



*The Museum of Everything's fourth showing of outsider art features work mainly by artists with developmental difficulties from different countries*



Artist: [unreadable]  
Title: [unreadable]  
Medium: [unreadable]  
Year: [unreadable]

Artist: Anthony Bonaguidi  
Year: 1990  
Media: Acrylic on Paper  
Dimensions: 100cm x 100cm  
This work is a re-interpretation of the classic cover image from the dawn of the album rock.

JOHNNY TUCKER ATTEMPTS TO NAVIGATE THE MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING IN ITS LATEST INCARNATION, A LABYRITHINE DISPLAY OF OUTSIDER ART IN THE BASEMENT AND WINDOWS OF LONDON DEPARTMENT STORE SELFRIDGES

# EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE

**Somewhere in a central London** basement is a labyrinthine group of rooms, a 'house' where the walls are crammed full of art and every twist and turn reveals peeling wallpaper, aged furniture and new works to delight the eye. The really strange thing is that this basement is in Oxford Street: Selfridges, to be precise.

The house is in effect a set. It's the fourth incarnation of the Museum of Everything, which annually pops up to challenge our very perception of art, from the choice of exhibits right through to the way we experience them through the environment, which in turn has a large bearing on your relationship with the work itself. With the Museum of

Everything, you cannot divorce the art from the exhibition. They are one; they work holistically. The central idea of the 'museum' is the need to show work by 'unintentional, untrained and undiscovered artists' – outsider art.

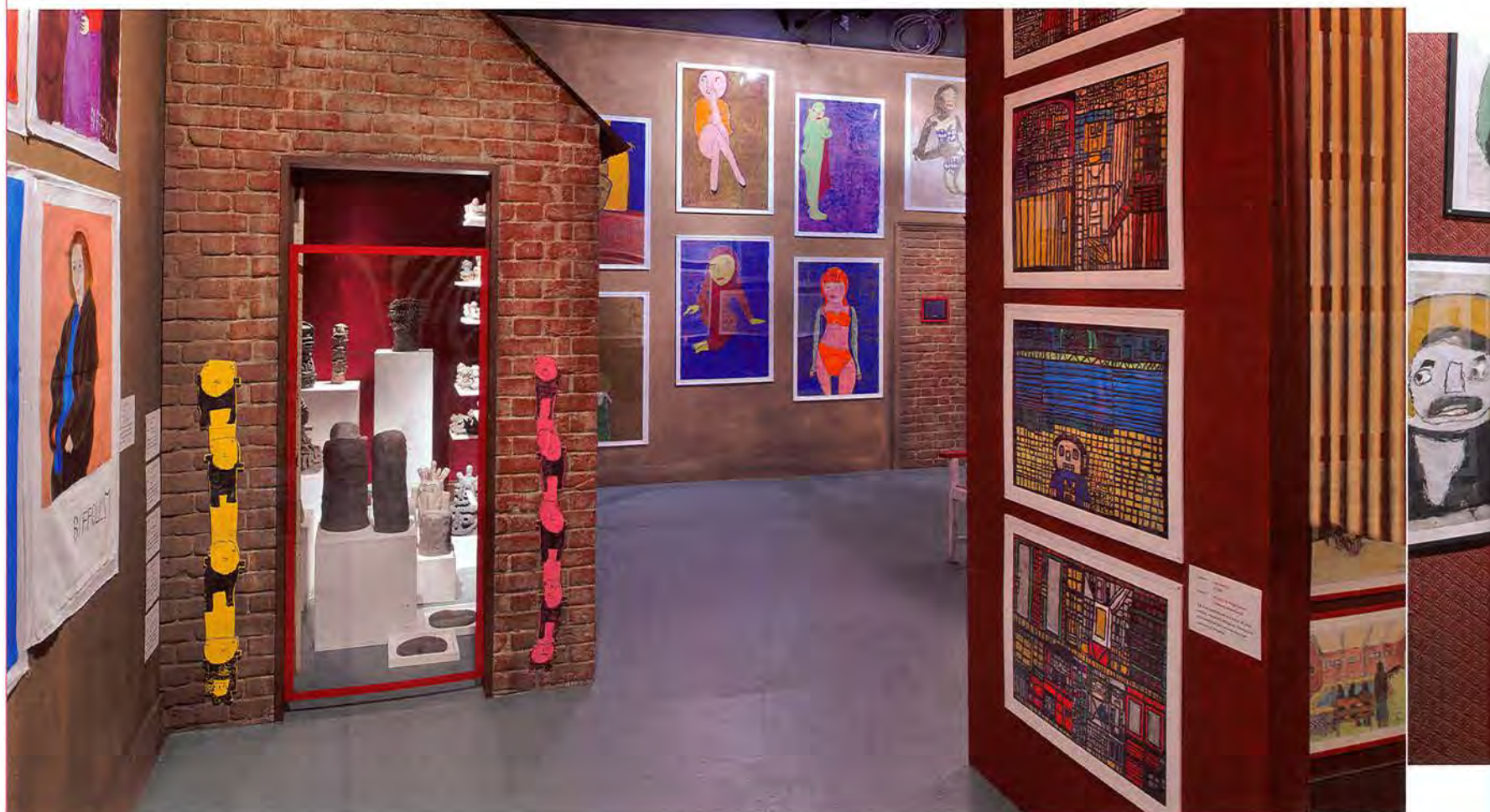
The man behind it all is filmmaker James Brett, an engagingly energetic, bearded, bespectacled and, more often than not, beargoo-shorted figure. His theatrical, narrative-focused past is supremely evident in the various iterations of the MoE. MoE #1 and #3 were in Primrose Hill, while #2 popped up in Tate Modern. Shows have featured everything from stuffed pugilistic squirrels to miniature fairgrounds. You learn to expect the unexpected.

