

Exhibition #1: Tarzan Retired, Roman

Buxbaum screening

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“Intensity always finds its medium” Miroslav Tichý (b.1926, Moravia, Czech Republic)

Slipping through a shop curtain into the bowels of Museum of Everything, we rummage through the darkness to perch on an old park bench at a packed screening of *Tarzan Retired* by Roman Buxbaum. Buxbaum's intimate and warming study of Miroslav Tichý, the Czech born DIY photo fanatic, is so up close and personal, you can almost smell the rats that share his home and the suspect smears on his cut-off jeans; a Robinson Crusoe figure, marooned, and more than self sufficient with it.

Tichý, a trained painter, hung up his brushes in the early 60's in favour of a voyeuristic and obsessive photographic study of women, most frequently taken whilst at his local public swimming pool. Whilst his work dallies on the uncomfortable, the hordes of photos we see depict almost naïve snatches of the female figure (all taken without the subject's knowledge), an incessant and seemingly formal infatuation.

High legged swimming costumes awash the screen, dappled in blotchy black and white, the foxing and rawness of each image is enhanced by the artist's hand-made cameras, which he unearths from beneath mountains of dust and detritus in his back yard.

Tichý's hand-made cameras are fascinating to behold. Lenses are crafted from scraps of Plexiglas, their sur-



Installation shot, photo courtesy Christoffer Rudquist

faces polished and prepared using concoctions of what is found close to hand; cigarette ash mixed with toothpaste, winders made from bottle tops, the list continues and becomes all the more obscure.

An artist capturing his unknowing subject in such a discreet manner would, in contemporary society, perhaps be cast off as simply a pervert, yet there is nothing in these photos which suggest dark intent, more a sincere fascination and dare I repeat the term, obsession with the female form at its purest. Hips and thigh bones enhanced by Tichý with adoring pencil lines, drawing the viewer's attention to serpentine curves, hem lines, and sweetheart necklines.

Tichý's hubris is as one may expect, when considering the historical role of Outsider Art, or Art Brut. The 'reclusive genius' motif bounds through theory surrounding this almost uncategorisable genre. The Museum of Everything, founded by collector James Brett, provides space for intimate and private work to breathe. The personal and sometimes un-nerving work of the obsessed and the misunderstood are provided equal platform and celebra-

tion, in this old dairy, tucked away in a side street, all be it in Primrose Hill.

Jean Dubuffet is credited for 'founding' Art Brut in the mid 1940s. Dubuffet strove not to culturally appropriate work by the untrained by positioning it within the public art realm, but to challenge both the role of the artist and of creation itself, by the instigation of 'crisis in The Museum'. Art Brut is likened by Michel Thevoz* to Boris Vian's 'schmurz' character in his play *The Empire Builders* (1958), which is often described as an essay on the culture of fear. In it, a 'monstrous, mute being', the schmurz, is born into a bourgeois family, is left to its own devices and occasionally beaten. Putting the schmurz into the public realm (the museum) creates an invigorating and sometimes unsettling insight into minds that have previously been overlooked or dismissed as worthless, mere case studies of mental illness. In his biopic, Tichý giggles deliriously as he recalls the policemen he battered as a young man, who wouldn't dare complain of their injuries, as no-one wants to admit to being beaten by a 'mad man'.

The sheer volume of work here, in just MOE's very first show, is almost overwhelming, climaxing in the main hall at the end of the journey, where no patch of wall is left vacant, canvases and found objects adorn the walls, carrying mixed motifs of the exotic and the everyday side by side.

A chapel is reconstructed, crammed full of work and an organ device resembling an altar, complete with rousing Gospel soundtrack. The exhibition contains much work by members of the church, most notably Sister Gertrude and her host of angels, flanked by church doors illustrated with daubs of vivid paint, capturing delirious faces and fiendish, rapturous smiles, by Reverend Anderson Johnson, resembling a child's school Christmas card project.

