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of **Everything**

outsider art



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AFBEELDING OMSLAG VOORZIJDJE
Henry Darger, *Zonder titel*, ca. 1940-1960 •
houtschool, potlood en waterverf op papier •
met dank aan The Museum of Everything

AFBEELDING INHOUDSPAGINA
Calvin & Ruby Black, *Museum Tickets*
Here 25c, ca. 1970 • geverfd hout,
19 x 20 cm • met dank aan The
Museum of Everything

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op facebook. Wilt u iets vragen
of meedelen, en op de hoogte
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Inside Out

MARIETTE HAVEMAN

The art lovers who we present here have one thing in common: without exception they object to the term outsider art.

There is a good reason for that.

This term carries an implicit value judgment: there is the inner circle, and there is the nebulous world of the outsiders. Artists in the shadows, silent outsiders on the other side of the Lethe, who practise art for therapeutic reasons or out of their pathology.

Anyone who has seen the work of artists such as Séraphine Louis, Willem van Genk, Henry Darger and Martin Ramirez (to mention some of the big names) understands how much this vision is detrimental to reality. These people are artists before they are anything else. If they exist in a ghostly world of silence and a lack of recognition, it is unjust.

In this sense, the work of individuals like Jean

Dubuffet with his Art Brut, and James Brett with his Museum of Everything are both an act of justice and an enrichment for art.

I myself encountered the work of Séraphine Louis and André Bauchant for the first time in the exhibition *Der Schatten der Avantgarde* (The Shadow of the Avant-garde) in Museum Folkwang in Essen [2, 4]. I had known about Willem van Genk only for a short while, and knew about the American Henry Darger only from reproductions. In other words, I was a novice in this field. Although I have seen quite a lot of art.

I came to it late, also in comparison with the other authors of this *Kunstschrift*. Mark Peeters knew about Willem van Genk since his childhood in the sixties, whose work was exhibited in the same gallery (Schmela in Düsseldorf) as his father Henk. Through a friend, Arjen Ribbens was made aware of the exceptional qualities of Adolf Wölfli and Carlo Zinelli in the late nineties.



1 Nek Chand Saini
Untitled (inhabitants of Rock Garden), c. 1980 – metal and textile, 137 x 44 x 37 cm – credit to The Museum of Everything Nek Chand Saini worked as a road constructor on the realisation of Chandigarh, a new city in India designed by Le Corbusier. He created his own sculpture park from scrap materials, Rock Garden.

2 Séraphine Louis
L'arbre de vie (Tree of Life), 1928 – ripolin and oil on canvas, 144 x 112 cm – Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie, Senlis

And The Museum of Everything opened its doors in 2009, in a former milk factory [11]. So not that long ago either. While outsiders have existed as long as art has existed, their work has been exhibited as art and not just as 'material' since the twenties of the previous century.

Because whoever would like to know how interest in this work arose needs to turn to psychiatric hospitals: that of Emil Kraepelin in Munich and Hans Prinzhorn in Heidelberg, Charcot in Paris, Morgenthaler in Bern, Binswanger in Jena, that of the British psychiatrist Heislop in

Bethlem, London.

In all these different places an art collection is still preserved and displayed today, by artists who via psychiatry have ended up in art. And it is not surprising, although very touching, to discover that also there, in the silence and the isolation of the hospital, are, and were, big talents. People who make art because they are artists, with a special ability which is a voice for a particular inner world.

In the work of the outsiders (in the absence of a better term; there are more bynames in art history, and this is simply the most common term)



3 Sam Doyle

Untitled (Brown Bomer),
1979 – painted tin 152.4 x
71 x 3 cm – credit to The
Museum of Everything

4 Bill Traylor

*Man in brown and blue with
briefcase*, c. 1939-1942 –
pencil and watercolour on
cardboard, 33 x 21 cm –
Philadelphia Museum of
Art, Philadelphia

you meet something that you will not find anywhere else: an intensity, an extreme tunnel vision which can be very useful for art. Size does the rest. With the biggest of all the masters (m/f) who are brought to attention, the viewer feels as if he is being drawn into the insides of another world. It is hardly ever or never pleasant, the universe of absorbing lines, stripes and secret codes with which this art surrounds you. But pleasant is not necessarily a quality in art.

The power of these works lies in a talent for imagery, bestowed by heaven, for visualisation, without which it would never work. But immediately afterwards follows that frantic intensity.