And now it's in Selfridges. It's a venue that surprises and challenges. And that's exactly why Brett has put MoE there. (You can read more about his ethos as he discusses the nature of museums and exhibitions with Design Museum director Deyan Sudjic and designer Ron Arad, starting below.) 'Everything is about trying to engage,' he says, delighted that he's managed to secure such a public stage. Popularity is not a dirty word in Brett's lexicon; the three previous shows pulled in 200,000 people in total.

The MoE even has its own store selling everything from pencils to prints, not to mention Celements Ribero clothing using patterns taken from certain artworks in the show.

As well as the shop on the ground floor, the store has amazingly also given over all of its windows to the MoE, which bring to life the work of the individual artists that appear on the walls below. The windows and the labyrinth below have been created by production designer Eve Stewart, who worked on *The King's Speech* film and has been involved with the MoE since its inception.

Brett explains the show's conception: 'We walked into the space and we went, 'Oh it's a bit small,' because we are used to curating 10,000 sq ft and this is quite modest at around 3,500. Key to unlocking it was that I became aware that to make the space big you had to make it smaller.



EXCLUSIVELY FOR BLUEPRINT,  
MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING  
IMPRESARIO JAMES BRETT,  
DESIGN MUSEUM DIRECTOR  
DEYAN SUJIC AND DESIGNER  
RON ARAD SAT DOWN TO  
RUMINATE ON THE NATURE OF  
MUSEUMS AND EXHIBITIONS

**JAMES BRETT:** I thought it would be interesting for us to talk about what a museum is and what structures a museum and what the function of that thing is: how you design people's journeys.

Thinking about Holon [Design Museum, Tel Aviv] which Ron [Arad] designed and about the Design Museum [London, director, Deyan Sudjic], I'm the novice here. I'm doing a really very difficult one where I'm taking a commercial space [Selfridges, London] and trying to mess with it.

**RON ARAD:** Let's just make it clear: it's called the Museum of Everything and it's not really a museum.  
**JB:** Don't give it away!

**RA:** That's the beauty of it, the name does a lot of work. You would go off down this little street in Primrose Hill and seeing it [Museum of Everything #1] for the first time was a real thrill. You couldn't imagine that there was so much space in there; you think it's not an exhibit, but it is. It was the most exciting thing that day. Week. Year! It was amazing.

It's nice to be surprised and to be surprised in a pleasant way. Your graphics were very important, things like "No photography, penalty = death". It was, forgive my word, alternative, in a good way. It was alternative and educated. Whether you liked it or not, it was scholarly. You're an expert in what you do, or at least, the visitors get the impression that you are!

