James Castle, 1899-1977
James Castle: “A Retrospective”
Philadelphia Museum of Art
OSU’s Urban Arts Space
“Constructing James Castle”
January 7—Feb 23, 2013
Foundation for Self-Taught American Artists
Documentary Film:
James Castle: Portrait of an Artist
http://www.foundationstaart.org/
“Visible Speech”
(Alexander Graham Bell & Alexander Melville Bell)


- "Aspirate;" a simple and nearly silent aspiration. = h.
- "Throat;" a rough aspiration—the throat contracted = whisper.
- "Throat-voice"—the same, vocalized = hoarseness.
- "Catch;" a stoppage of the breath by closing the throat = cough.

(Non-Vocal) P wh s tr rh l h s th sh y h k
(Vocal) b w v d r l z dh zh y g
Castle at the Gooding School for the Deaf and Blind, 1910-1915
1910-1915: A very oral time in American Deaf Education
The Kinds of Castle’s Art
Soot and Spit drawings
Soot and Spit Drawings
Soot and Spit Drawings
Self Portrait, age 8
Handmade Books
Handmade Books
Replications (and use) of store products and packaging
(Kaleidoscopic) Geometric Constructions
Work Created on Found Paper Materials
Constructions, Clothes & Dolls
Constructions, Animals
Constructions, Furniture & Household Items
Animate & Inanimate Blends
Wedding
Anniversary
SaistKAsfactio
Registered
Mail

Word & letter play....

COULD BE WORSE

Learn Living

Purse! Discusses
Word & letter play....

Taxes

P R D J E J & J Z J X
J H J K & & & Z & X & H.
& K & E & N Z Q Z J

Ch w w & & c w & h h

D U O Y U K
U U U O U Y U G U G U D
U K O G O

I e j
a e l e e n e a
I d l ne je de de

Purse! Discusses

J G T ?! B Y U
W Z X H K R E
N Q &

L E J
A E L E E E N E A
L D L N E J E D E D E

1 2 3
2 3 4
5 6
7 8 9
10 11 12
1 2 3
4 5 6
7 8 9
10 11 12
Bundling it all
Materials he used
Things the Critics Have Said
(from the documentary film)

- There is always a quality of mystery and wonder in his work
- His playfulness was his genius
- It’s like a fascinating study of the development of art . . . except it’s all in one person.
Things the Critics Have Said
(in titles)

- A room of his own
- A silent voice
- A voice of silence
- Images in a silent world
- Conversant with silence
- Out of the mainstream
- A world without words
- Reputedly illiterate
- The uncommon book
- Idaho’s artist of eloquence
- Mysterious Castle
- A Man’s Box is his Castle

- Treasure found
- Castle talks through his art
- Out of a country post office
- The only practitioner of a very personal art
- Good things come in small packages
- Gifts of Silence
- The bookmaker of Garden Valley
- Found and profound
- Castle in his mind
- Invention and discovery
- Unfolding the familiar
SOME THINGS HIS FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE SAID ABOUT HIM (IN THE DOCUMENTARY FILM)

- Used some “home signs” with his older (deaf) sister & mother
- He was incorrigible
- He was stubborn
- He would only eat sleep draw… he wouldn’t work
- He always wanted his own home.
- He always smelled like soot
SOME THINGS HIS FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE SAID ABOUT HIM (IN THE DOCUMENTARY FILM)

- Well, I thought he knew quite a bit. He was intelligent in his drawings. He wouldn’t go to school.... But you couldn’t blame him for that. I don’t think he was treated right . . . You know, if you’re pushed backwards, you’re going to go backward. And I think that’s what they did at school.

- The kaleidoscopes were a gift, he probably got a new one every year or so and he really loved those and treasured them.

- When company came he would bring out his latest drawing and show it to them and wait for their response. It was his way of having a conversation.
SOME SPECULATION (MY OWN) ON THE INFLUENCE OF HIS DEAFNESS AND THE GOODING SCHOOL EXPERIENCE ON HIS ART

• The making of, and fascination with, books
• The making of household objects—creating and sewing clothes; carpentry
• The effective use of whatever materials were at hand
• The importance/sense of letters, words, literacy and the patterning of text;
• Typography & printing as trade and art
• The charting of letters (vowel & consonant clusters) together, again and again
• An aversion to work--or being forced to do what took him away from his art
• The idea of “vocation” (of being an “artist”)
• The repetition of practice, the practice of repetition (speech/oral lessons)
• A blessing--being left alone to do this thing (because he was deaf)
CASTLE’S FINAL WORDS

ED

DU O Y UK
UU O U Y U G U G U D
UKOGO

le j e a l e e n e a
ldl ne je de de

Purse ! Discusses

je j & j z j x j h j k
& & & z & x & h & k & e
& n z q z j P ! D

Purse ! Discusses
Pd!