

Yoakum's Hokum*~for Joseph Yoakum, folk artist*

A rambler, who shoveled dung for Buffalo Bill
and posted handbills for John Ringling,
is bound to stretch the truth to wow a crowd.
Joseph Yoakum enlarged his life story
'til it read like a dime novel. It begins
on a Navajo reservation, gathers
steam under the big top, sees war
and winds through every continent but one,
if Yoakum can be believed.

This Black Indian had an itch to roam.
He scratched it however he could: hobo,
railway porter, ship mechanic, stowaway,
circus valet, soldier. He meant to see things
for himself. Long after his feet settled
on Chicago, his mind surveyed the globe;
day in, day out, even as he slept.

One night he woke up ill. Sweaty-palmed,
he grabbed a pencil, sketched a vision.

Golgotha; his first drawing.

Followed by one a day for eight years.

In his storefront window, art on a clothesline:
landscapes, real and imagined—

Window Rock, Mt. Thousand Lakes, the Andes.

Chromatic hills draped across horizons.

Empty biways to the next adventure.

Consulting postcards, an atlas, the Bible
and Encyclopædia Britannica, he even drew
the one continent he hadn't set foot on—

Antartica.