

Outsiders Become Insiders



With a new museum in Amsterdam and a major overview at the Kunsthal it seems as if the museum world is finally taking outsider art seriously. Only the name remains to be changed.

by Vera Ros

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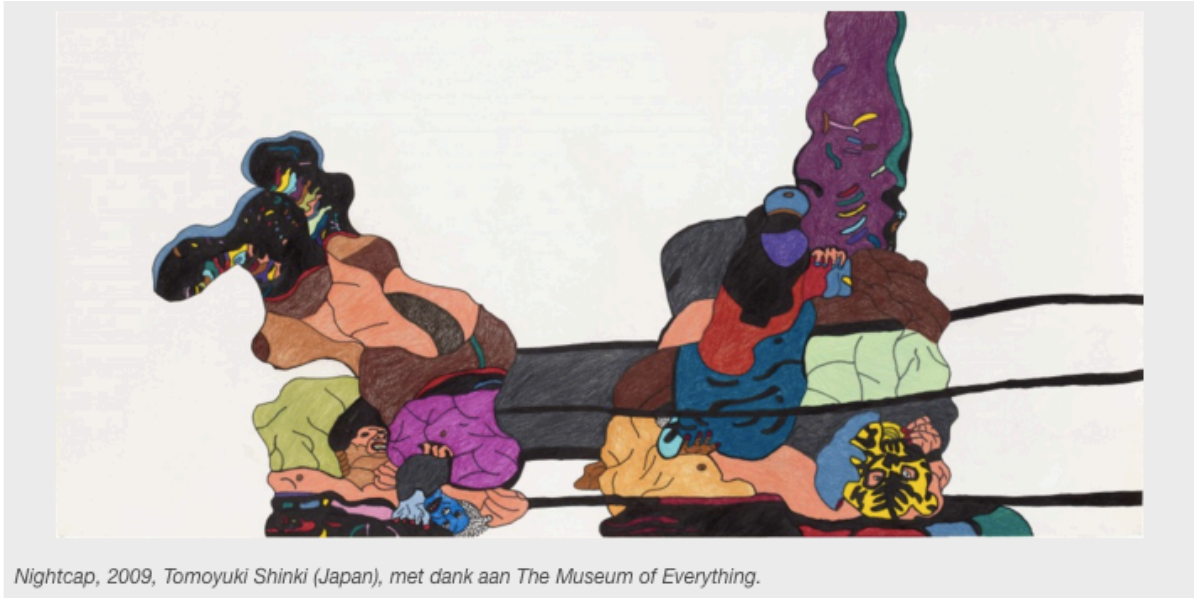
'First Outsider Art Museum in the Netherlands.' This is how a proud Hermitage in Amsterdam recently presented its new department of outsider art. This is not quite right though. The city of Zwolle already had such a museum, an interesting selection of which the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague showed last year. This new initiative does however highlight, as already mentioned in this magazine at the time of the exhibition, the growing appreciation of outsider art, dismissed for a long time as eccentric or psychiatric art.



Impressie Outsider Art Museum in Hermitage Amsterdam. Foto: Evert Elzinga.

The Outsider Art Museum has replaced one of the Hermitage shops with the international collection of the collaborating partner museum Het Dolhuys. A

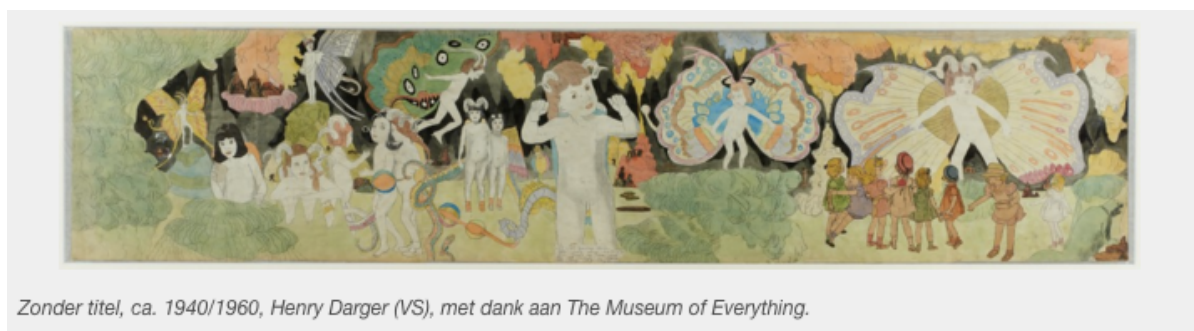
dusky space with bronze coloured walls where the works are beautifully lit (and the captions are unfortunately difficult to read). Many Japanese makers are amongst them. The bright pink and purple marker drawings full of fertility symbolism by Marie Suzuki (1979) are magnificent and seem to echo the influence of Japanese prints and manga. Or the shimmering soldiers built out of twist ties by Shota Katsube (1991); on a pillow under glass they look like precious objects. The vibrant drawings by the Dutch artist Jannemiek Tukker (1964) are also beautiful. Much more interesting work can be seen in the gallery and art library of the healthcare organization Cordaan, formerly housed in a building on the Amstel river, to which a studio is attached.



Nightcap, 2009, Tomoyuki Shinki (Japan), met dank aan The Museum of Everything.

Big Names

While the Hermitage shows mainly current art, the Rotterdam Kunsthall offers an overview of the travelling 'The Museum of **Everything**' of the Brit James Brett, flamboyant ambassador of outsider art, which contains many 'established' names. The visitor is rather an outsider on his exploration of this enormous maze of wooden, dingy walls. A design that perhaps unintentionally affirms the cliché image of outsider art as unpolished and not to be taken truly seriously. But one that also creates the informal atmosphere of art fairs for upcoming talent or a fair like Amsterdam Drawing.



Zonder titel, ca. 1940/1960, Henry Darger (VS), met dank aan The Museum of Everything.

Here it is full of paintings and works on paper of often considerable size, as well as sculptures, scale models and installations in widely diverse materials, including waste. Yet there are some focuses as several artists are represented by multiple works or have been given their own room. The highlight is the American artist **Henry Darger** (1892-1973), whose work has a cult status and so much of it rarely been shown. Eight vitrines present Darger's drawn panoramas of the Vivian Girls; little girls who sometimes experience horrific adventures in fairy-tale landscapes. Similar is the fictional family album of his compatriot **Morton Bartlett** (1909-1992). His photos of (little girl) dolls, the

dolls themselves and their clothes forming an oppressive *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which is in fact a big call for love. Completely different are the drawings of the *solitaire*, heavily veiled women-like figures by the Iranian **David Koochaki** (1939, also on display in Amsterdam); proof that not every outsider tends to scribble imagined worlds on paper in the form of city-maps or cartoons.



Quartumdimensio Aedificium, 1973, Paul Lafoley (VS),
Met dank aan The Museum of Everything.

National manifestation

As previously in The Hague, links can constantly be made in Amsterdam and Rotterdam between names and movements from mainstream modern and contemporary art. Consequently, the question arises as to what extent one can still speak of outsider art. In Amsterdam, therefore, they prefer to talk about the 'museum of the mind' and 'the inner voice in art'; the Kunsthal refers to it as 'non-academic art'. However well-meaning, maybe it is about time to give up all labels and to present the work of insiders and outsiders much more structurally than has thus far happened, together and as art. A point that will undoubtedly be addressed in the national programme of discussions and lectures.