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FIRST MUSEUM SURVEY DEVOTED TO ARTIST JAMES CASTLE

ON VIEW AT THE ART INSTITUTE

Exhibition Showcases Works by One of the Most Respected Self-Taught American Artists

James Castle: A Retrospective Opens October 10, 2009

The Art Institute of Chicago is pleased to host the first comprehensive museum exhibition of art by **James Castle (1899-1977)**, one of the most enigmatic and extraordinary self-taught artists to emerge in the United States during the 20th century. ***James Castle: A Retrospective***—on view in the **Jean and Steven Goldman Prints and Drawings Galleries in the Richard and Mary L. Gray Wing of the Art Institute (G124–**



127) from October 10, 2009 through January 3, 2010—examines the full range of the artist's work, bringing together more than 200 drawings, books, and constructions from across the United States. This exhibition marks the largest presentation of Castle's work ever to be seen in Chicago.

Castle, who had no formal artistic training, has received growing attention over the past few decades for his distinctive, searching works with their unique handmade quality, graphic skill, and visual and conceptual range. Deaf since birth, Castle never adopted speech, sign language, lip-reading, writing, or any of the usual modes of communicating with other people. Instead, he pursued art as his primary means of communication, drawing nearly every day of his relatively secluded life in Idaho and structuring his own sense of place through the precise architectural and

spatial references of his familiar surroundings. Though he led a somewhat isolated life, only attending school for approximately five years, he used magazines, books, catalogues, advertisements, commercial packaging, newspapers, and cartoons as sources for inspiration, transforming ordinary into extraordinary images with his constantly investigative and analytical mind.

James Castle: A Retrospective is comprised of a wide selection of images and objects in the media most often used by the artist: drawing, collage, and assemblage. Castle developed his favorite medium and method of working at a young age: mixing stove soot with saliva and applying this "ink" with sharpened sticks and cotton wads to such found materials as product packaging and discarded paper. These everyday materials give his works a singular, immediate, and appealing natural quality that perfectly complements the skill and acuteness with which he manipulated his materials. Many of his soot and spit drawings depict rooms in his family's farmhouse and outdoor views of buildings on the property, usually represented from memory and often embellished with odd surrealistic images. These drawings exhibit a superb handling of stick-applied line and deft tonal washes. Evident in this exhibition are Castle's mastery of linear perspective and the pleasure he took in creating such architectonic renderings.



The exhibition also includes Castle's remarkable works in color, often based in home-found materials such as laundry bluing, face powder, or color leached out of crepe paper by soaking. These compositions, stemming from appropriated images from popular publications and mass-produced printed materials, are often characterized by startlingly "surreal" shifts in scale or are peopled with fantasy figures like women with cat heads or wheel feet.

Castle also worked three-dimensionally, creating "constructions" or assemblages of people, barnyard fowl, articles of clothing, household objects and furniture, and architectural elements such as doors or windows. These constructions are small, abstracted explorations of common objects, yet they are also extremely complicated, requiring skillful cutting, tearing, folding, stitching, and gluing of his found papers and cardboards.

The artist garnered some local acclaim during his lifetime (including exhibitions in 1963 and 1976 at the Boise Gallery of Art) but only achieved international recognition decades after his death in 1977. Castle's work is now included in major museum collections throughout the U.S., including the American Folk Art Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the High Museum in Atlanta, Georgia; the Boise Art Museum; and the Art Institute of Chicago.

James Castle: A Retrospective was organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Chicago presentation of *James Castle: A Retrospective* is curated by Mark Pascale, Curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago.

James Castle: A Retrospective is accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalogue published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, a 272-page volume that is the definitive treatment of Castle's work and life. It is accompanied by the 53-minute documentary DVD *James Castle: Portrait of an Artist*. *James Castle: A Retrospective* numbers 272 pages and includes more than 350 full-color reproductions. The catalogue is supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Fund for Scholarly Publications.

James Castle: A Retrospective is made possible by The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, through the Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative. Additional funding was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts as part of *American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius*. Major funding for the Chicago presentation of *James Castle: A Retrospective* is made possible through the generosity of an Anonymous Donor. Additional funding is provided by Deone Jackman and Eugene Goldwasser, Dr. Robert Grossett, and Linda and Jerome Meyer. Further support is provided by Jeffrey M. Goldberg, Willa and Scott Lang, and James A. Young, M.D.

IMAGE CREDITS:

James Castle. *Untitled (Book)* n.d. Anonymous gift.

James Castle. *cat head woman in purple dress*, colored wash. Collection of Frances and Roy Ellsworth

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MUSEUM HOURS

10:30 am–5:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

10:30 am–8:00 pm Thursday

10:00 am–5:00 pm Saturday, Sunday

TARGET FREE THURSDAY EVENINGS AFTER 5:00 pm

SUMMER HOURS (from Memorial Day to Labor Day)

10:30 am–5:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday

10:30 am–9:00 pm Thursday, Friday

10:00 am–5:00 pm Saturday, Sunday

TARGET FREE SUMMER EVENINGS THURSDAY AND FRIDAY AFTER 5:00 pm

FREE FEBRUARY 1 TO 28

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

ADMISSION

Adults \$18.00 Includes all special exhibitions and coat check

Children 14 and over, students, and seniors \$12.00 Includes all special exhibitions and coat check

Chicago residents receive a \$2.00 discount with proof of residency

Children under 14 always free

Members always free

Free Evenings are free to all. City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Museum Passport" card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park. Visitors can enter the museum via the Michigan Avenue entrance or the Millennium Park entrance on Monroe Street.