What I would like to say is: what makes artists like the American Paul Laffoley, the Indian road

constructor Nek Chand Saini [1] and the Chinese factory worker Guo Fengyi different is secondary, and at the same time we cannot ignore it: it is completely intertwined with their talent. Also in the inner circle of art history will you find such powerful mavericks. Jeroen Bosch was a phenomenal talent and also a personality with a great fascination for the underside of the biological universe, of eating and being eaten. Piero di Cosimo was an eccentric, Jacopo de Pontormo suffered from severe neurosis. Talent is the decisive factor, imagination, perseverance, and all of this expresses an inner world, where you would rather not reside too long. And yet you do. Because it has been done so well, and so strangely, so completely original.

Undoubtedly, it is that relentless originality of the talented outsider that has caused outsider art to be part of the history of art.



Since the moment artists started to explicitly distinguish themselves from the mainstream and started to form avant-gardes, proclaiming their individuality, at the beginning of the twentieth century, has this group come into the picture, a group of artists who cannot be but original. As can be read in this Kunstschrift, the relation between insiders and outsiders is partially based on a misunderstanding, and also on a form of exploitation. Many of the early practitioners of naïve art, in particular Henri Rousseau, had great respect for Salon veterans like Jean-Léon Gérôme. What Picasso and the Surrealists liked in the work of the auto-didacts or the artists from psychiatric collections was not realism, but what deviated from it: the flatness, the fullness, the involuntary, frantic directness of their representations. Like Willem Sandberg described the work of the Haitians he admired in the forties: 'It is as if one has managed to keep the freshness of children's drawings, while the works sometimes truly have the characteristics of a mature and settled personality [5].

Sandberg had a serious interest in this work, and he was very much concerned with the makers, the same attitude that the Brit James Brett expresses

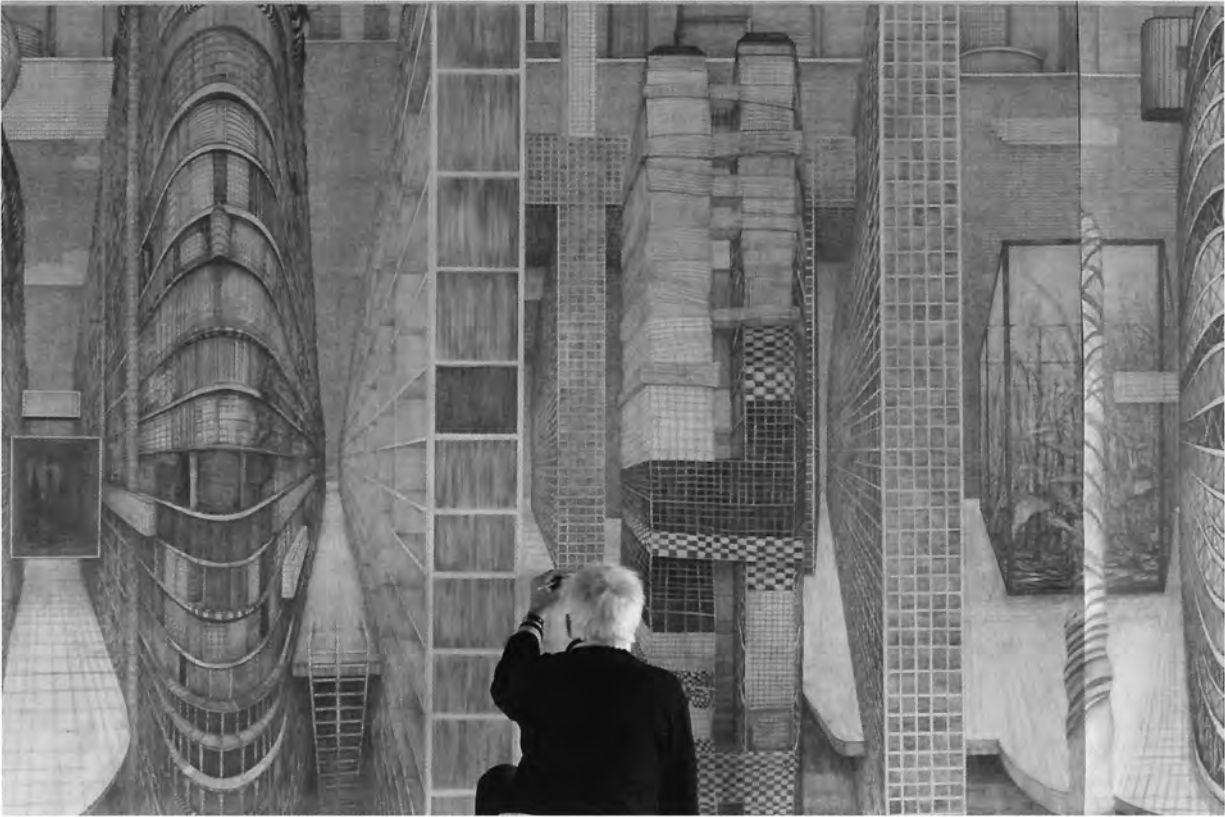
Since the moment artists started to explicitly distinguish themselves from the mainstream and started to form avant-gardes, proclaiming their individuality, at the beginning of the twentieth century, has this group come into the picture, a group of artists who cannot be but original.

