Wilcox also demonstrated a keen sense of the growing tourist market. In addition to his original paintings, he produced hand-colored prints, offering visitors affordable yet artful souvenirs of the region.

During this same period, Seabreeze—an emerging resort community that would later become part of Daytona Beach—was experiencing a cultural and economic boom. The town attracted a fashionable clientele eager to collect regional art and photography. Along Beach Street, several prominent photographers established studios, including Richard LeSesne and William Gardiner, contributing to a vibrant and visually rich streetscape.

Together, these artists helped shape the image of coastal Florida during a particularly glamorous era, when art, commerce, and tourism converged to define the character of this rising seaside destination.



113. and 114.

Alligator Canes

Undated

Carved wood and horn, metal

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



115.

Cypress Knee Stool

Undated

Cypress wood

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

Cypress knees are the unusual woody protrusions that grow vertically from the roots of cypress trees in swampy areas.

Their purpose is debated—some suggest they help aerate the submerged roots; others think they stabilize the trees in soft, wet soil.

A notable collector of these knees was Tom Gaskins, who ran the now-defunct Cypress Knee Museum near Palmdale along U.S. 27 from 1951 until his death in 1993. He celebrated these knobby growths as “Masterpieces of Nature,” encouraging visitors to see them like clouds—shapes open to interpretation and imagination. Gaskins would harvest the knees, then steam, peel, and core them before display. The museum was described by the writer Amy Bennett Williams as “a stranger-than-fiction place so gloriously, freakily Florida it was almost too good to be true.”

Beyond being exhibited, cypress knees have been repurposed creatively. Carvers have made lamps and furniture from them. This stool, for instance, uses the knees as legs, carefully fitted with pegs and metal footings to ensure it is level—showing both the aesthetic and functional possibilities of these natural curiosities.

116.

Coconut Lamp

Undated



Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida Self-Taught and Vernacular Art

John Herrmann, an antiques dealer, says he has “seen a number of these Florida souvenir lamps, and found most of them up north.” He assumes they were intriguing curiosities for visitors to Florida and represented a visitor’s “vacation experience.” This coconut lamp is marked “1936 Tampa, Fla.” Other lamps have other cities’ names on them. The Coconut Palm Lamp Shop in downtown Miami sold them; they also sold “Basket’s Coconut Faces and Coconut Tie Rings.” The lamps were adorned with palm tree parts, from

seeds to fronds, with a coconut being central. Shells and sea fans were incorporated into them, along with any number of similarly available objects. John Herrmann points out, “Some of mine even had light bulbs shaped and colored like oranges!” The Coconut Palm Lamp Shop’s tagline read, “Send for a coconut lamp and you’ll see the sunshine of Florida.”

117. Katherine Joy Postle
(b. Chicago, IL, 1896 – d. 1989, Winter Garden, FL)

Untitled
Undated
Gouache

Loan Courtesy of the Monroe Family Collection of Florida
Self-Taught and Vernacular Art



Katherine Joy Postle (1896–1989) distinguished herself as both a pioneering environmentalist and artist through her paintings of Florida’s fauna – especially its exotic birds. At a time when depicting local wildlife was far from popular, Postle chose to focus her work on the natural beauty around her. As Peggy Lantz noted in *Florida Naturalist* magazine, “She painted wildlife when it wasn’t trendy to paint Florida wildlife,” highlighting her originality and forward-thinking perspective.

Postle’s life was marked by exploration and dedication to her subject matter. After traveling across the United States, she eventually settled in Gotha, a historic, protected rural settlement in eastern Orange County. There, she immersed herself in Florida’s natural environments, studying animals in their habitats. According to art historian Alfred Frankel, Postle “waded through swamps, climbed trees, endured bugs, and stayed up all night to observe her subjects.” This hands-on approach gave her work a remarkable sense of authenticity and intimacy.

In addition to painting, Postle was an accomplished writer and educator. She authored several books, including *Fine Feathers* (1941), *Glamour Birds of the Americas* (1944), *Drawing Animals* (1953), and *Drawing Birds* (1963), which combined artistic instruction with a deep appreciation for wildlife. She also contributed to the Works Progress Administration Florida Art Project as a muralist, further expanding her artistic impact during the Great Depression.

Around 1937, Postle and her husband, Robert Blackstone, developed an innovative performance called “Glamour Birds.” This program blended recorded bird songs and music with live painting and singing, as Postle educated audiences about wildlife and conservation. These performances reflected her commitment not only to art but also to public engagement and environmental awareness.

Postle is best known for her carefully composed, elegant paintings of birds within their natural environments. However, her painting of a deer here reveals another dimension of her work. This piece may have served as a preliminary sketch for a mural or represents an early stage in her artistic development. Even so, it demonstrates her keen observational skills and her ability to capture the quiet presence of animals in nature.

Through her art, writing, and performances, Joy Postle helped foster a deeper appreciation for wildlife long before environmentalism became widespread. Her legacy endures as a testament to the power of art to inspire conservation and connect people to the natural world.