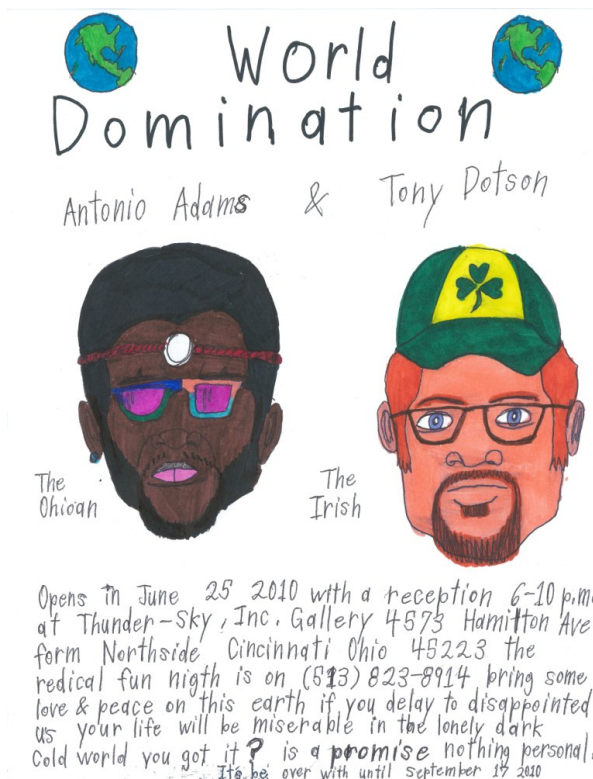


# Cincinnati CityBeat



## World Domination/Kitty Cat Extravaganza

*Northside's Thunder-Sky Inc.  
encourages new thinking about  
outsider art*

**MATT MORRIS // JUL 13, 2010**

Nearly a decade after Keith Banner and Bill Ross founded Visionaries & Voices (the well-loved local organization that supports and promotes self-taught artists and individuals with disabilities), a new chapter in the two men's careers has opened up.

Their Thunder-Sky Inc., a gallery and office located at 4573 Hamilton Ave. in Northside, was established in 2009 in order to preserve the work of the late local "outsider" artist Raymond Thunder-Sky, whom Ross met when he was hired as a social worker for people with mental disabilities. But another mission of the organization is to exhibit and promote the art of other "unconventional artists."

As Thunder-Sky has evolved, Banner and Ross have been using it as a platform for their thoughtful, thought-provoking ideas about the way the art world thinks about programs like V&V. The Thunder-Sky blog ([www.thunderskyinc.org](http://www.thunderskyinc.org)) is full of radical, rich rationales that challenge the way we consider the work of such artists to be apart from that of trained artists.

Here is a key example: “‘Outsider art’ can be anything you want to call it, of course, but we feel the term is so loaded with all kinds of cultural assumptions that we want what we curate and market to be seen as ‘post-outsider.’ ”

“What we are getting at with all this,” the post continues, “is the fact that labeling an artist ‘outsider’ may increase the chances of some marketing potential, but it also ghettoizes the art and artist, connects it too explicitly to an identity politics that probably in the end does not matter.”

I couldn’t agree more. When I visit exhibitions by artists with some form of disability, I don’t approach their work by making special allowances for their condition, any more than I would other artists working in the field. Frankly, they aren’t in need of sympathy or allowances to consider their art. Often, these exhibitions stand on their own refreshing ideas and quirky, personal solutions to image- and object-making.

These sentiments fuel the exhibitions that Thunder-Sky Inc. presents. When not showing Raymond Thunder-Sky’s oeuvre, the gallery aims to promote expressive work in the same spirit as Thunder-Sky, regardless of the artist’s background: self-taught, art-school graduates, with or without diagnosed disabilities.

Or as Thunder-Sky’s Banner explained in an e-mail: “Biography and circumstance do not necessarily create aesthetic impulses, and vice versa. What we are trying to do is redefine the way art made by different kinds of people can be seen/appreciated/curated.”

Currently on display through Sept. 17 is *World Domination: New Works by Antonio Adams and Tony Dotson*. Both Cincinnati artists have instantly recognizable styles. Though neither have any formal art training, both have exhibited in a number of prestigious venues — Adams in Visionaries & Voices exhibitions all over town and at a major exhibition in 2009 at the Country Club gallery, Dotson at such venues as ArtWorks Gallery and the now-defunct AVS Gallery.

Adams’ painting-drawing panels are populated with fantastical reinterpretations of cultural icons that get cast into good-versus-evil scenarios through which the artist can strive to make the world a better place. He represents his painting’s subjects with highly detailed line work and fills in the spaces around them with slightly-off-center fragments of poetic dialogue.

In contrast, Dotson’s paintings (here joined by a series of crudely expressive sculptures in metal and wire) are simple, symbolic cartoons. Dotson pumps out feel-good imagery with

some dark foreshadowing around its edges. Take, for example, the 4-feet-by-6-feet painting “Lizzy Borden Paper Doll,” in which the story of the hatchet-wielding, murderous spinster is dismembered into a forensic fantasy of an axe and bucket, misplaced boots and mop of hair, with a deathly pink head with vacant white eyes. Macabre, yes, but one of the most hilarious things I’ve seen this year.

Taken together, Dotson’s and Adams’ artworks, especially a few paintings they made collaboratively, are so much more than how I’ve known their work previously. Thunder-Sky’s gallery is transformed into a bizarre alter-ego of the contemporary culture we are living in. The grotesqueries and sensationalism we take for granted are recontextualized and magnified in the artists’ imaginations.

For instance, in the collaboration “Terrior of the Oil Spill the Movie” (pictured at the top), *American Idol* judge Simon Cowell and weight-fluctuating actress Kirstie Alley seem to be at fault for causing the oil spill in the gulf. Superman and Aquaman are rushing toward them against an acidic violet background; meanwhile, Alley seems to be nearly exposing her breasts and her speech bubble reads, “My big life is tolly ballsy of me to get all chunky.” Did I mention Osama Bin Laden is depicted in a submarine near the bottom of the panel, being attacked by a giant octopus?

The exhibition also features Adams’ narratives involving avant-garde Pop singer Lady Gaga, Batman and Robin, news reporter Nancy Grace and Jesus riding a unicorn, as well as Dotson’s renderings of vintage Fisher-Price toys and many other unexpected cameo appearances.

*Kitty Cat Extravaganza*, a group exhibition Adams organized with curators Melanie Derrick and Millicent Larson, is on display downstairs. Adams exhibits sculptures of mirrored cat robots that pay homage to departed celebrities like JonBenét Ramsey or Michael Jackson.

Glamorously resembling disco balls, strangely futuristic and a bit kitsch, I’ve never really seen anything like them. They’re joined by a dense group show that celebrates a diversity of cat imagery.

---

**THUNDER-SKY INC. exhibits *World Domination: New Works by Antonio Adams and Tony Dotson* and *Kitty Cat Extravaganza* through Sept. 17.**

<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13014006/world-dominationkitty-cat-extravaganza-review>