

Rudy Rotter's Spirit Driven Art

The Odyssey and Evolution of an Artistic Vision

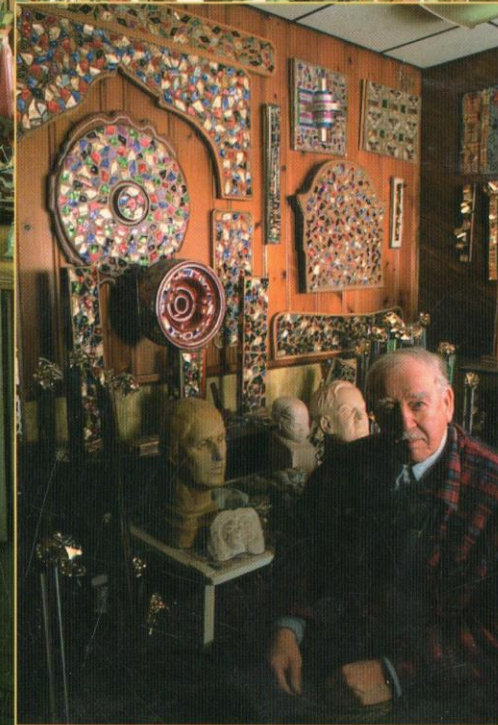
by Tony Rajer

1998

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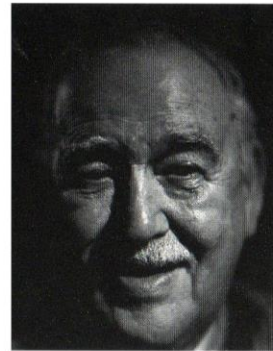
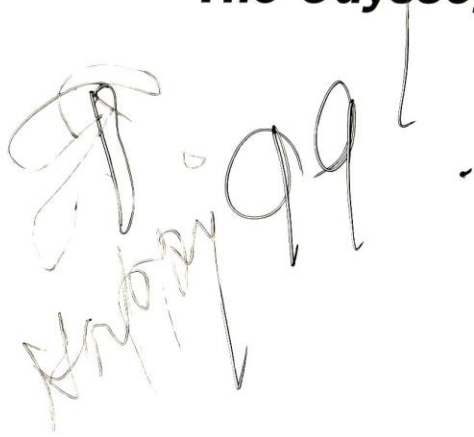
ANTON RAJER
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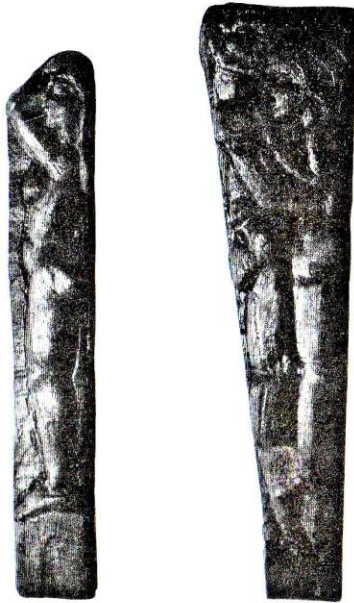
The Odyssey and Evolution of an Artistic Vision



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Fine Arts Conservation
Madison, Wisconsin



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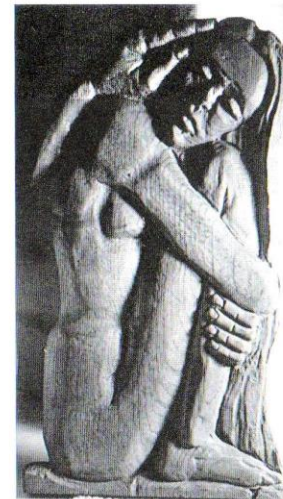
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Rudy Rotter's Museum of Sculpture

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*This book is dedicated to my
mother Mrs. Charlotte Rajer
who kindled in me a life long
love of learning.*



Cover

Rudy Rotter's Museum of Sculpture
(middle gallery) Manitowoc,
Wisconsin, 1998 — photograph
by J. Shimon & J. Lindemann

Cover inset

Portrait of Rudy Rotter in his office
1997 —Photograph by Ron
Byers

Inside covers, front and back

Detail of stain glass window
designed by Rudy and made at
Oakbrook-Esser Studios,
Oconomowoc, WI — Installed in
Rudy Rotter's dining room photo-
graph by Anton Rajer

Title page

Rudy Rotter, 1993 —photograph by
J. Shimon & J. Lindemann

This page

Photographs courtesy of Rudy
Rotter

Left: Figure and Double Figure in
Teak

Right: Hand on Female, carved wood



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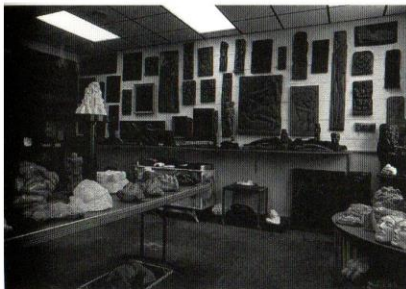
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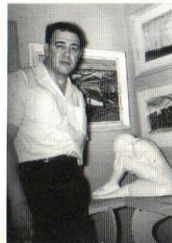
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35



29



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Acknowledgements



This book is the result of many individuals working together, not only to celebrate Rudy's 85th birthday, but to commemorate in permanent form his unique contribution to 20th century American art. This was an ambitious project to undertake, but we kept our word as promised. We are grateful to Rudy Rotter and his entire family, especially his wife Karen, for their assistance in preparing this book. We thank the individuals and firms that have supplied Rudy with materials, support, and words of encouragement over the years, including the following: Sue Abing, Ron Byers, Dan Hatton, Tim Holland, Kerrie Hughes, Mike Kazar, Phyllis Kind, Ruth DeYoung Kohler, Julie Lindemann, Cristina Ortiz, William Prevetti, John Shimon, Christine Style, Carol Emmons, Kim Roesler, Robert Margolis, Paul Phelps, Rebel Kanzelberger, Paul Roekle, Lester Schwartz, Burger Boat Co., University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry Company, Eck Foundry, Manitowoc Pattern Works, Trophies by Dave, Kaysun Corporation, D&A Core Cutters, Inc., Alfred Muchin Co. Inc., Luisier Plumbing, Schuette's Department Store, Oakbrook Esser Studios, Cawley Co., Van Ells Co., Kohler Foundation, Inc., Allen-Edmonds Shoes, Color Craft Graphic Art and many others. Special thanks to Manitowoc Herald Times Reporter for documenting Rudy's work for decades.

Rudy Rotter's Amazing Art Environment

Foreward

Rudy Rotter— even his name conjures up all sorts of magical and remarkable images. Remarkable is the fact that he has produced an estimated 15,000 works of art and at the same time raised a family and practiced dentistry for nearly 45 years. Rotter has made so much art that he's rented a warehouse one city block deep and three floors high to display it all, and he's still producing. You have to see it to believe it!

His outstanding achievement in the arts has been thoroughly documented in this series of essays on various topics of his life and art, including his place in American folk art, his family history, his museum, and his efforts as a recycler of various materials. Rotter's art is extremely varied, from the early realistic stone and wood carvings of human figures to complete flights of fancy, such as ancient ruins, totemic heads, birds, fish, flora and other imaginary creatures. His Hebrew traditions have been memorialized in stone and wood carvings of Moses, King Solomon and other ancestors. He has also co-mingled Judeo-Christian traditions in many works.

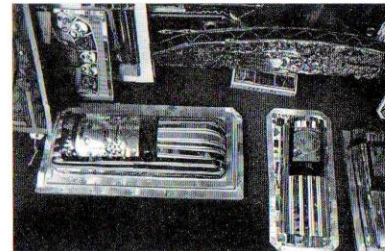
He will tackle anything, use any surface, appropriate any object found as well as given and attempt any subject no matter how silly or serious. We celebrate his contributions to the folk art field and wish him a happy 85th birthday.

Ann Oppenheimer

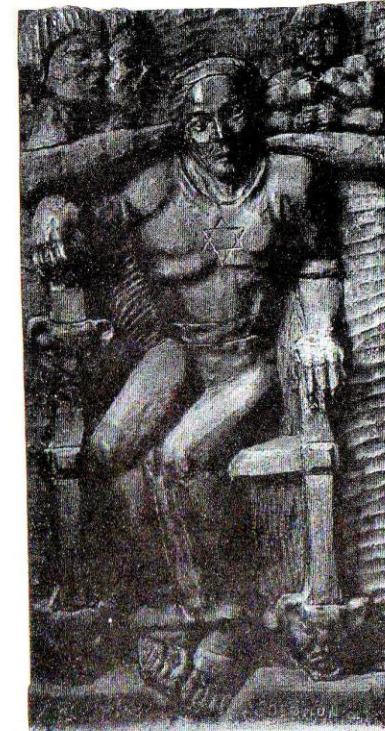
Founder and First President of the Folk Art Society of America



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

This page

Top left: Bible Room installation

Top right: King Solomon, carved wood

Lower left: Egyptian Mummies, wood, metal, mixed media

Previous page

Eye inset in text is Rudy's courtesy of a section of J. Lindemann and J. Shimon portrait of Rudy



Courtesy of J. Lindemann and J. Shimon

How I met Rudy Rotter

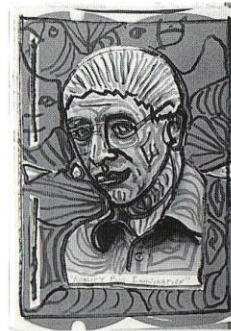
Introduction

Anton (Tony) Rajer



I went to Manitowoc in 1988 to visit the parents of my deceased friend, Al Scherer. That trip included a stop at the Elbow Room Restaurant on Buffalo Street, located across from Rudy's museum. We parked near the restaurant and my companions went on ahead. Intrigued by the big sign "Manitowoc Museum of Sculpture," now the Rudy Rotter Museum of Sculpture, I stayed behind to take a look in the museum window. To my amazement, I saw hundreds of sculptures, carvings, and ceramics displayed in the front room. I walked in, paid the 50 cents admission, and looked around stunned. Surrounding me were hundreds of luminous, one-of-a-kind works of art. After a brief visit with this unknown artist, I promised I'd return.

I have long ago lost count of the times I have visited Rudy since that day. He and I have become good friends, sharing through time and reciprocity our interest in the arts. Our friendship has become something that I value deeply. Because of that friendship, as a testimony to our *amistad*, and because I believe in Rudy's art, I wrote this book as promised. More than a decade has passed since I found a new friend in Rudy Rotter, and this tribute is my way of honoring one of Wisconsin's living cultural treasures.



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of J. Lindemann and J. Shimon



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes

This page:

Above: Portrait of Rudy Rotter cutting leather face

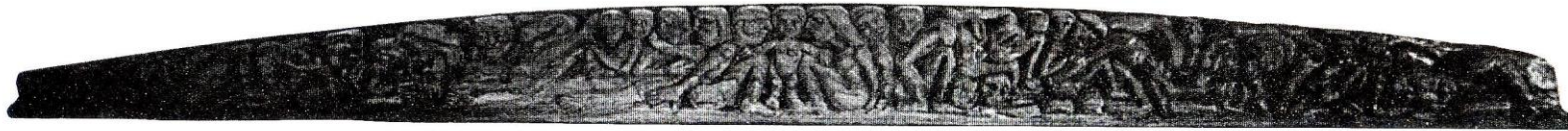
Inset in text: Drawing on wallpaper sample

Top left: Reality vs. Imagination, mixed media

Left: First floor front gallery, 1996

Previous page:

Installation photograph of Rudy's 1993 exhibit in the Neo-Post-Now Gallery in Manitowoc



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes
Inset courtesy of Dan Halton

Rudy Rotter's Spirit-Driven Art

Anton Rajer



Rudy Rotter is the most prolific artist in Wisconsin history, having created over a 45 year period an estimated 15,000 works of art, mostly sculpture, but also paintings, drawings, and assemblage. His artistic output is staggering by any account considering that he has no formal art training, just hard sustained work over many decades. At the same time that he was creating art, he also raised a family and operated a successful dental practice. Rudy is a self-taught artist, but does not fit the stereotype of impoverished visionary or social misfit. He is organized, disciplined and compulsive about his art, working every day in an organized manner, morning and afternoons; rarely does he take a day off. His commitment is as commendable as his artistic output. As Rudy puts it, "I feel driven to create; I just love the creative process. The product is not as important as the action."

From a global perspective, it is hard to categorize his work, but Spirit-Driven can be used to describe his inner drive and energy to produce objects that he himself describes as art. Rudy does, however, share many attributes of other self-taught or intuitive artists such as obsessive-compulsive production, serial proliferation, and artistic production outside of the academic realm.



Inset courtesy of Anton Rajer
Courtesy of Dan Hatton

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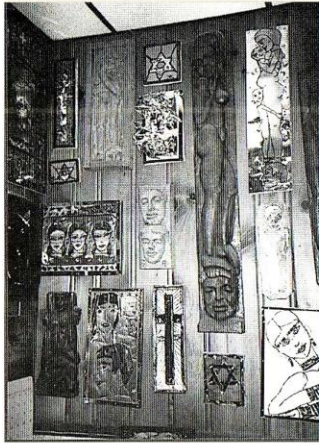
Inset in text: Female Face, Rudy's first carving in wood

Left: Antler Woman, carved moose antler

Previous page:

Top: Interrelationship, carved wood

Inset photo and large photo: Two different views of the first floor middle gallery, 1996



All photographs on this page are courtesy of Anton Rajer

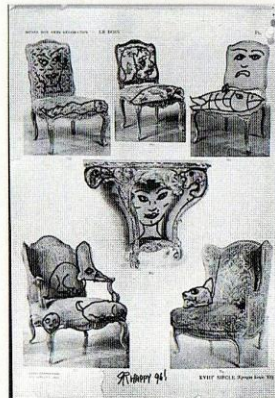
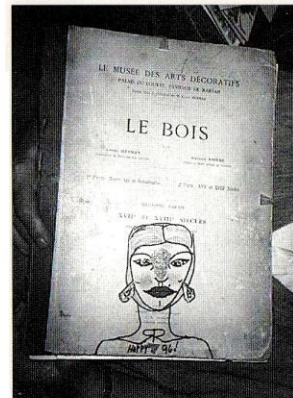
Top left: Office wall in the museum, 1997

Top center: Rudy's workshop in the museum, 1998

Top right: Imaginary Creature, plastic purge

Lower left: Mother and Child, carved wooden industrial pattern

Lower center and right: Portfolio of French Decorative Arts, modified by Rudy



Outsider art is the term coined by British scholar Roger Cardinal in his 1972 landmark book, 'Outsider Art,' to describe this phenomenon of artistic production outside of an academic or institutionally produced art. (Cardinal, 1972, 1994) Probably the most famous 19th century outsider artist in the mainstream was the Frenchman Henri Rousseau, who was self-taught. Some *outsider* artists transform common materials such as by-products of consumer society into novel forms of art. In the 1940s and early 1950s, the French artist Jean Dubuffet began collecting art made by these self-taught artists. He called them L'Art Brut because of the raw artistic vision that their work embodied. Dubuffet's collection is today displayed in Musée L'Art Brut, Lausanne, Switzerland, which specializes in self-taught art.

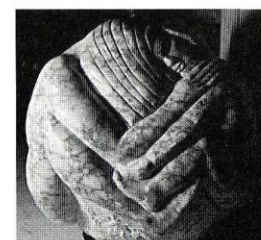
Today numerous terms abound in the academic art world to describe this form of artistic production: outsider, naive, intuitive, vernacular, grassroots, self-taught, folk art. Common denominators among most of these self-taught artists are their relative isolation from outside influences, their compulsive productivity and their inner need to express in visual form the artistic visions in their minds. Outsider art is also unlike traditional folk arts with its perpetuation of communal traditions such as basket weaving, or other creative efforts usually associated with the crafts. Rudy simply does not fit any of these categories, as he readily admits. He prefers to be called an artist, a primitive expressionist.

What then defines Rudy Rotter's art, and how does it fit into 20th century American art? Like many artists, Rudy is part alchemist and part magician. He has, for decades, utilized many industrial by-products as raw material for his art. Through production methods that include what he calls "happy, creative accidents," wonderful objects magically

emerge. His objects challenge us to bend our definition of art and expand the term to include these new forms. Like the French artist, Marcel Duchamp, who transformed industrial objects into ready-mades, Rudy does the same. A good example is the *purge* series in which Rudy took solidified plastic drippings and altered them with paint and magic markers into faces, fish and fantasy creatures. (Purges are the plastic waste purged from extruding machines in the plastics industry.) It is through these intuitive expressions that he explores the artistic potential in cast-off materials, many of which come from local industry in his hometown of Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Rudy has developed a network for gathering these materials.

Rudy expresses himself intuitively without preconceived notions of what he will produce. Some scholars have called this phenomenon *spontaneous construction*. A shipment of shiny reflective material may serve as the impetus which launches a new series. He does not consciously plan the work. In this way Rudy is like other intuitive artists who let creativity flow from their head to their hands, allowing serendipity into the discovery process. The American scholar Roger Manley, in his extensive exploration of the outsider artist, has described this as “art created by ordinary individuals who are not part of the art world and who often have no preconception of themselves as artists.” (Manley, 1989) This is certainly true in Rudy’s case. He didn’t consider himself a real artist until a life passage—his retirement from dentistry—strengthened his artistic identity. The sheer quantity of his work made it impossible for him to deny the driving force of art in his life.

Rudy tentatively began making art around 1955, following conventional concepts of artistic represen-



All photographs on this page courtesy of Rudy Rotter, documenting his work during the 1960's

Above: Rudy around 1965 sculpting clay figure

Top right: The Whole Family, glazed ceramic

Center left: Ceramic head of a baby

Center right: Interrelationship in ceramic

Center: Female in Relief, carved wood

Right: Mother and Child, carved marble

Lower right: Rudy carving marble female



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



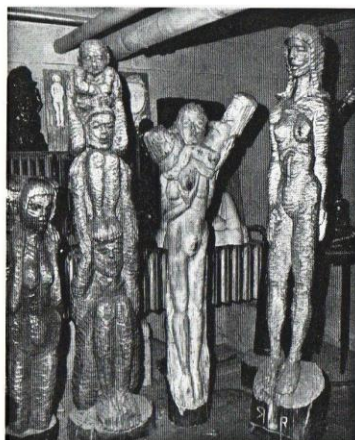
Courtesy of Herald Times Reporter



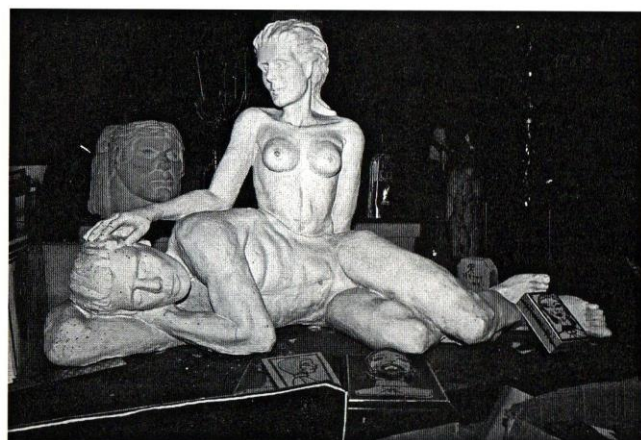
Courtesy of Herald Times Reporter



courtesy of Anton Rajer (both)



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes



Courtesy of Dan Hutton

- Top line left: Moses, carved stone
- Top line center: Rudy examining his cast metal sculptures, 1960
- Top line right center: Rudy carving Spanish Dancer, 1961
- Top line far right: Rudy's first two plaster sculptures, circa 1956
- Above left: Downstairs gallery at 812 Huron Ave., circa 1979
- Above right: Eve Emerging From Adam's Rib, painted plaster, circa 1960
- Lower: Grief, carved marble, 1959

tation and aligned with his natural interest in anatomy. He studied zoology in college before dentistry and excelled at anatomy studies in school. Most of his early work is an exploration of the human form. Almost immediately, through the medium of clay, colored chalk and watercolor, human figures began to emerge in his artwork, in singular or interlocking relationships. One of his early and most monumental groupings is a near life-size figure of Eve emerging from Adam's side as he sleeps. This painted plaster figure was created by both carving and applying plaster to create the figures over a metal armature. With extraordinary power, it conveys in vivid graphic form the Bible story of Eve's creation.

Sometimes working between dental appointments, Rudy continued producing art, drawing and creating small sculptures. He sought help from a respected Manitowoc artist, Lester Schwartz, who gave him a set of wood chisels and words of encouragement. Rudy began buying blocks of hardwood and stone in which he carved figures in interwoven, baroque-like groupings. Soon his work was noticed by local art groups. In 1959 he entered the Neville Public Museum Art Show in Green Bay. His polished alabaster figure called "Grief" won first prize.

