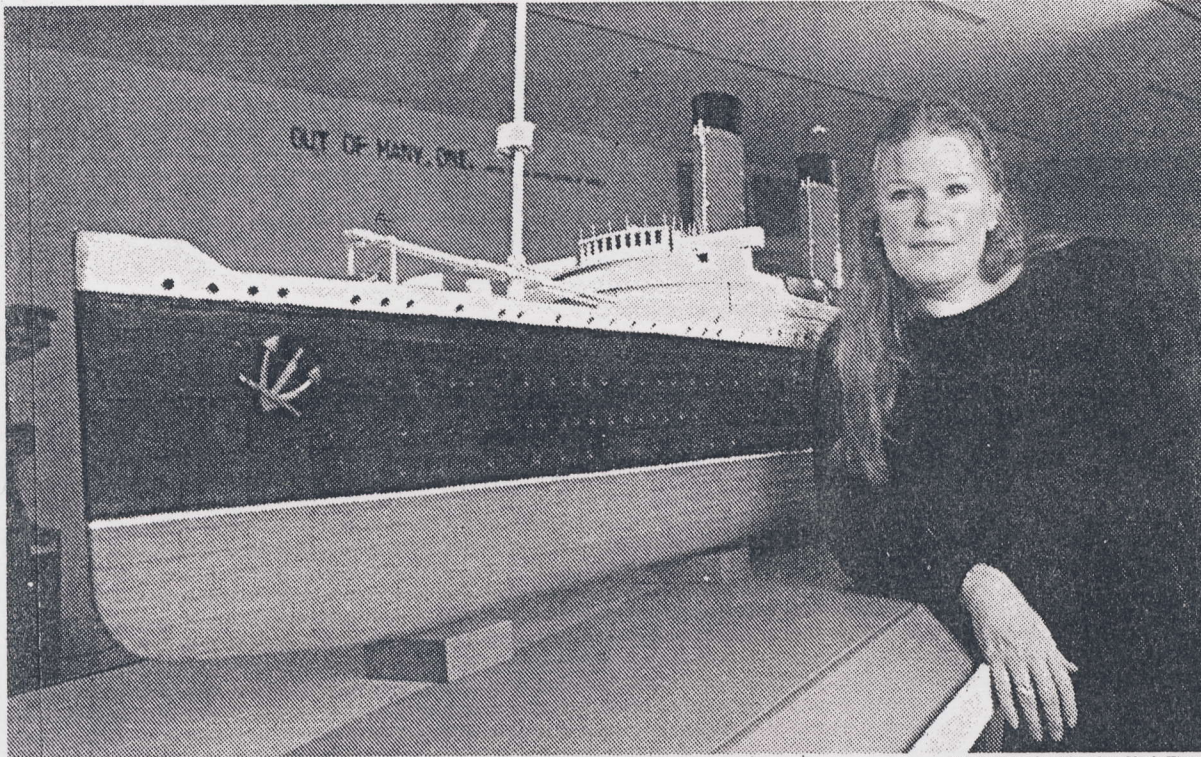


The Arts

The New York Times



Marty Katz for The New York Times

Rebecca Hoffberger, the founder of the American Visionary Art Museum, with a model of the Lusitania.

A Museum for Self-Taught Artists

By MICHAEL JANOFSKY

BALTIMORE, Nov. 22 — The first clue that something has changed along the southern edge of the Inner Harbor in Baltimore is the huge, colorful contraption of spinning ice-cream scoops, milkshake canisters, air-filter cups and who knows what else, twirling in the wind just east of Federal Hill.

But with its whimsical parts dancing every which way and back again, the "Whirligig" created by Vollis Simpson, a 76-year-old mechanic from North Carolina, is more than a fresh landmark. It is also an invitation to the equally joyous works on exhibit just beyond, in the American Visionary Art Museum, a museum that opens to the public on Friday.

Unlike other forms of expression, visionary art — often called outsider art — knows no boundary, genre or style, only the defining rule of art by artists who are entirely self-taught. It differs from folk art in that folk artists generally follow well-known and long-practiced norms, with less of the spontaneity or whimsy that

The opening exhibition, "The Tree of Life," features nearly 400 works, most expressed through materials of trees, including wood, roots, leaves, twigs, branches and nuts and their byproducts. A model of the luxury liner Lusitania, by Wayne Kusy, a Chicago artist, is made of 192,000 toothpicks.

"This is art that is very spontaneous," said Roger Manley, a visionary-art expert and author from North Carolina chosen to be curator of the opening show. "Often, the people who make it are even mysteries to their own families. In art, these people are out there on the edge of the bell curve."

Indeed, the opening show features many artists once known to their

with a carved wooden door that shows cotton picking and Ku Klux Klan lynchings. It is called "The Way We Was." Another is a carved scene of the funeral of someone he obviously held in low regard. Its title is "Glad You Dead, You Rascal, You."

Dr. Dennis's work, shown in the museum's adjacent building, a former whisky warehouse now called the Tall Sculpture Barn, includes "The Ancestors," a collection, or perhaps a family, of 10 outsize tree trunks, charred and sculptured into vaguely human form. It's only your imagination that they whisper secrets to one another and move about when no one is looking.

The founder of the museum, Rebecca Hoffberger, 43, is a Baltimorean who has spent the past decade planning and raising money to build it. The land, the main building (a former paint company) and the sculpture barn were donated by the city. Private donations of \$7 million covered design costs, construction and interior renovations that are still

In Baltimore, the spontaneous and the spiritual.

THEATER REVIEW

Topsy Another

By BEN BRANTI

HARTFORD, Nov. 2 — great characters of literature by nature a rebellious lot, they tend to shake off the didactic bridles and assuage their own, like Anna Karenina or Milton's Satanic Satan.

Or, less obviously, like the wily, unloved slave-ventured by Harriet Beecher Stowe 143 years ago. Reincarnated with ferocious vitality by the Michele Morgan, she is asserting her autonomy that at the Hartford Stage Company. Robert Alexander's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a hilarious dissection of the classic.

"I'm Topsy Turvy, I'm I'm black," Ms. Morgan defiantly to a rap beat with homeboy-style dancers behind her. Stowe would not be disoriented by the performance but she would also certainly nuzzle the sentiments behind

In fact, this belligerent, bursting with an energy and intelligence that can never be a productive outlet — is far from Stowe's original than the mischievous and more imp who showed up in the dramas, movies and shows adapted from "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Topsy, Stowe wrote, was of ages of oppression, subjugation, ignorance, toil and vice. A shrewd, vengeful charmer, child of unknown parentage, indeed the white man's nemesis, inevitable product of a corrupt system. Small wonder that she so convincingly converting to forgiving Christianity, Stowe her offstage for most of the book.