

## **Abstract**

Title: The 'In' Outside  
Outsider Art from Border to Brand

By: Valerie Francis  
Supervisor: Mícheál Mac an Airchinnigh

In the mid 1900s the French artist Jean Dubuffet created Art Brut as a revolt against mainstream culture. The term Art Brut was used to describe those artists on the margins of society, who were self-taught and without formal training, often institutionalised sufferers of mental illness. In his 1972 book, *Outsider Art*, which was intended to introduce Art Brut to the English-speaking world, Roger Cardinal coined the term 'Outsider Art'. Unlike Art Brut, which had a rigid structure, Outsider Art was left open to misinterpretation. Since its inception the term 'Outsider Art' has taken on a life of its own. In this paper it is proposed that the marketplace is creating conditions whereby Outsider Art as a definition is being exploited for commercial purposes.

In order to substantiate this claim I looked at the distinction between Outsider Art and its predecessor Art Brut, in order to emphasise the convoluted and misinterpretation of the term 'Outsider Art'. Outsider artist Clyde Angel was used as a case study in demonstrating the increased importance of the artist's background in authenticating their Outsider artist status. The contradiction inherent in the need for an authentic Outsider artist status to gain entry into the commercial art world was discussed. Examples from pop culture were also addressed to establish the commerciality of today's Outsider Art, and the ridiculousness of the term as evidenced in satire and unintentional misuse. The commercial nature of Outsider Art was further demonstrated by discussing its use as decoration on items such as clothing and skateboards.

The sincerity inherent in Cardinal's translation of Art Brut for a broader audience has been perverted. I conclude that there is no rigid definition of Outsider Art today, and the use of the term in contemporary society has lost any meaning.