

Review: *James Castle: His Life & Art*

Reviewed by *Melody Sky Eisler*

James Castle: His Life & Art, 2nd edition

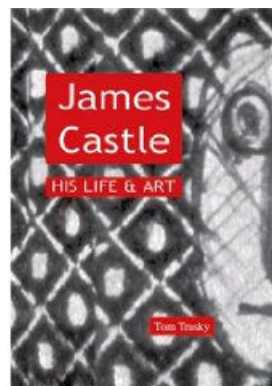
Tom Trusky

Idaho Center for the Book, 2008

0932129463, Paperback

234 pages, \$25.00

James Castle (1899-1977) was an Idaho artist who in recent years received posthumous art world success for his painstakingly constructed assemblages, books and drawings. Often labeled an “outsider artist,” the myths and legends surrounding this talented individual are epic and have been in need of rigorous scholarship to confirm or deny the tales. *James Castle: His Life & Art* is the only comprehensive biographical work on the life and art of James Castle, and it is now revised and updated.



As author Tom Trusky states in his introduction to the updated edition, his impetus for writing the book was an “attempt to gain the world’s ear for the country boy who may well have been an autistic genius, but who undeniably liked to draw” (page, viii). Trusky refused to accept the tales of James Castle as deaf and possibly mute at face value and instead consulted leading experts in the field to achieve a deeper understanding of the artist’s disabilities and so-called outsider status. Trusky explores the possibility that rather than being deaf, Castle might have been diagnosed somewhere within the spectrum of autism. This claim is heavily supported by further research into Castle’s life.

Art lovers will thoroughly enjoy the sixty photos added to the 2nd edition, some of which are from a newly discovered collection of Castle’s work. The owners of the Early Attic antique store in Idaho City were pleasantly surprised to identify a number of formerly unknown books by Castle when they purchased a box of books in Caldwell for ten dollars. The books were authenticated by Sandy Harthorn, the Curator of Art at the Boise Art Museum. The Early Attic Books provide an exciting addition to Castle’s voluminous body of work.

Readers wanting to know about the man beyond the fanciful paper constructions and soot drawings will find Trusky’s scholarship thorough and refreshing. The new information is presented in such a way as to not diminish Castle’s fine art; in fact the new revelations about the artist only succeed at providing deeper insight into his quiet oeuvre. The two new chapters shed even more light on the mysteries surrounding Castle’s education and medical history. The detailed appendix includes lists of family members, Garden Valley residents, and primary source documents such as letters, interviews, photographs, and maps. Trusky clearly traces Castle’s Idaho genealogy by sketching out these relationships.

I strongly recommend *James Castle: His Life & Art* for anyone interested in learning more about this remarkable artist and his Idaho legacy. This book will be an excellent addition to any art, Idaho, or biographical library collection. A must read!

Melody Sky Eisler is a Librarian at Library! at Colliester, a branch of Boise Public Library. Melody is a creative and innovative librarian who also happens to be an accomplished sculptor.