Later, through other contacts in his community, Rudy obtained high quality wood molds called *patterns*. These industrial objects, made by master pattern makers for industrial castings, had no function after production of a product ceased. Originally, they were used to make beveled gears,



industrial couplings, engine parts, and maritime equipment. Rudy was given hundreds of these obsolete intricate forms, many made of mahogany and other tropical hardwoods. Because of his tremendous upper torso strength (he was a shot put athlete in college), Rudy was able to carve and manipulate these pieces into objects of aesthetic beauty. In stone and wood he produced hundreds of unique figurative expressions, often utilizing male, female, and child forms interlocked in rhythmic beauty. Rudy was inspired by Gustav Vigeland's intertwining human forms at his Vigeland Sculpture Park in Norway. Rudy's carving had a therapeutic effect, as the very action and process of carving helped liberate him from the tight and confining work of dentistry. He produced precise and accurate dental castings for decades, which may be thought of as the first phase of his art. For Rudy, producing art is also a creative and emotional release and its forms have evolved over decades of his life. When arthritis and age began to slow him down, for example, he gave up carving and turned to assemblage.

Family life also contributed to Rudy's artistic production during this period. The birth of his first two children, Randy and Linda, stimulated his interest in children as a sculptural theme. Rudy's love of his new family was an outgrowth of his own parents' strong sense of family and community, which centered around the Mitchell Street neighborhood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he was raised.



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Top: Interrelationship # 31, carved wood

Lower left: Interrelationship of Man, African wonder stone

Lower center: Interrelationship # 24, carved wood

Lower right: Interrelationship # 35, carved wood

The illustrations on this page were inspired by the work of Gustav Vigeland in Vigeland Sculpture Park, Norway

Images on this page courtesy of Rudy Fotter except as noted

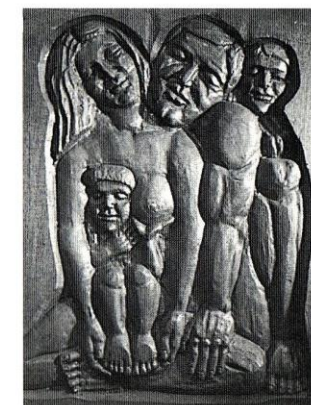
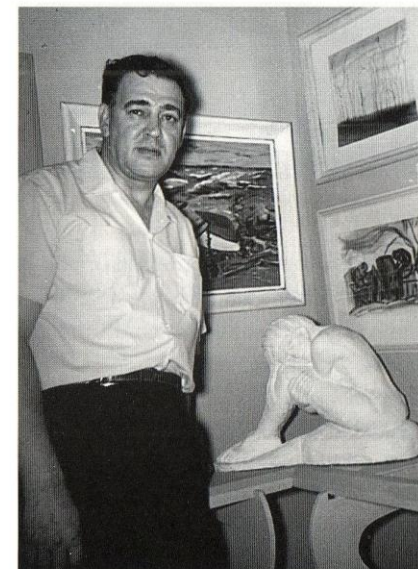


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Roger Cardinal 'Toward an Outsider Aesthetic', in *The Artist Outsider, Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, edited by Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. (Smithsonian Press, Washington, D.C. 1994)

Roger Manley, *Signs and Wonders: Outsider Art Inside North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1989)



All photographs on this page courtesy of Rudy Rotter

Top left: Rudy Rotter's family, circa 1911—the mother, Leah Rotter, 2nd from left, flanked by her children: Samuel, David, Henry, and Becky

Top center left: Rudy's father, Herman Rotter, circa 1908

Top center right: Rudy Rotter in High School track uniform, 1931

Top right: Rudy exhibiting his work, circa 1959

Center left: Rudy, center with his cousin Ann, left and sister Becky, right, 1929

Center right: Lieutenant Rudy in his Army uniform with his sister, Becky, 1941

Lower left: Bronze relief portraits of Rudy's children, Jimmie and Peter

Lower right: Family Group, carved wood

Childhood and Family Background



Rudy's parents were Russian Jews who came to the New World not looking for a handout but for an opportunity, a chance to better themselves. They found such a place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where members of their former Ukrainian village had settled. Lyubashivka (also spelled Lubasevka), Ukraine is a city some 200 miles south of Kiev near the Kodyma River. Rudy's father, a wheat farm manager, immigrated to the United States in 1908. In 1910, he sent for his wife and four children and brought them to Milwaukee. Rudy's parents worked hard and instilled in their children a strong work ethic. The family prospered and eventually opened several businesses, including a flower shop, a tire repair store, and grocery on Milwaukee's south side. His parents also invested in real estate. As Rudy recalls about these times:

We lived above the flower shop and got up early in the morning to help with chores around the shop, pick up flowers, cut and arrange them, all before school. After school we had to work in the shop, but I don't begrudge my parents for this. All of us worked together; it was a loving family. Sure, we joked around, but I always felt such love and care. This is why so much of my art work is about the family and human relationships. Eventually, my parents bought a small delivery truck and because there were eight of us, we didn't all fit up front. The boys would lay down in between the shelves in the back so we could all go places together.



Top inset: Family, carved wood

Center: Linda Rotter dusting
Spanish Dancer, c. 1960

Above: Moses, carved stone

Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

Courtesy of Anton Raler



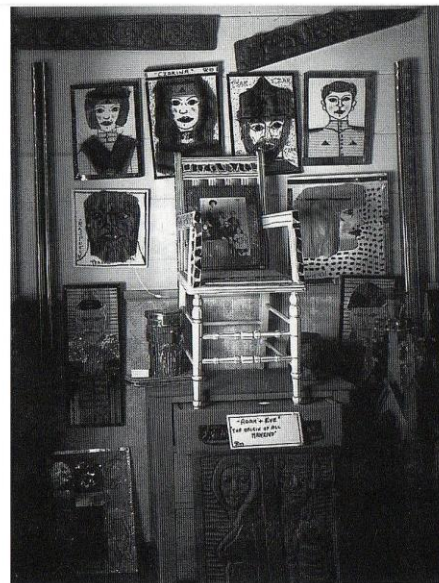
courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Dan Hatton

Top left: Face, wood relief

Top right: Genesis Panel detail, carved wood

Lower left: Rudy and wife Karen admiring pieces at 812 Huron gallery

Lower right: Installation of Old Russia, 1996

Rudy's family kept Sabbath and attended the Romanian Synagogue, but on Sundays made outings to local parks and occasionally the Milwaukee Public Museum where Rudy was exposed to different cultures. This helped to kindle his curiosities about the world. The family also went to Chicago to visit his aunt's home as well as cultural sites.

The year 1929 brought great hardship to the Rotter family, as it did to so many others. The Depression caused the failure of the family businesses. The Rotters did not despair, however, but kept on working. Rudy graduated from South Division High School in 1931 and went off to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he excelled in anatomy studies and majored in zoology. He was on the track team and also played football. He graduated in 1936 and got a job as a junior zoologist at the Milwaukee Public Museum, where he worked with artist Owen Gromme. "Perhaps the art there had an unconscious effect on me," Rudy noted.

Realizing it would take years to climb the museum ladder, Rudy enrolled as a dental student at Marquette University in 1937. He graduated in 1941 and promptly married. His first dental practice was located on Forest Home Avenue in Milwaukee. Between 1941 to 1943, he served as 1st Lieutenant in the Army Dental Corps at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Shortly after leaving the army, he traveled to Manitowoc, Wisconsin, where he was introduced to the Schwartz family, his wife's relatives. Rudy fell in love with Manitowoc, a small and safe community on the shore of Lake Michigan, and he decided to establish his dental practice there. In addition to launching a successful dental practice, he began inventing devices to help mankind. Rudy manifested an inner need to create, not just through the focused, often craftsman like work of dentistry, but in a broader, larger sense. In these early years he established a pattern of productivity that would serve him well his entire life.

Rudy's Inventions to Help Mankind



Before Rudy began making art, he invented a series of devices to help mankind, including sugarless chewing gum, a shoe shine roller, and a sterilizing autoclave. Unfortunately, none of his prototypes went into commercial production, but their history is recounted here as another example of Rudy's endlessly creative mind. *Dr. Ritter's ammoniated sugarless chewing gum* (Rudy chose the name Dr. Ritter as the name to advertise his chewing gum) was invented by Rudy in the early 1950s as an outgrowth of his dental practice. Sugarless gum would cut down on cavities and improve health. Several thousand packages in prototype form were produced by a chewing gum producer in Michigan. Rudy gave the gum away to his patients and tried marketing it through local drugstores.

One day a man came to Rudy's dental office and identified himself as an agent of the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). He asked tough questions about permits, distribution, production, and product shelf life. Because Rudy had kept some of the chewing gum packages longer than one year, the agent concluded the product had to be destroyed. Rudy watched as the agent took the remaining chewing gum to the basement and burned it in the furnace. Thus ended the chewing gum project.

Another invention, related to sanitation, was a portable water fountain that could be attached to a

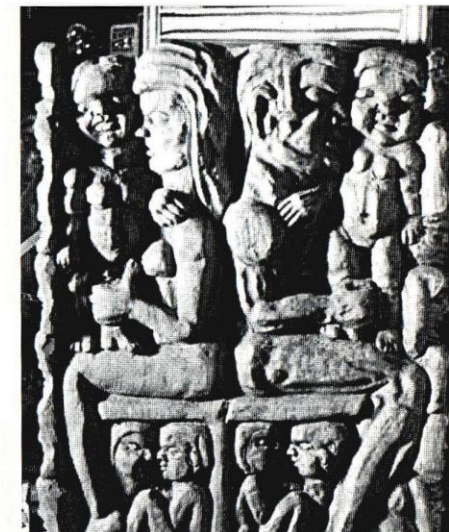
kitchen or bathroom faucet. Rather than having family members use the same glass, the fountain was a more sanitary way to get a drink of water. Rudy got a traveling salesman to market this for a short time.

Rudy disliked paste shoe polish, so he invented a device with white liquid shoe polish in a roller to make it easy to keep shoes freshly polished. Other colors were envisioned, but only one prototype roller containing white polish was produced.

Of all of Rudy's inventions, his sterilizing autoclave had the greatest potential for success. He began with a large industrial pressure canning device, purchased from the Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry in Manitowoc. When modified with heating elements, it became an autoclave hot enough to sterilize dental and medical instruments. Rudy sought a patent, but it was denied because his device resembled many others. Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry eventually began production and distribution of an autoclave similar to Rudy's.

Right: Interrelationship of Mankind, carved wood

Inset in text: Interrelationship #33, carved wood, courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Anton Raler



Courtesy of J. Lindemann and J. Shimon

Art by the Acre

The History of Rudy's Museum

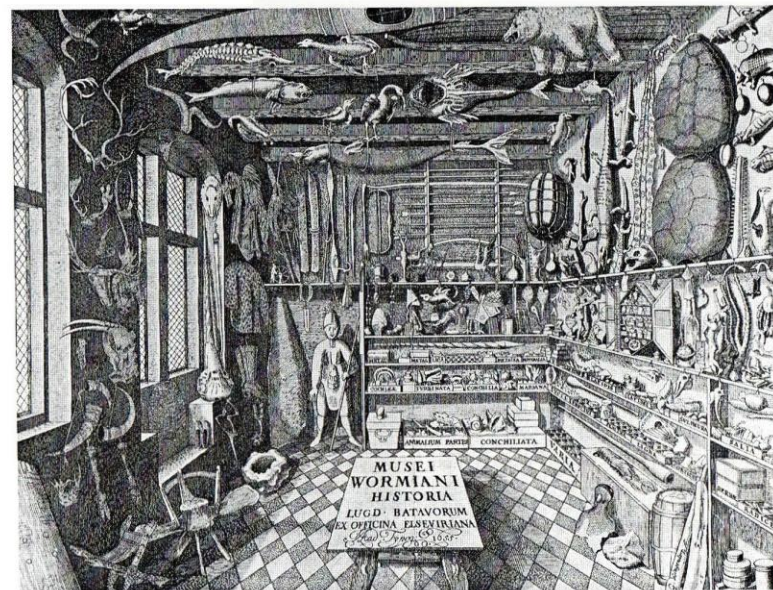
In this place is found and can be examined with wonder, odd and curious rarities and things among which a large part has not been seen before, and many royal persons and envoys visiting Copenhagen ask to see the museum on account of its great fame and what it relates from foreign lands, and they wonder and marvel at what they see.

That is what a visitor reported in 1654 after seeing Danish naturalist Olé Worm's Museum. It was as if they were describing Rudy's museum.



The age of exploration and discovery beginning in 16th century Europe brought a rise in collecting objects of curiosity. Collectors gathered all types of items believed to have scientific, cultural and artistic value. These collections were known as *cabinets of curiosities* and some evolved into museums in the modern sense. The first public museum in Europe was the Ashmolean at Oxford University in England which opened in 1683. In the United States, painter Charles Wilson Peale launched the first American museum in Philadelphia in 1786, stuffed with mastodon bones, animals, and art. In German, this type of eclectic gathering of objects is known as *wunderkammer*.

The 20th century brought a rapid increase in the number of museums created by artists, particularly in the



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes

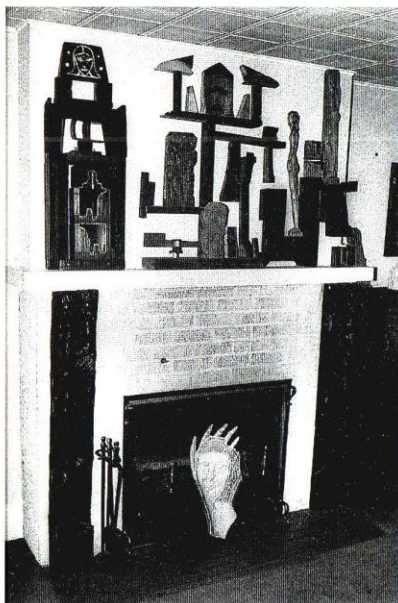
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Above: Museum Wormianum, Olé Worm Museum, published by Iohannem Elsevirium, 1655, Leiden, Holland, illustration from Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, Denmark

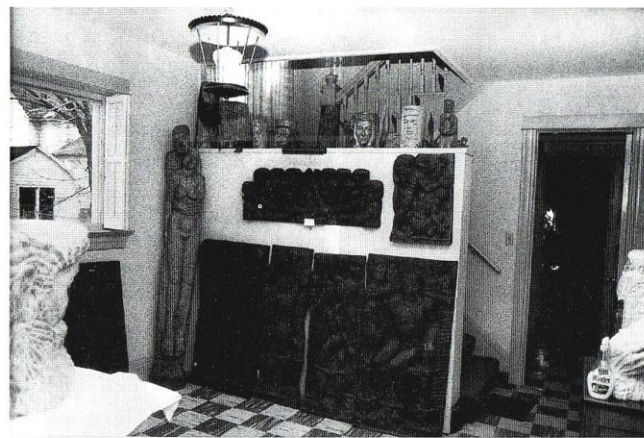
Left: First floor front gallery, 701 Buffalo, 1996

Previous page

Rudy in his first floor middle gallery, 1993



Courtesy of Rudy Roter



Courtesy of Rudy Roter

Top left: 812 Huron Ave. gallery, circa 1975 with Antler Woman in front of fireplace

Top right: 812 Huron Ave. front gallery, circa 1975

Below: 701 Buffalo Street middle gallery view, 1988



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

folk art realm. Two of the largest examples in the United States of this *Artist Museum* genre are Reverend Howard Finster's Paradise Garden and Plant Museum in Summerville, Georgia, and Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village in Simi Valley, California. In both, the artists have created tableaux settings of their art juxtaposed with other items of interest and popular culture. Rudy's museum is similar to these examples, with an overwhelming majority of objects being of his own creation.

Rudy's museum has undergone various transformations, each one progressively larger. The first museum was housed at 812 Huron Avenue which was also the location of his studio, home and dental practice in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Initially it was called the Manitowoc Fine Arts Gallery, but in 1979 Rudy changed it to the Manitowoc Museum of Sculpture. Rudy had a unique situation in this two story building. He was able to live on the second floor, keep his dental practice on the first floor, and have his art studio/gallery in the basement. The dental office lobby also served as a display area for his art work. Many people, including Rudy, have recounted the following story: Rudy was so obsessed with creating art that in between dental patients he would often draw pictures and sometimes even sculpt. He used every opportunity to create art. The museum stayed at that location for nearly four decades.

Upon his retirement from dentistry in 1987, Rudy rented an empty industrial building in downtown Manitowoc, at 701 Buffalo Street which officially opened as the Manitowoc Museum of Sculpture in September 1987. At first he rented only a few rooms, but as the collection grew so did his need for more space. Within five years he occupied nearly all of the first floor, over 13,000 square feet. Next, he expanded into the second and third floors, and by 1998

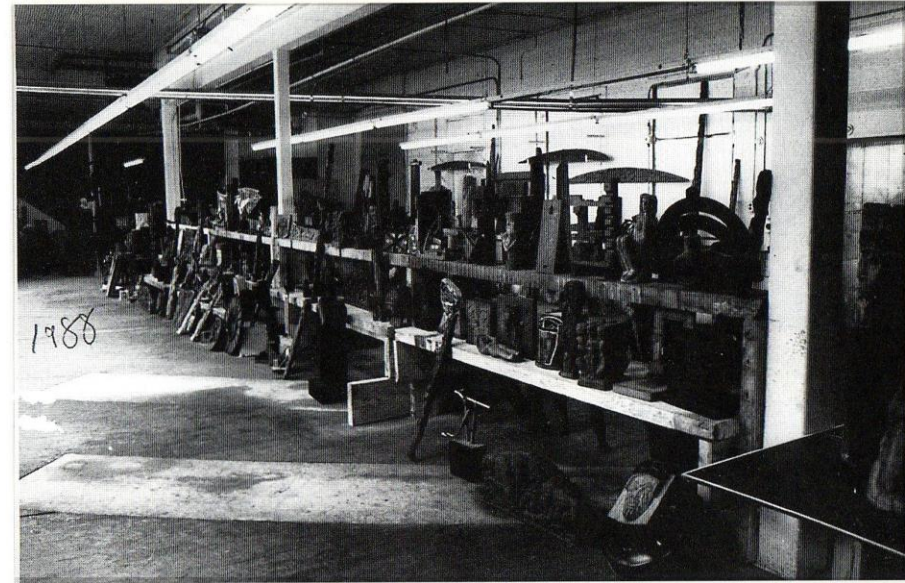
occupied nearly all 21,000 square feet in the building, a structure one city block deep and 40 feet wide.

In 1996, the museum reached an artistic apogee, with many individual art environments arranged by themes, such as the Bible room, Rotter Family Shrine, House of the Lord, Old Testament room and Old Russia. These rooms, crowded and dense but organized with art, remained essentially intact until requests for several one man shows necessitated the dismantling of parts of these rooms so pieces could be exhibited. At this time, Rudy changed the museum name to the Rudy Rotter Museum of Sculpture. In late 1996, the museum took on a new look as Rudy reorganized the museum once again with some spaces devoted to ancient civilizations such as China, Egypt and India. Far from being a static warehouse of his art, Rudy Rotter's Museum of Sculpture has remained a dynamic, evolving art environment, greater by its whole than its individual parts. In fact, it changes constantly because Rudy continues to produce art on a daily basis.

One of the primary reasons that Rudy has been able to dedicate so much of his free time to art, especially since retiring from dentistry in 1987, is because his loving wife Karen is devoted to him. She supports his endeavors with affection, insight and genuine love. As Rudy has so often said:

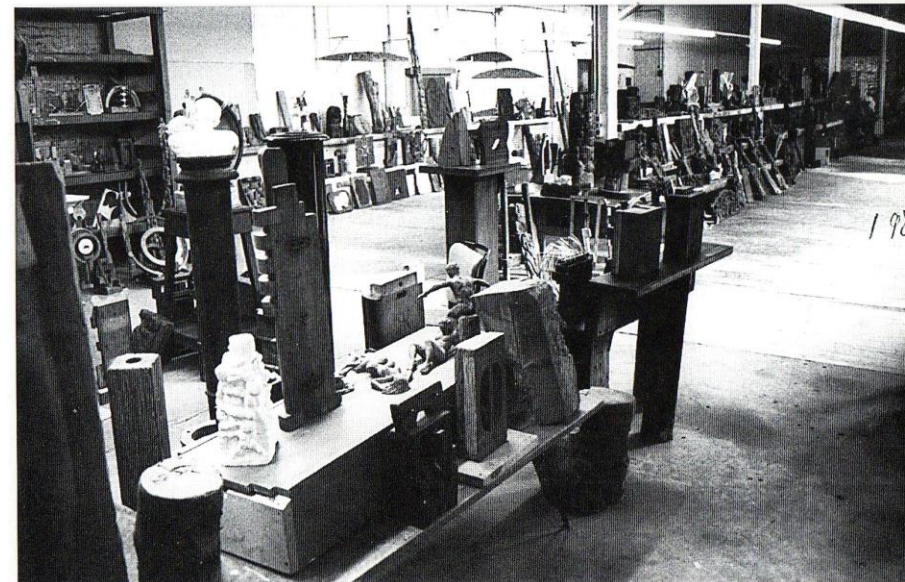
I couldn't have done this without my wife Karen. She takes care of me, pays the bills. I don't have to worry. She frees me to concentrate on my art. I really appreciate that; it means so much to me.

