AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM

AMERICA’S OFFICIAL NATIONAL MUSEUM AND EDUCATION CENTER FOR SELF-TAUGHT AND INTUITIVE ARTISTRY

“Baltimore, home of the first American Museum in 1786, is once (November, 1995) home to the most innovative: the delightful American Visionary Art Museum.” — THE ECONOMIST

“...a museum with a difference. Nobody is whispering. Blatant enthusiasm is encouraged.”
— FINANCIAL TIMES OF LONDON

“...one of the most fantastic museums anywhere in America”... — CNN

“10 Places to See Before You’re 10...AVAM #1 on the list!” — TRAVEL + LEISURE

“The Visionary Art Museum provides America with its most essential, innovative cultural experience. Baltimore is privileged to have such a great institution. All our cities should participate in the vital, inestimable, unique perspective it provides.”
— COLIN EISLER, ROBERT LEHMAN PROFESSOR, NYU INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS

“Many local art lovers think that Washington’s best museum is in Baltimore, specifically the stockpile of offbeat genius and piercing obsessions known as the American Visionary Art Museum.” — WASHINGTON POST

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CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

THE SECRET LIFE OF EARTH: ALIVE! AWAKE! (AND POSSIBLY REALLY ANGRY)! October 5, 2019 - September 6, 2020 • Levels 1 + 2, Main Building
Beckoning all Earthlings — from climate change skeptics to the world’s leading eco-scientists and kid activists — to an exhibition that’s one part visual Earth love feast and two parts environmental crash course on the wonders and fragility of life on our one, blue, homegirl planet.

ESTHER AND THE DREAM OF ONE LOVING HUMAN FAMILY
February 23, 2019 - March 3, 2024 • Level 2, Main Building
Featuring Esther Krinitz’s Holocaust survival story exquisitely told through 36 hand-embroidered works, this exhibition pays tribute to humanity’s long history, past and current, of unjustly persecuted innocents and the dream of a world at peace. A preamble to Esther’s fabric collages include South African Truth and Reconciliation embroidered testimonies, work gathered from Lily Yeh’s partnership with Rwandan Tutsi genocide survivors, and more.

REVEREND ALBERT LEE WAGNER: MIRACLE AT MIDNIGHT
Now open as of July 1, 2017 • Level 3, Main Building
AVAM mounts the first national retrospective of Reverend Albert Lee Wagner. His “story pictures” recount his life in Arkansas. Accompanied by his handwritten testimony, his work provides rich visual testimony to a life begun amidst dire poverty, to one that attained spiritual peace and a love for all humanity.

PERMANENT COLLECTION GALLERY
Ongoing • Levels 1 + 2, Main Building
The 1st floor Rebecca and Joseph Meyerhoff Gallery, and 2nd floor Gretchen V. and Samuel M. Feldman Gallery feature rotating selections from the museum’s permanent collection of over 4,000 works of visionary art. Visitor favorites include Wayne Kusy’s Lusitania model made from over 193,000 toothpicks, the Applewood Figure created by an anonymous British mental patient, Mr. Imagination’s Bottlecap Throne, and many more.

1984 Museum founder Rebecca Alban Hoffberger (then Puharich) has the idea for a unique new museum and education center that would emphasize intuitive creative invention and grassroots genius while she is employed as the Development Director of People Encouraging People, a program of the Department of Psychiatry at Sinai Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland.

1985–89 Folks visit this “that sounds like Juan Baldellou’s Art Beat (blue light)” Museum Collection of intuitive artists—factory workers, brewers, farmers, mental patients, housewives, housepainters, psychic mediums, etc.—located in Lausanne, Switzerland. • Rebecca’s friend, educational 72-jewels Donna Matton, agrees to make a documentary film of the Art Beat Museum to help promote the museum concept in the United States. • Expressionist art collector and philanthropist, LeRoy Hoffberger, accompanies them. Rebecca values Baldellou’s use of non-art, speak, personal art, birth that exemplifies simple facts of the artist’s time, their creative visions, and soul works. • At this time about six dozen additional public collectors/museums of art/folk/indigenous/visionary art (all terms for the same) exist, worldwide, among them the Museum of the Subconscious in Brazil, The Watts Towers in LA, Gugging in Austria, and La Fabuloserie in France. Rebecca perceives common repetitive themes that drive much of this art, the simple most common being the personal quest for truth—same back-up inspiration of fiction as an artist also for justice. • Rebecca collaborates with the George Circle Gallery in Baltimore to mount two wildly successful shows. The first features math artist, Gerald Hawkes. • Public and media interest in the ideas of the proposed new visionary museum mount.

