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THE MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING

By Guest Contributor Sarah Hyde

FEBRUARY 12TH, 2013

Exhibition Dates: At the Chalet Society until February 24, 2013

Location: 14 Boulevard Raspail, Paris 75007 [View Google Map](#)Website: [Click Here](#)

Renowned for its museums chalk full of Old Master, Impressionist and Modern paintings, Paris is home to the great French tradition of painting through the 19th and 20th centuries, which is why it's such a delight to find it is the currently also the site of The Museum of Everything. The Museum of Everything offers a journey through the alternative history of art and embraces creators who function without art education, theory or societal constraints. For them, as for The Museum of Everything, the act of creation and the impulse to make are more important than schools, galleries or institutions. James Brett, the museum's founder, describes the naming of his project in terms of inclusivity - "everything" seemed to have it covered!- although he admits that the name was inspired by an eccentric one man, one room museum in the Isle of Wight. Currently this travelling museum is based at the Chalet Society in Paris, a new space directed by Marc-Olivier Wahler, which is conceived as a community in search of a "poetic conscience". The red-and-white candy stripe décor and folksy circus atmosphere is somewhat incongruous to the discreet and stylish streets that surround it. If anything, the Museum of Everything does not seem to mind not fitting in and is rather proud of its unconventionality.



The Museum of Everything, Paris
Photo: Nicolas Krief © The Museum of Everything

The Museum is accessed by a precarious climb up the five floor fire escape, after which you must a step through some thick plastic factory style curtains through which you enter the murky realms of the mind of Henry Darger (1892-1973). A much lauded genius, this reclusive janitor from Chicago's epic works were discovered posthumously. Here in all its glory is *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is Known as the*

Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion), his masterwork: scroll upon scroll of narrative dreamscape featuring little girls in dressed in tiny white dresses. The work has something of a cult following and has been written about extensively; there is a beautiful text by Peter Chan and David Byrne is also a fan. But the pedophilic subtext of the work is impossible to ignore.



Installation view of The Museum of Everything, *Exhibition #1.1*, Paris.
Photo: Nicolas Krief © The Museum of Everything

This unsettling tone is reinforced by the Reverend Jesse Howard's intense revolutionary text works. If by now you are not trembling like a vertiginous Hitchcockian heroine in your Burberry raincoat, you are made of tougher stuff than me! This Museum will make you question many things. In this heightened state the journey continues, a helter-skelter ride through intense and deeply personal creative output, taking you on a tour of ever stranger and more curious inner worlds. As James Brett has noticed, the works often resonate with people because of their intensely personal nature, it's art at its most honest, personal and expressive. Tourists of this uncanny world of fantasy and obsession can leave "conventional society" by the front door. Outsider is a term that could easily describe not just the art but the artists themselves since they are not just outside the art world, almost all of them functioned outside of 'normal' society. Being privy to such raw, untamed expression is an amazing journey. The works are resourceful, on occasion funny, incredibly curious, and some of them are very good, especially those of Alexandre Lobanov (1924-2003), a deaf and mute Russian outcast whose secret drawings and photographs depict him as a powerful marksman, hunter and hero of the revolution.



Installation view of The Museum of Everything, *Exhibition #1.1*, Paris.
Photo: Nicolas Krief © The Museum of Everything

Each outsider artist was selected by an art world insider. The list is impressive and it's fascinating to see what the each of luminaries have chosen. Brian Sewell, art critic for *The Evening Standard* goes for a rather sensible set of figurative portraits painted by a serial killer. Ekow Eshun, former Director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, selected works produced by a liberated slave Bill Traylor. Artist Grayson Perry put forth an adolescent doll collection, carefully crafted and complete with their own teeny

tiny teen clothes. Lee Friedlander has chosen the works of visionary nun, Sister Gertrude Morgan, someone he discovered on one of his epic journeys having previously tried and failed to exhibit her work at the Museum of New Orleans.



Installation view of The Museum of Everything, *Exhibition #1.1*, Paris. Photo: Nicolas Krief © The Museum of Everything

There is a sense that for a really established artist, critic or curator, there is something rather amusing or chic about collecting this outsider art and patronizing it; the irony of having a show of outsider art need to be endorsed and curated exclusively by insiders was not lost on me. Catch this fascinating insider joke while you can in Paris; its next stop is at The Garage Center for Contemporary Art, Moscow.

Sarah Hyde works for Christies in London and lives in Paris.

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