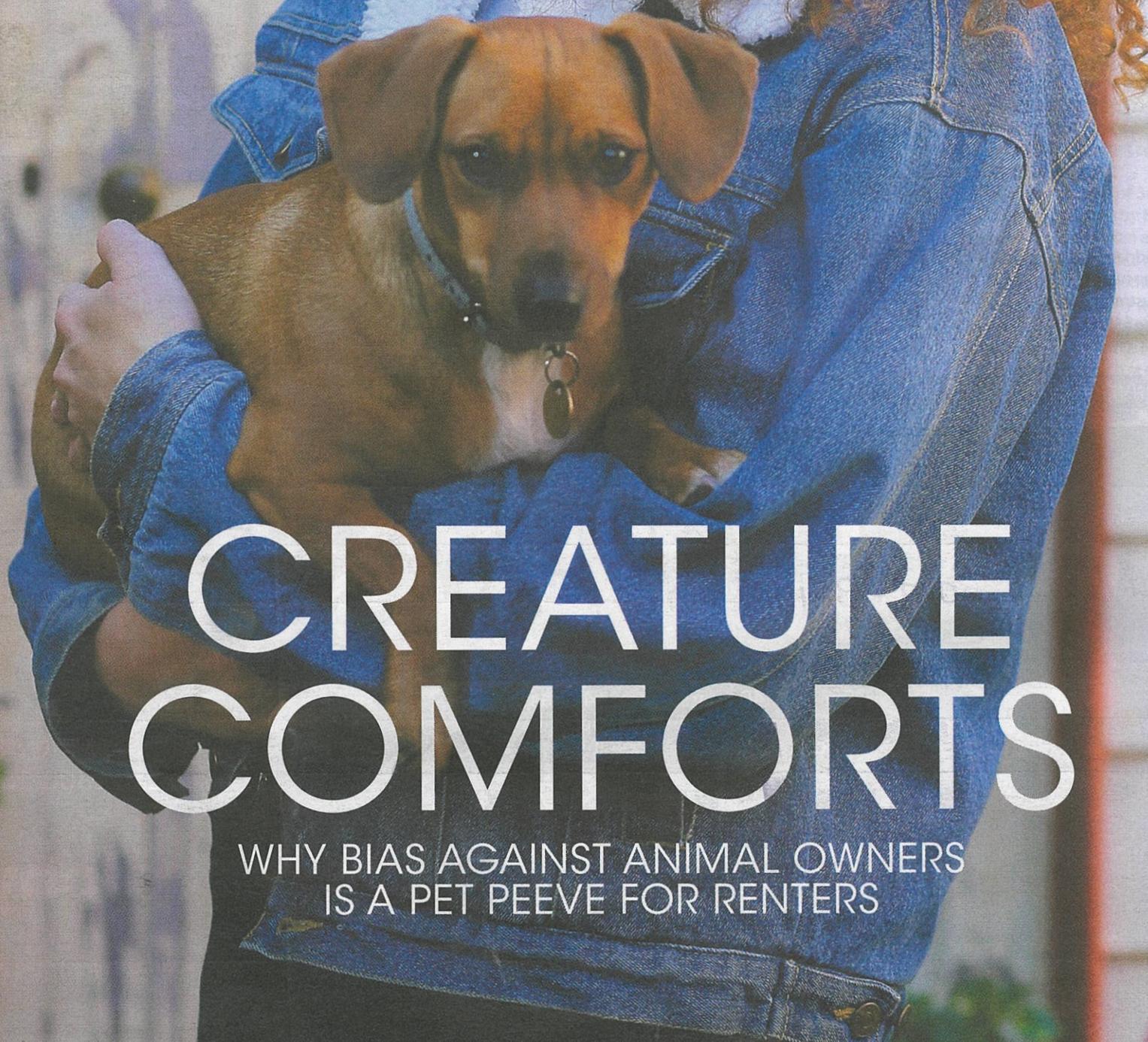


tasweekend

MERCURY JUNE 17-18, 2017

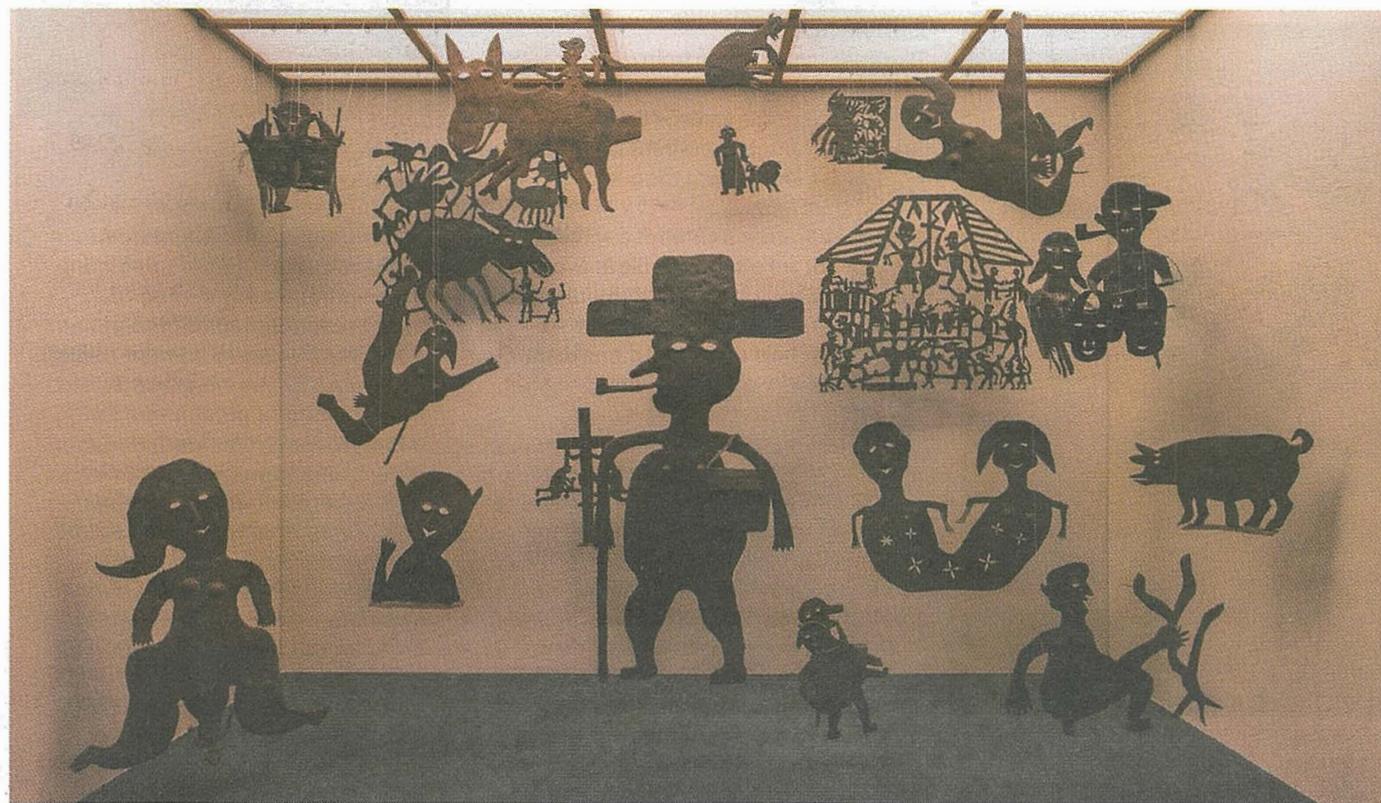


CREATURE COMFORTS

WHY BIAS AGAINST ANIMAL OWNERS
IS A PET PEEVE FOR RENTERS



A BIT OF EVERYTHING



THE MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING

Mona

Until April 2, 2018

If I were to use just one word to describe the Museum of Everything, it would be overwhelming. The sheer volume of art to engage with in this show is massive; it may be the densest show that Mona has given us yet. The title is a fair claim: there is so much art, of such astonishing variety, that in a way everything – every kind of art, every approach to art and an incredible range of art makers – is represented across this showing of almost 2000 works by 200 artists.