**JB:** Deyan: How did you perceive it [#1] when you came in?

**DEYAN SUJIC:** There was a shock of freshness, of something you hadn't thought of before. As Ron says, that experience of falling down a rabbit hole into this found space; the sense that someone had made it appear completely effortless, but had also considered everything as well, and it made me wonder how much time you'd spent on planning it? Had you made a model?

'Museum' is a very heavy word, which involves growing up and thinking about the future. How do

Frankly, I just went back to my original home, which is a small terraced house where there's never enough room to look at anything. I said: "Look guys that's what we need to do," and that's when it started to come alive.

'It also made it much easier for us to hang, and then we said we want just enough to give the indication of a home, so go and find small items of furniture that will indicate a home rather than a store. It's sort of basic production design. But, actually, I hope it comes across, because it's really about finding a balance and to make you uncertain, so that when you come in you're never quite clear. I can't help it, I don't like neutral spaces.'

Stewart adds: 'James' house is so

**Exhibition #1** featured 800 works including commentaries by Grayson Perry, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Maurizio Cattelan, Paula Rego and Nick Cave.

**Exhibition #2** at Tate Modern featured more than 200 works by undiscovered British artists, selected by a panel of artists and curators, including Ron Arad, Iwona Blazwick, Charles Avery and Jarvis Cocker.

**Exhibition #3** was co-curated with artist Sir Peter Blake and included a recreation of Walter Potter's Victorian marvel, the Museum of Curiosities.

iconic and full of this kind of passion for this type of art, I felt that it should be represented – with its excitement. I was worried there wasn't enough wall space. I think the division of the space in this place makes it seem bigger in a really weird way. You just never know where you are. You never meet with a dead end really, so you feel its continuous. I think that is the point: to give that optical illusion.'

The work on display this time is by artists who all have developmental difficulties. A lot of the work has been created at organised workshops, though Brett is quick to point out that this isn't therapy, it's art. 'I visited a lot of workshops and in the best ones, if someone came in, they were there

forever until they didn't want to be there anymore. When I looked at other places they were offering therapy, they were offering coffee and art or schools, and that was wrong: they were not producing good work. The best work was coming out of places that were not educative, that were not therapeutic; they were entirely art-making practices, run by creative people for other creative people.'

And this latest show is pretty much that too: one curated by creative people for creative people. It's also for shoppers, passers-by, so maybe it's the museum of everyone really.

*The Museum of Everything is at Selfridges until 25 October.*



you go on creating something which goes on having the power to be surprising? At the moment I'm looking at how you move a troublesome adolescent Design Museum that's been in one place for 25 years to a slightly more mature thing. There's that sense of how to create something which could have a life of its own and doesn't get burdened by the sourness that overtakes museums – somewhere which becomes full of bright people and allows people to get on with things. How do you create a game, or a kit, or a set of instructions that can be followed without feeling that they're a burden?

**RA:** There's another thing, James: your personality itself, you're always there. Most times I went to visit the museum, you were there selling T-shirts or just controlling everything! It's like a restaurateur who's there, who doesn't cook, doesn't serve the food, but he's there to see that everything is okay – these are the successful places. Going to Primrose Hill, to The Museum of Everything, I would be very disappointed

if you weren't there, even though it's your busiest time, just to watch you doing it. Deyan doesn't do it in his museum!

**DS:** I like watching people arrive. A gallery or a museum is a physical experience, in a way that a book is not. It's an experience you can have with other people. You can't really share a screen. Well you can, but it's not quite the same as wandering around with someone and feeling like you're doing something together. That's why it's an experience that should go on. There are precedents: it makes me think of Sir John Soane's Museum [London].

**JB:** Which we looked at a lot before we started.

**DS:** Really? Interesting.

**JB:** I mean there were a few inspirations, but Soane's was the only one which was slightly crazy and they'd kept the spirit of not paying attention to what you should do and just cramming it in, but at the same time it feels quite open.

