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TRANSFORMER presents:

CRYPTIC COMMUNICATIONS: *Work by Four Self Taught Artists*

Ken Grimes
Laura Craig McNellis
Judith Scott
Melvin "Milky" Way

November 6 – December 4, 2004

**Talk with guest curator Celene Ryan and artist Ken Grimes Saturday, November 6 at 6pm,
followed by an opening reception from 7 to 9pm.**

Of the 59 artists represented in the American Folk Art Museum's permanent collection, the largest museum collection of work by self-taught artists, only 7 artists are living. One of the primary issues that the field of self-taught/outsider artists faces is that the majority of artists identified as key or masters of the field are no longer alive. Most of these artists passed away long before their work was recognized by the arts community. According to Celene Ryan, guest curator of **Cryptic Communications**, "challenging a common perception that the field is drying-up, this exhibition helps open a new dialogue about the parameters of the 'self-taught' genre and demonstrates that there are self-taught artists today who are producing art that is compelling, strong, and emergent."

While visual material is generally considered a form of communication, for the four artists featured in **Cryptic Communications** their artwork is the primary way they communicate and are connected to other people. For Laura Craig McNellis and Judith Scott, both non-verbal without the ability to read or write, their art is their only direct and literal communication with other people. Paradoxically, they are expressing personal and private needs that will likely never be knowable for the viewer. For Ken Grimes and Melvin Way, science is the key to communication, and communication is the key to relationships. Grimes believes that communication with life on other planets holds the potential to bring a deeper level of understanding and tolerance for those of us on earth. For Melvin Way, the mathematic formulas and language layered in his drawings hold spiritual powers, mystery and personal meaning that will connect him to other people.

Though none of these artists have had any formal artistic training, each is producing work that is as contemporary, diverse, and vital, both in aesthetic quality and content, as the work of their academically trained peers.

Ken Grimes has devoted his life to making art about communication with life on other planets. Evidenced through a series of coincidences that he has documented in his art, he believes other life forms are continually contacting earth. He works only in black paint on white canvas or paper, which he believes is the most direct way of showing the contrast between truth and deception. The goal of his art is two fold, both to promote further research on alien communication by building public interest, as well as to promote tolerance of "others" whether alien or human.

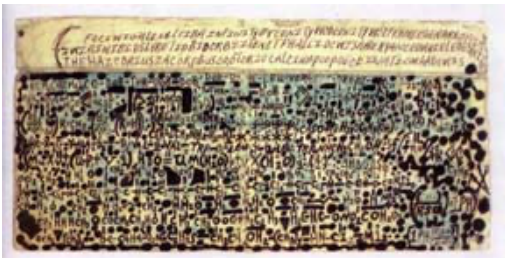


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Laura Craig McNellis was diagnosed with autism and developmental disabilities early in her life. Because she is non-literate and her speech is only understood by family and close friends, her paintings have become a vital form of expression. She has been painting with tempera on paper since childhood depicting every-day objects, events and people with acute observation and sensitivity. She chooses her subjects carefully, giving the viewer insight into what McNellis can't articulate verbally - those things that fascinate, amuse or hold deep significance for her.

Judith Scott, who has Down's Syndrome, is non-verbal and does not read or write. She began producing her sculptures at the age of forty-five. Each work begins with an object that she chooses and eventually cocoons by wrapping it in layers upon layers of string, yarn and twine. Her sculpture can be looked at, on one level, as a primary form of expression, and on another level, conversely, these hidden objects hold private information and significance for Scott that the viewer will never know.



Melvin "Milky" Way uses the language of mathematic formulas, diagrams, numbers, words and phrases, some real and others invented, woven in dense layers using pen and pencil on found paper. His work has an innate intimacy because of its small scale, like a charm or talisman; they seem to hold secret messages in Way's personal visual language.

Cryptic Communications guest curator **Celene Ryan** is an associate of the Ricco/Maresca Gallery in New York, NY. Ms. Ryan holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an MA in Visual Culture specializing in work by self-taught artists from New York University. Before joining Ricco/Maresca she was the Curatorial Assistant of the Contemporary Center at the American Folk Art Museum in New York.

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Wednesday - Friday 3:00 pm - 8:00 pm, Saturday 12-6pm and by appointment.

TRANSFORMER is a Washington, D.C. based 501(c) 3 non-profit, artist-centered organization that connects and promotes emerging artists locally, nationally and internationally. Partnering with artists, curators, art spaces and other cultural entities, Transformer serves as a catalyst and advocate for emergent expression in the visual arts. Transformer's 2004/2005 exhibition series is supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities/NEA, The Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, and The Visionary Friends of Transformer.

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