

SECOND READING SELECTION

Jimmie Lee Sudduth Self-Taught Artist



Jimmie's paintings depict everyday images of life in rural Alabama, scenes of cities that he has visited, his dog Toto, many self-portraits and grand old houses. Common images for an artist to paint you might say. Jimmie Lee Sudduth's paintings, however, are far from common. Jimmie Lee Sudduth is an artist who uses his creativity and imagination to paint pictures with the many things he finds in nature. Unlike most artists, Sudduth rarely uses canvases, paints, or brushes. Instead he has found his own unique form of art. His favorite painting surface is plywood. Instead of using paint, he uses clay, sand, soot, and such things as leaves, pine needles, and berries.

Self-Taught or Outsider

He is untrained as an artist. Untrained artists are often referred to as "self-taught" or "outsider artists" referring to them as being "outside" the mainstream traditions of art. Their art work is often referred to as "contemporary folk art" to distinguish it from "folk art." Self-taught artists are self-trained and they often create one-of-a-kind works that are highly innovative. Folk art is passed down from generation to generation and is a "taught" art form. Carol Crown, Associate Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Memphis has this to say about self-taught artists, "Their work is clearly grounded in the context of their daily lives." Jimmie Lee Sudduth would certainly agree as he uses mud for most of his paintings. He claims to be able to identify 36 different shades of mud.

There are other self-taught artists like Jimmie but few have gained as much recognition. In 1976 Sudduth's art work took him to Washington, D.C., where he joined in a huge folk art festival during our nation's two-hundredth birthday celebration. While he was there, he was delighted to meet the President of the United States. He also delighted the nearly 70,000 in attendance by wailing the Blues on his harmonica. His unique approach to both life and art has been featured at the Smithsonian Institution and on a 1980 segment of NBC's Today Show. He is included in Alabama Art 200, an international touring project that highlights work of 13 of the state's artists.

Using Nature

Born March 10, 1910, Jimmie Lee Sudduth has been painting for as long as he can remember. "When I was three years old I went out to the woods with my mother. She was a medicine woman and would go out to collect herbs and stuff. One day I got some mud on my hands and used it to paint a picture on a tree stump. When I went back a few days later it was gone. Then a man let me mix up some molasses with the mud, and that was it! I can use honey, syrup, even this diet Pepsi. Makes it all sticky so the mud won't come off. Guaranteed!" In fact, collectors have always been apprehensive about the durability of a painting made of mud, but from all reports, works that are 30 years old have held up well.

Many folk artists choose to show rural life through their art, but some also choose subjects from the city. Sudduth paints both kinds of scenes, and portraits, too. But he especially enjoys painting pictures of log cabins, flowers, and animals. "I can paint anything I can dream," he says. "Painting takes me anywhere my imagination goes."

When he begins a picture, he surrounds himself with containers holding sands, soils, and clays. He likes to use white, gray, and red clays. He prepares these by adding sugar and a little water to the sand, and the syrup to the dirt and clay to help make them stick to the board.

Through the years, Sudduth has collected many different colors of sand, dirt, and clay, most of them from the Alabama countryside. But people have also brought him unusual sands and soils from all over the United States. When he finishes a painting, he can point to the different colors in it, as though he were reading a map, explaining where he got each color.

Sudduth paints by dipping his fingers into the containers and then skillfully applying nature's "paints" to the board. He uses one finger to paint thin lines, and two or three fingers to paint wide lines and large areas.

He makes the color green for trees, grasses, and flower stems by crumpling leaves and rubbing them back and forth in designs across the plywood. In the winter, when it is hard to find leaves, he uses fallen pine needles. To add purples, pinks, and blues to his work, he presses berries against the board. Soot from his fireplace is sometimes used when he needs black. Clouds are made by dabbing white sand or white clay into his skies. Some of the lines are drawn with colored rocks.

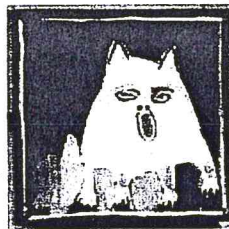
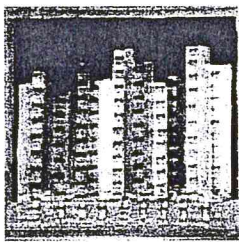
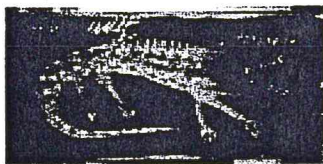
He says the most important parts of painting with nature are to explore the world with our imaginations and to have the courage to have fun with creativity. His paintings make us aware of many things in nature that we often take for granted. "I taught myself to paint with mud," he says. "Dirt is free, and it never wears out." Neither, it seems does Jimmie Lee Sudduth's imagination in creating his unique art.

New York Famous

Sudduth's bright and colorful paintings are shown in folk art galleries from Washington, D.C., to Berkeley, California. He is one of America's most renowned and colorful Self-Taught Artists and he often says, "I've been all the way to New York City and my pictures are all over this world."

