



REVIEW

# Common Art Common Folk

**MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM FOCUSES  
ON SELF-TAUGHT ARTISTS** ::BY CUTIS L. CARTER

curious about what something art, a visit to Milwaukee Art Museum be- to view "Uncommon tions in American Art" der. The exhibition fea- from the museum's per- American folk and self- se range of media.

hibit range from a fa- ses untitled landscape ) to the mid-century ukee artist Eugene Von ng exotic poses of his e. Also from Milwau- Prophet Blackmon who d spiritual ministry in ) from his shoe-repair as a religious commu- training center.

udes a large section of raylor's *Talking Couple* brown tempura. Animal rses, elephants, a great , among others) abound ion.

social or political com- ese works unless covert- ic images such as *Miss* ca. 1910). An exception uska's *Hit-Mu-To* (1942) era of Fascism under Tojo. The three leaders htly colored venomous nychological scene with tallions.

The question of who these artists were of- fers a clue to their art. They were, for the most part, extra-ordinary people living ordinary, sometimes reclusive lives. Their special gifts of perception and sensitivity for transforming everyday life objects are evident. Usually with- out formal training, they found, through obser- vation and inner expressive resources, uncom- mon images to share their visions. Hence, is it not surprising that viewers may find in these works experiences that resonate powerfully with their own everyday experiences?

Until the mid-20th century, folk and untu- tored artists went largely unnoticed in the art world. For a variety of reasons a significant body of American self-taught artists has at- tracted the attention of museums and collec- tors in Wisconsin, including the Milwaukee Art Museum and the Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan. The result is that arguably the most important collections of these art- ists reside within arm's reach for Milwaukee area residents.

The concentration of self-taught art in Wis- consin is due largely to the acquisition of the Michael and Julie Hall Collection under former MAM Director Russell Bowman, and re- cent gifts of the Anthony Petullo and Lanford Wilson collections. Director Ruth DeYoung Kohler at the Kohler Arts Center has focused their collection on preserving the works and working sites of the self-taught artists. We can be thankful for these efforts.

**Vestie Davis, *Nathan's Coney Island*, paint on canvas, 18 x 24", 1971**

**VISUALART | HAPPENINGS**

# ARTIST SERGEI ISUPOV FLIRTS WITH THE UNCANNY

*Sculptor is the focus at Racine Art Museum* ::BY TYLER FRIEDMAN

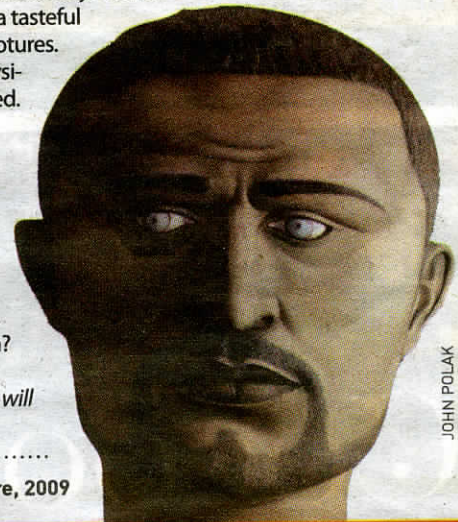
**H**uman beings like to anthropomorphize. So we make memes attributing touchingly inane dialogue to the expressive faces of Shiba Inu puppies. Our anthropomorphizing impulse is also evident in the attempts of CGI and video games to recreate the effortless naturalism of human behavior. But these valiant efforts sometimes go awry. To describe such failures, the term "uncanny valley" was coined to name the sharp drop off where verisimilitude prompts repulsion...think Jar Jar Binks.

Sergei Isupov's unmistakable technical mastery allows him to flirt with the uncanny by adding a tasteful pinch of the grotesque into his clay sculptures.

Humans and animals merge bodies. Physical features are compressed and flattened. Appendages abound in uncommon multiples and locations. All this makes sense in light of Isupov's express intent to explore the human condition. How better to evoke existential constriction than the flattening and elongating of bodily features? If you find yourself grimacing before Isupov's unsettling faces, is it because you just saw your reflection?

*Racine Art Museum's "Collection Focus: Sergei Isupov" opens Sunday, Feb. 23, and will be on display until June 8.*

**Sergei Isupov, *Ray*, glazed stoneware, 2009**



JOHN POLAK

## "ART FROM THE ASHES: FINDING LIGHT IN THE SHADOW OF THE SHOAH"

**Golda Meir Library @ UW-Milwaukee | 2311 E. Hartford Ave.**

It seems paradoxical that beautiful art originates in the most horrific of circumstances. And yet mushrooms burst forth from excrement and humans surrounded by ugliness bring forth beauty. "To comprehend a nectar requires sorest need," noted Emily Dickinson. "Art from the Ashes" presents the works of Bay-area artist Helene Fischman created while working in the remains of former concentration camps. The art, conceived as an homage to the victims of the Holocaust, will be presented alongside World War II artifacts held by UWM's special collections. The works will be on display until May 30.

## "Artists Now: Sandra de la Loza—Art as a Living Practice"

**Arts Center Lecture Hall, Room 120 | 2400 E. Kenwood Blvd.**

In his eleventh thesis on Feurbach, Karl Marx upbraided philosophers for overlooking the fact that they should not merely interpret the world, but seek to change it. Sandra de la Loza is an artist who strives, not merely to represent the world, but to change it. Her photographs, silkscreen prints and other creations draw attention to power relations in contemporary social, political and cultural landscapes. De la Loza will be giving a performative lecture at UWM at 7 p.m., on Wednesday, Feb. 26.