

SECOND READING SELECTION

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Jimmie Lee Sudduth
Self-Taught Artist

Jimmie's paintings depict everyday images of life in rural Alabama, scenes of cities that he has visited, his dog Toto, many self-portraits and grand old houses. Common images for an artist to paint you might say. Jimmie Lee Sudduth's paintings, however, are far from common. Jimmie Lee Sudduth is an artist who uses his creativity and imagination to paint pictures with the many things he finds in nature. Unlike most artists, Sudduth rarely uses canvases, paints, or brushes. Instead he has found his own unique form of art. His favorite painting surface is plywood. Instead of using paint, he uses clay, sand, soot, and such things as leaves, pine needles, and berries.

Self-Taught or Outsider

He is untrained as an artist. Untrained artists are often referred to as "self-taught" or "outsider artists" referring to them as being "outside" the mainstream traditions of art. Their art work is often referred to as "contemporary folk art" to distinguish it from "folk art." Self-taught artists are self-trained and they often create one-of-a-kind works that are highly innovative. Folk art is passed down from generation to generation and is a "taught" art form. Carol Crown, Associate Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Memphis has this to say about self-taught artists, "Their work is clearly grounded in the context of their daily lives." Jimmie Lee Sudduth would certainly agree as he uses mud for most of his paintings. He claims to be able to identify 36 different shades of mud.

There are other self-taught artists like Jimmie but few have gained as much recognition. In 1976 Sudduth's art work took him to Washington, D.C., where he joined in a huge folk art festival during our nation's two-hundredth birthday celebration. While he was there, he was delighted to meet the President of the United States. He also delighted the nearly 70,000 in attendance by wailing the Blues on his harmonica. His unique approach to both life and art has been featured at the Smithsonian Institution and on a 1980 segment of NBC's Today Show. He is included in Alabama Art 200, an international touring project that highlights work of 13 of the state's artists.

Born March 10, 1910, Jimmie Lee Sudduth has been painting for as long as he can remember. "When I was three years old I went out to the woods with my mother. She was a medicine woman and would go out to collect herbs and stuff. One day I got some mud on my hands and used it to paint a picture on a tree stump. When I went back a few days later it was gone. Then a man let me mix up some molasses with the mud, and that was it! I can use honey, syrup, even this diet Pepsi. Makes it all sticky so the mud won't come off. Guaranteed!" In fact, collectors have always been apprehensive about the durability of a painting made of mud, but from all reports, works that are 30 years old have held up well.