1989 People Encouraging Inc, giving Illinois on formation of a separate 501c3 nonprofit, American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM, Inc.), incorporated on February 4, 1990 in Illinois—an Aquarius! • The City of Baltimore offers AVAM exclusive developer’s rights on the 680 Key Highway Baltimore Harbor property, formerly the 1939 offices in the Baltimore Copper Paint Company and adjacent historic wildlife warehouse—contingent on design and neighborhood approval and obtaining full project funding.

1990 Architects Rebecca Swanston, AIA and Alex Castro are introduced by Rebecca and agree to collaborate on a design. • Scope of project and $7.6 million campaign now defined, obtaining begins. $75,000 provides the initial $250,000 planning grant, soon followed by a cumulative $2.4 million dollar challenge grant from the Zanvyl & Isabelle Krieger Foundation, matched with many generous private and public grants. • Otto Billig, M.D. and British founder of art therapy, Edward Adamson, each gift their important research.

1991 Fundraising begins. USF&G provides the initial $250,000 planning grant, soon followed by a cumulative $2.4 million dollar challenge grant from the Zanvyl & Isabelle Krieger Foundation, matched with many generous private and public grants.

1992 Maryland Governor Barbara Mikulski (sisterhood leadership) joined on by the entire Maryland Delegation and Senator Robert (Ozzie) Olive to pass a nonunanimous Resolution of Congress that designates the American Visionary Art Museum as America’s official national museum, education center, and repository for intuitive, self-taught artists.

1993 Thanksgiving Groundbreaking and Dedication followed by two years of award-winning construction. • Builders are J. Vinton Schafer & Sons.

1994 Completion. Museum Co-Founders, LeRoy and Rebecca Hoffberger, at Art Beat Museum photo by Donna Matton

1995 Opening Gala, 11/11/95 for 800 guests is held, complete with record winds, afternoon heat, lightening and by evening, hoary moon—November 25th Grand Opening Day, Thanksgiving. Artist David Hockney First to enter Museum front door, followed by farmer and giant whirled maker, 74-year-old Rolls Simonelli. Through endless.

1997 AVAM honored prestigious National Award for Excellence from the Urban Land Institute, along with many other design awards. Rare reviews of whimsical shows, educational materials, architecture and tile floor pavement calls. • Founders, historians, scientists, artists, musicians and engineers are attracted from the start to visit, collaborate, and lend their visionary fresh thinking to enhance the thematic exhibitions and educational programming. • Three employees from the local homeless shelter are hired and go on to open their own businesses. • AVAM’s Founding Senior Education Goals and Mission Statement are included in the American Association of Book of Best Museums Practices. These goals are beloved by teachers in many countries and were used, include, forward to/USC’s Lower Eastside Girls Club.

1999 AVAM opens Kinetic Sculpture Race (KSR) to the East Coast with collaboration and presence of ESP & Kinetic Founder, Hobart Brown.

2000 AVAM begins America’s largest youth at risk and youth incarcerated, mosaic apprenticeship program—artfully mixing, with recycled mirror, glass, and china shards, use Museum’s 5-story exterior carved walls. • This Shining Mula/Shining Youth transformation program results in stunningly beautiful walls that are also beauty in action.

2004 AVAM declares its “Wonderland” campus to its current 11 acre footprint by developing a second sculpture plaza, adding a spectacular outdoor movie theater and renovating a large second warehouse that includes a well-equipped classroom and a top floor meeting center that can accommodate 150. Named after the inspirational visionary social mission of the late James Rouse, AVAM’s third building, ‘The Jim Rouse Visionary Center’ further enhances AVAM’s commitment to the belief that “Creative acts of social justice are life’s highest and best performance art.” • Born & Bred at AVAM: JRS expansions architecture. AVAM now has a total of 70,000 sq. ft. under roof in addition to its two outdoor sculpture plazas, wildlife meditative garden, the LeRoy E. Hoffberger Speaker’s Corner, an underwater and popular summer movie theater. Private Permanent Collections reaches 4,000+ works and includes works of art, the film archives of LightSnail films, videos, research and documents related to visionary art, thought and practice.

2005 Chicago legendary artists, Ted Freedman, rolls and first returns to expand AVAM museum store “Eblozed” online.

2006 Maryland's Maggie Fitzgerald’s Boys From the Hill Outdoor Movie Theater opens with startling success that can accommodate 2,800.