with his Museum of Everything. For artists the priority is often subtly different. Artists like Paul Klee, Picasso, and even the active impresario of Art Brut, Dubuffet, always have their own agenda, namely their own work. Artists are magpies. The work of outsiders, loners, independent makers in the margins forms the breeding ground for their work. It is not helpful to blame them for it.

This double voice, from artists and curators, explains why the outsider art that we, art enthusiasts, get to see follows a pattern that shows a remarkable kinship with contemporary art; as a kind of shadow of the avant-garde, like the name of the exhibition in Essen.

Today it seems that this art is gradually coming out of this shadow and becomes integrated in the selection of museums of modern art.

5 **Touissant Auguste**
Adam and Eve (detail), one of the paintings of the exhibition 19 painters from Haiti organized at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1950. Director Willem Sandberg was so impressed by the art of Haiti he discovered that he organised an exhibition that same year which travelled to various European cities.



Again it is the United States that the first steps are being taken. In a New York Times article from 2013, titled 'Curator, Tear Down These Walls', the critic Roberta Smith advocated a larger integration of the autodidacts with 'official' art. Especially the sixties and seventies rooms, she writes, would greatly improve with the addition of a couple of Henry Dargers amongst the static monochromes. And the American museums, according to Mark Peeters, have followed her advice.

Tegelijk is het principe van de zwaan-kleef-aan-werking tussen de officiële kunstwereld en die van de buitenstaanders onverminderd van kracht.

At the same time, the principle of piggybacking between the official art world and that of the outsiders is still at play.

The Kunsthal presents an image that takes us by surprise; I thought of the old German art historian Alois Riegl's term *Kunstwollen*, who defined the human creative urge as something impulsive. But it also reminds one of the exhibition *All About Drawing* which was organised by the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam in 2011. There one could see how much inside and outside already intertwined.

Why are we at some point open to a certain source? Why does that language appeal so much to us right now? You can easily think of reasons for that, such as the fact that official art today is so sophisticated, so well-informed, organized and calculated it could do with being challenged by someone who doesn't care about trends.

But whatever the answer to those questions is, let's make the most of it.

Mariëtte Haveman is editor of *Kunstschrift*

7 Robbie Cornelissen working on *The Big Memory X* 2011 - pencil on paper 240 x 1320 cm - collection artist (photo Adriaan van Dam)

