



October 16, 2025 Blog #74



The Only in America Tour—Part 12 The Grand Finale The Toilet Seat Art Museum

Dear Reader,

Please take a seat. Allow me to introduce you to Barney Smith's Toilet Seat Art Museum, the only museum of its kind in the world. Admission is free.

When my college friend Thea and I toured Texas and New Mexico in the summer of 2024, we looked for quirky, off-the-beaten-path sights to see. Our search led us to The Truck Yard restaurant in The Colony, a city just north of Dallas. Its owner, Jason Boso, had purchased the collection of 1400 decorated used toilet lids from Barney Smith, a retired master plumber, artist, and recycler extraordinaire.

When I walked into the museum at the Truck Yard, I was overwhelmed by the sheer number of toilet lids neatly lining the walls. Looking up, I noticed the ceiling, upon which a muralist had painted a parody of the Sistine Chapel's "Creation of Adam." In Michelangelo's original, God stretches out his finger to touch Adam's finger with a "divine spark." In the toilet seat museum, the hand of God aptly passes Adam a roll of toilet paper.



Each of Barney Smith's toilet seat compositions has a theme. Many include personal mementos and chronicle his life. I particularly liked the lid decorated with Pez dispensers, which Smith dedicated to his great-grandchildren. Other seats memorialize events from history. One features a piece of the exploded space shuttle Challenger. Another preserves a piece of the fence from Auschwitz. Smith himself was a WWII veteran. Some U.S. troops even sent Barney a toilet seat from Saddam Hussein's palace in Baghdad!



Some artists use canvas;
Barney Smith prefers toilet seats

Other lids honor famous people—as diverse as President Lyndon B. Johnson (with a cowboy hat) and musician Michael Jackson (with a single white-gloved hand). Smith found creative inspiration far and wide. I have included photos of his homage to the United States Postal Service, American Sign Language, the “Hobo Code,” African Safari Animals, Petrified Wood, the Chapstick Museum, Dog Breeds, STIHL Chainsaws, and one of my favorites—Earrings.

Born on May 25, 1921, Barney Smith began creating on his unusual artistic “canvas” when he was a 26-year-old plumber. His father made wooden plaques to mount hunting trophies. Smith thought he could do the same with toilet lids. His first seat cover was adorned with deer antlers, but that was only the beginning. For the next 70 years, Smith hand-painted, decorated, or otherwise embellished toilet seats.

Smith originally housed his growing collection in the large back-yard garage of his home in Alamo Heights in San Antonio. He told his wife Velma Louise—with whom he would celebrate 74 years of marriage—that he would stop after he completed 500 lids. Obviously, he did not.

Once, when the Smith family was having a yard sale, another artist saw Barney’s toilet seat art and showed interest. The word spread, and soon many people wanted a tour. In 1992, Smith opened his garage museum to the public. Local residents and tourists alike came to see his unusual art. Smith kept careful records and estimated that an average of 1,000 visitors a year toured his museum.



Visitors were charmed not only by Barney’s art, but also by the man himself. Besides working as a plumber, Smith was also an electrician, a minister, a teacher, a volunteer fireman, an Eagle Scoutmaster, a world traveler, and a dog lover. Moreover, he was a highly valued member of his community.

The Texas Bucket List,” on March 5, 2018, Smith was asked if he had a favorite toilet seat. He sure did. It displayed a copy of Rudyard Kipling’s poem “When Earth’s Last Picture is Painted.” Smith’s teacher made him

learn it by heart when he was 12 years old, and he never forgot it. (Incidentally, when I was about the same age, my English teacher Miss Michaelson made me memorize another of Kipling’s poems, “If.”).



Kipling's poem about painting celebrates the joy of creativity and the value of work for its own sake—themes which no doubt resonated deeply with Barney Smith. He told his interviewer that he painted day and night—mostly at night. He said, "I'd rather do this than eat when I'm hungry or sleep when I'm sleepy."

Barney Smith's joy and enthusiasm is contagious. He concluded his interview by saying, "I feel like the Lord has given me this many years to be a blessing to someone and I hope that I've got this museum here a collection to where someone could be blessed." [To see Barney's interview with "The Texas Bucket List" visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQn7C7Wjc4Y>]

In 2018, the Cattywampus Press created a book to catalog Smith's collection: *King of the Commode: Barney Smith and His Toilet Seat Art Museum*.

As Smith approached his 98th birthday, he was ready to retire. He sold his toilet seat collection to Jason Boso at the Truck Yard, and Boso hurried to get his new museum set up. Thankfully, Smith was able to attend the opening ceremony and see his life's work beautifully displayed for future generations. Five days later, Barney Smith died on July 24, 2019, at the ripe old age of 98.



I was delighted by Smith's wonderfully whimsical toilet seat museum. There is something quintessentially American about the man's creative freedom and unblushing inventiveness. His unique body of art reads like a visual history of his personal life and a compendium of American culture.

I also appreciate the energy and enthusiasm of an ordinary man who found joy simply in making art for its own sake. As a Christian, Smith no doubt understood that he was made in the image of his Creator—a God who delights in the infinite variety and vastness of His creation. In the words of the Westminster Catechism, Smith celebrated his chief duty as man: "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Perhaps that is why the good Lord gave Barney nearly a century on this earth.

Delightfully Yours,
Mona



P.S. If you missed an issue of my "Only in America" Tour, hit the archives tab at the top:

1. The Giant Eyeball (Blog #61, Sept. 2024)
2. Bonnie & Clyde and the Texas Ranger Museum (Blog #62, Oct. 2024)
3. The Kennedy Assassination Site (Blog #63, Nov. 2024)
4. The Dr. Pepper Museum (Blog #64, Dec. 2024)
5. Buc-ee's, the Disney World of Convenience Stores (Blog #65, Jan. 2025)
6. The Sugar House (Blog #66, Feb. 2025)
7. Rocketbuster (Blog #68, April 2025)
8. Pie Town (Blog #69, May 2025)
9. The International UFO Museum (Blog #70, June 2025)
10. Cadillac Ranch (Blog #72, Aug. 2025)
11. Everything's Bigger (Blog #73, Sept. 2025)
12. The Toilet Seat Art Museum (Blog #74, Oct. 2025)



When Earth's Last Picture is Painted

by Rudyard Kipling, 1892

When Earth's last picture is painted
and the tubes are twisted and dried,
When the oldest colours have faded,
and the youngest critic has died,
We shall rest, and faith, we shall need it
- lie down for an aeon or two,
'Till the Master of All Good Workmen
Shall put us to work anew.

And those that were good shall be happy:
they shall sit in a golden chair;
They shall splash at a ten-league canvas
with brushes of comet's hair.
They shall find real saints to draw from
- Magdalene, Peter, and Paul;
They shall work for an age at a sitting
and never be tired at all!

And only the Master shall praise us,
and only the Master shall blame;
And no one will work for the money,
and no one will work for the fame,
But each for the joy of the working,
and each, in his separate star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It
for the God of Things as They are!

Have a delightful day!



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