

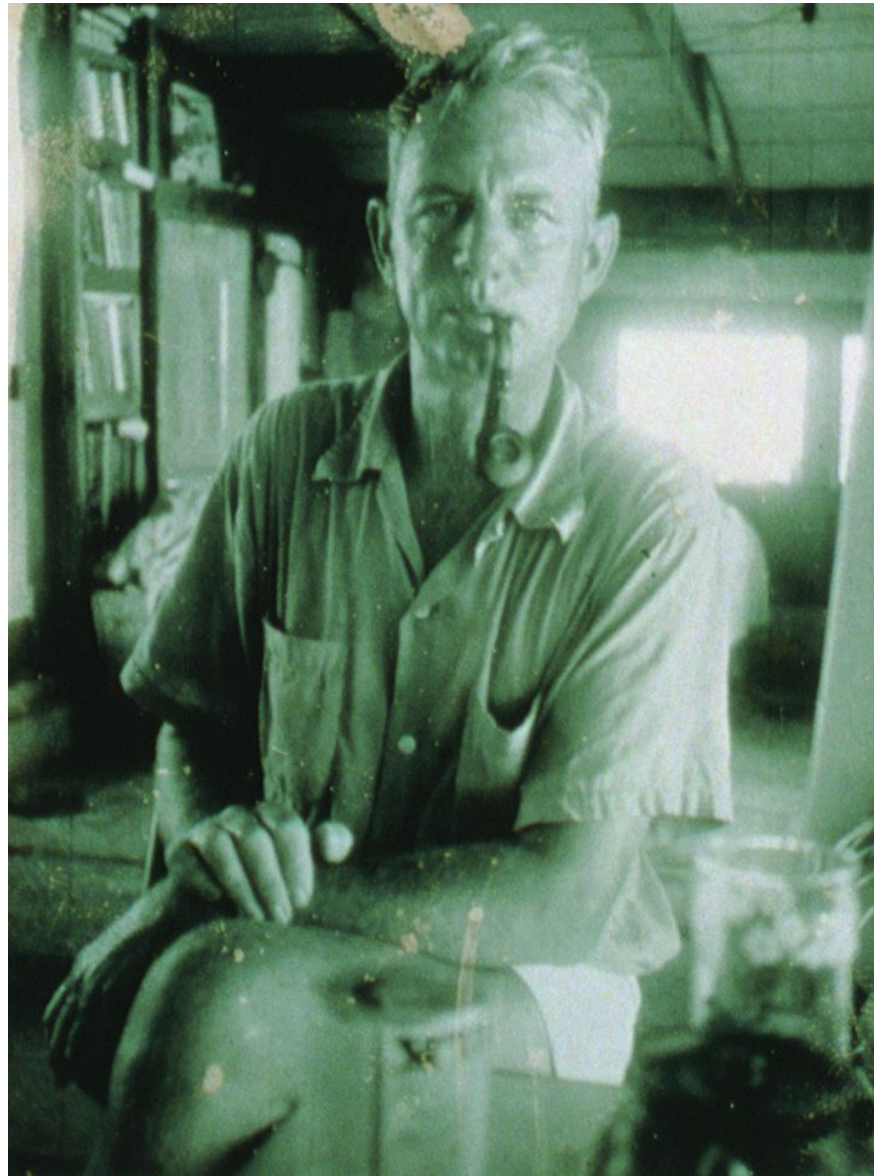
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HUFFPOST

Forrest Bess, Visionary Painter From Rural Texas, Gets A Posthumous Book (PHOTOS)

Years Later, The Visionary Art Of Forrest Bess Still Stuns

Apr 4, 2013, 08:24 AM EDT | **Updated** Apr 4, 2013



In the frantic search for artistic truth, creative people sometimes pledge themselves to intense spiritual endeavors. Like the mystic shamanism of Joseph Beuys or the perilous thirst for speed and violence of the Futurists, American painter [Forrest Bess](#) developed a challenging manifesto, claiming [the key to immortality was through a unification of male and female energy](#). In 1960, Bess underwent surgery to become, in the artist's words, a "pseudo-hermaphrodite."

In the New York Times last year, [Roberta Smith likened Bess's life to Vincent van Gogh's](#), in that both artists lived in relative isolation throughout adulthood and dealt with bouts of serious depression. Bess became a backwoods eccentric on an isolated island in Bay City, Texas, spending days trying to scrounge up cash by selling bait and painting vibrantly colored landscapes.

The "[fisherman painter](#)" passed away in 1977. Decades later, the artist is experiencing a posthumous moment of fame. Last year, Bess was included in the [Whitney Biennial](#), and this June will mark the release of a new book by filmmaker Chuck Smith titled, "[Forrest Bess: Key to the Riddle](#)." Inspired by his documentary of the same name, Smith compiled the painter's works and letters to take us inside the mind of the enigmatic artist.

"[The classification of my work is 'abstract primitive' and 'visionary painter](#).'" Bess wrote in a letter to Meyer Schapiro. The artist's crude shapes and startling colors reveal a chaotic, creative mind at play.

Scroll through the slideshow below the see some of Bess's paintings and intimate photos, and let us know what you think of his abstract primitivism in the comments.