



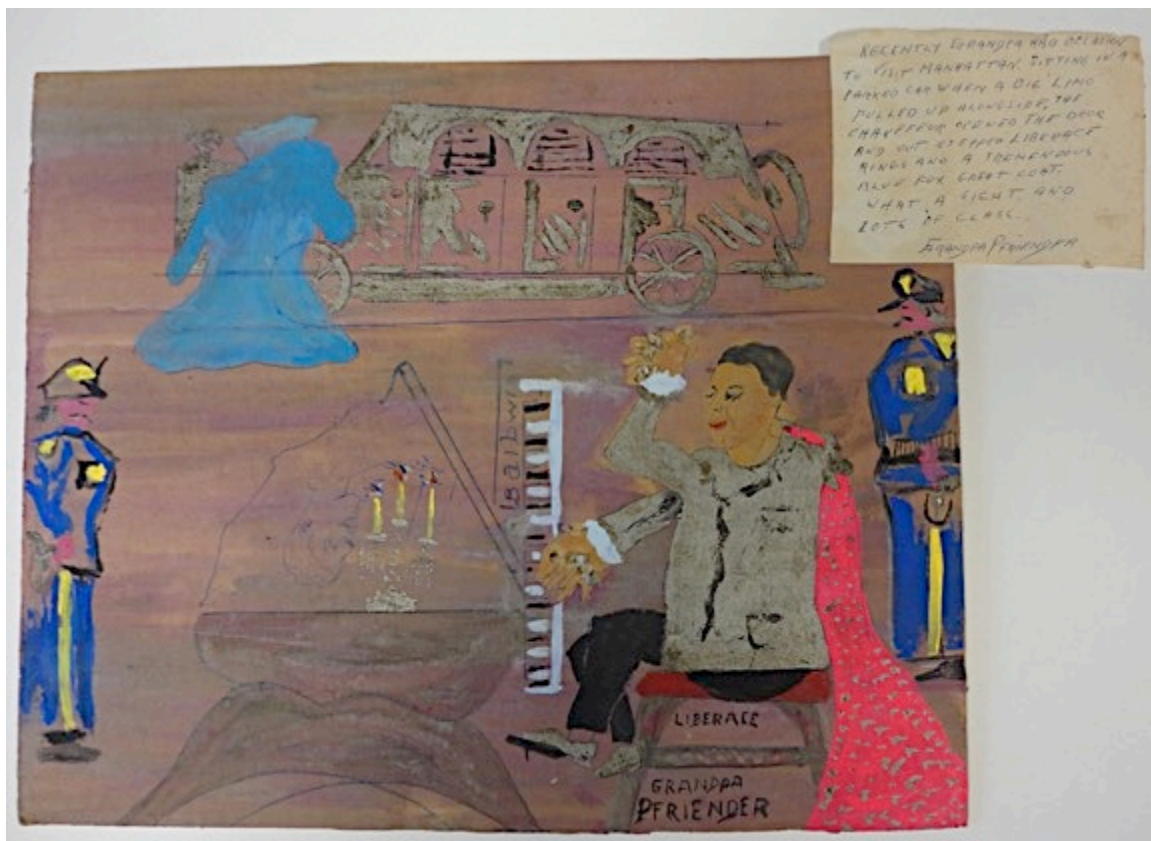
Andrew Pfriender

One wintry Sunday afternoon, in the mid-1980's, some friends and I, piled into a car and headed up Rte. 17 into the Catskill Mountains. In a couple of hours, we exited at Loch Sheldrake, NY, and wended our way to a rural mobile home belonging to Andrew Pfriender, aka Grandpa Pfriender,. He and his wife greeted us warmly as we followed pathways that were created by stacks of artwork and materials. There was just enough space to get from room to room and evidence of the work of the artist was basically everywhere you looked or stepped.

Pfriender's work had recently been seen by a painter friend of mine in a local thrift shop. The opportunity to look him up in person was facilitated by little labels stuck to the back of his work (the free ones you get with solicitations in the mail that have your name and address on them).

As an outsider artist, Pfriender's work does not have the characteristic trademark of obsession with a singular process, material, or image, (that often leads to a singular kind of elegance): instead, his work is raw, and in terms of imagery and materials, -anything and everything available seems to go into it. His paintings and sculptures, sometimes almost embarrassing in their goofy enthusiasm, chronicles much that interested, amused, moved him or crossed his path during his 77 years of life -the world according to Andrew Pfriender.

Pfriender conveyed much of his story through the use of little "text labels", usually written in ballpoint pen (with frequent! exclamation! points!) which were often attached to the front of his paintings.



We learn, for example, that Pfriender once saw Liberace getting out of a limo at Radio City Music Hall. A fantastic hot pink cape, and cerulean blue fox coat, and blue and yellow uniformed police are sharp hits of color against the muted

colors of silver and grey violet. Details include tiny jewel-like pieces of shattered glass to represent rings on every single finger, as well as a delicate line drawing of Liberace's reflection in the piano top, next to the candleabra. There is no mistaking Pfriender's delight in Liberace himself, but his own brush with celebrity and his ability immortalize their encounter through his art seems at least as important. (See the close proximity of their names on the painting.)



We also find from his work that he liked God and the Bible (many quotations become titles of works), as well as several god-like beings the Pope, the Kennedys, the Beatles, and Elvis. Artists, entertainers, and moments in history, both political (the bombing of London and cultural, (the assassination of John Lennon, find their way into his work, though, at times, it seems more that Pfriender, Zelig-like, is finding a way of putting himself into these moments?



