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**Emery Blagdon's "Healing Machines" Environment
American Premiere at Philadelphia Museum of Art**

The reconstruction of Emery Blagdon's "Healing Machines" environment is a prominent part of the exhibition **Self-Taught Artists of the 20th Century: An American Anthology** premiering at the Philadelphia Museum of Art from March 10 through May 17, 1998. The "Healing Machines" installation will recreate the main room of Blagdon's farmyard shed using the 377 pieces which were originally displayed there by Blagdon in a phantasmagorical assemblage.

Blagdon, the inventor/artist who lived in the Garfield Table area of west-central Nebraska, created more than 700 works of wire sculptures, wooden sculptures and paintings in the 30 years before he died in 1986. Blagdon called his works "healing machines" and believed each had a unique energy field which was effective in promoting healing and disease prevention. Further, the entire installation was a synergistic machine which multiplied the effects of individual machines.

Emery Blagdon was well ahead of his time in regards to the phenomenon of the effects of electromagnetic fields on health. The years since Blagdon's death have seen an explosion of studies and data on these effects, although to no consistent conclusions. Aside from their possible value as healing machines, the works are visually stunning. The logic and intelligence of these sculptures and paintings led Lynda Roscoe Hartigan of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art in Washington, DC to say that Blagdon's work is the "most important discovery of a visionary environment in the last decade."

The "Healing Machines" installation had its international debut at the *4th Biennale of Art* in Lyon, France in the summer of 1997. Dan Dryden and Don Christensen will install Blagdon's environment in Philadelphia.

Self-Taught Artists of the 20th Century: An American Anthology will feature some 300 works by over 30 artists. Included are works by such established luminaries as Grandma Moses (1860-1961), Horace Pippin ((1888-1946), Martin Ramirez (1895-1963), as well as younger artists such as Purvis Young (born 1943) and Ken Grimes (born 1947).

Spanning more than a century, beginning with Henry Church (1836-1908) and continuing through Lonnie Holley (b. 1950), the exhibition includes paintings, sculpture, drawings, constructions, installations and built environments. Materials used within these works range from traditional

artistic media, such as oil on canvas, photographic prints and carved wood and stone, to chicken and turkey bones, glass eyes, glitter, hair, corrugated cardboard, roots, wire, tin, fur, acorns and other found objects.

Subject matter for the self-taught artists is similarly diverse. Humor and riddles abound; extraterrestrial and apocalyptic visions are here as well. Eroticism is never far below the surface, and permeates the artistic conceptions of such artists as Henry Darger (1892-1973) and Steve Ashby (1904-1980). Much of the work, such as that of Howard Finster (b. 1916) or Sister Gertrude Morgan (1900-1980), bears public witness to profound religious faith; others enact more intensely private dramas, as seen in the obsessional multi-media homage to his wife, Marie, created by Eugene von Bruenchenhein (1919-1983). All of the artwork reflects the deeply felt convictions, passions and viewpoints of their makers, encompassing a wide range of techniques and approaches to making art.

Elsa Longhauser, Director of the Paley/Levy Galleries at Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia, and an authority whose experience presenting self-taught art began 20 years ago, is guest curator of the exhibition. Collaborating with Ms. Longhauser is noted Swiss independent curator Harald Szeemann, and the installation in Philadelphia will be coordinated with assistance from Ann Temkin, the Museum's Muriel and Philip Berman Curator of 20th Century Art, and Jack Lindsey, Curator of American Decorative Arts.

A full color catalog, published by chronicle Books in association with the Museum of American Folk Art, will accompany the exhibition. Included are major essays by art historian and curator Maurice Berger, philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto and folklorist Gerald Davis, as well as individual biographical and interpretive texts by writers from a broad range of disciplines.

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For additional information, contact the Marketing and Public Relations Department of the Philadelphia Museum of Art at (215) 684-7860. The Philadelphia Museum of Art is located on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway at 26th Street. For general information, call (215) 763-8100 or visit the Museum's web site at www.philamuseum.org.

The Emery Blagdon Project

Dan Dryden / Don Christensen / Trace Rosel / Eleanor Sandresky

81 Warren Street

Tel. 212-732-3644

New York, NY 10007

Fax. 212-571-6627