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Outsider Art, Together for a Time

By SUNSHINE FLINT DECEMBER 18, 2009 6:00 AM December 18, 2009 6:00 am Comment



Christoffer Rudquist The main hall of the Museum of Everything.

The intensity of the artwork that fills the new and temporary Museum of Everything (Sharpleshall Street and Regents Park Road, NW1; www.musevery.com; no admission fee, though donations are welcome), open through February, is a powerful antidote to some of the celebrity-based self-awareness of other recent London exhibitions. More than 200 works from 90 outsider artists, some well-known, others completely obscure, are housed in a former recording studio. Most of the pieces are courtesy of the museum's founder, James Brett, a filmmaker and longtime collector of outsider art.

"I thought it would be successful, but I had no idea it would be so successful," Mr. Brett said. More than 15,000 visitors have toured the warren of hallways and plexiglass-cov-

ered closets since the museum opened in mid-October. "We presented the work with an emotional connection to its creators," he explained. "You go on a journey through the building."

Outsider art, or as it is sometimes known, art brut, is art of a private nature, created by people who picked up a brush or a chisel or a camera for intensely personal reasons. The fact that most of it was not made for public consumption is considered part of its power.

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Instead of the usual biographical information, Mr. Brett asked well-known artists like Eva Rothschild, Tal R and Lee Friedlander, and musicians like Jarvis Cocker and Thurston Moore, to write about the work or artist.

The heart of the show is a huge room filled from floor to rafters with dozens of pieces from artists from the United States, England, China and elsewhere. It has a sense of grandeur, but also feels like the motley fool took over the lord's hall — Morris Hirschfield's "Leopard Family" is cheek-by-jowl with William Hawkins's colorful work and inked creations from the Chinese artist Guo Fengyi. But the museum's centerpiece is Henry Darger's Vivian Girls scrolls, brought together in numbered order for the first time here.

"For me outside art begins and ends with him," said Mr. Brett.

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