

Emery Blagdon

by David Batchelor



Emery Blagdon's painting are unusual. Much outsider art employs devices and techniques we associate with art of the 20th century, although quite independently of it. All-overness, repetition, the combination or integration of text and image, writing and drawing and so forth, are found in works that are often heavily worked and full of figurative incident and detail. But I have seen very little such work that is either abstract or particularly colourful.

Blagdon's small paintings are a brilliant exception to this rule. They were made, it is said, as integral parts of Blagdon's *Healing Machine*, the numerous and intricate three-dimensional structures he made in a barn in Nebraska for over thirty years. But the paintings are quite unlike the rest of the work, and one indication of how good they are is that they can be viewed independently of the context of Blagdon's ideas. And they look great. Small and quite spare, they are mandala-like, often but not always symmetrical, sometimes made in just two colours and a few lines. Improvised and vibrant, they may refer to energy fields and other invisible forces but, to me, they seem strangely calm, quite self-contained and very, very beautiful.

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