Recently, Rudy began decorating books. Drawing over photographs with faces and figures, Rudy began creating his "I See A Vision" series. This series includes the "Mimbres Pottery book," "Lazio, Italy Tourist Guide,"

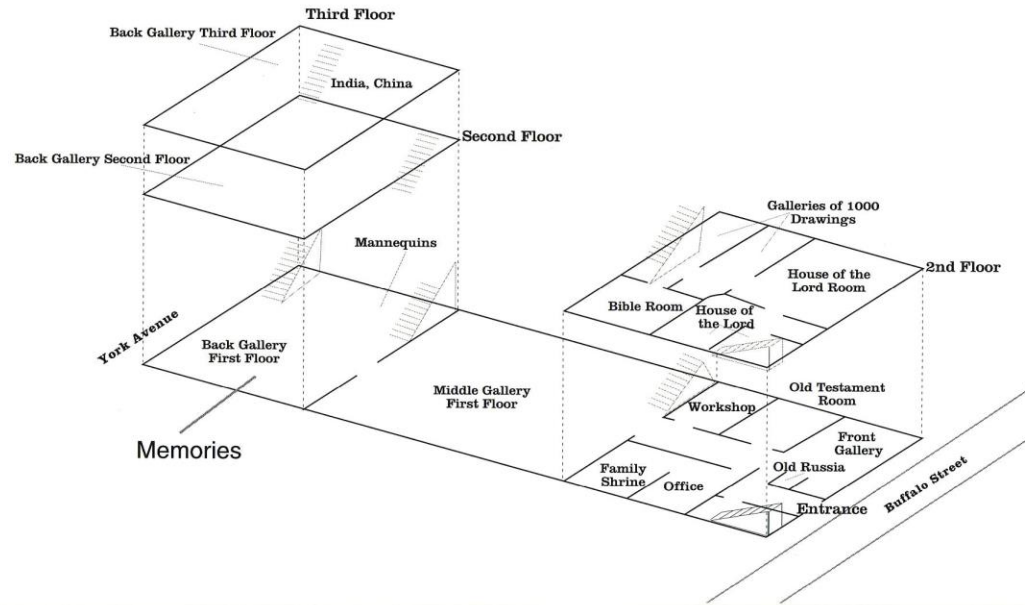


Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Above and below: First floor,
middle gallery views in 1988



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



"The Mosaics of Saint Mark's Basilica, Venice," and "Guidebook to Rome and the Vatican." This transformation of printed photographs in art books is an outgrowth of an earlier series in which he took a portfolio of French furnishings from the Museum of Decorative Arts in the Louvre and transformed them with felt tip markers. These whimsical and entertaining drawings illustrate Rudy's belief that art can come from anywhere.

Rudy challenges our notion of what art is and where it comes from. Museums are repositories of cultural heritage and should not be mausoleums but dynamic, changing, enriching institutions that bring new life to their communities and challenge us to expand our minds. Rudy's museum does all that and more and has done so without grants or foundation support—just his own personal commitment to his art. This is commendable.

Maintaining one's own museum is a common practice among self-taught artists, which Cardinal describes as providing "a radiant space of one's own creativity." (Cardinal, 1972) Other examples come to mind such as Mona Webb's house in Madison, Wisconsin, the Maison Picassiette in Chartres, France, and St. Eom's Pasaquan in Buena Vista, Georgia. In these artist museums, as in Rudy's, the stamp of the maker is clearly seen as their art is used to create patterns of decoration within the architecture. Rudy's museum spaces range from highly organized, almost religious altar-like arrangements as in the Rotter Family Shrine to his more random informal installations such as the large central gallery where hundreds of pieces are on display and the Galleries of a Thousand Drawings where the art is stored in boxes that visitors can flip through. In the museum Rudy has chosen to arrange much of his completed work on tables, on walls and suspended from the ceilings. It produces a dense, rich display



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Top: Building plan for Rudy Rotter's Museum of Sculpture, 812 Huron Ave., Manitowoc, WI, 1996

Above: Middle gallery view

Right: Front gallery view

Left: Pair of Faces, drawing on tortoise shell



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



that dazzles and delights the eye. As many have said after visiting, you have to see it to believe it.

Another characteristic of the self-taught artist is *horror vacui*, or fear of emptiness. (Rajer, 1996, p.4) Like so many others, Rudy possesses the obsessive tendency to fill every available space within his museum with objects, though they are usually arranged in a special and particular manner. Most of the time, but not always, his exhibits tend to focus on special themes like the Bible, the family or humanity. In a similar vein, artist Livingston Broom's decorated high rise apartment in Manhattan comes to mind. She has chosen to create tableaux dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the sinking of the Titanic by using bits and pieces of consumer society, just as Rudy does with industrial cast-offs. Roger Cardinal notes that with artists such as these, "quality arises out of sheer quantity" (Cardinal, 1972).

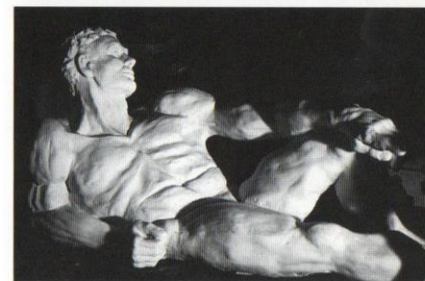
In Rudy's case, the glint of gold reflectors, shiny aluminum, cardboard, fur, leather, linoleum, as well as wood and paint combine in a never-ending exploration of forms. The results are a radiant, magical museum space. A hypnotic effect is often experienced as a result of visiting these crowded artist museums, including Rudy's. The visitor's

eye is drawn to thousands of rich, radiant surfaces. Some inner necessity, intuitive in nature, drives such artists to fill the void and crowd the space. Visitors are frequently stunned by the magnitude of the creation as the eye perceives the whole and only after time can adjust its focus to individual objects. The effect is magical, particularly when Rudy uses dramatic lighting to illuminate the pieces, as in the second floor Bible Room.

Rudy likes the ever-changing play of light in his materials. Glitter, reflective mirrored metals and plastic in many colors often animate his sculptures. His palette has grown richer over the years in contrast to his earlier, primarily monochromatic work. It is only within the past 15 years that Rudy has incorporated an exploration of color using colored markers, crayons and pens as well as various types of paint including, tempera, latex, and spray. The result, as Rudy puts it, is "Happy accidents of art." One of his favorite techniques is to apply paint, usually tempera, to a surface such as cardboard. He then places another sheet on the wet board, rotates it slightly and rapidly pulls it apart, creating ribbons of color, pools of light, and suggestive forms as the colors take on new life. He loves showing these



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Top left: First floor front gallery, 1993

Top center: Eight Female Heads, carved wood

Top left: Baby Moses, carved stone

Above center: detail of Love, painted plaster

Above: Adam, painted plaster



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes

Left: Grand staircase in first floor back gallery, 1993

Above: Two drawings, Man with Dots and Clown Face



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

to people, explaining the fusion of color, the illusion of depth and the endless possibilities of this microscopic world or the expanding universe.

Like many artists, Rudy has something unique and important to communicate about his world, his faith, humanity and the future. He does this in a sincere, unassuming way in his museum workshop with all its clutter of tools, supplies and raw materials. Like an alchemist, he takes base materials and turns them into artistic gold, though not simply as a commodity for the art world, but as testimony to his inventive spirit, driven compulsively to create. His work expands our understanding of the human experience and broadens our horizons enriching the meaning of art in our world. Rudy's work is deeply personal but broadly human in scope. He has created an alternate reality in his museum, celebrating the beauty of human life and expressiveness of the creative mind. His art has the spark of life and his odyssey of creation portrays a unique vision which is evolutionary in nature.

Bibliography

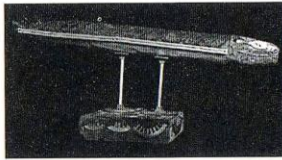
Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art* (studio Vista Publishers, London, England, 1972)

Roger Cardinal 'Toward an Outsider Aesthetic', in *The Artist Outsider, Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, edited by Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. (Smithsonian Press, Washington, D.C. 1994)

Anton Rajer, 'Rudy Rotter, The Alchemist,' in Rudy Rotter, (University of Wisconsin-Green Bay exhibition catalog, 1996.)

Recycling as Rebirth

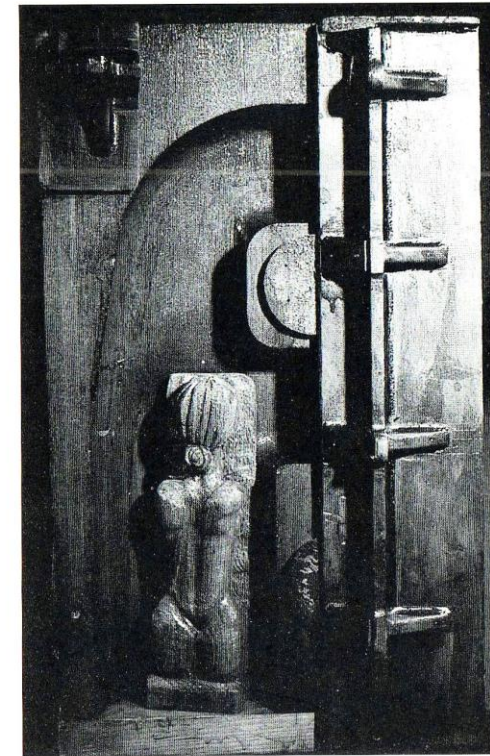
What we acquire and display around us at any given moment signifies who we are. Finally the act of acquisition has become more than just a source of our identity as individuals. It is proof of individuality itself. In contrast to real life limitations, the universe of consumption seems to evidence our free will and our freedom to choose from among countless possibilities. (Cubbs & Metcalf, 1997, p. 48)



Rudy Rotter's art is not, despite surface appearances, an example of recycling junk. It is a far more sophisticated process in which Rudy transforms all types of materials into something new. He continuously demonstrates his creative powers of making things from other things, even at times remaking earlier pieces into different versions. The creative recycling efforts of another Wisconsin artist, Dr. Evermore, comes to mind because he also uses castoffs to create his art. Artist Philip Moore of Guyana, South America sometimes uses recycled materials, and at times recycles his own art into new creations, as Rudy has done. True to this artistic genre, Rudy gives recycled objects new meaning; his transformed objects take on an innovative symbolic value and aesthetic beauty.



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

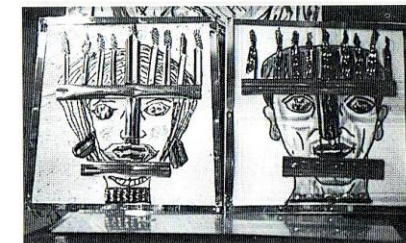
Many municipal and industrial wastes are commercially recycled because they have an economic value. Rudy, on the other hand, recycles materials that are not deemed recyclable in the commercial sense, and ordinarily end up in a landfill. He does so, in part, due to a growing sense of responsibility for the wastes our society creates. Rudy has recycled industrial and household castoffs into art for decades. What types of objects does he recycle? Photographs, computer boards, wood, plastic, wallpaper, shoes, toys, fur, aluminum, linoleum, copper, leather, stone, bowling balls, animal horns, and numerous other things are found in his art. Rudy sees possibilities in just about everything and does not limit himself to any particular material. Rudy emphasizes:

Left inset in text: Imaginary Fish mixed media

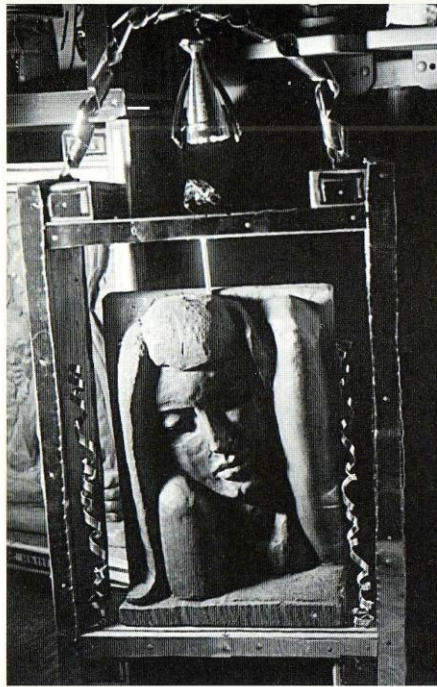
Above: Female Study, carved wooden pattern

Lower left: Two Columns, painted cylinder and mixed media, 1993

Lower: Queen and King of the Menorah



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Top left: Portrait of a Woman, recycled carved head with mixed media, 1996

Top center: Four heads made from cut-up pieces of shiny bowling trophy scraps

Top right: Carved bowling ball

Lower left: Two Kings, recycled metal pieces

Below: Female Face, plastic purge and ink



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

I'm open to it all, there's so much potential, I don't see it as junk and I don't want people to see it as junk. It's raw material with a form that I arrange into art. Sometimes I go to the lumber yard, sometimes to the trophy store, sometimes to Saint Vincent DePaul. I get material and off I go.

Rudy likes the thrill of the hunt as he explores his city and region for raw materials to be used as art, and is occasionally surprised by what people throw away, such as usable clothing. An idea might spring forth from a simple magazine illustration or piece of scrap metal that he reinterprets, transforms and mutates into different objects. A recent example is his embellishment of the book, *Mimbres Pottery*. Rudy took this book of Southwest archeological art and used colored markers to manipulate and alter the objects pictured in its pages. He brought the pottery to life and gave it new meaning. There is an undeniable creative life force in this process that Rudy has honed to perfection. He moves swiftly from one idea to another, creating individual pieces or a whole series. Although Manitowoc is a small community, local industries, particularly aluminum and die casting firms, have kept Rudy supplied for years, providing enough materials to produce thousands of works of art.

Rudy calls into question our notions of what art is and where it comes from. Many people are comfortable with his early, more traditional pieces, such as human figures. But, it is his more recent work, produced within the last decade, that really pushes the boundaries of art in a global sense. His carved patterns are transition pieces between the early realism and the later assemblages. It takes a lot of courage and conviction to do what Rudy has done, considering that only a handful of industries have consistently given

him materials. Apart from the donated materials he has paid for the rest out of pocket. He has taken risks in producing these new forms of art, much of which is not understood by people. Artist friend, Lester Schwartz, once echoed Rudy's own beliefs when he said, "Rudy, you've got it in you, keep working, you're doing the right thing, keep going, don't let people's opinion stop you." And Rudy has kept going. His career as a dentist uniquely influenced his second career as an artist. The fine dental castings he crafted contrast with his larger sculptural creations that society perceives as art.

For Rudy, the transition to recycler was a gradual one. His realistic works were followed by bolder experiments with form, size and new materials. It was when he was given the hardwood casting patterns from the tool and die industry in the 1970s that his early work began to be transformed. At first he cut away all traces of the industrial pattern. But as he began to see beauty in the marriage of industrial and artistic forms, increasingly more of the original pattern remained in the finished piece. In these works, Rudy preserved the history of the original form while creating new relationships for each object. The unwanted discards from local industry were thus given new life and meaning. He imbued them with special qualities—transforming, manipulating and altering them to reach his aesthetic conclusions.

New industries and changes in the local economy of Manitowoc have prompted Rudy to continually adapt his art. When the local tool and die businesses that



courtesy of Dan Hutton

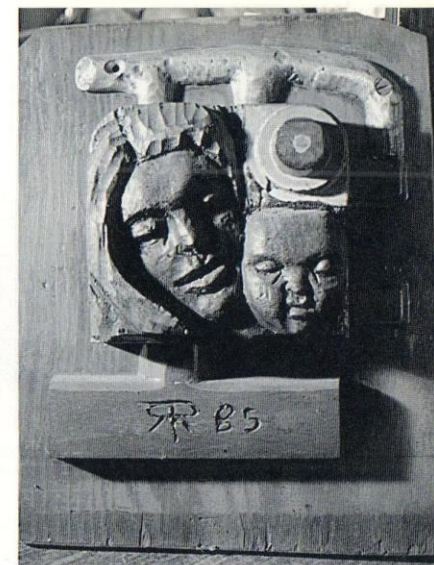
produced the wooden patterns closed, his supply of that resource dried up. In recent years, the trophy industry has boomed, making many kinds of reflective plastic and metals available. Rudy's work reflects the ever-changing availability of these local materials. Unwanted computer boards and other electronic parts, for example, are painted and reconnected into new machines of art. And as he admits, "I don't have a

preference for any particular one, I love them all." Rudy's gift is that he sees the expressive possibility in all materials, whether made of fur, plastic, metal, or cardboard. In his hands, it goes through an unexpected yet delightful metamorphosis and is reborn.

As the Reverend Howard Finster says, "The world needs to understand that you can make something out of what other people throw away." Rudy has certainly found this to be true. He sees new realities in old things, like the alchemist transforming base metal into gold.

Bibliography

Joanne Cubbs and Eugene W. Metcalf Jr. "Sci-Fiction and Bottle Cap Kings: The Recycling Strategies of Self-taught Artists and the Imaginary Practice of Contemporary Consumption," pages 46-49 in *Recycled, Re-Seen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap*. (International Museum of Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1997)



Courtesy of Anton Raler

Above: Mother and Child, carved wood machine pattern

Below: Family Group, carved machine pattern circa 1985

Top left: Ring, mixed media, wood and metal



Courtesy of Anton Raler

Toward Future Preservation



Top: Family, carved teak—part of the interrelationship series courtesy of Rudy Rotter

Although Rudy has produced thousands of individual objects his art environment—The Rudy Rotter Museum of Sculpture—takes on its broadest meaning taken as a whole. A room of Rudy's art is like a jewelry store filled with radiant gems. Thousands of surfaces dazzle and delight the eye. Preserving this grand vision, however, is challenged by economic and social forces. Manitowoc is a conservative community that has never really recognized Rudy's remarkable contribution to the arts. While Rudy's collection and museum are presently intact, its future is by no means assured.

There are other artist museums in the United States and abroad that have been preserved in a number of ways. Some have been saved through the intervention of private foundations and others through city and municipal agencies. A few are preserved by national cultural organizations such as the Palais Idéal, which is a national French heritage monument maintained by the government. In India, Nek Chand's incredible Rock Garden has been preserved as a public park, with additional recent support through the London-based Nek Chand Foundation.

In the United States, Reverend Howard Finster's art environment in Summerville, Georgia—

Paradise Garden—is operated by his family and maintained through donations and admission fees. Closer to home, the Kohler Foundation, Inc. has been a pioneer in preserving artist environments in Wisconsin. Noteworthy has been their support of Fred Smith's Wisconsin Concrete Park in Phillips and the Paul and Matilada Wegner Grotto near Sparta.

It may be possible to learn from these models of preservation and financial support how best to sustain Rudy's legacy. If this artistic treasure were to leave the Manitowoc community where it was made, the cultural loss would be great indeed. Rudy is the most prolific artist in Wisconsin's history. Already there are more pieces of art in Rudy's museum than in most art museums in the state. This is a jewel in our midst. Let us hope that Rudy Rotter's museum can be preserved in such a manner that future generations can experience it in its dynamic entirety. All too often such collections become scattered and sold in the commercial art world.

To begin this preservation effort, a Friends of Rudy Rotter (FORR) organization could be created which would help ensure that Rudy's art is kept accessible for exhibition, education and enjoyment. In keeping with Rudy's dynamic view of the world, this Friends organization would not only preserve the Rudy Rotter legacy, but would foster the continued creation of art from locally available materials for children as well as adults. It can be an educational tool, unique to Manitowoc. A lot can be learned from Rudy's commendable example. This is a rare opportunity to invest in our future and recognize Rudy's contribution.

