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## Private view

An exciting exhibition of “outsider” art also warns of the dangers of bringing this genre too far into the mainstream

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Hawkins Bolden’s Scarecrows, yellow and red

A marvellous temporary museum has opened in Primrose Hill in London. You enter through a tiny alleyway on a side street, and find yourself in a building that began its life as a dairy and was until recently a recording studio. The eccentric location is in keeping with its eccentric contents. It’s called The Museum of Everything, and is open to the public free of charge each week from Thursday to Sunday. Crammed into a warren of corridors, cubicles, uncomfortably shaped rooms and one cavernous double-height space is a generous exhibition of the marginalised art of the past 200 years, which has at various times been labelled art brut, outsider art (the most popular term), folk art, naive art, visionary art and, occasionally, Sunday painting.

The common denominator is that this is work by untrained artists, operating outside the commercial art world, in remote or impoverished communities and sometimes in mental institutions. But the competing terminology indicates the lack of consensus on what this art really is, or where it should go in the art historical and museological scheme of things.

The art in this show ranges from the St Ives painter Alfred Wallis (1855-1942), whose seascapes are in the Tate, to the obscure French artist ACM, whose intricate structures resemble models of Indian temples, but are made of electronics. There are intriguing back stories behind most of it. Downstairs you will find the religious works of Sister Gertrude Morgan, a street evangelist in New Orleans (1900-80). Her dense oil and crayon works are full of scrawled psalms, swirling flame-like brushstrokes and the heads of saints. She began painting after receiving a message from God in 1956, and stopped in 1974, apparently at His request. James Brett, the wealthy north Londoner who owns most of the collection on show, was able to acquire handfuls of her work after meeting her accountant. There is a room full of the scroll-like panoramas of Henry Darger (1892-1973), perhaps the best-known marginalised artist of them all, who, after escaping abuse at a children’s home, painted naked children in idyllic garden-like landscapes in the innocent style of children’s book illustration. Hawkins Bolden (1914-2005), meanwhile, was a blind sculptor who compulsively made “faces” from old kitchen pans, washtubs, road signs and

