



## **Untitled: The Art of James Castle**

Nicholas R. Bell, Leslie Umberger

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James Castle (1899-1977) spent his formative years in remote Garden Valley, Idaho and his adult life at locations near Boise, where, for nearly seven decades, he devoted himself daily to intensive art-making. Castle worked with materials that were immediately available, including a wide range of ephemera—advertisements, periodicals, and packaging—that he manipulated with soot, sticks, string and improvised colors to create an elaborate and unmistakable representation of his world. Subjects range from the farms of Garden Valley and interiors of homes, to family members, household objects, and snippets of popular culture. Other works move beyond the documentary to include invented words and symbols, fantastical calendars, and books with cryptic pictorial narratives.

Since Castle's work first came to light in the 1950s, attention has focused primarily on the unusual circumstances of his life: Castle was born profoundly deaf, remained illiterate, and never acquired a conventional mode of communicating with others. He is often assumed to have lived a form of extreme isolation. This new volume seeks to move beyond such biography; the artworks themselves can be seen as 'windows' on his world and unique life.

*Untitled: The Art of James Castle* is on view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, September 26, 2014—February 1, 2015



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