



James Brett

By Lauren Cochrane Photographer William Skeaping

JAMES BRETT IS the founder of The Museum of Everything. A gallery in Primrose Hill, north London, dedicated to “artists and creators living outside our modern society”, it first opened in 2009. After a show in Italy, the third exhibition (a collaboration with Peter Blake) is back in Primrose Hill until the end of the year. house talked to Brett about discovering artists, “collectitis” and dogs.

How did the Peter Blake collaboration happen?

I went to visit him in his studio and he had the same sort of disease as I do – collectitis. We used the museum as a base to make it as if you were walking inside a Peter Blake picture or diorama. Only a few pieces are actual art and the rest

of it is midgets, giants, self-taught embroiders, shells, dolls, circus posters, taxidermy and fairgrounds.

How do you feel about the museum being associated with outsider art?

I don't encourage it. I think it's too vague [a term]. It's not an insult but it's a bit like tainting someone with a name. For example, if you say to someone “you're outside because you've got a disability”, it's true that they are outside a lot of the things that would make them accepted artists. So they do tend to exist in different circumstances but these days “outsider” just means outside the art world more than it means anything else.

But is it somehow lesser art because it's not in, say, the Tate Modern?

The institutions weren't set up like that – they were set up to show work, but they have become dictatorial. They say “we are choosing what's right” and they try to fight against that but they're still large institutions, whereas a loose, sloppy environment like this that pretends to be a museum by calling itself a museum is something else and encourages something else.

Were you surprised by how popular it has been?

We didn't think anyone would come. Your average small private museum gets 10,000 to 15,000 visitors a year, not so many. We

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had 35,000 people come in four months and we were only open four or five days a week. It was astonishing. A lot of people didn't go to regular art galleries but it's very accessible and it's very democratic. I think that we were free also helped.

It must be great to see every man and their dog walk through the door...

We have dogs. They leave the biggest donations. The first time I saw them, I realised the owners hadn't been stopped at the door. Then I thought it's great. I don't know any other places where they let dogs in. Can you imagine if they let dogs into the Tate?

www.museumofeverything.com