My only experience of hanging work, prior to

The Museum of Everything, was in my own home, which is quite a narrow terraced house. There are clearly not enough walls and there's no good vantage point to appreciate anything, yet I was always able to cover wall space by careful hanging and making sure certain objects went with others. Rehanging that a few times was all the experience we needed.

Back to your question of whether we made a model or not: we did but it was useless. It really was not as helpful as taking a lot of stuff and moving it in. The big decision [with #1] was the very large, triple-height room; we originally hung on paper to work out if what we were planning was correct – this sort of Royal Academy hang across the whole wall.

The second time it was a different narrative [#3]. We took the building and we edited it the other way round. It seemed to make it different, but I also felt that was going to be the last time we did it. I felt if we were to do another one there it would become >>

too comparative. So I'm quite interested to ask you: How do you make a museum space become like a home, as in a home that you really want to come back to again and again, like a welcome friend? So that each exhibition is seen anew? It's a destination that you absolutely want to go to?

**RA:** In the back of my mind, the best gallery experience ever was the Saatchi Gallery in Boundary Road [London]. The problem there was it was nothing like a home but somehow it was a place where you couldn't display anything which didn't become interesting. Everything got the gallery sort of 'Kaboom!'

**DS:** Is that good or bad?

**RA:** It was a good problem. I enjoyed it a lot. I remember the shows and I remember installations.

**DS:** You can forgive Charles Saatchi everything except destroying that space.

**RA:** Yeah, it was a big loss.

**JB:** How big was that space?

**DS:** Big enough for [Donald] Judd. Big enough for [Richard] Serra.

**RA:** You know, they did the Richard Serra exhibition and had to break the walls of the caretaker's apartment adjacent to it to get the pieces in, and then rebuild. Then after the show, they broke them again. Then they had this once-in-a-lifetime piece, the Richard Wilson.

**DS:** The oil [20:50]?

**JB:** That's the one I remember seeing when I was young. It was amazing. Maybe it was an influence...

**RA:** That was an example of someone doing a piece that not only he can't repeat, but no one can repeat. It's dogged Wilson for the rest of his creative life. He's a fantastic sculptor, an amazing artist. The museum was smart enough to make something in a temporary exhibition into a permanent feature, because it recognised how incredible it was.

**JB:** It became the signature piece and everything else satellited around it. But why was Saatchi so good?

**RA:** It had to do with the content, but it also had to do with the space.

**DS:** Maybe like you, he and Doris [Saatchi's wife, 1973-90] were doing it in a way that hadn't been done in London before. When Nicholas Serota was planning Tate Modern, he kept having these think tanks about 'what makes a great art space?' He had rooms full of artists and everyone would say that it was the Saatchi space they found most appealing. It was unpretentious, but it had dignity: its spaces and volumes.

**RA:** There's nothing wrong with Britannia Street [the Gagosian Gallery, London], but it's like other galleries we've seen and we will see. The next gallery will be like that with less success. But it won't be Boundary Road.

**JB:** When Tate Modern was built, did they take any of those lessons and apply them rightly or wrongly? Is the Tate a good space for art?

**DS:** The Tate's a lot of different spaces. More or less everything was shaped by Herzog and de Meuron's ambition to create the Turbine Hall. There were other attempts to create better proportioned spaces which would have meant occupying the Turbine Hall.

One thing is always a trade-off for another, but how can one argue with a place that managed to attract two million more visitors than they planned for? It's heroic. James asked what makes people come back to a museum, which is not the same as a gallery of course, and I suppose it's the sense of something that has a personality without becoming insistent about it: a character. What we do at the Design Museum is basically treat it as a kind of stage, which is not really what you want from a place that you're going to be with forever. A theatre

full of stage sets is not a particularly appealing architectural model. You want something which has traces of each successive thing that happens in it. You want not too much, but a floor or a light that says you are somewhere real, not manufactured or something that's too aggressive, which an art gallery – or a machine to show art – can become.

**JB:** Am I detecting that you feel maybe that the Design Museum is too neutral in character?

**DS:** No, its neutrality has been successful, it allows you to do what you want with it, so what you see is the content. But you need something that's got that quality. I suppose the Holon Museum is fascinating in that respect because it does both: the spaces around the normal pieces, which give you that quality of being able to use the gallery for what you want. But it also has that sense of being somewhere distinctive.