Top left: Early view of Rudy's gallery with: 1) The Creation of Eve, 2) Moses and the Ten Commandments, 3) Adam and Eve and Apple, 4) The Angel Holding Jacobs Hand From the Sacrifice

Top right: Rudy in the Bible Room, 1996

Center left: Exterior view of the Rudy Rotter's Museum of Sculpture, 701 Buffalo, 1997

Center right: Paradise Gardens and Museum, Howard Finster's folk art environment, Summerville, Georgia, 1995

Far right: Shrine to Old Russia Installation with memorabilia about the czar and Rudy's family, 1996

Below: Rudy with his installation 'A girls best friend is mink,' 1997



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Ron Byers



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Ron Byers



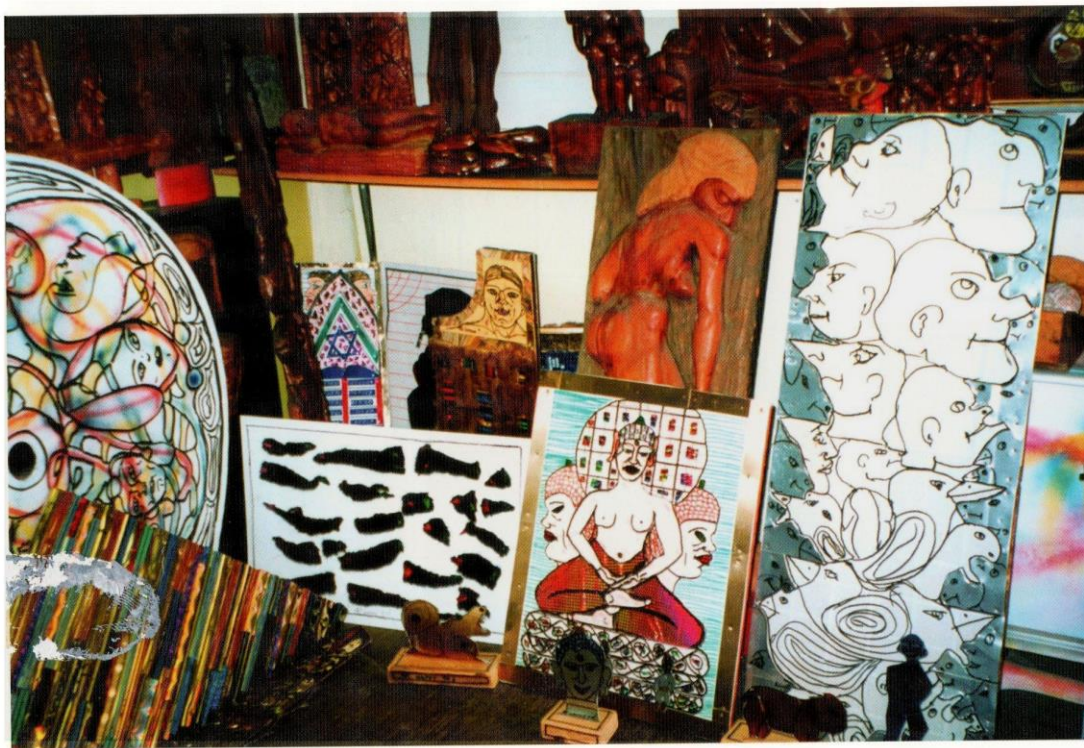
Courtesy of Anton Rajer



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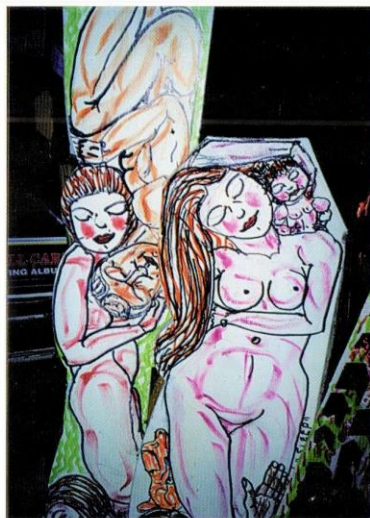
Courtesy of Ron Byers



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Above: Detail showing Rudy's use of a wide variety of materials and styles
 Top left: Egyptian Kings and Queens, birch bark and mixed media, 1995
 Top right: Part of the Indian series
 Right: One of Rudy's recycled early portrait carvings re-made into an assemblage using recycled metal



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Above: Sleeping Women, mixed media

Center right: Ancient Egyptian Mummies, metal, paint, and wood assemblage, 1995

Far right: Rudy Rotter in the Rotter Family Shrine holding a portrait of his son Peter as a baby, 1997

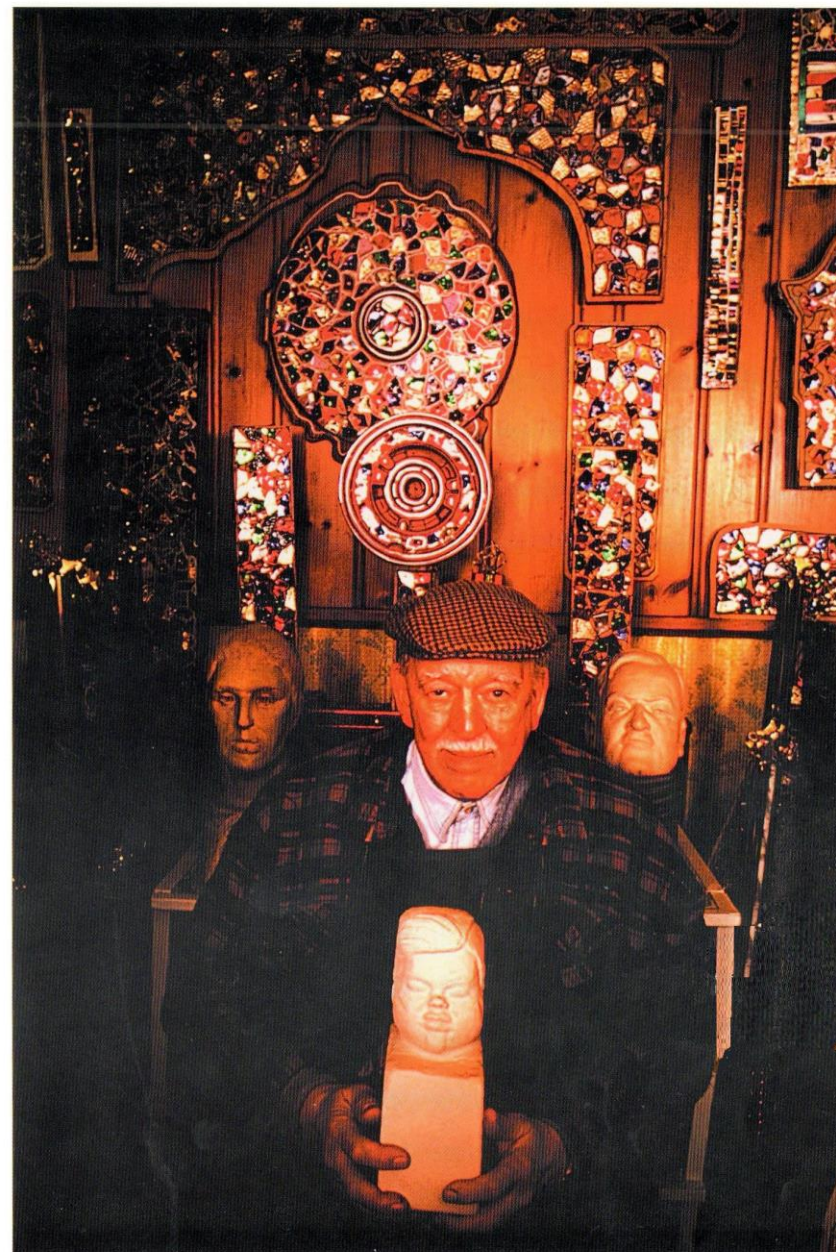
Below: Kwakiutl Indian series



Courtesy of Ron Byers



Courtesy of Ron Byers



Courtesy of Ron Byers



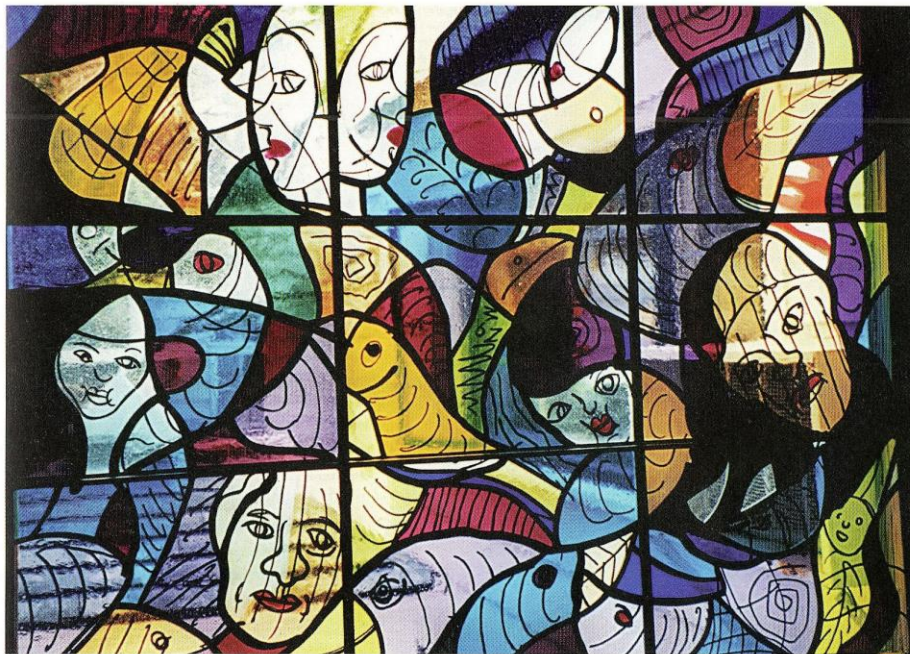
Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer and Christine Style

This page

Top: Stained glass window by Rudy Rotter and Paul Phelps, Oakbrook-Esser Studios, 1996

Left: Left to right; Karen Rotter, Jimmy Rotter, Anton Rajer, Rudy Rotter, and Peter Rotter, 1995

Right: Back of the Genesis Panel telling the biblical story of the first book of the bible, c. 1970

Previous page

Top left: Turkish Bath after J. D. Ingres, Rudy's interpretation of this famous painting carved in mahogany

Lower left: Examples of Rudy's work from the Mayan series, 1996

Right: Examples of Rudy's monumental carving including Male and Female Spanish Dancers, center and far right



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



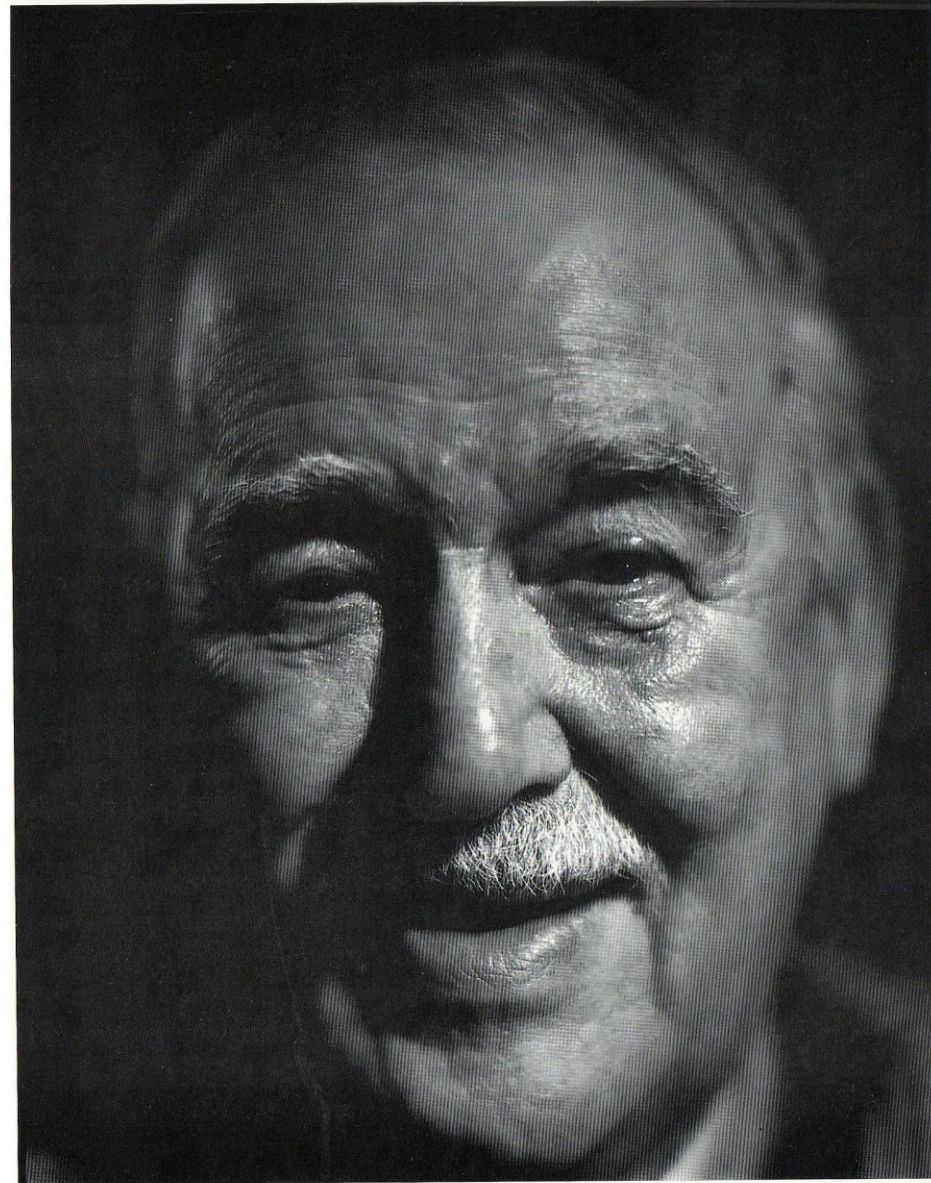
Courtesy of J. Shimon & J. Lindemann

View of Rudy Rotter's Museum of Sculpture middle gallery space, 1998

'MEMORIES'

As my eyes grow dim and my hands tremble, I remember the brightness of infants' eyes and the pudgy little hands holding these toys in awe and wonderment. As I sit and work in arthritic stiffness, I remember the beauty and pliability of the babies as they crawl, roll over and move the toys and dolls. I wonder what goes through their minds when they look in awe at these objects which will open their eyes and minds to the wonderment of the world. The start with dolls and toys the expansion to the wonders of the world and nature to the receptions of love and caring from family and all humanity I hope for them that they will not have to experience abuse, war. The newborn bring a hope for all that is good the look in their beautiful eyes should inspire us to fulfill that hope.

Rudy Rotter, age 82! May 1995



Courtesy of J. Shimon & J. Lindemann



Courtesy of J Shimon & J. Lindenmann



Courtesy of Ron Byers

Left: Dr. Rudy Rotter with the teak wood carving, *Mother and Child* (1970), which he donated to benefit the Victims of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, 1994

Left: Detail view of museum installation, 1997

Right: *Ancient Feline*, fur and mixed media, 1996



Courtesy of Anton Raler

An Artist In Their Midst

By Julie Lindemann and John Shimon



photographs on this page courtesy of J. Lindemann and J. Shimon

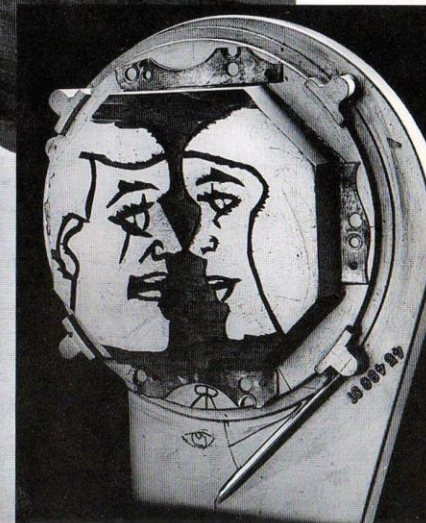
The frigid oppression of Lake Michigan and stoic restraint of early Northern European settlers shapes the character of the people of Manitowoc. Compulsion and obsession are only understood if focused on order and cleanliness. Creative compulsion is unfathomable. You can see this in the architecture. Ornate buildings crafted by European artisans have been replaced by parking lots, vinyl-sided storefronts, and franchise stores. Inside, walls are decorated with triple-matted landscapes and wild life watercolors purchased in Door County. Figurative art makes people feel ill at ease, unless it's a framed Olan Mills family portrait.

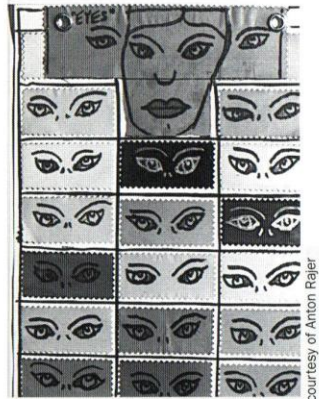
Transcending this numbing milieu is Dr. Rudy Rotter whose forty plus years of art making exceeds the average artist's productive career. His museum of 15,000

figurative and abstract pieces from the 1950s onward occupies three floors of an old factory in our neighborhood. It's just across the street from the Elbow Room where he often brings visitors for a bowl of soup or sandwich.

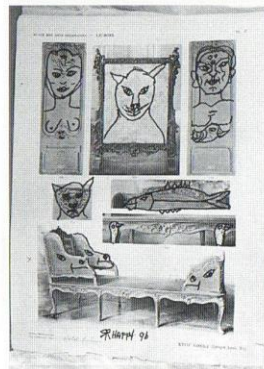
Driving around the city in his newish little white Pontiac, Rudy notices the things people throw away. As industry evolves, people move, fashions change, home decors are updated and another old building comes down, he watches and extracts the gems to make his art. He's the city's most prolific artist and its most insightful anthropologist.

Inexpensive real estate brought us to Manitowoc in 1989 to set up our photo studio. A few months later we met Rudy. The door was propped open at his museum as it often was then. He showed us around several

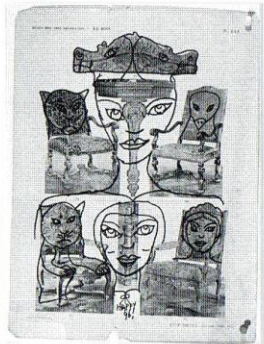




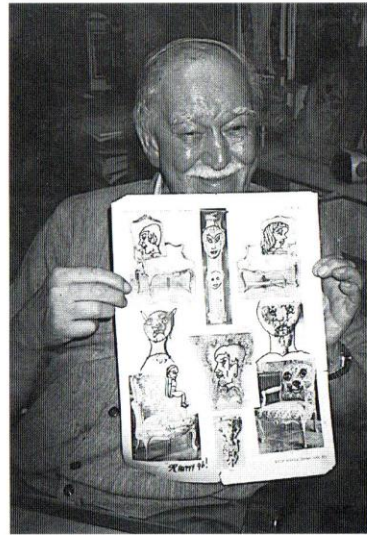
courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Top left: Interrelationship #20, carved wood
Center: Two drawings with Rudy's imaginary forms from a French Decorative Arts Portfolio
Above: Rudy showing one of the drawing from the French Decorative Arts Portfolio
Far left: Eyes, drawing from the gallery of a thousand drawings

rooms filled with his life's work. He had a regimen of opening from ten til noon, breaking for lunch, a nap or to watch a soap opera, then returning by two and working for a couple more hours. He encouraged tours and even had a banner hanging on a building across from the submarine, Manitowoc's biggest tourist attraction.

His neighbors remain aloof yet accepting of the growing enormity of his creative project. There's no reason for this lack of engagement as Rudy's ever accessible. You'll run into him at restaurants around town or find him working at his studio where he'll readily talk about his newest pieces, creative process or world events. As compulsively as he creates, he donates work to public places like the library, the hospital and to the businesses that have given him materials. As a result, his sculptures have a wonderfully insidious presence.

He often gives small sculptures or drawings—exercises he constructs for himself to open up the possibility of creative accidents—to museum visitors. Not all people “get it” and move the pieces along the fine art food chain to an appreciative home. Jim Vogel, an art collector and record store manager, found a couple at rummage sales. “The woman said she didn't have a place for it, even though it was very small,” he said with a laugh. The printing and design company that gives Rudy paper has gotten several sculptures in return which are offered to employees. Mike Thee, a designer, has a piece next to his video monitor. “People around here don't understand it,” says Thee who happily gets to take most of them home with him.

The local newspapers have dutifully chronicled Rudy's artistic evolution. Brenda Erickson, a Herald-Times Reporter editor who recently interviewed him said, “He gives us things every time we go there and we have a little gallery

of his work in our office. Some people here think he's nuts. Maybe it's because he does so much and takes so little care with the pieces because he gets so excited about making them. At the same time, they're impressed and realize there's something magical about his work. Sadly, he's gotten virtually no recognition in the community, even though there's something in him that's genius. He's told me that he's given things to the art museum and they've banished them to the basement. There's really nothing we can do except keep writing about him."

Like many small art museums, the Rahr-West is squeamish about dealing with pesky "local" artists. Its people-pleasing permanent collection includes Christmas collector plates and a blue chip Georgia O'Keeffe oil. The material and emotional intensity of Rudy's work has eluded them for decades. Director Richard Quick has been with the Rahr since 1972 but only recently visited Rudy's museum just four blocks away. Quick noted, "Within the community, Rudy Rotter is viewed with respect for the quiet, soft-spoken person he is, still well-remembered for his dedicated career in dentistry." Maybe it's just that memory of "Dr. Rotter" that leaves Rudy in a local identity-quagmire. But, as his art-making years exceed his dentistry years and his reputation as an artist grows elsewhere, Manitowoc is warming up to him.