8 Augustin Lesage working at the Institut Métaphysique International | Paris 1927



The Museum of everything

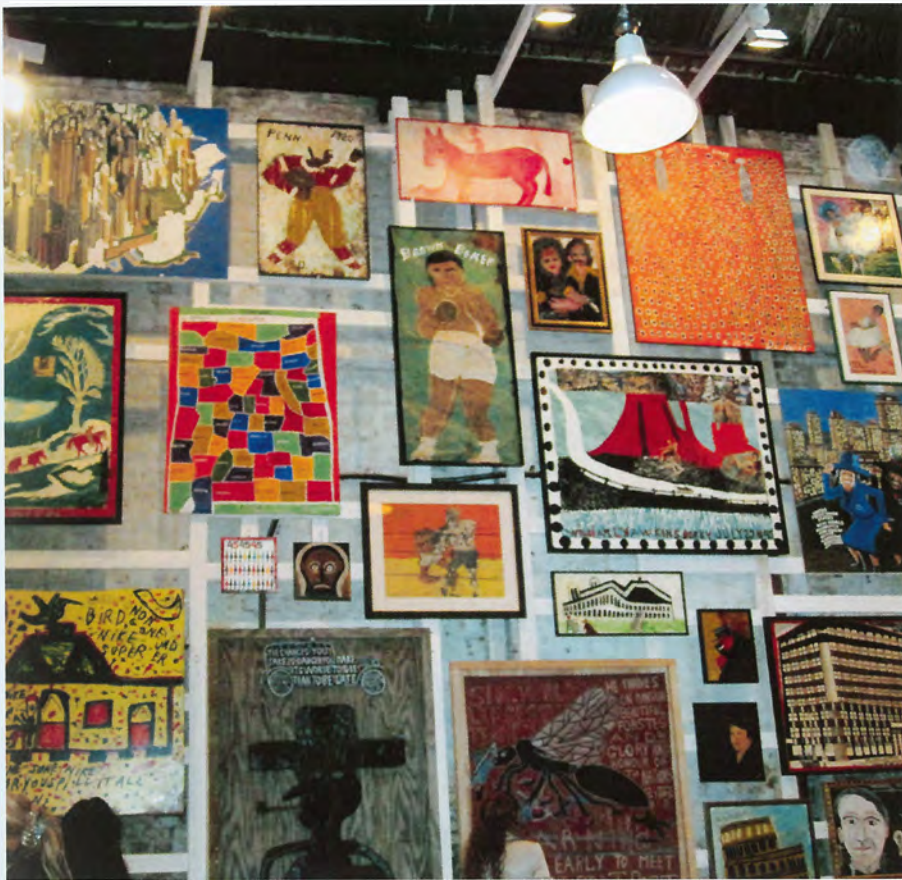


The art is everything, and it's not in the least a business that deals in brands: the Anish Kapoor, Marlene Dumas, Picasso, Van Gogh brand. You have A-brands, B-brands and blue chip artists and you have trends that take brands forward. That whole radar rests on a key assumption: that the hierarchy which has been cultivated by curators, critics, art dealers, is right. The absolute truth is that there is a firmament with a few stars and a vague outside world that does not matter.

You have the temples of the gods, and you have the underworld, where the irrelevant is teeming with life. It was determined for us all centuries ago.

But this view of reality is false. People make art, whose world they also belong to. Talent is everywhere, not only in places where this or that mighty curator wishes to take his or her eye to.

We at the Museum of Everything have made it our aim and commitment made this whole, huge, so-called outside world off the tracking, looking for talent. And what we found was overwhelming.



Our artists are not less. They are not simple. They are not outsiders. If they are different in some ways, they are the same as us too. They simply see the world in a particular way. And their visual opinions will fascinate and inspire if we give them THE opportunity and the time to do so.

That is the role of The Museum of Everything. We pretend to be a contemporary art project. We function like a contemporary art practice. But we are actually a platform: for people whose creative output does not naturally fit into other cultural worldviews.

The Museum of Everything acts as an advocate. It takes its artists by the hand and leads them into the light. It tries to define without definition, to represent without restriction, inferring the complications of creative human behaviour through visual associations and a subjective narrative installation.

This last point is essential. There is nothing neutral about our artists, so there is nothing neutral about our displays. Little in life is impartial, least of all a white box. That ubiquitous misunderstanding has led to a form of white supremacy, which until very recently, inevitably excluded the quieter,

stranger, more colourful voices.

You and I are not the outsiders. They are human beings, just like us. To exclude them, even in language, is not only bigoted, it's a mistake. For if what they do has historically not been seen as art, then it is time to wake up and give them their due.

The Museum of Everything expands accepted ideas of art-making. We bring unknown or overlooked or misclassified artists to people's attention. We encourage integration into the mainstream through radical cultural actions. We create disruption and debate, while delighting our audience and offering them a British cup of tea.

With our help, and with the support of like-minded curators and organisations, I believe our artists will herald a revolution in the universal perception of creative doing. For their art is the most art out there in the world. There are, simply put, more of them.

With that realisation, contemporary art becomes the minority, the outsider. The Clash wrote a great song about this. It is called White Man in Hammersmith Palais.



Sinds het begin van de 20ste eeuw is er een gestage opmars van kunstenaars buiten de paden van het officiële circuit naar het hart van de erkende kunst. Henry Darger, Adolf Wölfli, Séraphine Louis en Willem van Genk vormen de top van een fenomeen dat onze aandacht meer dan waard is. Kunstenaars als Picasso en Dubuffet wisten hun werk al veel langer te waarderen. Omdat het zo goed is, en zo zonderling, volstrekt origineel.



AP

