

The work of Frédéric Bruly Bouabré had a single objective: to record and transmit information about the known universe. Devoting his life to a quest for knowledge, Bouabré captured and codified subjects from a range of sources, including cultural traditions, folklore, religious and spiritual belief systems, philosophy, and popular culture.

Born in 1923 in Zéprégühé in western Côte d’Ivoire, Bouabré started his career as a clerk and translator in the French colonial administration. On March 11, 1948, he experienced a transcendental vision that prompted him to seek divine truths in nature and to interpret his immediate and wider surroundings—first through writing and eventually through visual art. From the late 1970s until his death in 2014, he created hundreds of colorful drawings on postcard-size pieces of cardboard salvaged from his neighborhood in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire’s economic capital. Distinctive in style, these works feature animated figures and abstracted elements enclosed within hand-drawn frames, which themselves contain text describing the subject or content of the drawings. Bouabré once said that he used writing “to explain what I’ve drawn. . . . Writing is what immortalizes.”

Through his work Bouabré revealed that meaning could be discovered anywhere, from everyday chance occurrences to natural phenomena. He endeavored for his drawings to capture all “the elements of the universe . . . for the love and sole purpose of serving human education.” Bringing together major and rarely seen drawings and manuscripts from across his prolific career, this exhibition explores the artist’s commitment to collecting, preserving, and sharing knowledge as a way of promoting limitless intellectual curiosity and of demonstrating the interrelatedness of the world we live in.

Organized by Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, The Steven and Lisa Tananbaum Curator, with Erica DiBenedetto, Curatorial Assistant, and with the support of Damasia Lacroze, Department Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture.

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We invite you to explore the accompanying publication, *Frédéric Bruly Bouabré: World Unbound*, which is available in the Museum Store.

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