

RAWVISION

**BODIES
OF THE
BLUES**
HENRY
SPELLER

**HEAD OF
CHRIST**
NORBERT
KOX

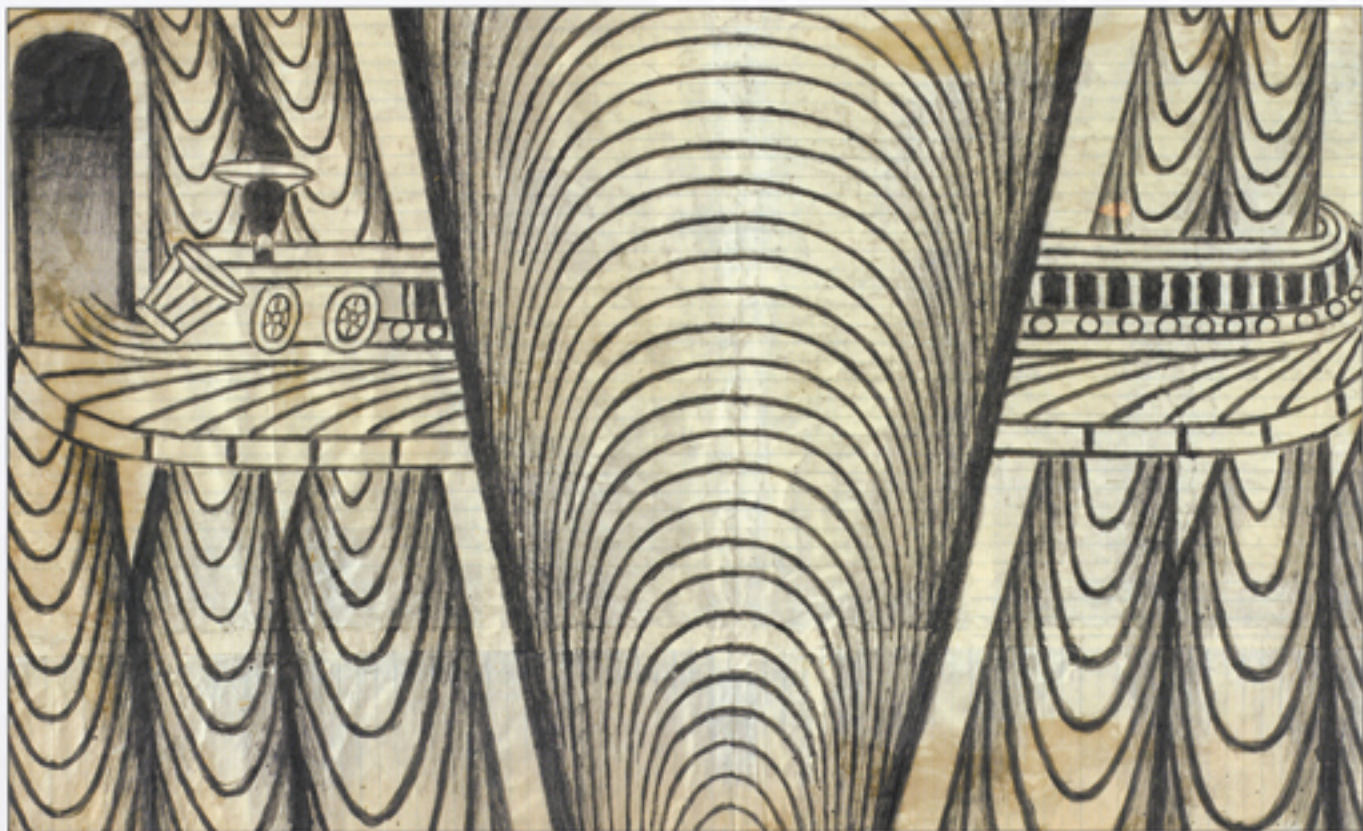
**STREET
ART**
HAITI

**PATRIOT
ARTIST**
REV BF
PERKINS

RV65
WINTER 2008/09
\$14.00
£8.00+€15.00



**TWENTY YEARS
OF RAW VISION**



MARTIN RAMIREZ - THE LAST WORKS

Ricco/Maresca Gallery, New York, October 2–November 29 2008
American Museum of Folk Art, New York, October 7 2008–April 12 2009.

