

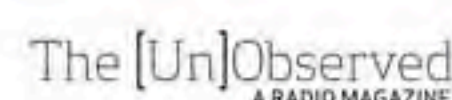
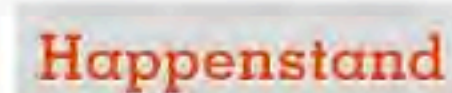
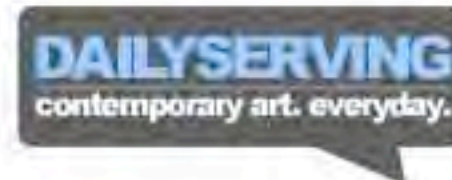
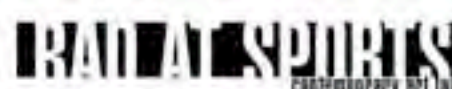


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ALTERNATIVE EXPOSURE



The SF Fire Department were called to extinguish "America (Burnt/Unburnt)," an installation by the Parisian art collaborative Claire Fontaine, shortly after the map, constructed of thousands of matches, was ignited.

Romanian police are holding three suspects linked to a major art heist from a Dutch gallery back in October.

From Paris: The Museum of Everything: Exhibition 1.1

GROUP SHOW
OCT 18 - FEB 24
CHALET SOCIETY

by Patricia Maloney

The Museum of Everything is a roving installation of historical and contemporary work by self-taught artists that is organized by founder James Brett. The museum's current incarnation, *Exhibition 1.1*, fills all three floors at the Chalet Society in the Saint-Germain-des-Près arrondissement of Paris. A new exhibition venture initiated by Marc-Olivier Wahler, former director of Palais de Tokyo, the Chalet Society is a nomadic project that explores the concept of a contemporary art institution; for now, it is housed in a structure that gives ample evidence of its former life as a Catholic seminary. The Museum of Everything overtly resists the type of institutional indoctrination that programmed the building's origins, but it evangelizes nevertheless for more than five hundred works on view.

These works include drawings on scraps of paper or giant scrolls, figural sculptures and dolls, collaged photographs, and paintings executed on rough-hewn planks of found wood. Installed, the works form a warren-like path through former classrooms and narrow hallways. The work is densely crammed onto every possible wall, including in stairwells, and unevenly lit. Its subjects, ranging from cataclysmic portents to deeply introspective self-portraits, are universally resonant but idiosyncratically rendered, untempered by aesthetic theory and unrestrained by art historical baggage. The exhibition's curatorial statement intimates that the tight strictures of institutionally sanctioned art exclude the kinds of production in which these artists engage, either because of materials, forms, or the private concerns that motivate their realization. While it is certainly true that many, if not most, of the makers included in this exhibition are unintentional artists, it is erroneous not to consider the artworks for their formal, conceptual, spiritual, and even political intent.

For example, the Reverend Jesse Howard (1885–1983, Missouri) created hand-painted signs of colored block-letter texts that include scripture quotes, biblical genealogies, political commentary, admonishments, and entreaties: "Read on, and on, and keep reading," he implores in one sign, found on the third floor of the Chalet Society. The words, written on panels of wood and sheets of metal, are spaced closely together, resulting in signs that convey deliberation and urgency in form as well as message. Like many artists, Howard was self-reflexively aware of his audience and the effect of his chosen medium: "I am so glad to think that someone is taking an interest [sic] in my work," he writes, a sentiment that could only be conveyed through the act of reading.

A small group of drawings by Anna Zemánková (1908–1986, Czechoslovakia), located in the far room of the second floor, similarly suggests an astute aesthetic sensibility, even though the drawings were created in trancelike states.² They depict fantastical botanical specimens composed of florid and rhythmically repetitive shapes. In one, a totem of stacked bulbs leans to one side, as if to balance their weight. Stalks intersect the bulbs to form a column of heart-shaped chevrons; on the right, four wheat shafts blossom with flowers that radiate stamen-like sunbursts. The dynamic lines and colorful patterns at once invite comparison to the stylized flora that appears on Art Deco metalwork and to fifteenth-century Turkish ceramics.