2009 AVAM opens a summer arts camp for kids, followed by an after-closed program.

2019 More than 70 weddings in a year take place at AVAM. Total rentals and admissions income help AVAM generate one of the highest museum percentages of total earned incomes to total annual operating costs in the US. Both arts, our stated Board goal is set to raise a $25 million endowment before exploring the many offers to establish a West Coast branch of our national museum in fulfillment of a founding vision to bring AVAM’s unique original exhibitions, unique education programs, fan and spirited philosophy, beloved “This One For Shining Stars” • There are now more than 60 museums and major visionary art environments open to the public around the world. AVAM is the largest and continuous to influence museums and city planners thinking all over the world.
Just let it leak from your heart and soul through your eyes and hands and then it is art.
—visionary artist Lonnie Holley

**WHAT IS ART?**

The ancients—the Greeks, Egyptians, Hopis, and New Guinea tribesmen—were among earth's most prolific art-making peoples. Yet, none had any word for “art” in their respective languages. Rather, they each had a word that meant “well-made” or “beautifully performed.”

Our American Visionary Art Museum believes that this view of what art really means is as perfect an understanding of art as ever was. It speaks to an art incumbent upon all its citizens, pervasive throughout all the acts of our daily life. Its emphasis is on process and consciousness, not mere artifact.

Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed his profound respect for the true artistry each member of a society can uniquely evidence to bless our communities by saying, “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth would pause to say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

—Excerpt from True Visions© speech by Rebecca Alban Hoffberger

**AVAM’s sure-fire “recipe” for enchantment**

1. Take one grand spirited theme that has inspired or bedeviled humankind from the get-go.

2. Add the works of the world’s best self-taught artists—known and first-timers—that have wrestled in their lives and art with some key aspect of that theme.

3. Spice the exhibition text with insightful quotes, lyrics, factoids, and humor on diverse aspects of that same exhibition theme—interweaving timeless, global wisdoms.

4. Integrate key historic, scientific, and social justice underpinnings of each theme via the well-researched exhibition text, and dynamic creative partnerships.

5. Call up anyone (appropriate to theme) you/your staff have long admired and invite them to come take part in some way that is a new delight to them, too. (We did this successfully with Nobel winner Peter Agre, M.D., Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Andrew Newberg, M.D., Arianna Huffington, Matt Groening, Julia Butterfly Hill, Julian Bond, PostSecret’s Frank Warren, Patch Adams, M.D., and more!)

6. Top with community based-programming that makes a difference, i.e. theme-related film series, festivals, conferences, plus fab ops for grassroots communal play. Never bore—enchant!

7. Stay true at all times to AVAM’s Seven Founding Education Goals, Definition of Art, Definition of Visionary, and Founding Mission Statement.

**LIFE, LIBERTY & THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS WHIRLIGIG**

Colorful, all-recycled, 3-ton, 55-ft. tall whirligig by farmer/artist Vollis Simpson

Dedicated to Robert H. Levi by his wife Ryda Hecht-Levi

“I had a lotta junk and I had to do something with it.”
—farmer/artist Vollis Simpson

**“I had a lotta junk and I had to do something with it.”**
—farmer/artist Vollis Simpson
Many of our best visionary artists begin to make their art when their life experience has become just too big for words—either through some fathomless loss or inspired by a new, ecstatic joy. —Rebecca Alban Hoffberger

WHAT IS A VISIONARY?

Visionaries perceive potential and creative relationships where most of us don’t. English writer Jonathan Swift put it simply, “Vision is the art of seeing things invisible.” Such vision lies at the heart of all true invention.

Whether that special vision manifests itself as an astonishing work of art like those created by the intuitive artists featured at the American Visionary Art Museum or as a medical breakthrough, a melody never before sung, some deeper understanding of the cosmos, or as a way in which life could be better lived, visionaries have always constituted humankind’s greatest “evolution-aries.”

Without visionaries’ willingness to be called fools, to make mistakes, to be wrong, few new “right” things would ever be birthed. Albert Einstein rightly observed, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” Visionaries are brave scouts at the frontier of the unknown. They explore their visions with a passionate single-mindedness.

Social visionaries like Gandhi, washerwoman-turned-philanthropist Oseola McCarty, or free-medicine practitioner Patch Adams, M.D., have a great deal to teach us all about the real art of living. They creatively transmute personal loss and outrage at injustice into redemptive strategies for positive change. Social visionaries champion and further what is best about being human.

Creative acts of social justice fulfill every function that can be asked of a work of art. They inspire, make us think in new ways, and birth new beauty, balance and dignity into our world.

—Excerpt from True Visions® speech by Rebecca Albah Hoffberger

WHAT IS VISIONARY ART?

Like love, you know it when you see it. But here’s the longer definition, straight out of our Mission Statement: “Visionary art as defined for the purposes of the American Visionary Art Museum refers to art produced by self-taught individuals, usually without formal training, whose works arise from an innate personal vision that reels foremost in the creative act itself.” In short, visionary art begins by listening to the inner voices of the soul, and often may not even be thought of as ‘art’ by its creator. The single most common theme of visionary artists worldwide is the recreation of some backyard Eden—a personal and private Utopia.
THE MORE I THINK, THE MORE I FEEL THAT THERE IS NOTHING MORE TRULY ARTISTIC THAN TO LOVE PEOPLE.

