

# InsideOUT

PRODUCED BY THE DENVER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Denver Center  
Theatre Company  
KENT THOMPSON  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



The Most  
Deserving

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# InsideOUT

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## SYNOPSIS

*The Most Deserving* follows the members of the Ellis County Arts Council in rural Kansas as they attempt to determine the most deserving artist to receive a \$20,000 grant. Head of the council is Jolene Atkinson; her husband Ted, originally from England, is also on the council. Recently widowed, Edie Kelch financially supports the arts council. Dwayne Dean is an aspiring artist himself. The newest member of the council is Liz Chang, an assistant art professor at the local college. Among the candidates are Rick Duffy, the local high school art teacher, and Everett Whiteside, an African-American artist with unconventional methods. ■

# ELLIS COUNTY, KANSAS

Ellis County in north-central Kansas boasts 900 square miles and is home to just over 28,000 people. It was named for Civil War Lieutenant George Ellis of Company I, 12th Kansas Infantry, who was killed at the Battle of Jenkins' Ferry, Arkansas, on April 30, 1864. Initially settled by small groups from Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York, then a few hundred English farmers, Ellis County saw a large number of German and Russian immigrants in the 1870s and 1880s, including Volga Germans whose ancestors had settled around the Volga River in Russia a century before. According to the 2000 census, Ellis County's population was 96% white, 2.4% Hispanic, 0.8% Asian, 0.7% African American and 0.2% Native American. The county seat, Hays, is home to nearly 20,000 people; two other cities, Ellis and Victoria, have between 1,000 and 2,000 residents each.

The Ellis County Historical Society supports a museum in Hays as well as various sites throughout the county. Fort Hays State Historic Site offers a modern visitor center as

well as four original buildings from the site's time as a U.S. Army post from 1865 to 1889. In 1912, William Jennings Bryan, three-time candidate for President of the United States, visited Ellis County and nicknamed Victoria's brand new St Fidelis Catholic Church "the Cathedral of the Plains." Five years ago, Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius named the Cathedral of the Plains one of the eight Wonders of Kansas; the church hosts 16,000 tourists annually.

Founded in 1902, Fort Hays State University now serves nearly 5,000 students at its Hays campus and another 8,000 via its online services. FHSU hosts an annual Oktoberfest in celebration of Ellis County's Volga German heritage. Hays also is home to a campus of the North Central Kansas Technical College.

Each July, the Ellis County Fair features events such as rodeo and mutton busting, speedway racing, music concerts, demolition derby and its variant, the combine demolition derby. ■

# THE ARTS IN KANSAS

*Art improves the quality of life. The Hays Arts Council promotes the visual, performing and literary arts for the people of our region. We support creative expression, foster arts education and bring cultural experiences to the community.*

—Hays Arts Council Mission Statement

The Kansas Arts Commission was established in 1966 after legislation was introduced by Mr Vivian Meckel, owner of Hays Music Company in Ellis County. The following year, the Hays Arts Council (HAC) became the first arts council in the state. In 1998, the council received the state's highest honor for arts excellence, the Governor's Arts Award.

In 2010, Governor Sam Brownback vetoed the Kansas Arts Commission budget, leaving the commission with \$0 for the new fiscal year. Kansas was the first state in the nation to completely eliminate arts funding, and the end of state funding also disqualified Kansas arts organizations from matching funds from regional and federal agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts. Some amount of state funding was restored in 2012 with the intent to promote economic growth through art via the Creative Arts Industries Commission. In June 2013, Governor Brownback signed a two-year budget giving the CAIC only \$200,000 annually, with restrictions on money designated for grants. Arts funding continues to struggle in Kansas. ■

# OUTSIDER ART

“Oh, I’ve been making shit outta shit for as long as I can remember.”

—Everett Whiteside, *The Most Deserving*

Outsider art refers to art created outside the traditional culture of academic art study. Outsider artists have little to no formal artistic training; rather, they are self-taught. Outsider artists often use non-traditional materials, or found objects, instead of commonly used artistic implements such as oil paint and stretched canvas. Found objects are discarded or common items that most people would overlook but in which the artist finds aesthetic value.

Jean Dubuffet coined the term *art brut* (French for raw or rough art) in 1949. His definition specifies “pieces of work executed by people untouched by artistic culture, in which therefore mimicry... plays little or no part, so that their authors draw everything... from their own depths and not from clichés.”

