

Department of Religion Studies

Imagining Mr. Imagination

friend of Lehigh and

friend of the universe

by Norman Girardot

Thursday, March 23rd

@ 4:30pm

The Scheler Family Humanities Forum
(Linderman 200)

Norman Girardot is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus in Lehigh's Religion Studies Department. Trained in the comparative history of religions at the University of Chicago (MA, PhD), he taught at Notre Dame University and Oberlin College before arriving at Lehigh in 1980. His research areas are broadly comparative but especially involve Chinese religious tradition, particularly Daoism. His current research, writing, and curation concern outsider artistic and visionary tradition, especially as seen in the work of artists like Howard Finster and Mr. Imagination.



In this talk, Professor Norman Girardot narrates a deeply personal story about the extraordinarily triumphant and sadly tragic life of Gregory Warmack (1948-2012). Warmack was a poor, fatherless African American man who grew up on the cold and mean streets of Chicago. Shot and almost dying, he experienced an out-of-body experience where he traveled back to his ancestors in ancient Afro-Egypt. This led to his resurrection and the revelation of his secret identity as Mr. Imagination. Realizing that his destiny was to harness the creative power of the imagination, he produced an art that conjures or transforms the discarded material debris of urban society into something inspiring and strangely special. In his persona as Mr. Imagination, he went on to become regionally, nationally, and internationally famous as an outsider artist. His peripatetic life brought him to Bethlehem, where he became a special friend of Lehigh University, the Banana Factory, and the city's southside neighborhoods.