Some former dental patients are among his greatest admirers though. Joan Graff, an art-savvy publicist for the Manitowoc Public School District, has vivid memories of her childhood visits to his dental office on Huron Street.



Courtesy of J. Lindemann and J. Shimon

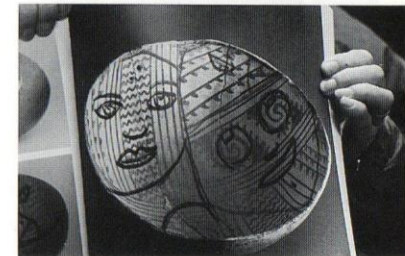
"When I was in the fourth grade, I needed a lot of dental work...after the shot of novocaine, he would always disappear. I knew he was going down to his basement studio where he had a sculpture he was working on. I didn't mind because I hated the drill, so the wait was a little respite. I'd wait for his footsteps and hope he'd forgotten about me. There was something about him being a dentist and an artist that appealed to me. I thought that the same craftsmanship was going into my teeth as into his sculptures and that was a neat tie."

Although Rudy is creating from within the isolated realm of a provincial Midwestern American town such as this, his themes are universal, far-reaching and could be explored anywhere. He's tapped into his imagination which draws from a pastiche of input ranging from streetside discards of a consumer culture, to what's on TV and in magazines, to his college anatomy classes. His work encompasses the belief systems of the world and a tribal search for beauty in the materials and life around him.

His creativity is driven by a passion to convey a feeling about humanity. In the sanctity of his Buffalo Street studio, it doesn't matter who or what is outside the door. Inside, his mind and imagination take him to places most ordinary mortals will only begin to know by looking at his work.



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

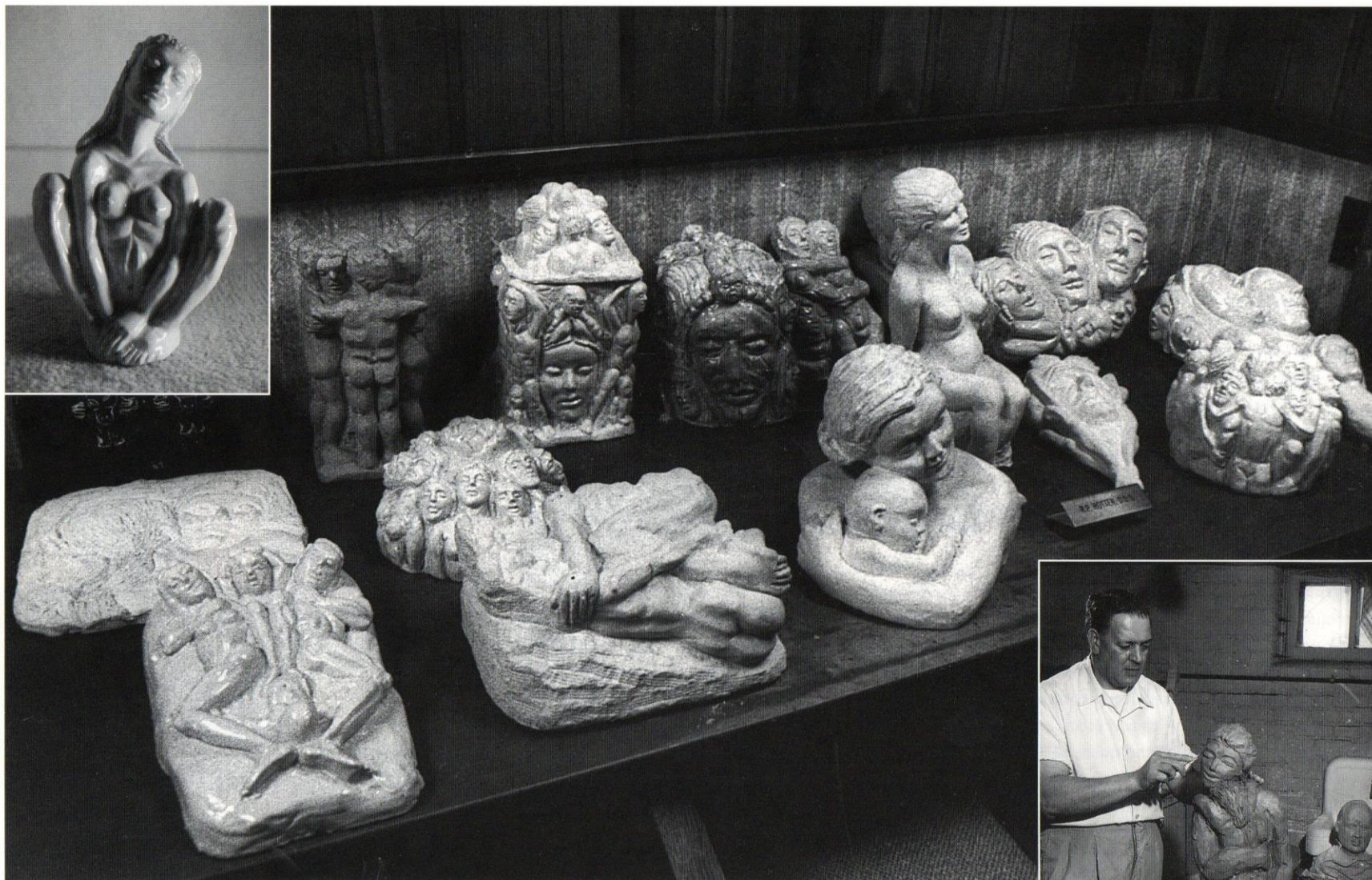


Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Top left: Figurative drawing, conte crayon on paper, 1974

Top right: Family, Mother, and Earth, carved wood

Above: Drawing/Mimbres Pottery book, magic marker



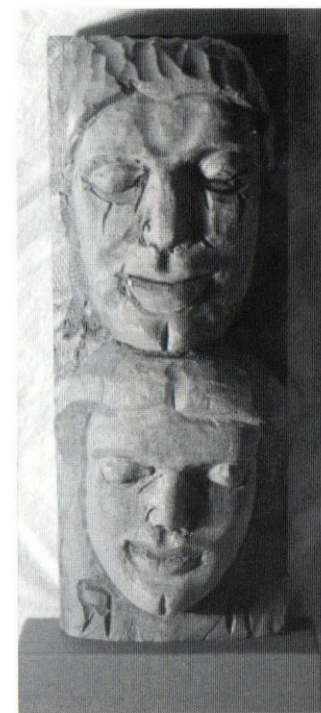
Examples of Rudy's early sculpture

Rudy carving clay sculpture

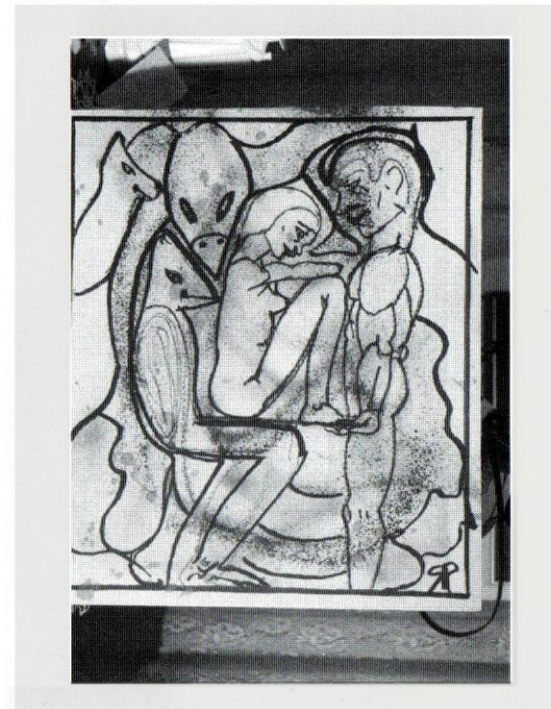
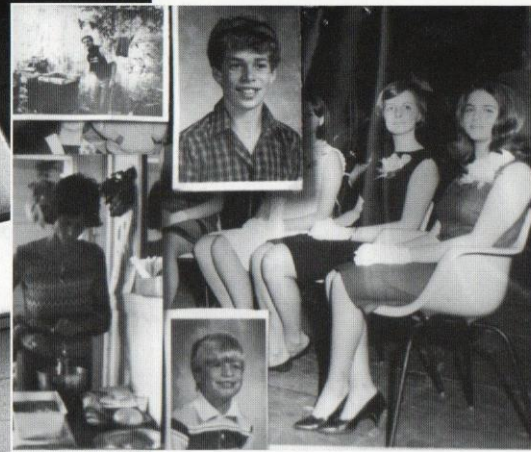
Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Adam, after Michelangelo, painted plaster.



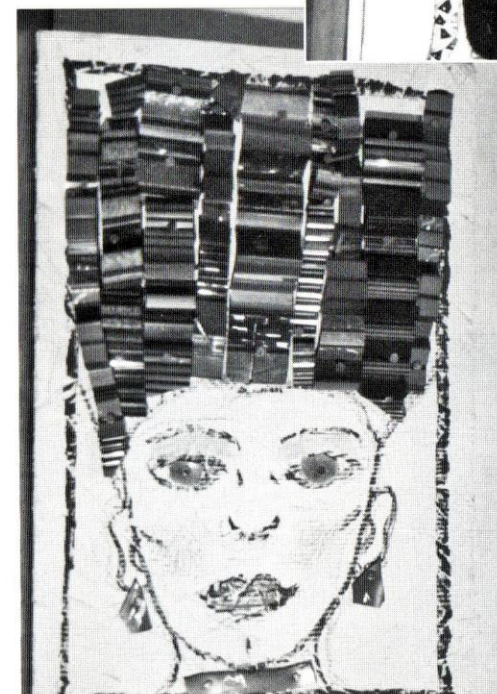
Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



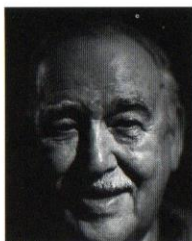
Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Rudy in his Girls Best Friend is Mink installation



Courtesy of Ron Byers



JS & JL

Rudy Rotter's Biographical Chronology

including exhibition record



- 1908 Rudy's father Herman Rotter emmigrates from the Ukraine to Milwaukee, WI
- 1910 Herman Rotter brings his wife Leah and four children (David, Henry, Rebecca and Samuel) from Ukraine to USA
- 1912 Peter Rotter, Rudy's brother is born in Milwaukee, WI
- 1913 Rudy is born on April 23 -He is a 2 1/2 lb. premature baby, born in Milwaukee, WI
- 1931 Graduates from South Division High School in Milwaukee, WI
- 1931 Enters the University of Wisconsin-Madison, plays football, letters as a discus thrower and shot putter in track, majors in zoology
- 1936 Graduates from UW in Zoology, at age 23
- 1936 Hired as a zoologist at Milwaukee Public Museum for \$25 per week
- 1937 Enrolls in dentistry program at Marquette University, Milwaukee
- 1939 Rudy's father dies
- 1941 Graduates from dental school, Marquette University, Milwaukee
- 1941 Marries Beatrice, Rudy is age 28
- 1941 First dental practice in Milwaukee
- 1941-43 Serves in Army Dental Corps, Camp Claiborne, Louisiana
- 1941 Randy Rotter is born, Rudy's first son
- 1942 Rudy's mother dies
- 1943 Moves to Manitowoc and opens dental practice
- 1943 Linda, Rudy's daughter, is born
- 1954 Talks with local artist Lester Schwartz about art and buys supplies and attempts a few pieces



- 1955 Begins in earnest making art, at age 43. Experiments with watercolors, jewelry, plaster, and ceramics
- 1956 Displays some of his new creations at his dental office
- 1958 Exhibits art at Wisconsin State Fair, West Allis, WI
- 1959 First Place Award in Sculpture at Manitowoc County Art Show
- 1959 Best of Show Award, 18th Annual Northeastern Wisconsin Art Show, Neville Public Museum, Green Bay, WI with "Grief Figure"
- 1959 Exhibits art at Wisconsin State Fair, West Allis, wins a prize.
- 1959 Shows several sculptures at Two Rivers School of Vocational and Adult Education Exhibit
- 1960 Exhibits at Wisconsin State Fair, West Allis, WI
- 1960 Two Rivers Public Library, two person exhibit of Rudy's work and Manitowoc artist Mike Kazar
- 1960 Exhibits over 50 pieces at the Paine Art Center in Oshkosh, WI
- 1960 Exhibits "Family Totem" (first place) and "Mother and Child" in alabaster at Manitowoc County Art Show
- 1961 Participates in 28th Annual Manitowoc County Art Exhibit at Rahr Civic Center
- 1961 28th Annual Manitowoc County Art Show, Outstanding Entry Award for "Mother and Children"
- 1961 Two Rivers Vocational School, 4th Annual Art Exhibit includes work by Rudy
- 1961 Exhibits many of his sculptures in the basement of his dental practice studio
- 1961 Exhibits "Mother, Father and Child" at 20th Annual Northeastern Wisconsin Art Exhibit at Neville Public Museum, Green Bay, WI



- 1961 Wins blue ribbon for "Family Totem" Sculpture at Manitowoc County Art exhibit
- 1962 Exhibits "Sleeping Figure" at Rahr Civic Center and wins first place
- 1962 Opens the Manitowoc Gallery of Fine Arts at his dental office, open by appointment
- 1963 One person show at Lakeland College of Sheboygan County, WI
- 1963 Several sculptures exhibited at UW Manitowoc Fine Arts Room along with work by local artists
- 1963 Donates his large wood carving "Shofar" (Ram's Horn) to the Anshe Poale Zedek Synagogue, Manitowoc
- 1963 One person show at Holy Family College (Silver Lake College) of his art
- 1963 "Sleeping Figure" wins First Place Award at Manitowoc County Annual Art Show, where Rudy exhibits several other pieces
- 1964 Two-person show at Rahr Civic Center in Manitowoc with Ted Kramole
- 1964 First Lutheran Church, Manitowoc exhibits Rudy's work along with that of other local artists
- 1964 Manitowoc County Art Exhibit shows seven Rudy sculptures at Rahr Civic Center
- 1965 Rudy marries Karen Kimmes. They honeymoon in Europe
- 1965 Appleton Gallery of Art, H.C. Prange, exhibits several pieces
- 1965 36th Annual Manitowoc County Art Show, "Family Totem" wins a blue ribbon



KH



HTR

Pictures courtesy of Rudy Rotter unless noted: **HTR**-Herald Times Reporter / **TR**-Tony Rajer / **JS&JL**-John Shimon & Julie Lindemann / **KH**-Kerrie Hughes



- 1965 Exhibits at the Appleton Gallery of Arts Midwinter Show at H.C. Prange, Appleton
- 1966 Peter, Rudy's second son, is born
- 1966 One-person show at Sibley Gallery in Milwaukee; this was Rudy's first major show in Milwaukee, At age 53.
- 1968 Jimmie, Rudy's third son, is born
- 1969 Photos of his work are exhibited at a dental conference in Cologne, West Germany
- 1970 Donates wood carving to Manitowoc YMCA, "Global Man"
- 1970 Wisconsin Painters and Sculptors Exhibit at Milwaukee Memorial Art Center (today Milwaukee Art Museum) accepts his "double figure" in their annual show
- 1971 Donates sculpture to Holy Family College (Silver Lake), Manitowoc
- 1973 Around this date Rudy exhibits his work at Lynn Kottler Gallery in New York.
- 1974 At Silver Lake College, Manitowoc, Rudy exhibits sculpture in December art exhibit
- 1975 Rudy and Karen vacation in Europe
- 1975 Silver Lake College, Manitowoc exhibits 25 pieces of Rudy's art
- 1975 Participates in University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Art Exhibit
- 1976 Welnetz Art Gallery of Manitowoc exhibits Rudy's work along with other artists
- 1978 By this year Rudy has created an estimated 1,000 sculptures, some are numbered
- 1978 Participates in the exhibition "Grass Roots Art: Wisconsin," Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
- 1978 812 Huron Street, Manitowoc, Rudy's studio/gallery in his dental practice building has open-house
- 1979 Renames his gallery Manitowoc Museum of Sculpture



HTR



TR



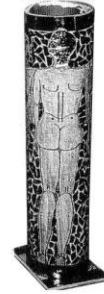
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- 1979 Donates a sculpture to Manitowoc Public School District
- 1981 Donates several sculptures to the Manitowoc Public Library
- 1981 "Mother and Child" wood carving is donated to First Lutheran Church, Manitowoc
- 1982 Donates wooden bas-relief of "Boy and Girl" to Woodrow Wilson Junior High School in Manitowoc
- 1982 "Clown Fantasy" is donated to Two Rivers Public Library
- 1983 Exhibits at Artisans Guild, Inc., Cedarburg, WI
- 1986 Rudy, Karen and their son Peter tour Europe
- 1987 Sells his dental practice, retires from dentistry, at age 74
- 1987 Exhibits several pieces at the Rogers Street Fishing Village Museum in Two Rivers, WI
- 1987 Manitowoc Museum of Sculpture moves to 701 Buffalo Street and is open to the public in September, occupying most of the first floor
- 1988 Tony Rajer meets Rudy Rotter while visiting Manitowoc
- 1989 Wood carving "Harmony and Understanding" is presented to Rev. Schrankler on behalf of Manitowoc Lodge of B'nai B'rith
- 1991 Paint Box Gallery in Door County, WI exhibits his art until 1998
- 1992 Colucci Gallery, Madison, WI, exhibits Rudy's art in exhibit called "Ubiquitous Art"
- 1993 Exhibits 74 pieces in Neo-Post Now Gallery, Manitowoc in one person show. Rudy is 80 years old
- 1993 Expands his museum exhibit area to nearly 21,000 square feet. and occupies all three floors of the warehouse



JS & JL

- 1994 Pyxis Gallery Exhibit, Madison, one person show curated by Anton Rajer
- 1995 By now Rudy has produced an estimated 15,000 works of art
- 1995 One person show at Instinct Gallery in Milwaukee
- 1996 One-person show at Jewish Community Center in Milwaukee.
- 1996 One-person show at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Lawton Gallery
- 1996 One person show at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI, November 1996-February 1997
- 1997 One person show at Two Rivers Historical Society
- 1997 Oakbrook-Esser Studios, Oconomowoc, WI exhibits Rudy's work
- 1997 One person show at Castellani House, National Gallery of Art, Georgetown, Guyana
- 1998 Plymouth Art Center exhibits Rudy's work in Plymouth, WI
- 1998 85th Birthday Celebration for Rudy at his Manitowoc museum
- 1998 Publication of book, "Rudy Rotter's Spirit Driven Art" by Anton Rajer



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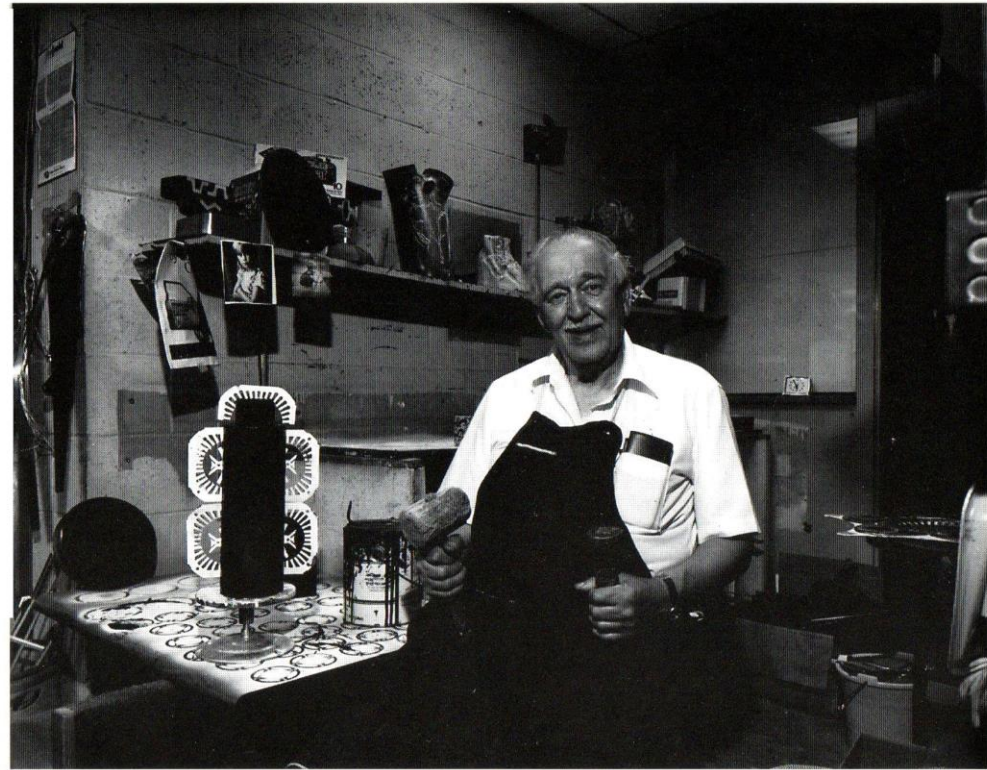
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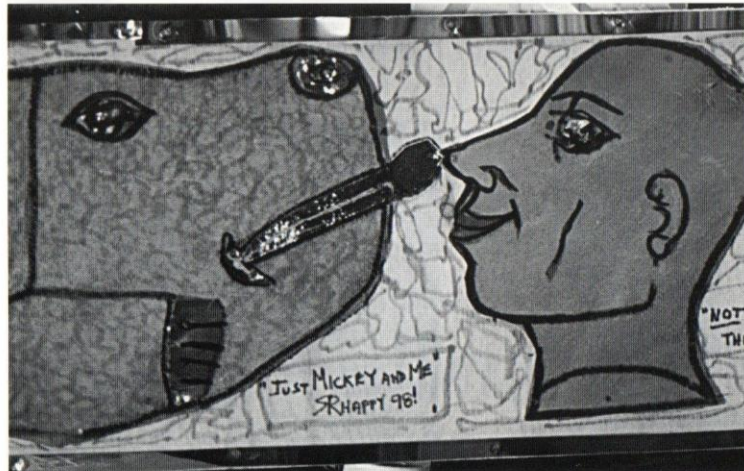
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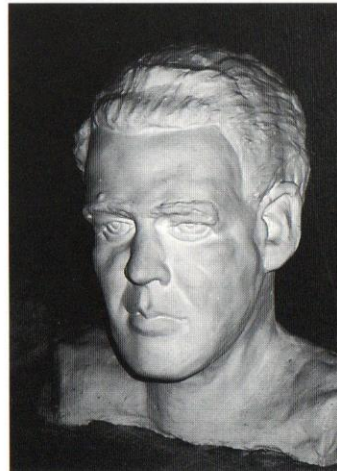
Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of J. Shimon & J. Lindemann



Courtesy of Tony Rajer



Courtesy of Tony Rajer



Courtesy of Tony Rajer

This page

Top left: Rudy on far left moving Adam and Eve from 812 Huron Ave. for his exhibit at the Paine Art Center, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 1960

Top right: Rudy in his workshop, 1990

Lower left: Mickey and I, mixed media, 1998

Lower center: Self portrait by Rudy, painted plater, c.1959

Lower right: Head of Moses, carved stone, c. 1960

Next page

Left: At Play, carved wood relief

Right: Rudy in his gallery showing the back of the Genesis Panel, 1996

Rudy Rotter: Interviews

The interviews with Rudy and his family from 1993 onwards were conducted and tape-recorded by Anton Rajer and transcribed by Sue Abing.

