



In my quest to relentlessly expose us to art (in the hopes that it will improve our persons in the quiet and difficult to quantify way that art has), I dragged my husband to the [Museum of Everything](#) on 14 Boulevard Raspail one cold and rainy Paris afternoon in early February.

He came with me because less than two minutes down Boulevard Raspail there is an electronics and wine discount store. (Cheap electronics with your discount wine? I love France.) Pierre was interested in the electronics - he is in the midst of purchasing a new computer - and he wanted to check out the PCs and their prices. He tends to go Apple, but he's been leaning towards a PC in part for gaming purposes ([Skyrim](#)). Whatever he buys, he usually pulls it apart and installs anew all the bits he wants, so we both insist he buy discount.

After the prerequisite hour of wandering around the electronics store while he inspected items of interest, we headed back to the museum entrance. "The Museum of Everything is the world's only travelling museum for the undiscovered, unintentional and untrained artists of the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries, with over 300,000 visitors since its creation in 2009." I found out about it through a friend on Facebook who follows [Goop](#), Gwyneth Paltrow's city guide newsletter.

The museum, as advertised, features an ever-changing hodgepodge of beautifully curated art that hails from the far corners of North America, Europe, Japan, China, and most recently (according to what we read on the walls of the museum during our excursion) Russia. Run by a group called the [Chalet Society](#), a project conceived and directed by the independent curator Marc-Olivier Wahler, the former Director of the [Palais de Tokyo](#), the goal of the museum (and the Chalet Society in general) is to tear down the walls between high and low culture. Apparently, this is the hallmark of work by Mr. Wahler.

The current incarnation of the museum is at the end of a long arched stone hallway, a bit like a castle straight out of the Middle Ages except that everything is striped in red and white like at a circus (a low art meets high art reference, I guess) and the museum at the end of the corridor temporarily occupies a tenement building in the middle of bustling Paris.

After you wait in line and buy a ticket for five euros, you have to sign a guest book. The [emo / hipster](#) type art student guides (who reminded me a lot of the type of guides you get when you look at student art in Savannah, Georgia) tell you that you needn't sign your real name, as this is a sort of registry required by the Government, and it's best to avoid that sort of attention. Most people hadn't signed their real name, either. The entries in the guest book were sort of a work of art themselves - lots of 'Student', 'Artiste', and 'SDF' and other acronyms best left to the Frankophone imagination. I'm always amused by this sort of anonymity. I've gotten married and applied for a VISA in France - there is no way the French government is organised enough (or interested enough in me) to track my museum visits. I actually signed my real name.

As you ascend the sinuous fire escape to enter the museum itself, there are several red and white signs that tell you 'camera = death'. Once you get inside, you find out the use of a camera really results in a 1000 euro fine. The first exhibit was a series of [bizarre paintings and artistically scabbled books](#) by a [super-Catholic doorman in Chicago](#) who was sexually abused while a young orphan in a religious institution. He worked out his internal angst via some amazingly complicated murals that any psychotherapist would have a field day analyzing.

To see the rest of the art, you slowly descend through five rickety wooden floors and wander in and out of reasonably crowded spaces displaying strange 'treasures' composed of paper, paint, wire, wood, metal and whatever else untrained artists generally hoard prior to being struck by the creative fire. The stories behind the artists are sometimes more interesting than their work (and often, both story and works are fascinating.)

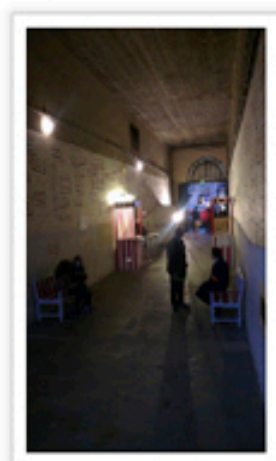
There are a lot of works by religious freaks (er...fervent followers anxious to turn you into an equally fervent follower) from the Southeast in the USA, including a blues player who turned his whole tiny studio apartment into a church by painting himself a captive congregation on the walls.

Then there are just the freaks (and I use that word fondly - some of my best friends are freaks.) A creative couple, Calvin and Ruby Black, carved a collection featuring 80 life-size female wooden dolls. Originally they used these dolls to found the faux American city "Possum Trot" located in the Mojave Desert. Calvin even made up personalities for the dolls, faked their voices, and wired loudspeakers to their necks so his girls could share Calvin's wisdom with any poor human guests that happened upon Possum Trot.

My favorite art work proved to be a series of fantastic tiny structures made up of the painted cast-off bits of typewriters, clocks and radios. My second favorite was the peculiar Healing Machine made by a Nebraska farmer convinced that when he stopped making the Machine in his barn, he would die - and he did in fact die two days after he finished.

My favorite back story was by a curator who described his childhood growing up in a town in Germany where a mental institution let patients wander freely among the amenable townspeople. The curator explained how this upbringing taught him to tolerate difference and see the artist in the odd.

All in a all, a lovely Saturday afternoon. The cafe was very nice too, but crowded - probably because the rain discouraged anyone from heading outside too soon.



Posted 3rd March by Linda Margaret Warnier

Location: 14 Boulevard Raspail, 75007 Paris, France

Labels: French stuff, personal stuff