In contrast to his enthusiasm for *art brut*, Dubuffet was quite critical of traditional, mainstream cultural art. Dubuffet’s own collection of *art brut* formed the basis for the *Collection de l’Art Brut* museum in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Art historian and curator Michel Thévoz explains the work of outsider artists: “This is creation that is impulsive, often circumscribed in terms of time, or sporadic, which does not obey any demand, which resists any communicative prompting, which perhaps even finds its motivation in frustrating the expectations of others.”

The American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM) in Baltimore, Maryland, defines visionary art in its mission statement as “art produced by self-taught

individuals, usually without formal training, whose works arise from an innate personal vision that reveals foremost in the creative act itself.” The AVAM is careful to distinguish visionary art from folk art, which is passed down from generation to generation within a specific culture. The artists’ originality and spontaneity are of paramount importance.

Leon Kennedy is an African-American spiritual visionary artist born in 1945 in Houston, Texas. He creates art with mixed media on found objects, often paint on cardboard. He considers each of his works a message from God, inspired by and emanating from God’s love. Many videos of Leon Kennedy at work can be found on YouTube.

In 1997, the Smithsonian American Art Museum acquired 220 pieces of contemporary American folk art from Chuck and Jan Rosenak of New Mexico, including a bed-sheet Leon Kennedy painted in 1995.

Chuck Rosenak declared, “It is our desire to see them as part of the history of 20th-century American art.” The Rosenak Collection was the first exhibit of American art displayed at the *Collection de l’Art Brut*. ■

# BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

*“I draw my inspiration from three things: found objects, the word of God and my own lived experiences.”*

—Everett Whiteside, *The Most Deserving*

Everett Whiteside creates his three-dimensional artwork out of found objects that others usually consider trash. His first artwork mentioned in the play is a huge angel made from dog food cans. Everett has also depicted Bible characters as various as Samson and John the Baptist. A third brings to life the story of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel.

**S**amson was a Judge of the ancient Israelites; his story is told in the Biblical book of Judges, chapters 13-16. His birth was foretold to his father with the warning, “No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be [consecrated] to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines” (Judges 13:5). Therefore Samson’s hair was never cut, and he had unnatural strength: when he was handed over to the Philistines, “he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men” (Judges 15:14). When he fell in love with Delilah, the lords of the Philistines bribed her, “Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver” (Judges 16:5). He eventually confessed, “A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man” (Judges 16:17). They shaved his head as he slept, seized him and gouged out his eyes. After some time in prison, he was called out to entertain a party of 3,000 Philistines, and he prayed to God, “please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes” (Judges 16:28). God answered his prayer, and Samson pushed down the pillars that held up the house, and he died along with the 3,000 Philistines.

**E**zekiel is an Old Testament prophet who, as told in Ezekiel 37:1-14, had a vision from God in which God set him in the midst of a valley full of dry bones. God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones that God would return the bones to life, adding sinew and flesh and skin and breath: “Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord” (verses 5-6). Ezekiel prophesied and the bones rose: “And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them” (verses 7-8). And then “the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army” (verse 10). God explained the vision to Ezekiel by saying the dry bones represented the entire house of Israel, which God would similarly return to life.

**J**ohn the Baptist was a cousin and forerunner of Jesus. An itinerant preacher, John baptized many people, including Jesus himself. According to Matthew 3:4, “Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and honey.” John’s death is described in Mark 6:14-29. He was imprisoned by Herod for denouncing Herod’s marriage to his sister-in-law Herodias. Herodias wanted John the Baptist dead, but “Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe” (verse 20). However, Herodias’s daughter Salome danced before King Herod, so pleasing him that he promised her “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you” (verse 22). Salome asked for her mother’s advice, and Herodias insisted she ask for John the Baptist’s head. Upon Salome’s request, “the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her” (verse 26). John’s head was delivered on a platter to Salome, who gave it to her mother. ■

# VINCENT VAN GOGH

The historical artist most frequently mentioned in *The Most Deserving* is Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh, born in 1853 in Zundert, in the south of The Netherlands. He left school shortly before his 15th birthday. In 1869, 16-year-old van Gogh began working for international art dealers Goupil & Cie at their branches in the Hague, Brussels, London and Paris. However, he was increasingly distracted, both by the art surrounding him and by a growing interest in the Bible; his work performance deteriorated until he was dismissed in 1876. By December 1878 he had moved to a coal-mining region in southern Belgium, living in poverty among the miners and working as a lay preacher.

