

Visions of Paradise

—The Artists—

Spread throughout America, in cities and in suburbs, in remote desert and mountain country, there is an extraordinary wealth of folk art.

The work of folk, or "naive," artists reflects a pioneer spirit, a hope and optimism that represent the best of the American experience. And the artists themselves are an inspiration.

Visions of Paradise is a series of five 30-minute films, each portraying the life and work of an important living American folk artist.

The artists are each different in ethnic background, geographical location and artistic style. Yet they have much in common. They are all self-taught. They all began pursuing their art late in life. After years of working without recognition, known only to friends and neighbors, they have all achieved national recognition, even prominence. They are mature artists, whose works are rich in content and revealing of their lives, opinions, and personal wisdom. With all pioneers, they share a vision of a better world.

"A man can see many things through his eyes. He can see birth, maturity, he can see the cemetery. After a man dies, he can't see anymore, but while he is alive, his mind can carry him with no limit. He can see heaven and he can see hell, he can see the wonder of the hereafter where he will receive everything he wants—food, drink, peace.

Man makes this image in his mind because without it he couldn't live, he wouldn't survive."

Harry Lieberman

Harry Lieberman, born in 1877 in Poland, began painting at the age of 80 and has created over 700 works. His detailed and ornamental paintings take their themes from the Talmud, the Old Testament and Hebrew and Yiddish literature, and each is accompanied by a legend which he has written.

Grandma Prisbrey, born in 1895 in North Dakota, moved to California's Simi Valley in 1950 and there began the construction of a complex village from nearly a million bottles and other discards collected over 20 years. The interiors are a fairy tale world of improbable materials, assembled with a rare sensitivity and wit.

Chief Rolling Mountain Thunder is a naive artist of great vision who sculpts "spirits of the living" at his isolated ranch in Nevada. His purpose is to "bring the messages of the ancients to all people," and he says of his work, "I felt that if I could build anything out here, even a good outhouse, and maintain it for a few years, it might give people a little hope wherever they were."

Minnie Evans lives in North Carolina, where she was born in 1892. A descendent of slaves, she vividly recounts the stories of past and present generations of her family. Her dreams and rich imagination are the source of inspiration for her magical paintings. She says, "I never plan a drawing. They just happen."

Felipe Archuleta lives near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Now 70, he carves life-size animals from wood, capturing their wild and raw power. Recognized by many art experts as one of America's most important living naive artists, he complains of the great demand this recognition has created for his work. "Maybe I quit this tomorrow. If I want to go to the cemetery I just keep making these things. Too many people come out and want this and that . . . and one of these days when I die, they're going to go to my hole in the ground and say, 'Oh no, I didn't get what I asked for.'"

The Films are shot on location where the artists live and work—in California, New York, North Carolina, Nevada, and New Mexico. They show the artists at work and include extensive documentation of the work itself, while capturing the relation between the artist's life, art and dreams.

The films are designed for a broad audience, and are excellent for use by groups and classes with a special interest in

- ★ Folk art
- ★ Americana
- ★ Regional heritage
- ★ Aging
- ★ Creativity
- ★ Minorities and Women

Visions of Paradise will be broadcast by PBS, and is funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Filmmakers previously collaborated on "Possum Trot: The Life and Work of Calvin Black," a pioneering folk art film which won wide praise in its 1976 PBS release.

Allie Light is a poet, writer, filmmaker and teacher, currently a lecturer at San Francisco State University. She published a book of her poems, *The Glittering Cave*, and produced the award-winning film "Self Health."

Irving Saraf is a filmmaker with over a hundred film credits in documentary and fiction film as producer, director, cinematographer and editor. He is a former founder and head of the KQED-TV film unit and former Manager of Fantasy Films. He is a lecturer in film at San Francisco State University.