

James Surls



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A prolific artist with a prodigious gift for stimulating the creativity of others, James Surls is one of the most important sculptors working in America today. His art blends natural forms created of wood, steel, and bronze with sophisticated, sometimes edgy imagery and content to explore fundamental dualities and paradoxes - male and female, joyous optimism and anxious foreboding, conscious rationality and unconscious intuition. Fusing personalized folk idioms with the aesthetics of high modernism, Surls'

sculptures are clearly self-expressive, yet freighted with universal meaning. This beautifully illustrated book, which accompanies an exhibition of the same name at the Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston, captures an extraordinarily creative period in Surls' career - the two decades he lived and worked in Splendor, Texas. During this time, Surls established a home and artists' colony in the East Texas pineywoods, where he produced an astonishing body of work while encouraging the creativity of other visual and performing artists. Magnificent colour and black-and-white images illustrate the key sculptures and works on paper that Surls created in Splendor. Accompanying the images are essays and interviews that offer fascinating insights into Surls' artistic breakthrough in Splendor. Terrie Sultan introduces Surls' work and provides a concise biography of the artist. Eleanor Heartney places Surls' Splendor works within the larger contexts of American and international art. Artists and gallery owners John Alexander, Joseph Havel, The Art Guys, Hiram Butler, and Sharon and Gus Kopriva, as well as curator Jim Harithas and architect Peter Zweig, share lively memories of Splendor as an artist colony and of Surls' pivotal role as artistic mentor and arts impresario for the whole Houston-area arts community. James Surls and his wife Charmaine Locke add a personal signature to the book by describing how their love and their work blossomed in an atmosphere of total freedom to experiment and create. This publication of James Surls' Splendor works clearly establishes that no other artist of Surls' generation has had a greater impact upon the development of Texas as a center of vibrant creativity. At the same time, it confirms Surls' standing within the contemporary international art world as a revolutionary who has expanded the boundaries of traditional sculpture while maintaining a high degree of aesthetic and intellectual quality.

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目录:

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