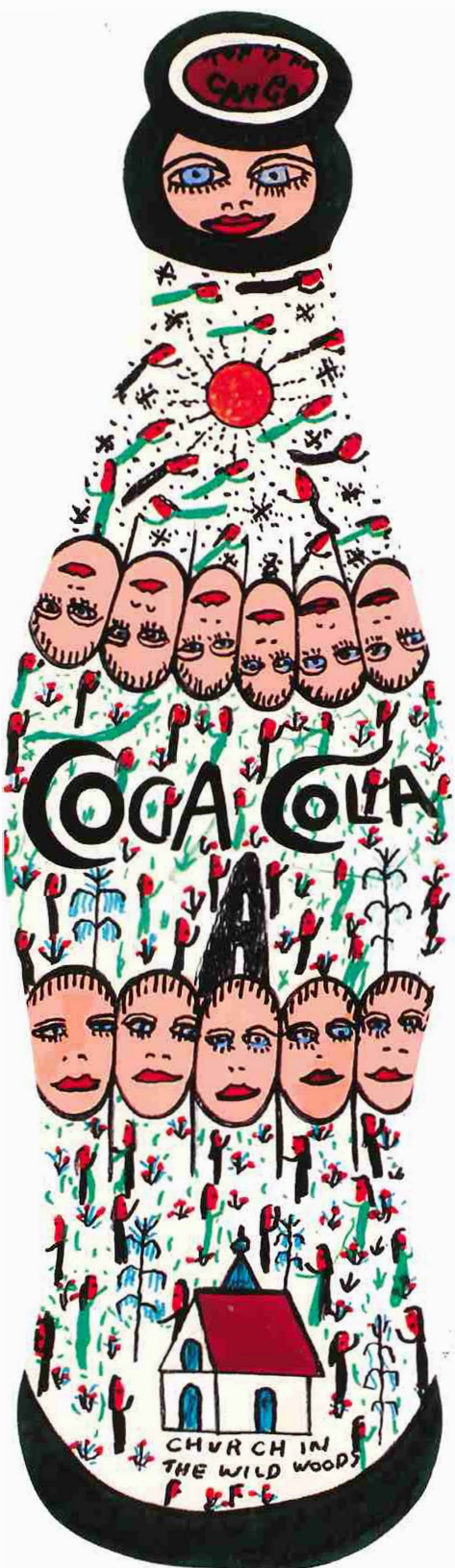


Howard Finster



Born and raised in Valley Head, Alabama, the Reverend Howard Finster ministered to congregants and generated faith-based folk art from nontraditional materials in rural Summerville, Georgia. Inspired by a holy vision at the age of three and ordained a minister by age sixteen, Finster led nine different churches and staged tent revivals for members of all faiths, races, and social classes in Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee. He concluded fifteen years of active ministry upon the realization that his afternoon congregation could not recall the subject of his morning sermon. Believing he had lost his effectiveness as a preacher, Finster returned to a World War II-era vocation: decorating repaired bicycles.

Because God's voice instructed him to paint sacred art, he expanded beyond enamel on metal surfaces to acrylic paint and ink on flat shapes of sheet metal, wood, and cardboard. Finster

Coca Cola, 1998
Paint and marker on wood, 9" x 4 1/2"
Brenau University Galleries
Photograph by Tom Askew

Painted angels, "beasts" from the Book of Revelation, cityscapes, landscape elements, and figures from popular culture. He inscribed these works with Bible verses and moralizing messages. His work first adorned his four-acre garden, which soon attracted folk art collectors.

Finster's increasing fame brought numerous invitations for college campus visits, exhibition opportunities, and television appearances. His work was exhibited at the prestigious Venice Biennale in Italy. He was a guest on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*. The Phyllis Kind Gallery of New York represented him. Finster's commissions included rock album covers for the bands R.E.M. and Talking Heads; his Paradise Garden, full of encrusted objects and decorated structures, was used as a backdrop for an R.E.M. rock video. Finster's intention was to leave the garden as a permanent message of ministry. Current visitors to



The Ark, 1984
Acrylic on masonite, 19" x 14 1/2"
Lamar Dodd Art Center at LaGrange College
Photograph by Brandy Klopp

Summerville can still view what remains of Finster's garden, although many works were removed to the High Museum of Art in Atlanta for preservation.

An intriguing commission came from the Atlanta-based Coca-Cola Company: to create a signature piece for the *Coca-Cola Olympic Salute to Folk Art*, an international exhibition staged during the 1996 Centennial Olympic

Games in Atlanta. Finster created an eight-foot, painted plastic Coca-Cola bottle, then filled it with many small, flat, wooden Coke bottle shapes with rings of joined faces above and below the company name. Close to the bottom is a small, red-roofed building labeled Church in the Wild Woods. A shining sun hovers above the "wild woods" scene, which includes small human figures interspersed

with trees. Unusual in its large size and provenance, the Coca-Cola bottle piece is now in Brenau University's collection. It was originally given to then-Governor of Georgia Zell Miller and his wife, Shirley.

Mary Beth Looney
Associate Professor of Art and Art History
Brenau University



TV Woman and Child, 1980
 Mixed media, 24½" x 21½" x 20"
 High Museum of Art
 Photograph by Peter Harholdt



In Visions of Another World - September 15, 1990
 Mixed media on wood, 24" x 28"
 State Art Collection of Georgia
 Photograph by Walker Montgomery