These two bodies of work counter the impulse to relegate the individual oeuvres presented as discrete modes of expression that operate without "justification or destination."¹ But the

IT WOULD TAKE TO BLOW=THEM TO HELL. I HAVE NEIGHBOURS AND FRIENDS WHO HAVE LOST OVER 50 HEAD OF CATTLE STOLEN. THERE HAS BEEN AS MUCH AS \$1,000 REWARD FOR THE ARREST AND CONVICTION OF THESE CATTLE. ONE MAN OFFERED A REWARD OF \$1,000 DOLLARS. I NEVER HAVE HEARD OF JUST ONE HOOF OF A COWS FOOT. EVER BEING RETURNED TO ITS OWNER. I MY SELF HAVE LOST OVER 100 HEAD OF CHICKENS AND DUCKS. TRIED TO STEAL 2,500 POUND CALVES. \$1,000 WOULD NOT PAY ME.

Reverend Jesse Howard. *Untitled (IT WOULD TAKE THEM TO BLOW=THEM TO HELL)*, 1950/1980; paint on sheet metal; 16.5 x 32 in. Courtesy of the Museum of Everything, London and Paris.



Aleksander P. Lobanov. *Untitled*, 1970/1980; watercolor, ink, and colored pencil on paper; 17 x 12 in. Courtesy of the Museum of Everything, London and Paris.

casual juxtaposition of divergent bodies of work enables only cursory suggestions of themes or context. The exhibition seems to parry societal rejection or disavowal of these self-taught artists (the term Brett uses to encompass both academically untrained artists and those with developmental or mental disabilities) with rejection of the traditional forms of exhibition display that might sanction this work. As a result, the installation strains under the effort to be eclectic and nonprogrammatic, and an uneasy positioning recurs throughout the building's three floors.³ It fluctuates between asserting the primacy of the artists' visions and projecting a defensiveness that preemptively marginalizes them.

There are pieces that suffer from this studied disregard; in one claustrophobic room, Herman Bossert's (born 1940, the Netherlands) dizzying, scribbled urban landscapes complement the looping, cadenced tunnels and tracks that pervade Martin Ramirez's (1885–1963, Mexico) drawings. In a larger space, one might have found footing in these terrains that fluctuate between daydreams and nightmares. "We are trapped in these cities, like flies in a web or the blind in a maze" notes gallerist and author Nico van der Endt of Bossert's work, but the closeness of the room overpowers the immersive potential of the drawings.⁴

However, the impediments of the exhibition's installation do not diminish the opportunity for discovery and appreciation, or even trepidation, over the visions revealed. The wooden Woodbridge Figures from the 1920s and '30s, by an anonymous artist, are enchanting for their individual styling and expressions, while their buxom and hippy figures evoke an army of fertility statues. In Guo Fengyi's (1942–2010, China) tall scrolls, humanoid and animal figures emerge from swirling frenetic lines that convey both mass and energy; physics and spirituality converge as smoke and stone and sentient beings. Fengyi's unbridled expression finds a darker counterpart in assemblages by the deaf-mute Aleksander Pavlovich Lobanov (1924–2003, Russia), who depicts himself as a Russian revolutionary icon carrying cardboard-mounted machine guns and rifles drawn in felt-tip marker, ink, and pencil. Lobanov stares inexpressively in front of hand-drawn backdrops that suggest military glory; he holds his weapons cocked to the side or pointed at the camera. They are unnerving precisely because his exaggerated bravado finds correspondence in conventional depictions of power, not at the edge, but close to the center. There is much that we might recognize in these visions; the Museum of Everything succeeds in suggesting that their place is not at the periphery of what we usually choose to see but intermingled with our own views of the world.

THE MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING: EXHIBITION 1.1 IS ON VIEW AT THE CHALET SOCIETY, IN PARIS, THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2013.

NOTES:

1. From an interview with James Brett. Siobhan Andrews, "In Pictures: The Museum of Everything," *AnOther*, October 10 2012, http://www.anothermag.com/current/view/2254/The_Museum_of_Everything, accessed January 2, 2013.

2. Zemánková would draw in the early morning, between the hours of 4 am and 7am, frequently in a trance; she felt her artistic talent emanated from a divine source. However, she would frequently rework the drawings later. http://www.petulloartcollection.org/the_collection/about_the_artists/artist.cfm?a_id=65, accessed January 2, 2013.

3. By contrast, *Create*, curated in 2011 for the UC Berkeley Art Museum by Lawrence Rinder and Matthew Higgs, who contributes commentary to the Museum of Everything, provides an outstanding example of an exhibition that applies institutional modes of presentation to work by artists with developmental disabilities. The traditionally arranged exhibition conveyed the inventiveness, singularity, and highly developed aesthetic sensibilities of the participating artists without marginalizing the work in broader contemporary practices or stripping it of its dynamic qualities.

4. From the wall text for *Exhibition 1.1*.