

Calvin and Ruby Black

By Marnie Weber



The Mojave Desert is a dismal, barren, godforsaken place. It is not one of California's romantic deserts, or a vacation spot, it is just somewhere you pass through to get to somewhere else. To this day only outcasts, loners, and brave eccentrics call it home. It is a place where one can't help but confront one's own soul. This is where **Calvin Black** chose to live with his wife **Ruby** and create his glorious folk art masterpiece, *Possum Trot*. It was a small ramshackle town inhabited by some 80 hand-carved and lovingly adorned female dolls, all of which had a job to do. They cranked cranks, pumped

pumps, rode bikes, and greeted visitors, while some performed in the *Birdcage Theater* on the property.

Calvin lovingly brought all these dolls to life out of castoff redwood, left-over paint and refashioned old clothes. Real women in **Calvin's** life inspired the dolls. He gave them personalities, carved soft almond eyes, distinct noses, half-smiles - and he and **Ruby** made their homemade garments. In contrast to all this, in the backs of a number of the doll heads, **Calvin** rigged speakers, which boomed his shrill manwoman voice in falsetto. Through his characters he spoke and sang of the way he saw things and the way things were in *Possum Trot*. To see this magical place in its heyday must have been like coming across a strange mystical hallucination, a hopeful oasis in the dry, deserted Mojave Desert.

Today all we have left are **Calvin's** dolls, each with its own inner beauty and outward calm. If I close my eyes I can imagine them exclaiming in **Calvin's** characteristically high-pitched lady voice: *Look at me! I am beautiful! I'm important! Love me!*

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