

Many folk artists choose to show rural life through their art, but some also choose subjects from the city. Sudduth paints both kinds of scenes, and portraits, too. But he especially enjoys painting pictures of log cabins, flowers, and animals. "I can paint anything I can dream," he says. "Painting takes me anywhere my imagination goes."

When he begins a picture, he surrounds himself with containers holding sands, soils, and clays. He likes to use white, gray, and red clays. He prepares these by adding sugar and a little water to the sand, and the syrup to the dirt and clay to help make them stick to the board.

Through the years, Sudduth has collected many different colors of sand, dirt, and clay, most of them from the Alabama countryside. But people have also brought him unusual sands and soils from all over the United States. When he finishes a painting, he can point to the different colors in it, as though he were reading a map, explaining where he got each color.

Sudduth paints by dipping his fingers into the containers and then skillfully applying nature's "paints" to the board. He uses one finger to paint thin lines, and two or three fingers to paint wide lines and large areas.

He makes the color green for trees, grasses, and flower stems by crumpling leaves and rubbing them back and forth in designs across the plywood. In the winter, when it is hard to find leaves, he uses fallen pine needles. To add purples, pinks, and blues to his work, he presses berries against the board. Soot from his fireplace is sometimes used when he needs black. Clouds are made by dabbing white sand or white clay into his skies. Some of the lines are drawn with colored rocks.

He says the most important parts of painting with nature are to explore the world with our imaginations and to have the courage to have fun with creativity. His paintings make us aware of many things in nature that we often take for granted. "I taught myself to paint with mud," he says. "Dirt is free, and it never wears out." Neither, it seems does Jimmie Lee Sudduth's imagination in creating his unique art.

New York Famous

Sudduth's bright and colorful paintings are shown in folk art galleries from Washington, D.C., to Berkeley, California. He is one of America's most renowned and colorful Self-Taught Artists and he often says, "I've been all the way to New York City and my pictures are all over this world."

Sudduth lives in a small house near the railroad track with his dog, Toto. He greets a steady stream of visitors who find their way there from throughout the world to watch him paint and to hear him wail the Blues on his harmonica. One of Sudduth's art friends tells everyone, "I've always told people, if you can only go see one artist, Jimmie is the man to see. Jimmie is not only a superb artist, he's also a gregarious and friendly host. He's slowed down quite a bit (I guess that'll happen when you're in your mid-90's), and his output of paintings has slowed to a trickle, but he's still worth a visit. This is one of the all time greats, and you really should give yourself a chance to meet him. A visit to his house means a great day of stories and songs."

Self-taught artist, definitely, an "outsider," never. An artist who paints everyday images of life in rural Alabama, scenes of cities that he has visited, his dog Toto, many self-portraits, and grand old houses is definitely an "insider."

