

James Castle

At a very early age Castle began drawing and making things with found materials. Throughout Castle's lifetime, nearly everything that crossed his path inspired or influenced him. His daily ritual included checking all the trash containers in the home and throughout the immediate neighborhood. His discoveries became the materials from which he made his art, as well as fodder for his voracious visual memory. Depending entirely on his ingenuity, Castle fashioned materials such as sticks, apricot pits and broken fountain-pen nibs into tools he could use to create. He discovered he could scrape soot from the wood-burning stove and spit into the powdery substance to mix a black ink suited for his diverse imagery. He often derived color by squeezing pigment from saturated crepe paper. Family members gave him store-bought art materials such as oil sticks and watercolors, and he incorporated these new materials into his own self-made concoctions to produce the many subtle textures and colors found in his work.

In the 1950s, Castle's nephew, Bob Beach, came home on a break from the Museum Art School in Portland, Oregon. Beach suggested to family members that Castle's drawings, handmade books and constructions could be called "art." Beach was allowed to take some of his uncle's drawings back to the Portland art school to show his professors. This introduction launched the beginning of Castle's recognition as an artist in regional museums and art galleries. Castle's work quickly became the subject of one-person and group exhibitions throughout the Pacific Northwest from the 1960s until his death in 1977. Overwhelmed by the continued interest in his work, his family denied access to the collection for the next twenty years.