



Happy Clouds, Happy Trees: The Bob Ross Phenomenon

By Kristin G. Congdon, Doug Blandy, Danny Coeyman

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Readers will know Bob Ross (1942–1995) as the gentle, afro'd painter of happy trees on PBS. And while the Florida-born artist is reviled or ignored by the elite art world and scholarly art educators, he continues to be embraced around the globe as a healer and painter, even decades after his death. In *Happy Clouds, Happy Trees*, the authors thoughtfully explore how the Bob Ross phenomenon grew into a juggernaut.

Although his sincerity in embracing democracy, gift economies, conservation, and self-help may have left him previously denigrated as a subject of rigorous scholarship, this book uses contemporary art theory to explore the sophistication of Bob Ross's vision as an artist. It traces the ways in which his many fans have worshiped, emulated, and parodied him and his work. His technique allowed him to paint over 35,000 paintings in his lifetime, mostly of mountains and trees in landscapes heavily influenced by his time in the Air Force and stationed in Alaska.

The authors address issues of amateur art, sentimentality, imitation, boredom, seduction, and democratic practices in the art world. They fully examine Ross as a painter, teacher, healer, media star, performer, magician, and networker. In-depth comparisons are made to Andy Warhol and Thomas Kinkade, and mention is made of his life in relation to Joseph Beuys, Elvis Presley, St. Francis of Assisi, Carl Rogers, and many other creative personalities. In the end, *Happy Clouds, Happy Trees* presents Ross as a gift giver, someone who freely teaches the act of painting to anyone who believes in Ross's vision that "this is your world."

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Editorial Review

Review

“*Happy Clouds, Happy Trees* presents a compelling argument about the significance of Bob Ross culturally and socially, and in the realm of arts education. The authors’ smart engagement with emergent and established theories of aesthetics and art practice relative to art education pedagogy, as well their use of a cultural lens to situate the ‘phenomenon’ of Bob Ross in the larger contemporary milieu, results in a text that ‘joyfully’ shines.”

?Lisa Rathje, *Journal of American Folklore*

“This book, like Bob Ross himself, is a wonderfully captivating encounter that takes you to unexpected places in both art and life. *Happy Clouds, Happy Trees: The Bob Ross Phenomenon* reveals information about the internationally famous painter Bob Ross, but goes far beyond being a biographical recounting of this character of contrasts. Bob Ross is often viewed and welcomed as a calming, neighborly, painting presence and a trusted, artistic friend; other times he is seen as a joyful, yet perplexing, enigma. Which was he? A mix of both? Who was Bob Ross, really? In discussion of intriguing topics such as boredom, democracy, sentimentality, seduction, imitation, shamanism, and joy, along with the inclusion of lively and thoughtful comparisons between Bob Ross, Andy Warhol, Thomas Kinkade, Florida’s Highwaymen, and a host of other artists, this book gives richness to the conversation about Bob Ross and how he is perceived. *Happy Clouds, Happy Trees* provides a window into the life of Bob Ross while at the same time exploring a multitude of artistic ideas, audiences, artists, and the art world, casting light on the life and practice of this unique painter, teacher, and friend to millions.”

?Paul E. Bolin, professor and assistant chair of art education and visual art studies, The University of Texas at Austin

About the Author

Kristin G. Congdon is professor emerita of philosophy and humanities at the University of Central Florida. Her authored or coauthored books include *American Folk Art: A Regional Reference* and *Just Above the Water: Florida Folk Art* (published by University Press of Mississippi).

Doug Blandy is professor and senior vice provost for academic affairs at the University of Oregon. He has been published in *Studies in Art Education* and *Art Education*, among other journals, and has coedited five anthologies in art education.

Painter Danny Coeyman earned his MFA from Parsons in 2006 and received a Jack Kent Cooke Fellowship.

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Dennis Ramirez:

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