In the early 1880s, van Gogh began to paint. Eschewing formal education, he took lessons from individual artists, including Dutch artist Anthon van Rappard and Anton Mauve. No longer earning a living for himself, Vincent was supported financially by his younger brother, Theodorus (Theo), who was working at Goupil in Paris. Contention arose between the brothers when Vincent thought Theo was not trying hard enough to sell Vincent's paintings at his gallery; Theo tried to explain that the paintings were not in the current Parisian style. In 1883, 30-year-old van Gogh was painting bleak landscapes and darkly colored paintings of peasant workers, a stark contrast from his contemporary Impressionist artists' bright palettes.

In 1885, shortly after his father's death, van Gogh completed his first masterpiece, *The Potato Eaters*. The following year, he accepted his brother Theo's invitation to come live with him in Paris; Theo introduced Vincent to many artists, including Paul Gauguin, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Emile Bernard, Camille Pissarro and John Russell. Van Gogh experimented with Impressionism and, influenced by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, Neoimpres-

sionism or Pointillism; his paintings graduated from his previous dark palette to encompass much more color. He wrote, "What is required in art nowadays is something very much alive, very strong in color, very much intensified." Interested in portraiture but unable to afford models, van Gogh created a series of self-portraits.

Inspired but exhausted by life in Paris, van Gogh moved to southern France in 1888. Fellow artist Paul Gauguin joined him there, but in December van Gogh experienced a psychotic episode: he threatened Gauguin with a razor, then cut off part of his own left ear. He later claimed he could remember little of the incident, and wrote to family that it was "simply an artist's fit."

The following year he admitted himself to a psychiatric hospital in Saint-Rémy, stating "I wish to remain shut up as much for my own peace of mind as for other people's." He produced 150 paintings during his year in Saint-Rémy, including *The Starry Night*, depicting the view outside his sanatorium window.

He continued to send many paintings to his brother Theo in Paris, where they were shown in exhibitions, gaining van Gogh critical recognition. In 1890, he moved to Auvers-sur-Oise, near Paris, where he had another burst of creativity. However, on July 27, 1890, he shot himself in a wheat field and died two days later.

Vincent van Gogh's paintings were eventually inherited by his nephew, who transferred them in 1962 to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation; the Van Gogh Museum opened in Amsterdam in 1973. ■

# OTHER ARTISTS MENTIONED IN *THE MOST DESERVING*

**CARAVAGGIO (1571-1610)** was an influential Italian painter in the Baroque period. His paintings are naturalistic with a luscious use of color and light. Having always led a violent life, he killed a man in 1606 and was forced to flee Rome for Naples. In 1609 an attempt was made on his own life; he survived though his face was disfigured. Shortly thereafter, he created two paintings featuring his own face on a severed head: *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist* and *David with the Head of Goliath*. In 1610, while en route to Rome to receive a pardon, Caravaggio died under mysterious circumstances.

**MICHELANGELO (1475-1564)** and **LEONARDO DA VINCI (1452-1519)** were Italian artists, geniuses and the archetypes of the Renaissance Man. Da Vinci's most famous paintings include *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. Michelangelo's most famous works include the sculptures *David* and *Pietà*, as well as the paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City.

**EDVARD MUNCH (1863-1944)** was a Norwegian Expressionist painter; his most famous painting is *The Scream*, in which a distorted human figure holds its face, mouth agape, as the skies above throb a fiery orange-red. In 1908-1909 Munch underwent treatment for acute anxiety; he later said "Without fear and illness, I could never have accomplished all I have."

**JACKSON POLLOCK (1912-1956)** was an American painter of the abstract expressionist movement. Most of his paintings were created by his style of drip painting, or action painting, whereby he dripped or poured paint onto a canvas spread on the floor. He struggled with depression and alcoholism all his life.

**BOB ROSS (1942-1995)** was an American painter and television host best known for his PBS program *The Joy of Painting*, airing from 1983 to 1994, on which he taught aspiring painters his quick and unique Bob Ross Wet-on-Wet Technique. By painting on top of previous, still-wet paint layers, he was able to create a new landscape painting within each half-hour television episode.

