

Maine, Stephen. "Artists Quarantine With Their Art Collections," *Hyperallergic*, 2 April 2021.

## HYPERALLERGIC



"Running Man," artist and date unknown, acrylic on carved wood, 12 x 3 x 3 inches (image courtesy Robyn O'Neil)

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *In this [series of articles](#) about the effects of the pandemic on the meaning of artworks that predate it, I've thought of meaning as something that can be reshaped by the pressure of circumstance.*

*The questions I've been asking artists as the pandemic has progressed – Do you look at your personal collection differently now, and which works in particular? Is there one that especially resonates with you in this weird, frightening time? And does it take on new meaning? – have elicited multifarious and often surprising responses.*

**Robyn O'Neil** (Los Angeles, California): My friends George Morton and Karol Howard, Texas collectors with a major-league treasure of outsider art from around the world, found this little guy for me a decade ago. For about 20 years, my own drawings featured hordes of miniature middle-aged men in matching sweatsuits, running around landscapes doing various good and terrible things. This sculpture brought those characters to life and maybe even made healthy fun of them a bit.

While adjusting to quarantine, this sculpture became a constant companion. I focused on him, wondered how old he was, where he was born. I even looked over at him when something funny happened on TV, the way I used to when it was my best friend in the room with me. He became the houseguest I wasn't allowed to have anymore.

Life outside our own tiny bubbles hasn't exactly been enjoyable for a long time now, and it still seems difficult to imagine a world that isn't equal parts awful and terrifying. I believe what's lost now more than anything besides human lives is a sense of humor, fun, elation, and laughter. But this little running man figure reminds me of the ridiculous, the goofy, and the dumb. I like those things. I miss those things. I want those things back.