



We held an exclusive interview with James Brett, The Museum of Everything director, in which he highlights the element of the show, and why he believes that Nek Chand's work needs to be seen, at a global level.



Image Courtesy: Nekchand's Installations at Rock Garden, Chandigarh

**S.S:** What inspired you to initiate The Museum of Everything?

**J.B:** We opened The Museum of Everything in 2009 to celebrate an incredibly creative and often overlooked art form which had existed in all countries since mankind first made a mark. It incorporated what was known as folk art or primitive art.

This art form went by many names, most of which were dismissive. In Europe it was usually called art brut or outsider art. So we opted for 'Everything' instead

What was very clear at that time was that this art form had rarely found

its way into mainstream art history and art museums, even though its influence was wide.

Thus, instead of categories, we focussed on the personal and private nature of the work and celebrated it as loudly as we could. The show was a hit and what had started as a temporary two week project, grew into what is now one of the most successful independent museums in Europe, with over half a million visitors in three and a half years.

**S.S:** The Museum of Everything curates the work of 'undiscovered, unintentional, untrained and unclassifiable artists.' Do you feel

there is a marked difference between autodidacts and trained artists?

**J.B:** A person with artistic talent who has not been shaped or educated in a particular way has to find his or her own creative solutions to do what they want to do.

It's not better or worse than what a trained artist does, but it can reveal surprising forms - because a gifted self-taught artist/non-artist may be substantially more liberated and inventive than the same artist working within an art historical or academic framework.

What we are really looking for is work

which is truthful, which has deep personal meaning, which relies on no-one for its aesthetic or resonance and which wakes us up ... the very same qualities, perhaps which any of us look for in a great work of art.

At The Museum of Everything, we believe that the people you wouldn't normally think of as artists can not only make art, but can break the boundaries of visual culture.

Thus we include amateurs, folkloric artists, homeless artists, individuals with physical and learning disabilities, visionaries and prophets ... people from all walks of life and all cultures.



Image Courtesy: Nekchand's installations at Rock Garden, Chandigarh

For us, they are artists – no more, no less.

**S.S:** Sri Nek Chand Saini is an important element of the Museum. What makes Sri Nek Chand's installations unique?

**J.B:** For us, Sri Nek Chand is one of the heroes of this genre. What he created in Chandigarh is not just an installation; it is a kingdom, assembled over most of his adult life, both with and without the support of the authorities. I would personally urge all of your readers to go and see it, at least once in their lifetimes!

His story is also a classic autodidact's tale: one man has a dream and decides to make it a reality, creating it in secret. Yet, it is the scale of his vision which lends the Rock Garden its monumental authority; almost three square kilometres, containing thousands of handmade sculptures.

Few trained artists would ever commit to one monumental work like this, not to mention an illegally conceived one. Certainly, few would create what they create without thinking about the marketplace, which is of course part of what lends his masterpiece its beauty and sincerity.

And perhaps the most essential element of all: the Rock Garden is not for sale – which is probably why Nek Chand, who is an artist, an artisan, a craftsman, an architect and a visionary, has been sadly overlooked by contemporary Indian art ... he is simply unique and he just doesn't fit!

For us the Rock Garden is not the recreational park, it sometimes seems to be, but one of the greatest and most inspiring works Indian art today. If we were able to, we would almost certainly vote for it to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site!

**S.S:** Could you tell us a bit about the solo exhibition. What works have been featured as part of the 'Alternative Guide to the Universe' at the Hayward?

**J. B:** For this summer show at Hayward Gallery, one of London's leading contemporary art museums, we have put together an assembly of over 100 sculptures, created by Nek Chand and his team in Chandigarh. The installation has been created to mimic the feel and style of the original Rock Garden and give viewers a taste of what the real place is like.

Nek Chand is one of over twenty artists featured in the show and it is

the first time he has had his work presented in a major contemporary art museum in Britain. It is a historic and substantial achievement.

The show will run until the end of August and we sincerely hope tens of thousands will discover this master artist.

**S.S:** Thank You, Mr. Brett, for taking the time out to speak with us.

James Brett, Director, The Museum of Everything