Sudduth lives in a small house near the railroad track with his dog, Toto. He greets a steady stream of visitors who find their way there from throughout the world to watch him paint and to hear him wail the Blues on his harmonica. One of Sudduth's art friends tells everyone, "I've always told people, if you can only go see one artist, Jimmie is the man to see. Jimmie is not only a superb artist, he's also a gregarious and friendly host. He's slowed down quite a bit (I guess that'll happen when you're in your mid-90's), and his output of paintings has slowed to a trickle, but he's still worth a visit. This is one of the all time greats, and you really should give yourself a chance to meet him. A visit to his house means a great day of stories and songs."

Self-taught artist, definitely, an "outsider," never. An artist who paints everyday images of life in rural Alabama, scenes of cities that he has visited, his dog Toto, many self-portraits, and grand old houses is definitely an "insider."



SECOND READING SELECTION QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS:

Mark only the **BEST** answer for each multiple-choice question. You may look back at “Jimmie Lee Sudduth Self-Taught Artist” any time.

R.WS.05.04, R.WS.05.07

14. The text states “Common images for an artist to paint you might say.” In this sentence **common** means

- A. a place to eat
- B. an easy and simple life
- C. of no special quality
- D. less than noble

R.CM.05.01, R.CM.05.03

15. Another title for this article would be

- A. “Paint and Canvas”
- B. “The Life of Jimmie Lee Sudduth”
- C. “The Importance of Folk Art”
- D. “Creative Art with Mud”

R.CM.05.01, R.CM.05.03

16. The author’s purpose in writing this article is to

- A. describe the creative art of a famous southern artist.
- B. teach readers how to make their own paints out of mud.
- C. encourage artists to attend folk art festivals across the country.
- D. inform readers about the creation and history of folk art.

R.CM.05.01, R.CM.05.03, R.CM.05.04

17. The article states “**When he finishes a painting, he can point to the different colors in it, as though he were reading a map, explaining where he got each color.**” This means

- A. his paintings have lines like those on a map.
- B. he can identify where the soils in his paintings come from.
- C. he has toured the country selling his unique art.
- D. he paints rural and city scenes from around the country.

R.CM.05.02

18. As a young artist Jimmie Lee Sudduth started out by

- A. taking art lessons from a professional.
- B. learning this unique folk art from his elders.
- C. reproducing well-known rural life pictures.
- D. making mud paintings on trees.

R.WS.05.01, R.CM.05.04

19. The article states that Jimmie Lee Sudduth uses *nature's paints*, this means Sudduth

- A. uses the florescent colors of flowers.
- B. uses purchased paints based on natural colors.
- C. uses soil, sand, leaves and berries.
- D. uses Mother Nature Paints®.

R.CM.05.02

20. People send Jimmie Lee Sudduth unusual sands and soils from around the country because they know

- A. he uses sands and soil in his paintings.
- B. there is very little sand where he lives.
- C. he teaches them how to paint with sand and soil.
- D. there is only one color of sand where he lives.

R.CM.05.01, R.CM.05.03

21. The quote, "**Painting takes me anywhere my imagination goes,**" means

- A. imagination is needed for any artist who is painting.
- B. painting has allowed the artist to tour the country.
- C. all painting is dependant upon nature's inspiration.
- D. imagination in painting is not limited by supplies or training.

CROSS-TEXT QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS:

The following questions are based upon the two selections that you just read. For each question, choose the **BEST** answer. You may look back at the texts at any time.

R.CM.05.01, R.CM.05.03, R.NT.05.01

22. What is a common theme for both selections?

- A. Doing what is expected will make you happy.
- B. Dreams come true with effort and hard work.
- C. Anything is possible when you believe in yourself.
- D. Self worth comes from the opinions of others.

R.CM.05.01, R.CM.05.03, R.NT.05.01

23. From these selections, the courage to be me could be defined as

- A. following the well-worn path of others, it is easier.
- B. listening to the advice of your elders.
- C. the self-determination to follow your own path.
- D. living up to the expectations of others will make you happy.

R.NT.05.03

24. In both selections the characters can be described as

- A. flexible and accommodating.
- B. impulsive and unreasonable.
- C. daring and creative.
- D. self-confident and imaginative.

R.CM.05.01, R.CM.05.03, R.NT.05.03

25. What is the challenge faced by Ellen the Eagle and Jimmie Lee Sudduth?

- A. To overcome adversity.
- B. To face their fears.
- C. To be who they want to be.
- D. To please everyone.

R.CM.05.01, R.CM.05.03, R.NT.05.01

26. Ellen and Jimmie would MOST LIKELY want to be remembered as

- A. role models for others.
- B. supporters of doing the right thing.
- C. sacrificing their happiness for others.
- D. following their personal dreams.