1965 "Basically, everything stems from the family unit. I advocate a resurgence of interest in religious art."

1969 "I create what I want, when I want. I want to feel free to create without any encumbrances or recourse to questions."

1970 *Pointing to a mammoth slab of Honduras mahogany,* "It is one block of the main theme of all my work." Carved on front, back and sides, beginning with the creation of the world, man and his fall, the mute narrative emits the book of Genesis. "It is a cohesive story of this entire section of the Bible," he said. Only his Biblical themes are planned. The beginning outline is developed as it goes along".

1975 "I had a degree in zoology before I entered dental school, but no art training of any kind when I began, although I'd always had more than a casual interest in art."

1978 "I'm a primitive expressionist downstairs and a perfectionist from the moment I enter my dental office."

1978 "'Interrelationships' is the name I give to my current works showing how man, woman, family all people are interrelated. The biblical act, 'laying on of hands,' is what I have tried to express."

1978 "Originally one of the reasons I was attracted to sculpture was the actual physical experience that carving required, but I'm always concerned with each small detail, too," the dentist/sculptor admits.

1978 "In the central space where most of the stone work is located, a huge head of Moses carved from marble



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

dominates one whole side of the room. "I broke twenty chisels on that piece," the sculptor muses, "but I finally got what I wanted."

1978 About his drawings. "I do these while I'm waiting for the anesthetic to take effect. I develop ideas for new works upstairs," he explains. "There's so little time. There's so much to do."

1991 "If I keep my eyes and mind open I see new things that I haven't seen before. I follow these instead of sticking to the so called tried and true conditions."

1991 "I work on an emotional or gut level rather than being completely intellectual. Something seems to happen in the process I'll follow a new lead and it goes into a series, which will then lead into something else. This is the fun of creating all these things. I don't concern myself about whether somebody will like them or not, but for 35 years I've done these as a kind of moral creative thing what I feel is the right thing."

1991 "After the tension of the fine and careful work needed to be done in patients' mouths, it was a release to work freely in my studio. I also enjoyed the solitude of working alone after being with people all day."

1991 "I did one piece after another in series, letting my experiences dictate the development of the creative process."

1991 "My pieces depict love of family and hope that all humanity can inter relate with peace and love and care for each other."

1993 "After all of the years working with just wood and stone, which are beautiful unto themselves but not colorful, I became attracted to the beauty of intense color and reflective materials," said Rotter, describing his fascination with bright spray paints and cut up pieces of discarded trophies destined for the scrap heap.

1993 "The secret, being completely self taught, is to work continuously ... new things will develop almost like variations on themes in music," he said. "I'm doing this purely as an amateur in the true sense of the word for the love of doing it."

1993 "I'm so happy to be 80 years old. Julie and John gave me a nice show at their gallery (Neo-Post Now) that really made my stuff look good, you know nice display. We had a lot of people at the opening for my birthday party."

1995 "I'm busy making art, I'm always busy thinking, creating this stuff. I get new ideas when I get a new shipment of raw materials."

1996 "Since I'm now 83 years old, life is giving me a lot of trouble and I work from a sitting position. The time is becoming more and more valuable to me, more precious and I would like to devote that time to working in my studio and then saving my strength so to speak for people who are really interested in art or will call make an appointment and then I will make arrangements either individuals or groups to take them through and I think this is a better way of running the museum."

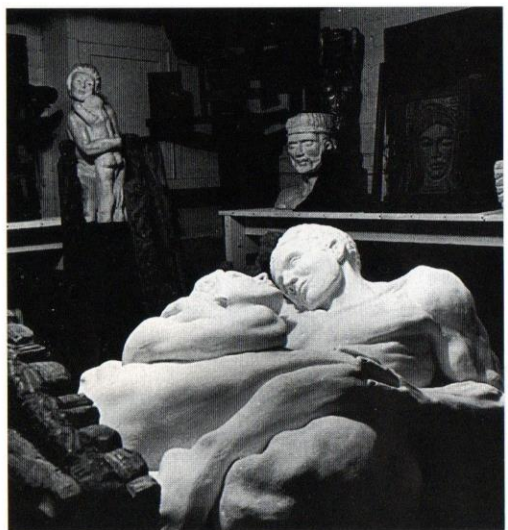
1996 *Do you always sign your work Rudy?* "Yes, yes, always. Now that I'm 83, starting when I was 80 years old, I was so happy 'to be alive' for one thing. At the same time I



Courtesy of Tony Rajer



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

Top far left: Display of Rudy's drawings in basement studio on Huron Ave., 1960s

Top #2: Interrelationship #48, carved wood

Top #3: 500 BC, collage and marker drawing

Top #4: Ancient vs. Imaginary Art, collage and marker drawing

Top #5: Rabbi praying, carved wood

Above: View of Rudy's basement gallery with the painted plaster sculpture, Love, 1950s

Right upper center: Birth, carved translucent stone

Right center: Female head, plaster

Right lower: Two-sided Face, carved stone



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



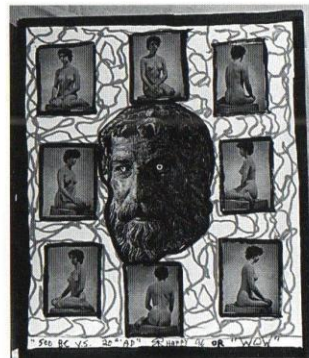
Courtesy of Dan Halton



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

have a good attitude and the fact that I want to go on and intend to go and do the art work which I feel is so stimulating that it's a helpful thing for me too, and so I continue to work and so I sign every piece since I was 80 as happy. Rudy Rotter, "HAPPY '96". See, because I've been working since then, one of the artists that I know has changed my name from Rudy Rotter to Dr. Happy and so this is the reason for my signing with my double R special initials plus the "HAPPY" date."

1996 ...Regarding photographs of nude models, 35 years ago, "I bought this book of models to use when I was learning how to draw. Just recently I opened up a large book that I had on ancient art, ancient Grecian art that's been on display, many of them from B.C. So I titled this, 'Grecian Series' I have this ancient bronze sculpture with eyes gleaming and all these nude figures surrounding it, and I call this 500 B.C. vs. 20th Century A.D."

1996 "I did a series of creatures that were known as cave art creatures. One of which was the cave art pony. Ever since I've been working with ancient civilizations and primitive civilizations, I've come to realize the magnificence and the beauty of primitive art, which people today say well, it doesn't look like this because they're used to what the, the slim svelte girl smoking a cigarette in a bathing suit."

1996 "That was my favorite material--clay--, then I started working in stone. And I came upon Italian alabaster out of all the stones which carved nicely and you had to be careful not to fracture it. But that you learned in the process of doing. And then I enjoyed Indiana limestone, and Texas limestone was soft so that you didn't have to really hammer the stone hard. You could still get some nice carvings and grindings. The material itself couldn't be polished, but it was gratifying, each material

regardless of what it is, has its own qualities and its own end result of creativity that is different from something else, but when I got into wood carving, I was able to obtain a whole bunch of teakwood because one of my patients, Mr. Burger, owned the Burger Yacht Company here and they made these multi million dollar yachts which were made of teakwood. And when they cut out a panel, there was always extra left over. One time, when he was in my office he said "I've got this beautiful wood, he says it's too expensive to throw out and I can't use." So I bought a little bit from him and then he decided that he would like to have a carving in trade rather than just money and so I was able to get, over a period of some years, over a thousand pieces of teakwood. Teakwood is a magnificent wood. It carves beautifully. It polishes beautifully. If your chisel is sharp you can carve infinite detail into it whereas you can't with larger and heavier woods and so teakwood was my favorite wood. Next to that was the Honduran mahogany which I was able to get from the foundries and it carved very nicely too. So that was my second choice. Then there were a lot of, cocobolo which came from South America— beautiful wood, extremely hard. There was a blackwood ebony, I was able to get a log and then after one log I was not able to obtain any. I was able to get, from our local shipyards, lignum vitae which is a real heavy wood and real hard, but it's overcoming the density and being able to create a piece which is gratifying. But the wood itself is a beautiful wood. And then there are oak logs and rosewood, rosewood is also a nice wood and beautiful but hard to get."

1996 "I would like posterity to remember me as a person who's interested in creating things, but interested in creating for the honesty of creating rather than notoriety, so to speak, or even financial gain, because I've paid for



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

Above: Genesis Panel, front of panel which is also carved on sides and back representing the Old Testament

Top right: Rudy exhibiting his work, 1950s

Center right: Rudy with portfolio on French Decorative Art

Lower right: Newborn with Family, wood carving

this whole thing out of my pocket for 45 years now. . . never even tried to get a penny. This is an honest, decent way of trying to create, and the more I got into it, the more satisfying they became and the less concerned I was, and I said, I'm having a ball making this stuff, you know. Naturally, what's happening now is gravy, you know, gravy on the meat, so to speak."

1996 "My sister Becky passed away recently. She was the one who was actually the artist in the family. I had never taken a lesson and she had gone to the old Layton School of Art in Milwaukee and then to the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee which was then the State Teachers College, and then the University of Wisconsin in Madison and then to Michigan University. She did the traditional things, she did watercolors and sculptures, she loved sculpture. She never did any stone carving other than the clay sculpture and then transferring into plaster, and she did watercolors, she did some oils and a lot of drawings over the years."

1996 "My father came first to the United States and he worked like a dog for a couple of years, anything and everything, day and night, saved up enough money to bring my family back. There was my mother, my three brothers and a sister, and he brought them back in steerage which was a horrible way to go, no toilet facilities, no bedrooms, no nothing. Well they got here and my dad started working again, and then they opened a little grocery store on the south side, on Mitchell Street in Milwaukee where it was mostly Polish. Since they came from Russia, and Russian and Polish are closely aligned as far as languages are concerned. They spoke Russian, they spoke Polish, they spoke German which is closely aligned to Yiddish, and a little bit of English, not too much."

1996 "I could never go overseas because of my bad ear. I worked in a camp hospital dental clinic in the army. They said you can do your job here because all these soldiers have to have their teeth fixed before they can go overseas. They have to have fillings and dentures and ... or whatever, and so you work in this clinic here, so that's what I did, wherever I was needed. So I worked at the dental clinic in Camp Claiborne until I was released. And then when I was released I went back to Milwaukee, I had had all my stuff in storage. I had met the Schwartz's from the foundry, they were related to my first wife."

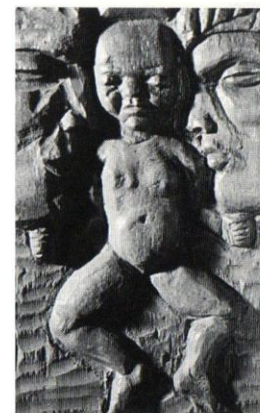
1996 "This postcard came by way of a friend of mine, Tony Rajer. He keeps sending me cards from all over and this card showed a picture of the early Chinese civilization where they had dug up things showing an emperor and

thousands of clay soldiers. I then started doing a study of that and did a whole series of these soldiers in metal and in iridescent material. Then the beasts, like the camel caravans that went with them, with ancient Chinese temples, the ancient Chinese gods, and Buddha, and then in studying Buddha I found out that Buddha originated in India. So I started reading about early India and I did a whole series on ancient India, with the Buddhas and the god Shiva and the dancing girls and the prayer symbols and so I did that whole series. And as I went into series after series, then I did a series on the northwest coast Indians, the Kwakiutl tribes".

1996 "Here's the thing that started me off when I looked at ancient China, studied that original Chinese series that I did was that here what we today think as primitive and not really very pretty and not really very aesthetic, but when you start studying it and start reproducing it and start doing it, you start to realize the magnificence and the beauty and the simplicity of the art of the untrained, so to speak. And that actually they are trained and actually they do have aesthetics, do have a sense of the beauty. Plus the fact that this is not only aesthetic and beautiful, but becomes a religious icon for them also, so that in doing all these different things, now I've done an African series, I've done the ancient Egyptian series, I've done the ancient Mayan series, I've done the ancient caveman series, the ancient Indian, the ancient Chinese and all the distortions and things that I see that I didn't like at first, it made me so aware of the beauty and the religiosity even and the aesthetic feeling that relates then to the basic unit of the caveman doing these simple things, but that these are actually tremendously artistic. And the things that the ancients made were magnificent and were beautiful and were almost inspirational by virtue of their relationship to their gods. So that this has been a big inspiration for me and I feel that I've gained so much knowledge and so much intensity and appreciation of what people pooh pooh as simplistic art, it is. There is no such thing as not beautiful art. I have people come to me, they say, well I try to make a couple things, but I know what art is and I can't draw and everything. And I says, don't say that, anything that you try to do is a form of creating something, you should be proud of and that it is interesting and that it is aesthetic and that it is beautiful in your eyes. Don't sell it short, keep on doing it, keep on creating. But like I say, this whole thing has opened so much, it's such a wonderful vista to me that I just can't explain it."



Courtesy of Christine Style



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

This page

Right: Seated Woman, carved wood

Left: Early view Genesis panel with other sculptures in Rudy's basement gallery which was below his dental practice on Huron Ave.

Next page

Top far left: Early view of Rudy's basement gallery with wood and stone carvings

Top #2: Log Faces, carved wood

Top #3: Man and Woman, re-made piece with wood foundry carving and re-cycled metal

Top #4: Rudy's double R signature

1996 "Well because of my age and arthritis and everything, I like to get up in the morning after a good night's rest and have a bite to eat and come down to the museum and work all the way until noon. By that time I'm fairly tired because it's physical, pounding and nailing and cutting, then I will go home, have a bite to eat, take a nap for an hour or so, come back at 2:30, work from 2:30 to 4:30, 5:00, after which I am tired and then I go home and rest and relax. I work every day that I can."

1996 *How does this current work habit differ from the work habit when you first started making art? How did you do it back then?* "Well back then I had to do it on a catch and catch can basis. I had my studio, I had a large practice, I had children that needed attention, so I took care of my musts first, first things first, I took care of my family, I took care of my practice, I took care of my patients, and then whatever spare time that many other people who are busy and do the same thing would go golfing, would go fishing, would go hunting, would go sailing, that's when I

spent that time in my studio. I had a lot more free time when the kids got older."

1996 "When I became 80 years old, I felt that I was doubly blessed by reaching not only this age but being able to create art at this age, so every piece from my 80th birthday on is marked with my double initials RR and a 'HAPPY 95', 94 and so on. That's the reason for the happy."

1996 "This is a series, it's a whole series of disks, of large circular disks which I called Tondos. I used spray paints in most of them and different colors. First these are large round cardboard, heavy cardboard pieces and I painted them white so they'd have a nice background. And then I spray painted all different colors and then when that would all set, then with a large wide marking pen I made designs in them, some of them abstract designs, some of them the abstractions that would have certain shapes which then would mimic or I could see figures or animals or faces or things. So again, just let 'er go. I mean, free

wheeling, free association, not knowing what's going to come out and then creating something from it."

1996 "This is a series of constructions, these are oh maybe two feet high or something like that. Each one has these large pieces from the trophy industry that look like ancient Roman columns, broken down. And then within these I have a large sculpture like it is in the Piazzas and I have water fountains and I also have people, tiny people to give the dimension of the tremendous size of the Piazza and two of the seven I call Tribute to the Acropolis. The other five I call La Piazza Del Santo Rudolpho, that's me, Rudy Rotter."

1996 *About Rudy's family—Did your family go to the synagogue?* Oh yeah, sure. My parents were old fashioned Orthodox Jews. And they went to the synagogue on all the holidays. They would go, the real Orthodox Jews would go to the synagogue, like the Orthodox Catholics, every morning and every sabbath, they would go on the holidays and they were kosher, they kept a kosher home, but at the same time, when we went to the restaurant . . . they were in business and so my mother wasn't home cooking all the time, although she was a wonderful cook and did wonderful things, that when we would eat in restaurants near our stores, they would not eat any meat, they would eat eggs or vegetarian dishes, but at the same time they recognized that we kids were a new generation and we ordered a hamburger even though they would never touch that meat, they didn't object to our eating hamburgers and we had Passover, we had wonderful Passover dinners at home and religious things. We all had to go to religious school, just like you went to the catechism.

1996 *Rudy, in those days when you were having a ball and enjoying yourself in Madison and Milwaukee, did you ever go to the museums?* "No. I was too busy with girls, working, girls, football, girls, working, and school. It was only after, of course, like I say I had done posing for the art classes at UW, I was in the midst of art, my sister Becky was a real artist, I used to pose for her too, she did sculptures of myself and my brothers."

1996 *Rudy, when was the transition from your realistic work to the more abstract and what brought it about?* "Well, the first abstract things that I did, if you'll notice here you'll see a whole series of red wooden figures and red wooden objects, these are all obsolete foundry patterns which are made of beautiful Honduras mahogany. In the beginning, when I was able to get a hold of these patterns from the Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry from the Schwartz's,



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

they're made up of a number of pieces that were glued together. What I did is I knocked off the pieces that were small and then used the larger pieces to do carvings, because that's what I was doing, I was doing carvings at the time. This must be ten years ago, that I was doing that, around 1985. Subsequently I ended up with a whole bunch of small pieces of pattern and throughout the years that I already had been working, I kept noticing that these pieces were so wonderfully made by pattern makers who just did them, the great workmen that did them by virtue of studying the plans which were submitted to them and making measurements and making finished product, but I could see these little pieces had beautiful shapes to them, beautiful color and I said this is a shame just to throw these away, so I started putting those pieces together, those beautiful pieces, putting together into constructions, into just design. I nailed some, I put screws with others, I glued some and I ended up with abstract constructions. By that time, after all the years of working with the figure, just working with the figure itself was fun. The figure itself is made up of a multiplicity of beautiful abstract shapes.

