



145 CHARLIE LEVINE
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OUT OF THIS WORLD

What's happening outside the mainstream? And is art still Outsider when the institutions start to show it...? Charlie Levine opens the doors to the Hayward Gallery's summer show and finds it's all about the making, and the ideas.

How "Outsider" is Outsider art any more? It pops up periodically at major museums, and there are significant collections of it — including the Musgrave Kinley. More recently, one of the standout exhibitions this year so far was *Souzou: Outsider Art from Japan* at the Wellcome Collection (ended June 30). I was impressed and inspired, and it may seem like a cliché, but I found both a purity and a quality in the works that I had felt lacking in many recent gallery experiences. All of which is by way of introducing the Hayward Gallery's latest exhibition *The Alternative Guide to the Universe: an exhibition exploring "the work of self-taught artists and architects, fringe physicists and visionary inventors, all of whom offer bracingly unorthodox perspectives on the world we live in"*. With a preamble like that, it had a lot to live up to.





Outsider art, which is art made by untrained artists working outside the mainstreams of the art world, and often of society too, is gaining even more profile, thanks to projects like the Museum of Everything, a roaming arts project dedicated to promoting outsider and forgotten art. This is important, as it offers a counter argument to the presupposition that an art education is crucial to the quality and success of an artist and their work. This shift in focus also reaffirms the importance of the end product, the artwork itself; although there is an accompanying danger of fetishising the status of the Outsider themselves.

The Alternative Guide to the Universe seems aware of this potential pitfall, and takes an interesting approach to the Outsider art genre. The exhibition doesn't really focus on the fact these artists are untrained, rather it explores the concepts, inventions and ideas of physics that have impacted the work, and looks at why the end product appears as it does. Unlike Souza, this incredibly large exhibition promotes the fact that it is eccentric and that its artists/contributors depart from accepted ways of thinking — one of the upsides,

perhaps, of not having your mind filtered and shaped by an art education?

The exhibition does not just present a selection of artists, rather it highlights ideas common to the various artists, with the result that it is not only Outsider art, but smart art. It is all about process, ideas, fictional utopias and cities; the artists play with architecture, concepts of time and space, time travel, and communication with other dimensions. We are presented with explorations of energy flows, and investigations into how our identities sit within the world.

Particular highlights for me were the repetitive number/colour combinations by Alfred Jenson, the intricate paintings/drawings and text maps of Paul Laffoley and the terrifyingly amazing child robot by Yulu Wu.

It is a must see show, you may not like all the work, you may not think of it as high-end contemporary art, but you will not leave the exhibition without having had your thoughts changed, your understanding of the world altered, and it is quite possible that you won't be able to think about your life in the same way again.

Charlie Levine is Chief UK Artfetcher and Curator.

Rammellzee, Color Letter Racer Set (c.1988) and White Letter Racer Set (c.1991). Installation view Alternative Guide to the Universe, Hayward Gallery 2013 © Estate of Carmela Zagari Rammellzee. Photo: Linda Nyland.

Paul Laffoley, Thanaton III (1989). Installation view Alternative Guide to the Universe, Hayward Gallery 2013 © the artist. Photo: Linda Nyland.

Lee Godie, Lee and Cameo on a chair... (early to mid 1970s) © the artist. Courtesy Richard and Ellen Sandor Family Collection.