

William Dawson

by Bob Roth



My first purchase of self-taught art cost \$432. The date was September 13, 1986, and the seller was the legendary art dealer Phyllis Kind in Chicago. Thus began my 25-year addiction. It was intense and weird, and for some reason I had to have it, though at the time I feared I must have lost my mind to be spending over \$400 on something I didn't need.

Mr Dawson was very eager to tell you how superior he was to most African Americans. For him, the most important thing about being in the landmark Corcoran show (*Black Folk Art*

in America) was that he was the one artist who got to squire Nancy Reagan around the opening. Apparently his fellow black artists in the show were too *country*.

Mr Dawson craved visitors, and loved making sales in person. Unfortunately by the time I met him, he was about 85 years old, basically housebound, and had lost much of his earlier ability for fine carving and extraordinarily inventive tableaux. But many, many of his earlier works had it all: power, weirdness, invention, and even an art *brut* sensibility. In the best of these **Mr Dawson** proved to be much more than a folk carver.

Robert Roth
b 1947 (USA)
editor, publisher,
co-founder *Intuit* (Chicago)