**JOSEPH TURNER (1775-1851)** was a British Romantic landscape painter whose works influenced the later Impressionist movement. He often painted sea storms and shipwrecks; an urban myth about Turner declares he had himself tied to the mast of a ship in order to experience the drama of a sea storm. Extremely prolific, Turner produced over 550 oil paintings and 2,000 watercolors. ■

# O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

In discussing painter Joseph Turner with his wife, Ted makes a fleeting reference to the poem “O Captain! My Captain!,” written by American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892) in commemoration of the death of President Abraham Lincoln. Originally

published in New York City’s *Saturday Press* in November 1865, Whitman’s poetic elegy immediately struck a chord with the war-torn nation, and he was frequently asked to recite it at his public appearances for decades afterward.

## O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

*O captain! my captain! our fearful trip is done;  
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won;  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring.*

*But O heart! heart! heart!*

*O the bleeding drops of red!*

*Where on the deck my captain lies,*

*Fallen cold and dead.*

*O captain! my captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up! for you the flag is flung, for you the bugle trills:  
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths, for you the shores a-crowding:  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning.*

*O captain! dear father!*

*This arm beneath your head;*

*It is some dream that on the deck*

*You’ve fallen cold and dead.*

*My captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still:  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will.  
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done:  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won!*

*Exult, O shores! and ring, O bells!*

*But I, with silent tread,*

*Walk the deck my captain lies*

*Fallen cold and dead.*

# GLOSSARY

**AN ANTICHRIST** is one who works against the teachings of Jesus: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 1:7).

**FENG SHUI** (literally “wind water” in Chinese) is a complex system including the belief that the energy of your surroundings can have a positive or negative impact on your life. Buildings and objects should be arranged in an auspicious manner, according to feng shui.

**JERRY GARCIA** (1942-1995) was a member of the American rock band The Grateful Dead, formed in 1965. He died of a heart attack while in a California drug rehabilitation facility.

**LADY GREY** is a black tea with oil of bergamot, a variation on Earl Grey tea. Lady Grey tea was developed and first went on sale in the early 1990s.

**MANCHESTER UNITED**, an English professional football club, is one of the most widely supported football (soccer) teams in the world.

**THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON**, is an art museum in Trafalgar Square which exhibits work from its collection of more than 2,000 Western European paintings from the 13th to the 19th centuries. It is among the most visited art museums in the world.

**THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION (NRA)** was founded in 1871 by Civil War veterans dismayed at the poor marksmanship displayed by their Union troops. Today the NRA is a major political force lobbying for and against legislation affecting firearm ownership. There are currently more than four million NRA members.

**NICODEMUS** is a small community in north central Kansas, about a one-hour drive from Hays, county seat of Ellis County. Named for the biblical Nicodemus, a Pharisee who assisted Joseph of Arimathea in preparing Jesus’ corpse for burial, the township was founded in 1877 and is the only remaining western town established by African Americans during the post-Civil War Reconstruction Period. Just over 50 people call Nicodemus home today.

**THE WHO** are an English rock band formed in 1964. Their fourth album was *Tommy*, the first ever full-length rock opera. ■

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# THE MOST DESERVING QUESTIONS

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## PRE-PERFORMANCE QUESTION

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1. What constitutes art? How would you define it? How do others define it?  
Are you ever surprised at what some people deem art?

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## POST-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

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1. What does the title, *The Most Deserving*, have to do with the play?
2. How do personal agendas and community politics shape the choices that the Art Council makes?
3. What is the movement of “outsider art?” Why is Everett Whiteside labeled with this term?
4. What is Liz’s motivation for helping Everett? Do you think she truly believes in Everett’s work or does she have a different reason?
5. How would you describe Jolene and Ted’s relationship?
6. Why are Jolene and Liz at odds?
7. Why does Dwayne believe he is an artist? What does he think are the qualities of a deserving artist?
8. How are you expecting everyone to vote? Are you surprised with the vote at the end?
9. What do you think happens to the characters after the play?

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**Held in the theatre, post-show**

- **Oct 20, Talkback**
- **Nov 10, HEAC Talkback**
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