The material nature of much of Pfriendr's works could only be described as inclusive. (imagine a salad made with all the ingredients in a salad bar). Pfriendr collected and utilized every sort of scavenged and found material - broken glass, yarn, scraps of wood, metal, and plastic, random discarded hardware. In the same way that his life experiences and encounters gave rise to paintings, he collected these materials and shapes that had no significance on their own but to him they suggested meaning and form that fed his development of an image. In the work below, a broken ornate chair backing becomes both the stylized stormy waves of the sea and the boat that is tossed about by them.



Another painting created on found pieces of wood, "Are You Guys for Real?", contains mythological creatures that would be at home in a painting by Gustave Moreau, but with the vivid fruity coloration one finds in some Bonnard paintings.





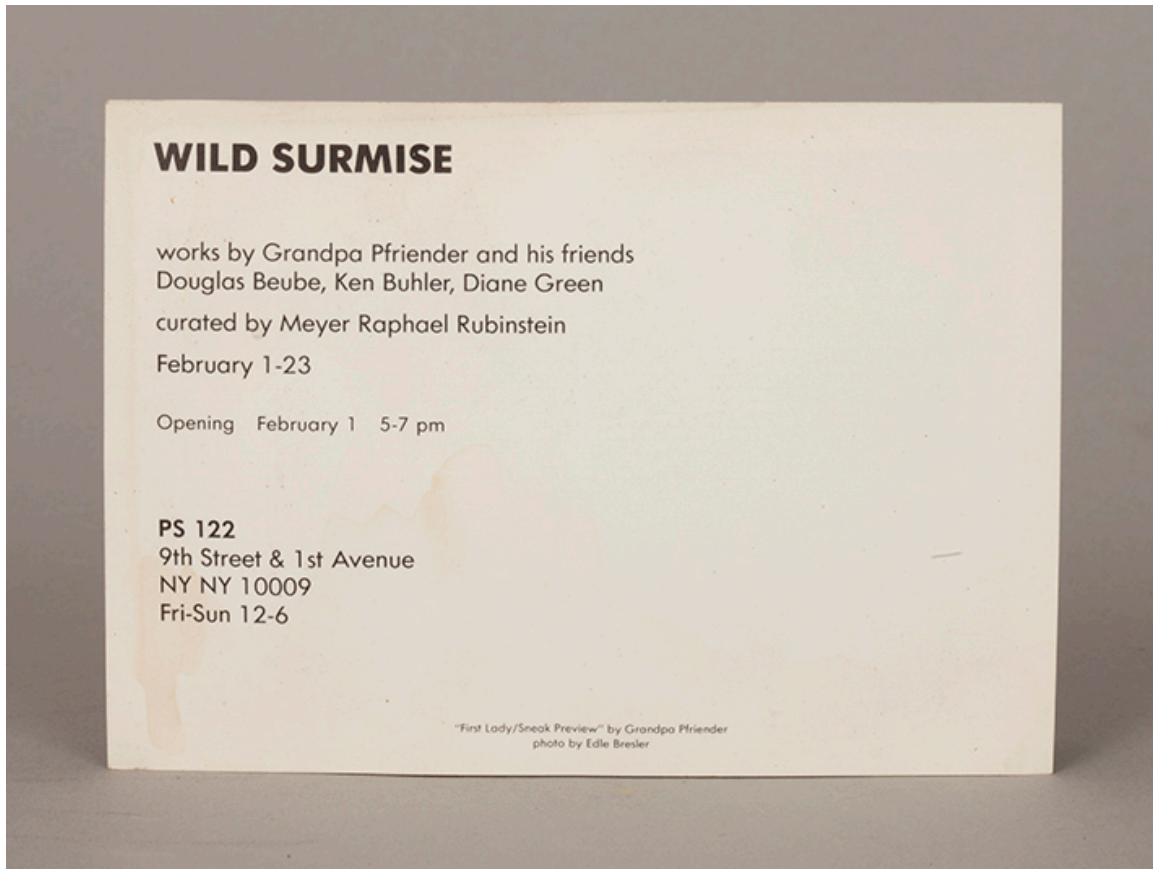
"ARE YOU
GUYS FOR REAL?
GRANDPA
PFIENDER

Pfriender very rarely painted on a blank or even smooth surface. He seemed attracted to things that had had a previous life or a character that helped generate his imagery and ideas. He particularly liked rough wood, often carving into it to suit his needs, or a paper surface with images already on it. At least once he worked into an existing thrift shop painting, and, determining it was quite good enough already, he decided only to sign his name to it.



The encounter with Pfriender and his work culminated in a show called “Wild Surmise” at PS 122 in New York City in Feb. of 1986. It featured several of Pfriender’s pieces and also work by a few of his artist admirers, myself included.

After the opening, we went out to a big Chinese restaurant in Chinatown, where Pfriender and his family, though somewhat flummoxed by the odd looking food we were served, seemed delighted. He must have felt like the world was finally beginning to understand him. Perhaps he imagined that the culturally and historically significant world he mingled with in his artwork had finally entered his life in some way. (He had christened himself “Grandpa” Pfriender with a nod to the painter Grandma Moses).



In the end, I think he expected more from this moment of “fame” in the art world, and perhaps was a bit disappointed that his life was not more transformed by it. Some of us were trying to find him gallery representation with one of the outsider art dealers, but sadly, he lived less than a year after his New York debut.

One of his paintings is of Jimmy Durante who stands in the spotlights and delivers his trademark sign off phrase (written in blue ballpoint of course). As I write this now, so many years later, it makes me hope that after all those years of working on his own in his trailer, Pfriendr might have enjoyed being the one in the spotlight, even if briefly.



Good night, Pfriender, wherever you are.