1996 The Bible room I did a number of years ago, well 20 years ago, around 1976 I would say, I started and since have made certain additions, but the main body was practically all Honduras mahogany, large panels. I started out with a basic unit and also have large log carvings, seven feet tall of two figures, Adam and Eve. The start is Adam and Eve of the Bible. And so I did a number of

Adam and Eve figures and Adam and Eve heads, I've done heads in metal, in granite, in leather, to the point of drapery material and iridescent metals of Adam and Eve and then I've done separate panels of many Biblical figures. so I did a whole number of different carvings of different people in the Bible. Large wood head of Moses, a limestone carving of baby Moses in the bull rushes, a large panel of Moses parting the Red Sea, a large panel of Adam and Eve in Honduras mahogany, a large panel of Lot's wife in turning around and looking in horror because she was not supposed to turn around and she's to be turned into a pillar of salt. Next we have a large panel showing Isaac blessing Jacob, then we have the large Genesis, It's one of my best works."

1996 Rudy, tell us about this Old Testament piece, what's the name of it? The panel is made of mahogany from Honduras. "This piece is called 'Genesis' and it's carved to convey the exact Biblical story. I'll go through it slowly. On the top right side is, in the beginning God created night and day, then he created the waters and the fishes, and then he created the animals, from the dust he created Adam, bottom left. Bottom right, put Adam to sleep and created Eve from Adam's rib, then he created the Garden of Eden. Here's God with his arms spread out. Then here's the tree, then here's the serpent around the tree. Adam is looking on in horror, Eve has taken a bite out of the apple that starts all the trouble. Then over on the other side . . . it shows the angel with this flaming sword chasing Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. This is

expulsion story. Next. . . this shows Adam and Eve in conjugal love. This shows Adam leaning over to Eve and helping to deliver Cain. This is the first family, Adam and Eve, Cain and Able. Cain murders Able, this is the next carving. After that, Cain is sent out to wander the earth as his punishment. Down below starts the story of Noah. The people were not God like or God fearing, they scorned God and did things which were not right and Noah was pleading He pleads with the people to mend their ways and they scoff at him and wave their hands at him in derision. He's received the message from God to build the ark and it shows him wielding this large sledge hammer and building the ark. The next panel shows the ark completed and on the seas during the flood. The next one shows the ark which is on land and the sun is shining and the rains and floods are over and it shows the dove with the olive branch which is depicting new life and peace. The next panel shows Noah and his entire family in prayer, thanking the Lord for their deliverance. Down below is the tower of Babel and it shows the people all falling off the sides because they can't understand each other's language. Different people are falling off of the tower of Babel because they had not listened to God and they had started doing things and they all spoke different languages which they could not communicate with each other and they were fighting and falling down, They were speaking in many tongues. Then on both end sides of the entire panel which is quite thick, there are a whole series of different heads depicting all different peoples of the



Left: Early view of Moses and other works on display in Rudy's museum

Right: Moses with the Ten Commandments inscribed in Hebrew, carved granite



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

earth that came by way of Adam and Eve and then above that is the symbol of wheat or bread."

1996 Rudy, in your early art career were any of the pieces for sale or were they just for exhibition? "No, they were just for show. I had no idea of selling them. And then over the years I've donated pieces all over, the YMCA has a whole bunch of my pieces, the library has, the Two Rivers Library, the Two Rivers High School, the Manitowoc High School, the Manitowoc Grade School, the Manitowoc Junior High Schools, the churches, the synagogues, every organization that has a fundraiser here, I gave and they have auctions and I've donated through the years. That's been a particular peeve of mine, not the giving, see we always wanted to cooperate with other local museums and be known as the Manitowoc Museum of Sculpture, but it has never been accepted as "a museum" because I was an outsider. We have more art in my museum than in most others."

1996 You want to tell us about these Rudy? What are these pieces? "They are memorials and are entitled 'The Killing Fields of Cambodia' and the other one is 'Remember BabaYar' which is an area in the Ukraine of Russia where they found a mound of skulls and these were all Jews who had been killed by the Nazis and by some of the Ukrainians who were connected with the Nazis and so

they have a large installation and sculpture there, a memorial, so this is the idea behind this BabaYar and this other one shows all these skulls with the iridescent teeth and eyes glowing with blood streaming down the skulls of Cambodia where the communists had slain thousands of Cambodian civilians. That was really sad."

1996 Rudy, what are some of your favorite tools to work with? "Naturally the hammer and the chisel. With all this metal work, a real good sharp tin snips and I've learned to do quite fine work by maneuvering my hands around on the specific metal. The metal that I'm using now, as you can see I'm working, finished the fourth one and this is of a tiny infant, sitting there and I have a flat piece here that I'm going to bend over so I can nail it, I'm going to make an entire installation showing these little infants sitting all around with the head or figure of a mother in the center. This is the adoration of the mother by the babies."

1996 Tell us about these plastic purges, what are purges? "Purge is a plastic material that is cleaned out. There are plastic factories who make plastic objects of all different kinds, it comes in all different colors and all different shapes and so they have these machines and they call these castings and at the end of the run there's always some left over so they purge or clean out the machine and then it falls on the floor or something, but they dispose of

it, throw it away. And many times it come in just wonderful colors and it is extremely difficult to work, you can't cut it, you can't carve it. I tried using a heating iron, welding iron on it, and you have to leave it as is, but it does come just by itself in many interesting shapes and many interesting colors and it does take the magic marker permanent ink very nicely as you can see. And you can drill holes in order to mount it and it's very, very hard."

1996 Rudy, tell us about the Ankor Wat series. "In ancient Cambodia, there was a large temple, one of the largest in the world actually from what I understand, and they had thousands of dancing girls carved in stone all the way around this large edifice and when I first got this iridescent material and I saw that, I remembered seeing pictures of Cambodian women, that they wore the most magnificent colored head pieces and rings and bracelets and had this wonderful dance with their hands and their feet and so when I got this new material that all these magnificent colors, that's where I got the idea that this would represent the Cambodian dancing girls and so I made them and they turned out very nicely and I'm really pleased."

1996 "The other thing that I would like to add is all of these things can be so enjoyable and so much fun and so satisfying that you should continue working with it. And what was told to me a number of years ago when I first started. I read this by a great art critic in the New York Times paper, the only thing an artist has going for him is that he must be convinced that regardless of what anyone says, that what he's doing is good, what he's doing is right, and that he should not be dissuaded by snide remarks or even corrections. Many times corrections, even though you may resent them, you should recognize that they are for your own good so that you should accept them and many times through the years, I've gone through that very same thing where I reacted adversely to someone who said, and then I said to myself, hey, maybe they're right, so rather than just resent that, to look at it and not let it deter you."

1996 Rudy, can you tell us about the Moses piece with this Hebrew inscription on it? "It's made out of an old tombstone, actually of granite, and the front part was heavily polished as tombstones are, and so I used the front part which was nicely polished and I inscribed in Hebrew the ten commandments and that's that, and above that is a bearded head of Moses carved in the granite and on the sides and back are like a prayer robe and it shows him with his mouth open, his eyes partially closed, in the throes of what we call dovening or in Yiddish it means

prayer, praying, the ten commandments that he brought down from the mount."

1996 *Tell us about this piece, Rudy, what's it called?* "It's a grief figure, and it's made of Italian alabaster, and it was just a block, my friend, my buddy who is a physician here, Dr. Simon said that I made everything block like because I had bought the block and paid money for it and I wasn't going to waste one iota. I entered that in a regional show at Green Bay. Neville Public Museum, and won first prize in sculpture and best of show. '59 I think, it was quite a while ago. "Grief" is one of my wife's favorite pieces. That other piece there is the harvest wood that's made, it's a face made out of lignum vitae, tree of life. Lift that, you'll feel how heavy it is, . . . dig your nails into that, it'll give you an idea. . . it's almost like a stone."

1996 *Did you number your pieces* "Some of my early pieces I numbered, but that got to confusing. My friend Lester Schwartz suggested that, and it was a good idea, but I couldn't keep track."

1996 *What are the inspirations for these early drawings?* "These drawings were what I did in my dental office, I would take a piece of chalk and I would make a long swirling line and this would then give me an idea for a figure, because I did practically all figurative work at that time, so it was a case of developing all the different figurative things, just purely out of my mind by making these swirling lines which then give me an idea for a start on a figure. I like doing stuff just off the top of my head without any rhyme or reason. These are shiny reflective material, holographic stuff that remind me, my background in zoology of deep sea creatures. So these, and a lot of these hieroglyphics are purely abstract and sometime a face or figure or animal will appear and I will then include that in, so there's that variation."

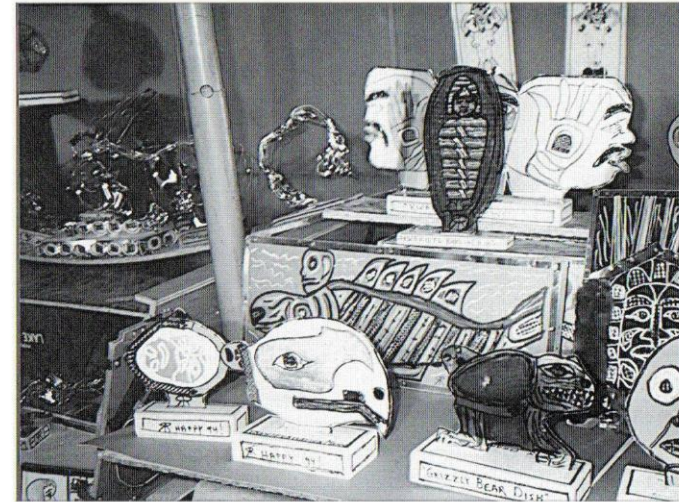
1996 "We went on May 21, 1996 to Sheboygan and saw Nek Chand at the Kohler Arts Center who is this famous sculptor from India and I saw the pictures and I saw and heard the lecture and I was so impressed with the beauty and the simplicity of the things. I was inspired by seeing a long large fence with a series of arches which reminded me of the ancient Indian rams and so I did a whole series of these using that design and there's a continuity of 1, 2, 3, . . . 13, about 25 of these pieces and it's made out of this wonderful metal that has this movement."

1996 *Rudy, tell us about your current work?* "These are carvings that I had done as many as 20 years ago, but I decided to incorporate them into a new fitting and a new arrangement utilizing the new gold material that I've

been working on the last few years and embellishing the entire sculpture into a setting rather than just leaving it as such. And not only that, but if somebody told me a couple years ago I would take one of my carvings, paint the lips red, accentuate the eyes and make eyelids I would have told them they're crazy. But new things happen and since I've been working on this Egyptian series, these two seemed to work out very nicely, the utilization of the ornaments of all different kinds, plus the setting that it has, in gold, and so I'm having a lot of fun with this. These drawings were made with spray paint, using a spray paint haphazardly, then while the paint was still wet I folded it over so that there would be an indentation, almost like a test. The Rorschach test, and then it would leave imprints and a blending of colors so then I would see and be able to find the different animals, see, just like the fella who went to his psychiatrist and he showed him the Rorschach test and he says, this guy just says what do you see, he says a naked lady. Then he shows him another one and says well what does that look like? He says a naked lady, and whatever he showed him he said, finally in exasperation the psychiatrist says gee you've got a dirty mind, and he says hell no, you're making the dirty pictures . . ."

1996 "This is called Ancient Egypt and it has a carving within this beautiful wooden enclosure, and on it are many ornaments applied, tell us about those. These are ornaments which originally are part of the trophy industry and I've taken them and cut them and changed them and then utilized them to simulate the decorations that there were an ancient Egyptian jewelry and so it's not exactly the same, but it's my creative effort to reproduce it as such and so then on the opposite side I have engraved metal of the male figure also with embellishments of these figures on the forehead and like the ancient decorations, so I'm constantly redecorating but not changing the basic sculpture in any way, just adding to it, but leaving it so that the person can see what the original sculpture was. I find great enjoyment in doing these things."

1996 "These are all what I call like in music, variations on a theme, see the basic theme is the same, man and woman, mother and child, family but, and the basic unit is a wooden carving, but all these additions then are like I say variations on a theme. I was listening to a Beethoven symphony the other day that went on for over an hour. The main theme ran through this entire thing, but there were so many variations where you could recognize little hints of the main theme that it was just marvelous to hear these little variations and this is what, I'm not trying to copy or anything, but as I worked on it, this is how these



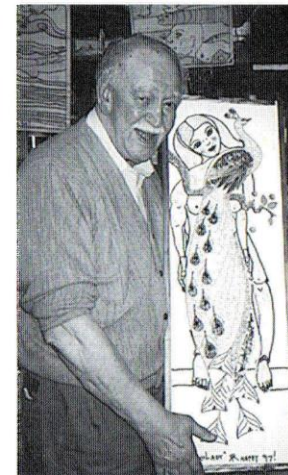
Courtesy of Anton Rajer

things appear to me and I find that with a lot of my work, that I do a lot of it subconsciously or just as it appears to me or appeals to me, and then after I'm done and sit back, then I see where there is an influence, and so it's interesting to do these things off the top of my head, rather than to say now I'm going to make an Egyptian piece and it's going to be this way and that way, I don't. I mean, I embellish the head and I create all these different decorative things which are not the same, but resemble the Egyptian decorations on the royalty. I just go on to the next one, because this reminds me of the story of the two old ladies that came into my museum not knowing that I was the sculptor and they were standing there and looking at two pieces of sculpture and one old lady says oh I like this one, that one stinks, and the other one said no, no, I like that one, the one you picked out stinks. See, so here it is. And so I don't judge them. This is one of my favorite statements, I don't judge them, I just make them. 'The Joy of Creativity', that's it, I mean, that's the entire thing because if you didn't like really love doing this, nothing would mean anything in the things I've done, but I've enjoyed every piece, banging away at it with hammers and nails, cutting it, chiseling, grinding, kicking, cussing, everything else. And so it continues and I hope this will, and I think it will because for four years I've been doing this and I don't think I'm going to change my attitude or my philosophy of doing these things."

1996 *Do you have a preconceived idea of what you're going to make?* "I don't have, this is all created as I go along, but as

Above: View of a few of the pieces from the Kwakiutl Indian Series, 1996

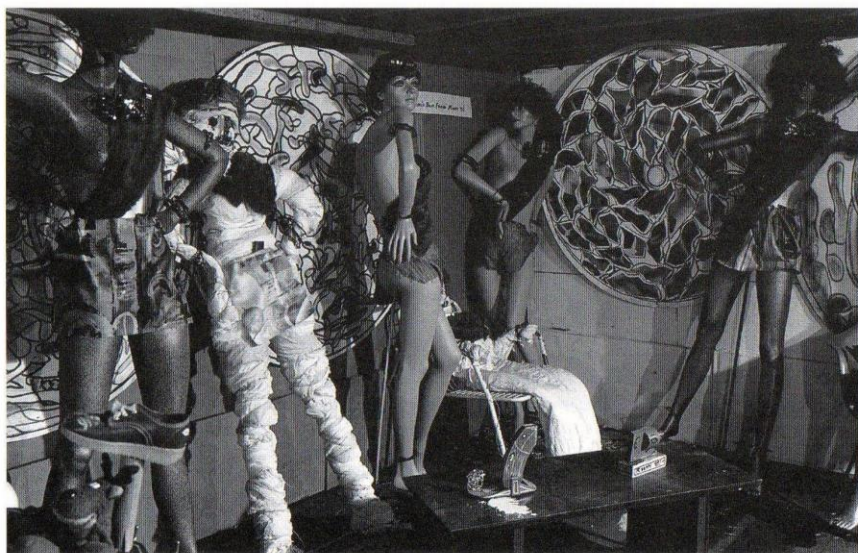
Below: Rudy showing Lady with Peacock, 1996



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes

This page

Top: View of front gallery in the Rudy Rotter Museum of Sculpture, 1996

Lower: View of 'A girls best friend is mink' corner in first floor back gallery

Next page

Top left: Face, computer panel component and wood

Top right: Faces, drawing on recycled wallpaper sample

Center: Enigma of the Face, drawing with re-cycled metal on wood

Lower right: Chinese Head, mixed media

Lower left: Oklahoma Bombing Memorial, mixed media with stuffed animals

I do that, certain things start to form that look better than others then it develops into a, even though it was just from outer space and develops into a definite pattern develops. Then I have a tendency which I have to guard against, I always say I'm going to make this very simple and the first couple are simple and then I start changing and start different colors and before I know it's very complicated and I curse myself for doing that because I want to keep it simple. There's something in my makeup, in my personality, in my research that leads me to add more and more and change and change until something else comes up, but this is the fun of creating these things. These are "happy accidents." Just working continually, not knowing exactly what it's going to be, not having a preconceived idea, and then having things happen. This happened even in the beginning when I was working with clay. When making a casting in plastic, sometime if the casting wouldn't be perfect, then I'd have to recarve and the recarving would make it better than what my original was, so this is what I call happy accidents. Just like working in stone, a nose breaks off or wood that you recarve, reshape, and the end result is something better than what your original idea was. So all of these things, and with a drawing or with using spray paint, these are things which you have no preconceived notion of and where it comes out better"

1996 Rudy *what is your advice to a young artist?* "Alright, what I would advise young artists is first of all they've seen beautiful works of art and they immediately on their first project attempt to duplicate that beautiful work of art and my first advice would be don't try to make a masterpiece on your first piece because what will happen, you will, I've seen it happen so many times, they try to make a "masterpiece" and they can't and they give up immediately. The thing to do is to take things slowly or rapidly, whichever your own system demands, but not to judge too harshly, be happy with your beginnings, see where you feel your mistakes are, don't hesitate to study because the studying will help you and don't hesitate to work, don't expect to just to by some magic create something. It takes work, it takes hard work, it takes perseverance."

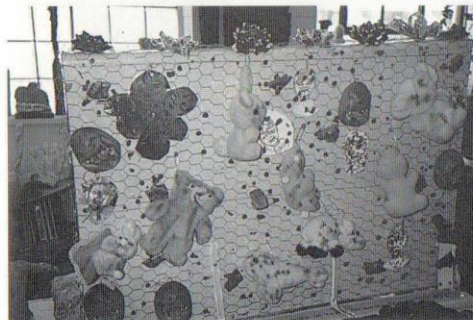
1996 Rudy *What do you think is the meaning of your life ?* "I'm blessed with having the love of my family and the closeness of my family, that means more to me than almost anything. As you can see from my artwork, I have thousands of family groupings. Love of a man for a woman, the love of father and mother for children, I mean what can be more than that, love, there is nothing. And through my parents I learned to expect nothing so that whatever you get is gravy, whatever you get is great. And also through my parents, every time I started to bitch all

through the years, you know, this isn't right, that didn't go right and I'm having trouble with this and that, I always refer back to them and say, Rotter, look what your parents went through, look how easy you got it."

1997 Rudy, tell us about the new piece that you did dedicated to the children that died at the Oklahoma bombing. "I was so taken with watching all the court things and everything, and also seeing the horror of the bombing, and then seeing the little mementoes that people would hang, little dolls and little ribbons. I then built a piece, a large panel and covered it with chicken wire, surrounded it with chicken wire. From the chicken wire I hung ribbons, little dolls, also doll features of babies, of infants, which all of them were, only these I covered with dripping blood. There were hands there still holding the little nursing bottles separate which were blown off and I attached those to the board too. So that people came in and said well that's horrible. Well it wasn't meant to be pretty. It was meant to document the horror that existed and so this is what I did, It's a memorial piece."

1997 About the Rotter Family Shrine Installation in the Museum. "A portrait of my mother, Peter, my son as a baby, and my father; these are sculptured heads and then there are oil paintings of my mother, father, my brothers. And then I added these in here as a kind of decoration for the entire room. I had these gold thin strips, narrow strips and I started to work on one and just weaving it and twisting it and I noticed on there, a little bit of the paint had got on there from these paint things that I was doing and I thought that looked very interesting." (insert photo of Family shrine by Ron Byers with Rudy)

1997 "This is a part of a fur coat and this is the collar. I was able to take the collar intact and blend it across the top as a fur cape or a fur headpiece, parka almost and then

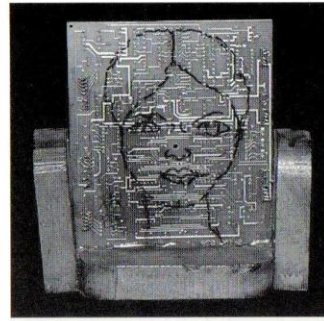


Courtesy of Anton Rajer

insulate it or have the gold mother's face with earrings and glowing eyes and then a tiny daughter just below it also with earrings and necklace, beautiful necklace."