The name doesn't reveal what the museum is, though, and that's a hard task, as there is no real concept that ties all this work together beyond it being made by people who are probably not artists in the traditional sense; none of it was made with an entry into the global art market in mind, and there's not much here that's been made by people who have engaged with art on an academic level.

What it all has in common, though, is expression. Some of this art is the most beautifully raw expression I have ever come across; some of it is almost magically pure in execution – there seems in many cases to be a total lack of any notion of making work for an audience beyond the maker themselves, and much of it is free of cynicism or guile. It is refreshing to experience this, but it is only the beginning of the story: whatever this kind of art is, it is not naive. On display here is some of the most intense commitment I have encountered in art.

The staggering variety makes it hard to single out particular works, which elevate

themselves beyond the others, and I could mention dozens. Some are attractive in their simple, direct methods, others because of their complexity, some are awkward and seem entirely otherworldly, while other works convey deeply personal emotions such as religious supplication or intense obsessive commitment. Some display all these qualities. There is humour and rich pathos as well.

Elder Anderson Johnson's work is among several spectacular expressions of profound religious faith. In these works (and there are quite a few) I could grasp that the art was made as an act of faith, and that this faith was likely hugely important to the artist. Other artists were possibly reporting back from the outer edges of sanity, giving the works a feeling of powerful, yet inscrutable, insight.

There are many flavours of obsession on display. Some people have clearly worked for vast swaths of time to realise their work: Nek Chand Saini, creator of the Rock Garden of Chandigarh, worked for decades, at first in secret and then with the support of local government, to realise his immense and ambitious project. Other works are smaller, but are examples of many works that the person has made over their lifetime, and have a daunting complexity to them. Some of the material is not so complex in execution but has a well-defined aesthetic, such as Haitian sculptor Georges Liautaud's flat, blackened metal creations, which have an impish feel and seem to move before one's eyes. I found it hard to remove myself from these ones. Liautaud, who died in 1991, is worth noting as someone in this show who had an extensive career as an artist, and whose art is in many permanent collections; he was a successful professional



Clockwise from top left, *Untitled (all)*, Georges Liautaud 1960–90; detail of *Untitled*, Morton Bartlett, c. 1950; and *Untitled (all)*, Hans-Jörg Georgi, 2010–15.

Pictures: COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING

on many levels, and the sheer power of his art demonstrates exactly why this is the case.

But this is simply the tip of the iceberg. What makes many of these works amazing is the story of the person who made them: their circumstances, background and motivation. The greatest moments come when an entirely singular motivation for creating art is revealed – and the way you look at what art is for, and what it might be – is not just expanded, but thrown wide open.

The question of what the exhibition is about does hang in the air somewhat unanswered, but the Museum of Everything's curator James Brett seems to want to expand the notion of what contemporary art is and what an art audience might consider as art. I was left overwhelmed, exhilarated, excited

and full of questions: I wondered about the ethics of displaying work from a private inner world that was very possibly never intended for display, but existed as a personal act of creativity; I wondered why some of these artists are 'unknown' to the broader population when investigation reveals they are in quite significant collections; and most of all, I wondered about the logic of putting all these works together as if they have something in common. These questions excite me. If art or a show makes me uncomfortable, or I resist it, that means it has worked: that somehow I've been shoved outside how I look and think about art. This is why I look at art: not to be entertained, but to be shaken.

Everything has shaken me, and I want to go again.