–Vincent Van Gogh
THE LUSITANIA
by artist Wayne Kusy
190,000 toothpicks, 5 gallons of glue, 2 1/2 years of work
photo by Dan Meyers
1. expand the definition of a worthwhile life. 2. Engender respect for and delight in the gifts of others. 3. Increase awareness of the wide variety of choices available in life for all—particularly students. 4. encourage each individual to build upon his or her own special knowledge and inner strengths. 5. Promote the use of intuition, innate intelligence, self-exploration, and creative self-reliance. 6. Confirm the great hunger for finding out just what each of us can do best, in our own voice, at any age. 7. empower the individual to choose to do that something really, really, well.

For additional information on AVAM’s mission, programs, and philosophy see www.avam.org.
American Visionary Art Museum celebrates the best fresh visionary thinking in all the creative and inventive disciplines—engineering being a favorite. Be it our fanciful automata like our in-house Cabaret Mechanical Theatre; the 3-ton Whirligig of farmer/engineer Vollis Simpson; DeVon Smith’s World’s First Robot Family; or our awesome annual Kinetic Sculpture Race that challenges kids and adults to dream and build land and sea-worthy, giant crowd pleasing human-powered moving sculptures—AVAM is in the business of inspiring tomorrow’s new da Vinci’s, today!

IN PRAISE OF MISTAKES

“Everyone makes mistakes. That’s why there is an eraser at the end of a pencil.”
—Japanese proverb

Charles Kettering, successful inventor and engineer, wrote, “We fail toward success . . . we often say that the biggest job we have is to teach a newly-hired employee to fail intelligently . . . to experiment over and over again and to keep on trying and failing until he learns what will work . . . for failing is one of the greatest arts in the world.

Leonardo da Vinci observed, “Life is pretty simple: you make some things. Most fail. Some work. You do more what works. If it works big, others quickly copy it. Then you do something else. The trick is the doing something else.”

“I honestly think it is better to be a failure at something you love than to be a success at something you hate.”
—George Burns, Actor, Comedian

“Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.”
—Scott Adams, Cartoonist

“Mistakes show us what we need to learn.” —Peter McWilliams, Author

“Results! Why, man, I have gotten a lot of results. I know several thousand things that don’t work.”
—Thomas A. Edison, Inventor

“Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently.”
—Henry Ford, Founder Ford Motor Company, and father of modern assembly line

“I prefer you to make mistakes in kindness than work miracles in unkindness.”
—Mother Theresa

“There is no failure except in no longer trying.”
—Elbert Hubbard, Writer, Artist & Philosopher

“Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm.”
—Sir Winston Churchill
MY TRIANGLES CAN BE THE HOLY TRINITY.
KEEPING YOUR MIND ON GOD, OR, YOU, ME, AND HIM.

—artist Gerald Hawkes, the first person to walk through AVAM doors on Opening Day
the hughes family outdoor movie theater

Voted one of the "100 Best Free Things in The World!"

Flicks From The Hill can easily seat over 1,000+ under starry, summer skies. Photo by Nick Prevas

DIVINE HAND
by artist Adam Kurtzman
Photo by Alain Jaramillo
DIVINE

By artist Andrew Logan
10-foot tall sculpture of renowned Baltimore actor, Glenn Milstead.

Photo by Dan Meyers

ICARUS

by artist Andrew Logan
Ascending and descending, life-sized sculpture in The Marilyn Meyerhoff Stairway to The Stars.

Photo by Dan Meyers
Parting of the Red Sea

14-foot painting

by artist Albert "Reverend" Wagner

Gift of Pat Handel

Permanent Collection of the American Visionary Art Museum

Photo by Dan Meyers
We must hold fast to the realization that our cities are for people. And unless they work well for people they are not working well at all. As the people of the world learn what is possible, they will demand that their cities be geared to the humane and the beautiful.

—Jim Rouse, Social Visionary

Cornerstone words to our Phase II expansion
The Jim Rouse Visionary Center

We give thanks for all our visionary artists, collaborative thinkers, activists, kindred spirits and for all our very generous donors past and present, our loyal Fan Club members, tireless and good-natured volunteers, inspired and hardworking uber-dedicated staff, those ever-supportive Board Directors, the media who embraced and trumpeted what we do and to all our honored visitors of all ages and nationalities who have together and singularly, cherished and enriched our American Visionary Art Museum and kept us alive and thriving. Please put us in your will, but live long and happily! Special thanks to our amazing tenants: Firstly, “Sideshow” the Museum Store and our restaurant.