Next is a small corridor of plan chests which contain some really sumptuous examples of Aloï se's work. Next-door is a dystopic haven for lovers of legendary misfit Henry Darger. Darger's torturous childhood is depicted in some of the finest examples of his work I have seen to date; 10 of his enormous sheets hung together in sequence. Violent nature revolts in Darger's sorry tale of the Vivian Girls, a wonderful Bayeux Tapestry of the inner workings of a troubled soul, only to be discovered after his death. Darger transposes the pain experienced as a child onto the lives of 6 fictitious girl soldiers, reinforcing a sense of frustrated silence, within epic collages of pastel chocolate box landscapes. The girls morph into winged creatures, butterflies with ram horns, alluding to the escape we know Darger himself eventually achieved, after years of forced child labour.

Alexandre P Lobanov was transfixed with soldiers as a child, after being promised a rifle from one of them, during his family's evacuation from the Rybinsk Sea to Yaroslavl following a great flood. This resulted in Lobanov's endless self-portraits as a gun-toting promethean Soviet hero. The visitor is encouraged to step inside his mind, by looking into a seemingly unfinished fresco. When looking into its mirror, we too become the hero in his imaginary tale. Within a few minutes of absorption in this room, your eyes catch a porthole in the wall, where, through a dark mist, you are stared out by a cast of enormous and grotesque dolls, with eye lashes like tarantula legs. They are just stuck there; grimacing, lipstick-wearing scarecrows, spot-lit mistily enough to make you shudder as you back away from the window...

The installation here is extremely well executed and thoughtful. Nooks and crannies in this old dairy-come-recording studio, make for perfect alcoves and gated passageways. Judith Scott's woolen sculptures suspend from the ceiling in what would otherwise be an overlooked picket fenced alley. Exposed

boiler rooms and hidden, seemingly unreachable rooms, which you think you have imagined, tease the senses (and at times your nerves) as you tip toe through the labyrinth.

Madge Gill's exquisite pen drawings, all obsessively scribbled whilst in bed, are interwoven very simply with the breeze block patterns of the exit corridor, emphasising the sheer volume of her small postcard pieces. On the opposite wall we are able to focus up close and personal with two of her larger pieces, which are simply mesmerising in their complexity.

MOE raises interesting questions as to the place of Art Brut within art history. Its visibility and prominence became evident in the late 40's following Dubuffet's strong advocacy and passion, but it has always been in existence. It is fantastic that London finally has its own hidden treasure trove of unadulterated, untrained, creations. It is with this however which makes me wonder as to the credibility of the Museum's appropriation of work via its celebrity-scribed text panels, which seem to take the edge off. Names such as Nick Cave, Jarvis Cocker, alongside uber-curators Roger Malbert and Hans Ulrich Obrist, and artists such as Richard Wentworth, Eva Rothschild, Grayson Perry, Annette Messager, and

Jamie Shovlin, tell us what they admire in the work of the exhibited artists, and in some cases how the featured artist has influenced their own practice. To reinforce this 'cool list' of MOE friends, there is a sycophantic Jeremy Deller style mind map of how they are all interconnected with the artists featured, like one big dysfunctional 'happy' family.

It will be interesting to see whether MOE continues to develop in cahoots with its celebrity friends in order to peddle its wares. The work here is epic and powerful in its own right, celebrity endorsement sullies the purity of its message, which does not concern the role of the artist, nor the appropriation of art and its public (it has no public, no patron other than its own hand, that's the entire point). The Outsider artist's message is instead embroiled in the status of an exertive, obsessive, untutored production, which is neither a conscious act or behaviour, but the most basic means of self expression and communication available to you, a compulsive and extremely personal reflex.

Notes: * Michel Thevoz, "Le dé bile n'est pas toujours celui qu'on croit" Museum, Paris: Unesco, vol.34, no.3, 1982

Judith

Carlton

REVIEW

Pre Owned: Looks Good Man, curated by Morgan Quaintance
Cell Project Space

REVIEW

Ruin Lust
Tate Britain

REVIEW

Wafaa Bilal's *The Hierarchy of Being* at Maraya Art Park, Al Majaz Waterfront, Sharjah, curated by Sara Raza

INTERVIEW

Elaria Lupo and Joe Namy about their recent project *Concrete Sampling (arrangement for derbekah and jackhammer)*

INTERVIEW

Ronnie Close's Film Project: More Out Of Curiosity