Just over a year ago, news broke that, in northern California, former public-school teacher Peggy Dunievlitz had come forward as the owner of 144 pencil-on-paper and mixed-media drawings that were assumed to have been made by Martín Ramírez (1895–1963). The hitherto unknown works by the legendary, Mexican-born outsider artist, who had immigrated to the U.S. in 1925 and spent the last half of his life in psychiatric hospitals, had been stashed away in her garage for many years.

Dunievlitz's late father-in-law, Dr. Max Dunievlitz, had served as the director of DeWitt State Hospital, a psychiatric-care facility in Auburn, California, where Ramírez had resided for the last 15 years of his life and where he died. During the last three years before Ramírez's death, Dr. Dunievlitz supplied him with art-making materials, and the self-taught artist gave the physician dozens of his unusual drawings. In 1963, at DeWitt, Dr. Dunievlitz organised the first posthumous exhibition of Ramírez's art. The works the doctor had received from the artist were those which Peggy Dunievlitz had inherited and which had been stored for decades in her home.

In October 2007, she revealed that she had had the drawings authenticated and had chosen Ricco/Maresca, a well-known New York gallery in the outsider-art and contemporary-art fields, to oversee their conservation and bring them to market. Since then, admirers of self-taught artists' works have had one burning question in mind: When would the public have an opportunity to see them?

In New York this past autumn, two public showings of the rediscovered Ramírez drawings took place. On October 2, twenty pieces from the Dunievlitz holdings went on display at Ricco/Maresca; several of the works had been sold before the gallery's exhibition opened. At the American Folk Art Museum, which had presented a comprehensive, retrospective survey of Ramírez's art in early 2007 before the news of the Dunievlitz holdings became known, an exhibition titled 'Martín Ramírez: The Last Works' presents 25 more of the 'new' Ramírez works, three of which have been donated to the museum.

Simply put, the rediscovered works by the classic outsider who evoked the rural and Roman Catholic iconography of his homeland through his depictions of churches, Madonnas, horsemen and landscapes are ravishing. Because they were left untouched for so long,

they are in remarkably good physical condition. Moreover, conservators who have treated the fragile works on paper have removed harmful bits of cellophane tape and remnants of rubber cement that Ramírez had used to join together numerous sheets of paper to create large drawing surfaces for individual works.

One drawing, which is almost six meters (roughly 19 feet) in length, is as bold, dynamic and formally inventive as any emblematic work of the pop or minimalist art movements of the 1960s and 1970s. It shows stacked rows of rectangular arches marching with a jaunty rhythm horizontally across a vast pictorial space. In this grand image, evidence of Ramírez's artistry – of his keen compositional and design decisions – can be seen in his effective use of repetition (a pop art hallmark), the simplicity of his forms (a mainstay of minimalist aesthetics) and the purposeful unevenness of his stacked rows of arches.

'There's nothing random in Ramírez's work – ever,' observed the art dealer Frank Maresca of Ricco/Maresca, who offered *Raw Vision* a preview of the newly rediscovered drawings before the openings of the two New York exhibitions. 'These 'new' pieces unquestionably prove that Ramírez was an artist whose work dramatically changed and evolved,' Maresca added.

Because they had been well-preserved, the rediscovered works, which were made with regular pencil, coloured pencils and gouache, appear more vivid than the more faded and familiar works by Ramírez that have been shown publicly and widely reproduced over the past three decades. The colours in the 'new' works are fresh and rich; in these pictures, the artist's imaginative line is more confident than ever, and he offers unexpected variations of past, familiar motifs, including horsemen blowing giant trumpets and Spanish galleons in full, exaggerated sail, set against turquoise skies. In the rediscovered works, Ramírez's pattern-making – in his tunnel/tubular forms, the ripples of waves and all those arches – are as inventive as anything in hand-drawn or computer-generated contemporary art. His arches recall the modernist Paul Klee's playful treatment of this same elegant, architectural motif.

Until the Dunievlitz holdings emerged, only around 300 Ramírez works were known to have existed. The newly rediscovered drawings could forever alter the ways in which this singular artist's entire body of work is appreciated and understood. With the two recent New York presentations and the catalogue the American Folk Art Museum has published to accompany its exhibition, the serious and probing reconsideration of Ramírez's entire artistic career has begun.

Edward Gomez