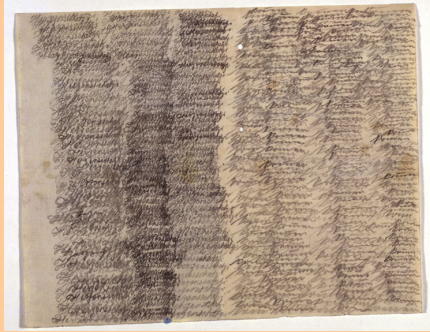


Challenge

The Love Letters of Emma Hauck



“The desire to make images and to communicate something of the otherwise unsayable is innate in all of us. There can be few people who did not make drawings as children, whether using materials provided by earnestly indulgent adults or scratching marks into dried earth with a stick. Early in our lives we make patterns and representations with anything that comes to hand, unconsciously exploring the bounds of space with the objects we arrange and depict. In this way we begin to learn about a relationship with the world which goes beyond practicality. For most, creative activity of this kind declines and ceases by the time adulthood is reached, though creativity and considered looking are channelled imperceptibly into other areas of our lives, our work or leisure activities. A few people become professional makers of images or spectacle, that is artists in the modern western sense. But there is also a rich and varied group of creators who do not fit into the official category of the professional artist, however it is defined. At their best, they are the creative patternmakers par excellence, often producing interesting and powerful bodies of work that find their way, through various means, into public view. Here their artistic production takes on a life that distances it — often emphatically separating it — from its producer. This is the domain of **Outsider Art**.

The specific term Outsider Art was first coined in 1972 by the british writer Roger Cardinal, in his eponymous book, as an English-language equivalent for the French term ‘Art Brut’ originally formulated by the painter Jean Dubuffet (1901-85) in the mid-1940s. The artist outsiders are, by definition, fundamentally different to their audience, often thought of as being dysfunctional in respect to the parameters for normality set by the dominant culture. What this means specifically is, of course, subject to changes dictated by history and geographical location. Thus, the emergence of a heterogeneous group has been made possible which includes those

labelled as dysfunctional through pathology (usually, though not always, in terms of psychological illness), or criminality (often in tandem with the first), or because of their gender or sexuality, or because they appear to be in some way anachronistic, or are seen as (under)developed, or often simply because of a cultural identity and religious belief that is perceived as significantly different

Psychiatric patients, self-taught visionaries and mediums are the groups at the heart of early definitions of Outsider Art.”

Colin Rhodes in “Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives”

The Prinzhorn Collection

The Prinzhorn Collection is the custodian of a worldwide exceptional body of work done by patients in psychiatric hospitals at the dawn of the 20th century. Collated by the art historian and physician of the Heidelberg Psychiatric University hospital, Hans Prinzhorn from 1919 to 1921. It comprises around 5000 works, the majority in pencil or crayons, together with paintings in oils and watercolours, fabric art, and wood sculptures. The collection comprises works created by 435 patients/artists (80 of them women). They were by and large diagnosed as "schizophrenic" and mostly committed to institutions in Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

Emma Hauck (1878-1920).

Diagnosed with dementia praecox, she was incarcerated in Heidelberg's psychiatric clinic on her thirtieth birthday in 1909. There, she wrote obsessively to her long-absent husband, the letters consisting of barely legible scrawls rendered doubly incomprehensible by being layered on top of one another. In these letters to her husband we find obsessive repetitions of a simple imperative—komm (come), Herzensschatzi komm (sweetheart come). The repetitive words intensifies meaning and emotion but were considered by Prinzhorn as an example of “progenital form of drawing” or the “nearest to the zero point on the scale of composition”.

Challenge

Explore ideas of composing letters in the style of Emma Hauck or inspired by their patterns, using swarm art composition, where each individual is responsible to draw a word, but trying not to predetermine the letter form but let it emerge somehow from the interactions of the micro-artists, by composing the words on the letter in a auto-organized way.

