

NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Susan Flamm
212-977-7170
or
Suzanne Gyorgy
212-713-2885

PHOTOGRAPHS AND SLIDES AVAILABLE

MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE OF MORE THAN 100 WORKS
BY REVEREND HOWARD FINSTER

The astonishing output of painting and sculpture by self-taught artist Howard Finster is seen in **THE ROAD TO HEAVEN IS PAVED BY GOOD WORKS: THE ART OF REVEREND HOWARD FINSTER**. Organized by the Museum of American Folk Art and sponsored by PaineWebber Group Inc., the exhibition will be on view at the PaineWebber Art Gallery, 1285 Avenue of the Americas, from September 21, 1989 through January 9, 1990.

Born on a farm in Valley Head, Alabama in 1916, Howard Finster preached his first sermon at age 16. A Free Will Baptist, he spent the next 60 years spreading the word through tent revivals, radio programs, a newspaper column and pastoring eight churches. To support his mission and family of five, he mastered twenty-two trades, from carpenter to grocery store owner to bicycle repairman, all skills later used in his career as an artist.

One day, after realizing that his congregation had forgotten the topic of his morning sermon, Baptist preacher Howard Finster decided that to be remembered, his lessons needed to be illustrated, much like he had done on the blackboard when teaching Sunday School bible lessons. Thus began an unparalleled career.

In 1976, at the age of sixty, he was divinely inspired to pick up a paintbrush and a can of Fixal tractor

--more--

enamel to "paint sacred art". Painting passages from the Bible on masonite from the backs of old television sets, Finster made drawings which reflected the fire and brimstone sermons he gave as a revivalist. These "sermons in paint" became ornaments and "signposts to salvation" in "Paradise Garden" (a 3 acre environment at his home in Summerville, Georgia).

Paradise Garden, a combination roadside attraction and Bible park, was built by Finster, to lure in the sinners and saved alike to audience the hourly sermons of salvation by the "painting preacher".

Finster worked fearlessly in as many materials as he could salvage, using wood, metal, and plastic to create astounding sculpture and found object assemblage. Although Finster says "I started as a baby in art", his vocabulary as an artist grew rapidly. From the early Bible paintings, he expanded his subjects to include popular icons like Henry Ford, Elvis Presley and George Washington. He also began painting visions of other planets.

This retrospective exhibition of approximately 100 works, traces Finster's path starting with a simple pulpit (holding a worn Bible), to models he constructed of the mansions of his Heavenly Father. The show is divided into four sections, of which the first, "Come Hear the Man of God Preach", examines Finster's roots as a revivalist preacher, craftsman, and businessman, all of which contributed to his success as an artist.

"Paradise Garden", which has been called his strongest and purest statement, will be recreated in the second section with sculpture (such as the Double Presidents

--more--

Bed), early works (Hidden Man of the Heart) and photos of the Summerville, Georgia site.

The next section, "Natural Born Talent", looks at the early examples of inspiration (preaching diagrams and book illustration), techniques (templates, cutouts, woodburning, etc.) and further explores the wide range of Finster's work. Included are paintings that speak to social issues (The World is Living Between Two Super Powers) as well as commissioned works such as the cover used for the Talking Heads album "Little Creatures".

The last section, "Chairman of Sacred Art", includes important multi-media and environmental works.

Howard Finster is probably America's best known and most prolific living American folk artist. His paintings, which now number in the 10,000's have a direct quality, touched with humor. His works have been exhibited at the 1984 Venice Biennale and in numerous galleries and museums national and internationally.

Guest curator John Turner is the curator of 20th century American Folk Art for the San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum and works for ABC TV News in San Francisco. His book, "Howard Finster, Man of Vision" will be published by Knopf in November and will serve as a catalogue for the exhibition. The book will be available, in the Fall, at the Museum of American Folk Art Book and Gift Shops.

PaineWebber Art Gallery
1285 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10019
(212) 713-2885

HOURS: Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

ADMISSION: Free

GROUP VISITS: School groups and other groups may arrange visits. Please call 212-713-2885 or 212-595-9533.