1997 What has been the source of your materials? "Sure. Well, there's the Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry, those are the Schwartz family, Lester Schwartz, the artist, his brothers and father and the Eck Foundry here that I've got foundry patterns from. And then there's the Manitowoc Pattern Works where I was able to get pattern parts also and beautiful mahogany wood, and they also were generous in calling me when the wood salesman would come in so that I could order the special large mahogany pieces for my Bible series. The local junkyard, a man by the name of Margolis who saved all these shiny metals for me, says 'I've got a box of this shiny metal; you're always monkeying around with stuff, would you like it?' And I said yes, and so I took it and I started monkeying around with it and I found out subsequently it came from Dave's Trophy Company and I went to see him and he said you can have all you want. He said he'd rather see me have it than throw it out. And so I was able to get that, and still am able to get thousands of pieces of this beautiful colored metal from him, plus I was able to get this iridescent paper that glows and changes color and then there's Rebel Kanzelberger, she has a company here and she makes these name tags, these golden name tags, I get all the cutouts and all the strips of gold, and some are large pieces too. In today's factory society, there is so much perfectly good stuff that's being thrown out because it isn't exactly the right size or they've overdone the production and they throw it out because it cost too much to try to re and I get all these perfectly beautiful things, gold and all this wonderful paper get from a printing company."

1997 "These are seconds and it's perfectly good wonderful cardboard and you pay a dollar apiece for these and I get hundreds of them for nothing and with this trophy stuff, for the metal that I've got it would be thousands of dollars. I give them, they don't like any of the trophy sculpture because they're handling them all the time, but they love my teakwood and I give them a teakwood carving for their home. We eat breakfast at the same place, I will buy their breakfast for them, I buy things for them. They have perfectly wonderful pieces of 2x4 which I've used thousands of them and pieces of



Courtesy of Christine Style

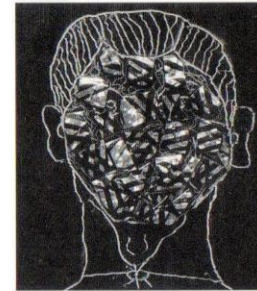
plywood, wonderful big pieces or smaller pieces which you can see, I've got thousands of those. So I get all these things from the building trade, from the factories here and they've all been cooperative and just wonderful to me and so I appreciate that and I told this Van Elles guy for instance who has all this trophy stuff, he says, well I throw it out anyway. I said look, I can no longer carve

the big heavy things or even carve with a hammer and a chisel on anything anymore. With this trophy stuff I can sit there at my work bench and be able to cut while I'm sitting there, to nail, hammer, design, everything. I says if it wasn't for your stuff, I would go crazy. I would be so frustrated not being able to do the carving, plus the fact that I never dreamed in all my life that I would be doing things like this."

1997 "This opened up a new world to me, my inability to carve because of arthritis, actually opened up an entirely new vista, the idea of these different colored metals and the cuttings and the drawings and the paintings and these, I don't know what you would call this, pressing of designs and things, that I never dreamed of. So there are constantly new things that are coming aboard which are so much fun. Some people may say well that's not fine art, but I think fine art is anything that you do, including just taking a pencil and drawing one straight line or even a curved one or a crooked one. If your intent is to create, if your intent is to do fine art it becomes fine art, that's what makes the decision. I don't do it to try, and I haven't, to try to impress anybody. I do it to have the enjoyment of the creativity and if other people like it, that's just great, I mean I love that too."



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Dan Hatton



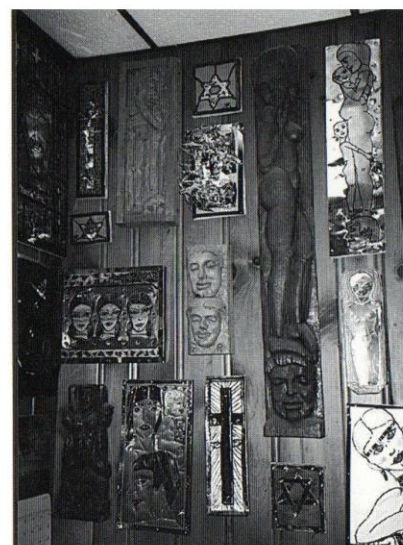
Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Top left: View of middle gallery in the Rudy Rotter Museum of Sculpture, 1996

Top right: Early portraits of Jimmie and Peter Rotter by Rudy, cast bronze

Ceter right: Portraits of Linda and Randy Rotter by Rudy, painted plaster mounted on wood

Lower right: Family Shrine with his mother, his son Peter as a child, Mr Nissenbaum, and his father. Installed in the Rotter Family Shrine

Far left: Woman, carved tree section

Left: View of part of wall display in Rudy's office, 1997



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Interviews With Rudy's Children

1996 Randy Rotter
Rudy's first son

"There were art competitions and we would go and it was terribly exciting for me because we would go to the big city, Milwaukee, State Fair, biggest fair that I had ever seen and I would sometimes sort of sneak out, it was sort of interesting because they would have these tents of black performers, there would be music shows and I would sneak into the tent because it was so exotic to me, it really was, actually it was wonderful. However, then I would go back and he would always be setting up his pieces amongst all these others and then he would always win prizes and this was a period of, my admiration for him, seeing your father win prizes and the zestfulness of the whole enterprise. And the preparations in the basement on Huron Ave., and the way he would be making plaster and the way he would be moving these pieces around and the speed with which he would produce them. He worked a lot during his dental practice and I don't know if you heard the story, but whenever anybody cancelled, he had a bell, so if there was a cancellation he would run downstairs and he would chop away and then the bell would ring, and then he would run up, clean up, and go practice. And so a lot of it was done during the day. Weekends, Saturday, one of my pleasures was to go sit and watch my father work and sort of, it was a father-son time, where I could speak with him, and I sometimes would model a Ferrari or something in clay, but I couldn't compete. It was almost too much I think for me to even consider competing against him. I've never been as aggressive as he is, you know, in terms of going into things."

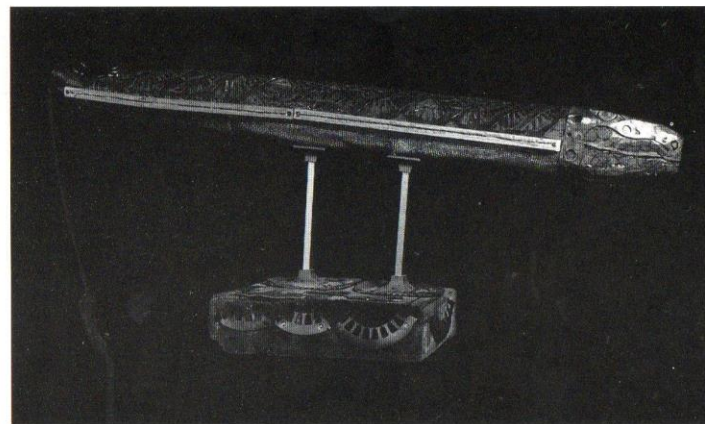
Randy, did you model for him? "No, the modeling was more in the books that I would sneak in and read. There were these pin-ups, but they weren't pin-ups, they were more arts. He would use these as models because in Manitowoc you couldn't use a model. It was just too risqué and risky because it was risqué, and so that would be what he would use for the base for his figurative work."

Randy, when you were growing up with your family, did you go visit museums? "I'm trying to remember in Milwaukee, I don't remember in Milwaukee, but we did have an annual trip and that annual trip was 8 hours to the Chicago Art Institute, he and I would be running around in the museum, and sometimes my sister followed. The reward for this, I think for me, it was just a wonderful experience although I didn't necessarily think it at the time because I'd get awfully tired of it. Then on Sundays we'd head up to Milwaukee, it was the Breck's May's Indy Cars Races, so we would go and spend all day on Saturday in the art museum and then we would go to the Indy Car races on Sunday in Milwaukee and that was a ritual, once a year. I think he would go down to Chicago, I know he went down for the King Tut exhibit and he would go down for special things, but it was more if he got near a museum he would go in it."

"It seems so important that at least a part of the body of the work always be kept together and that it be kept here in Manitowoc. I have only one or two pieces of the traditional bas relief and the rest, because early on I became very fascinated with the more eccentric pieces, so I've got everything from the recent bird, with the shiny metal, to what you were talking about the casement, I actually have an old little foundry pattern that I really love, it just had a little depression for some kind of aluminum object that they made that he put a little face on, and you can see almost these much more ornate and religious pieces that he has now with his more introspective sort of enclosed pieces, so yeah, I picked up these little totem type of figures"

Randy tell us about your grandparents, Herman and Leah Rotter. "Well, the mythology is quite simple, that my grandmother was very smart and very strong and ran the household, and my grandfather was very loving and not as strong and not as good at anything, and he was to be respected because he was a good man. And my grandmother was the really forceful party she created seven stores right before the depression, they came with nothing, they built up seven stores, lost those in the depression, but kept going."

Tell us about your dad "Rudy's always been an eclectic person, not an academic in his interests. He's always had his, I mean, like in the living room, he's always had his opera going, he's going, the TV is on, he's got his art books, he's got the radio on and he's pulling in information and it's eclectic, it comes from all over, and it always has. I mean, he went through a period where he was trying to buy a boat, you heard about this, the big boat, a cruise ship. Well I mean there was a year where he read every book on boats I think there was, and you'd go into his office and it was filled with books on boats from all over the world. So not in the academic sense, but he's always thinking, and he's always taught me to have a wide view, whatever view of the world I have of the world is a starting point is from him and I hope it's not too narrow. At one point I helped photograph his work because I've always had a fascination and admiration for it. I mean, he is just such a light force and an astounding production, that's why I'm so happy you're doing something, Tony, like a book. That's a wonderful idea."



Courtesy of Dan Hutton



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

Left: Interrelationship #22, carved wood courtesy of Rudy Rotter
Above: Benny Bird, mixed media
Lower: Fish, metal on wood



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes

This page

Below: Detail view of Rudy's ladies
on display

Right: Sisters, carved wood

Next page

All photographs courtesy of
Rudy Rotter

Left: Linda dusting Female Spanish
Dancer, 1960s

Center: Interrelationship #21,
carved wood relief

Far right: Deborah and Barak,
carved wood panel from the
Old Testament series



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

1996 Linda Rotter Canon
Rudy's daughter

"My father's work is simply an extension of how he lives his life ... with family, with love and with a great sense of joy. I love all his artwork. I am particularly fond of his early marble/ alabaster, metal and wood pieces. In his latter years, he always carves or writes, *HAPPY (the year) R*. He is truly an inspiration. He uses the same love for his family and transposes it on paper, wood, marble and anything else he can find. He finds beauty in everything. One time he was into using different fabrics and found what he thought was an old dress. So he cut and chopped and glued until his heart was content ... only to find that it was Karen's new dress. Needless to say, we all laughed.

When I come home to see Dad, he always takes me to the museum. I see drawings and sculptures that he has done through the years. I see all the different phases as well. I always ask him "What is your favorite piece?" ... And he always answers "The one I'm working on right now!" I see pieces of sculptures that we did together when I was young. He sculptured the face and I sculpted the hair. He always had time for his family. I also see sculptures of my Grandparents from Russia who instilled this great strength and love in him. He dedicated a whole room of sculptures in their honor to our roots.

In the future, I would like a very well known institute or museum carry some of my father's artwork. I believe he is a genius and would like to share his talent with the world.



1996 Peter Rotter
Rudy's second son

Do you remember your father's compulsion with making art?

"I remember he would have a couple patients and then go downstairs because the office was on the first floor and the basement was the studio. So in between patients he would go down and work on his art, come back upstairs, see another patient, and go back downstairs and work on his art. And we lived on the second and third floor so we were around a lot and were able to see that, and we spent a lot of time with him that way so it was pretty neat, pretty unusual."

Peter, did you ever participate with Rudy in making his art, helping him?

"Sure, I did a little bit myself when I was young. I can remember, when I was in high school I helped him tear apart patterns that he got from the foundry, tear them apart and clean them and organize them, and then he of course came in and did his thing. I myself like the older traditional sculpture."

"It's just something that, I mean, it's just continually evolving. It's like he started out with the family concept and I mean it's gone from family to, he builds cities out of patterns, he builds, and then it was animals for a while, and then the house of the Lord and then it was God. So it's really, it's incredible how it started out as sort of one theme and now he's expanded, I think the main theme was the family theme and love."

"I would like to see sculpture saved, I think he should definitely be recognized for what he's done. I think it would be a shame if it wasn't. I would like to see a permanent installation if not at a museum in Manitowoc, somebody to carry on the legacy of the museum."



1998 Jimmie Rotter
Rudy's third son

"I remember walking down into the basement at 812 Huron and seeing him carve away. I really didn't know what to think of it, but obviously it's something he enjoys. When I was in early grade school I remember carving a couple of sculptures. I also remember the smell of teal when I was cleaning up the mounds and mounds of sawdust and shavings.

I'm not sure if it's my place to say what is best or not for the Rudy museum. What I would like to see happen is what he mentioned to me, I guess there is a self taught artist museum in Baltimore, its called American Visionary Museum. Places like that, where his work can be displayed and cared for."

"The museum has grown tremendously! From a fairly dinky basement to three floors in a huge warehouse building. I've never seen the museum look as good as how it looks presently."

"I think originally he made art because it was an outlet which grew into a passion. It's just something that he really enjoys. Everyone should be so lucky as to find something that they love so much as he does his artwork."



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Source information is incomplete because most of the materials are from Rudy's own newspaper clippings (without dates or page numbers) and other archival items

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Courtesy of Anton Rajer



Courtesy of Rudy Rotter

This page

Above: Interrelationship #37,
carved wood

Top right: View of third floor gallery
in Rudy Rotter's Museum of
Sculpture, 1996

Lower right: Detail view of Rudy's
Kwakiutl Indians series, 1996

Previous page

Holocaust, carved wood

RUDY'S SERIES

Interrelationships (his largest)

The family of man

Adoration of the mother by the babies

Abstract constructions

Biblical, Old Testament

Cave art

Column series

Color and space series

Denizens of the deep

Egg and sperm

I see a vision

The enigma of the face

Horn art

Judeo-Christian symbols

Piazza series

Holographic series

House of the Lord

Ancient verses imaginary

Memories

Painted columns

Leather craft

Hieroglyphic series

Tondos

Ancient civilizations, Egypt, India, Aztec,
Maya, Eskimo, India, Buddha, Inuit,
Khmer, Kwakiutl, African

Memories

Tragedy Series: the Holocaust Memorial,
Cambodia Memorial, Oklahoma
Bombing Memorial

Art Installations in the Rudy Rotter
Museum: The Rotter Family Shrine,
Old Russia, Bible Room, Old
Testament Room, A Girls Best Friend
is Mink



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes



Courtesy of Kerrie Hughes

Contributors To This Book



Courtesy of Christine Style

Anton (Tony) Rajer is a native of Sheboygan, Wisconsin where he worked at the Kohler Arts Center for years. Academically, he completed his undergraduate work in art history at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee with additional studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. He completed graduate work in conservation at Harvard University Fogg Art Museum and as a UNESCO Fellow at Centro Churubusco Restoration Institute in Mexico City, and the University of London. He received additional conservation training as an ICCROM Fellow in Rome under the auspices of the Kress Foundation. Recently he was a Fulbright Professor at Panama's Catholic University. He reads, writes and speaks several languages and publishes on various topics related to the care, preservation and documentation of cultural property, including folk art. Currently he resides jointly in Sheboygan and Madison, Wisconsin, where he directs SOS! Save Outdoor Sculpture, a joint project of the Smithsonian Institution and Heritage Preservation. He teaches part time at the University of Wisconsin Madison.



Courtesy of J. Shimon & J. Lindemann

John Shimon and Julie Lindemann have been photographing collaboratively since 1986. They both have bachelors degrees from the University of Wisconsin (1983) and masters degrees from Illinois State University, Normal (1989). They exhibit widely, including the Madison Art Center, Walker's Point Center for the Arts (Milwaukee) and Neville Public Museum (Green Bay). Their work has been published in the New York Times Magazine (New York), View Camera (Sacramento) and Milwaukee Magazine (Milwaukee). They have contributed to New Art Examiner (Chicago) Art Muscle (Milwaukee) and received grants from the Wisconsin Arts Board, and Milwaukee Artists Foundation. They occasionally teach at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. Their photographs are in the permanent collection of several institutions, including State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Ripon College, Madison Art Center. Their studio is located in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, a block from Rudy's museum.



Courtesy of Anton Rajer

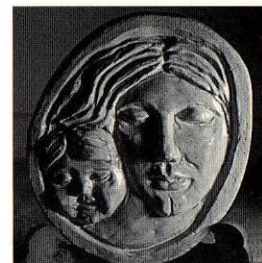
Christine Style, is an artist and educator who lives, works, and maintains a printmaking and graphics studio in Green Bay, Wisconsin. She received her bachelors degree in art from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her Masters of Fine Art degree in printmaking, from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1986. From 1987-93 she was the Assistant to the Curator of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Green-Bay and in addition taught courses in printmaking, drawing, design, graphics, and arts management. Since fall of 1993 she has been an Assistant Professor in Communication Arts at UW-Green Bay. She teaches all levels and types of printmaking, graphic communication courses, and the Arts Italy travel course. For the past seven years she has also taught during the summer at the Peninsula Art School in Door County, WI. She is currently vice-president of the Milwaukee Art Museum Print Forum and has an extensive exhibition record and graphic design experience.



Partial support for this book came from S.O.S.

S.O.S.

Save Outdoor Sculpture is a joint project of Heritage Preservation and the National Museum of American Art Sculpture Inventory Project, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. In the year 2000, Internet users will be able to access Rudy Rotter's art on the National Museum of American Art Worldwide Web site at <http://www.siris.si.edu>. We thank them for their support in this project to document and disseminate Rudy's work.



SPANISH ABSTRACT

El Doctor Rudy Rotter (nació en 1913) en los Estados Unidos. Es un artista que tiene más de 15,000 obras de arte en diferentes técnicas (escultura, dibujo, pintura, collage, etc.) El trabajó casi cincuenta años como dentista. Durante este tiempo se dedicó al arte como aficionado (hobby) En 1987 él se jubiló como dentista y se dedicó a la labor artística completamente. Con su prolífica producción artística, Rotter ha abierto su propio museo en la ciudad de Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Lo más notable del arte del Sr. Rotter es que él nunca estudió formalmente bellas artes, sino que perfeccionó sus técnicas de forma autodidacta. El está casado y tiene 3 hijos y una hija. Este libro está dedicado a su gran labor. Se elaboró para el 85 cumpleaños del Dr. Rudy Rotter.



150 Years 1848-1998, Wisconsin

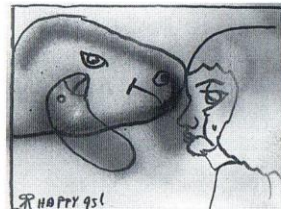
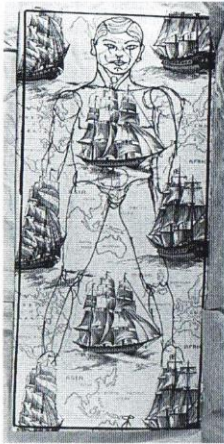
1998 is a year of celebration in Wisconsin, being both Rudy's 85th birthday and our state's SESQUICENTENNIAL. Throughout the state, cultural celebrations are being held that focus attention on past and present achievements of our citizens, including Rudy Rotter.

*This page
All photographs courtesy of
Anton Rajer*

Left: Detail of Standing Woman,
carved wood

Center: Mother and Child, ceramic

Right: Lady in Fur, mixed media



A partial list of Rudy Rotter Collectors

Herald Times Reporter, Manitowoc, First Lutheran Church, Manitowoc Anshe Poale Zedek Synagogue, Manitowoc, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Lawton Art Gallery, National Gallery of Art, Georgetown, Guyana, Two Rivers High School, Julie Lindemann, Rahr-West Art Museum, Manitowoc, Manitowoc Public Library, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Anton Rajer, Hillary Clinton, White House, Holy Family Memorial Medical Center, Manitowoc Christine Style, Tim Holland, Tom Atwood, Lester Schwartz, Fred Stonehouse, Nancy Wroblewski, Wade Weber, Leon Howard, Steve Wadzinski, Robert Pum, Richard Gehrke, Elfrieda Bissember, Randy Rotter, Paul Mathaney, American Visionary Museum, Linda Rotter Canon, Peter Rotter, Jimmie Rotter, Fred Easker, Barbados Gallery of Art, Manitowoc YMCA, Silver Lake College, John Shimon, Manitowoc Public School District, Manitowoc Health Center, Grace Congregational Church, Two Rivers James Vogel, Jeremiah Zinn, Michael Hartig, Jan Elftmann, Jo and Jack Shimon, Sara Belleau, Randy Bentinck, Ohene Koama, Marcel Austin, Mr and Mrs. Ron Byers, Dr. Max Wasserman, Nancy Isaakson, Mrs. Peter Ritter, Dr. Dan Grossman, and many, many others.

Above are a few of the many thousands of drawings/collages/paintings that Rudy has created. Many of these are on re-cycled wallpaper sample pages. Top left to lower right: Man & Ships, Hieroglyphic, Metallic Face, Creature, Reality vs Imagination, Reality and Imagination, and Happy '95. All courtesy of Tony Rajer





Rudy Rotter's Museum of Sculpture installation view/detail, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, 1998

J. Shimon & J. Lindemann Photographers

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