

## James Castle

January 13–February 12, 2022  
537 West 20th Street, New York



James Castle, *Untitled (studio/studio)*, n.d. Courtesy James Castle Collection and Archive LP

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of works by James Castle (1899–1977). Organized in collaboration with the James Castle Collection and Archive LP, the exhibition offers an extensive look at Castle's captivating visual world, which documents his home and surroundings in and around Boise and central Idaho through vivid drawings and assemblages.

An overview of the artist's expansive practice, this exhibition explores how Castle, who was born deaf, found his primary means of expression through drawing and other forms of art making. Using sharpened sticks and soot from his family's wood stove, which he mixed with his own saliva, Castle created elaborate and detailed drawings. These intricate works embody a sense of lived-in familiarity and display the artist's preternatural understanding of perspective and spatial relations and his deep sensitivity to his environment. As John Beardsley notes, "What Castle found in this ... place became the subject of acute visual attention and near photographic memory: minute details of the spaces he inhabited provided him with an inventory of images that he would repeat, transform, and manipulate in his art for the whole of his life. He remembered—and drew—the contours of every room, every bed and bureau, the patterns of wallpaper, the exteriors of houses and barns and other outbuildings, adjacent roads, fences, and fields.... Castle was able to recall the exact ridgelines of a mountain visible from his childhood home and replicate it in drawing after drawing."<sup>1</sup>

Castle incorporated color into many of his drawings—a number of which will be on view—using watercolor, crayon, laundry bluing, and myriad other materials to create washes of color that give the works a dreamlike, surreal quality. Contrasting with many of the soot drawings, the artist's colorful works frequently emphasize flatness over spatial depth and detail, while highlighting his palette choices and the texture of his surfaces.

<sup>1</sup> John Beardsley, "Introduction," in *James Castle: Memory Palace* (Boise: James Castle Collection and Archive LP; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), p. 22.

Several of Castle's mixed-media constructions and other sculptural works will also be featured in the exhibition. Using twine at times to sew together disparate scraps of found and cut cardboard and paper, Castle fashioned figural forms and objects that include chairs, baby carriages, birds, and architectural elements. Castle stored his drawings, handmade books, and ephemera in small boxes and bundles that he carefully assembled and wrapped in paper or fabric and bound with twine. These small containers and art capsules were stored throughout his family's property—in the walls, underneath floorboards, and along the rafters—reflecting both their importance to him and his desire to protect the artwork stored inside them.

Reflecting on the power of Castle's art, art historian Alexander Nemerov notes, "The spirit of these things left to us is generous. What they reveal is that the world we all lived in ... always did glow with the radiance of some other world, a vision this artist could see but we couldn't.... What is revealed at last is that the world always was a revelation, had we but known it."<sup>2</sup>

James Castle (1899–1977) was born on a small farm in rural Garden Valley, Idaho, the state in which he would live for the entirety of his life. He began creating drawings and art around the age of seven. Though he shared his art with his family, friends, and visitors to his home, Castle's work was not exhibited publicly until he was in his early fifties.

The artist's first solo exhibition took place in 1951, at the Museum Art School in Portland, Oregon (now the Pacific Northwest College of Art). During his lifetime, he had subsequent exhibitions at the Boise Gallery of Art in Idaho (now the Boise Art Museum) in 1963 and 1976, and at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland in 1965. An early retrospective of the artist's work, titled *A Voice of Silence: A Retrospective of Works by James Castle*, originated at the Boise Gallery of Art, Idaho, in 1982 and traveled to the Cheney Cowles Memorial Museum, Spokane, Washington (now the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture) (1983); Montana State University Fine Arts Gallery, Bozeman (1984); Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, Great Falls, Montana (1984); and the Matthews Center, Arizona State University, Tempe (1984–1985).

More recently, Castle has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent institutions worldwide, including The Drawing Center, New York (2000); Boise Art Museum, Idaho (2009); The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2009–2010); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2011); Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC (2014–2015); Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota (2016); and

the New York Studio School (2018). In 2008, *James Castle: A Retrospective*, a major survey of Castle's work, opened at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, before traveling to the Art Institute of Chicago (2009–2010) and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley (2010).

Work by the artist has also been included in major group shows, such as *Inner Worlds Outside*, Fundación "la Caixa," Madrid, which traveled to the Whitechapel Gallery, London, and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (all 2006); *The Encyclopedic Palace*, 55th Venice Biennale (2013); *America Is Hard to See*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015); and *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*,

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Nemerov, "Introduction: The New and the Never-Known," in *Untitled: The Art of James Castle*. Exh. cat. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2014), p. 15.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2018), which, in the same year, traveled to the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, and then to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2018–2019).

Castle's work can be found in public and museum collections, including the American Folk Art Museum, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley; Boise Art Museum, Idaho; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; The Mennello Museum of American Art, Orlando, Florida; Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin; Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; New York Public Library; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Museum, Philadelphia; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Portland Art Museum, Oregon; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Tacoma Art Museum, Washington; Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

#### About the James Castle Collection and Archive LP

Approached by the Castle family in Boise, Jacqueline Crist began managing the Castle family's impressive holdings in 1995 and brought this American master to the attention of major museums and art collectors. Crist has described James Castle's work as having been "produced during a life lived with freedom to explore, imagine, and create full-time." William Louis-Dreyfus first acquired work by Castle in 2001 from the artist's debut New York gallery exhibition, *James Castle: The Common Place*, organized by Knoedler & Company, and he would go on to collect the artist's work passionately and in depth over the next ten years. Louis-Dreyfus later described Castle as having "an artistic urge that forced itself through ... difficult life conditions." Louis-Dreyfus's interest in and commitment to the artist continued to grow, and in 2012, he became the majority partner in the James Castle Collection and Archive LP (JCCA), a partnership with Jacqueline Crist and Frank Del Deo that acquired the Castle family's collection, which had passed after the artist's death to his sister Agnes (Peggy) Castle Wade and was then known as the A. C. Wade James Castle Collection. As stewards of Castle's oeuvre, JCCA has worked to catalogue and archive the collection as well as to bring understanding to the artist's themes and conceptual strategies. Most recently, JCCA in association with Yale University Press published *James Castle: Memory Palace*, an expansive monograph authored by John Beardsley exploring the life's work of this extraordinary artist.

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