**JB:** Ron, tell us about Holon and why you designed it as you did.



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**RA:** Because I don't know how to design in any different way! You start by drawing things on a site plan. This was called, incorrectly, a piazza, so I began to address it from one second to another, saying: 'No, I turn my back to it.' It's a building that I used to call completely autistic. There's nothing beautiful in the neighbourhood to be part of; it's not like everyone wanted a Bilbao. [The Guggenheim Museum] Bilbao sits beautifully in the city, and there's nothing like that there.

So it had to turn its back, the outside had to come in, if you know what I mean. You're outside but you're already protected from everything else. Bilbao was a fantastic thing, but I don't think it is a very good exhibition space. You want to create this neutral space to allow you to do different exhibitions. But you don't want the architecture to suffer so you have to find a way to do both; and you have to justify it. You don't just decorate a building. At the Holon you have the two rectangular spaces and then you can play with the envelope. There's

the gap between them where you put all the services, it's all sort of devices to deal with problems that you recognise or you think you have to deal with. But most of what I'm telling you is post-rationalisation. With clients you always have to justify and explain things and convince and...

**DS:** ...tell the story.

**RA:** Yeah, tell the story. I don't know now what is real and what is not. All I know is that I can draw fast and I have equipment here that can build models, virtual models, very fast: so you can start enjoying from day one of working on a project.

**JB:** What you're saying is something I definitely recognise, which is that you understand what you're doing by the process of doing it. Certainly that happens with me. I didn't think about any of the stuff I was doing until I did it. Now I'm post-rationalising and thinking about that first building and the things that were really key, and also at the design of space.

Coming from a film background, I'm interested in how spaces relate to each other narratively. I think the difference is, in Holon, you're creating a space for other people to put things in; at the Design Museum [London], your fundamental, main concern isn't just the space but more the content and what's being created, chosen, coming in, what your choices are.

With the Museum of Everything, it's been about something in the middle of those two, where it's an experience and it's a story of which the art is a part, but not the only part – that the work needs an opinion in order to give it a context, because on its own it will be neutralised, which would be OK, except the work itself is so rarely neutral that to put it in an entirely neutral environment is really un-neutral. It's the opposite, so to speak; it becomes a very specific choice.

During the lifetime of the Museum of Everything, the biggest museum in the USA that advocated neutrality for that kind of work failed, which was the American Folk Art Museum [New York]. They took a very modest brownstone next to MOMA, which they probably should have kept as is, and gave it a major redesign. They tried to compete with the mainstream institution, both with the style of the building, clad in bronze, and the interior, which was sort of neutralised. The result was that people just didn't come and very sadly it ended up closing. [It is now open and has relocated to its original site in Lincoln Square, New York].

**DS:** It had a wonderful collection but somehow the combination of elements never quite gelled. On the one hand there's something delightful about building a museum that has a domestic scale, which is what that museum once had. It wasn't rebuilding a house, it was building a museum on the footplate of a house, which meant that it was narrow and thin, like James's home. That could have been an advantage, to be something more domestic. It seemed like quite a charming idea that you have something on that scale and intimacy sitting next to this gigantic aircraft carrier [MOMA]; it was this sort of rowing boat tethered to the aircraft carrier.

**JB:** I'm not blaming the architecture but I'm interested in it, because if you look at things like the Tate, it's proven by its numbers, and if we look at the Holon Museum and the Design Museum, we see that they're really successful spaces. We're in a period where architects and museums have become a big thing. But the fundamental of a museum is to engage. You don't want it to be that word 'museum', you want it to be this really cool environment for engagement that you go to and want to keep going back to.

**DS:** What would you want to do? Call it a centre? >>

**RA:** No, you're stuck with the name The Museum of Everything.

**DS:** The Centre of Everything: That's not bad.

**JB:** Or perhaps now [it's in Selfridges], The Shopping Centre of Everything.

**DS:** Actually in the end the name disappears. It doesn't matter what you call it, it's what you do in it that matters.

**JB:** I'm obsessed by language and language's restriction. Architecture as a connective tissue, as the physicality of language sometimes restricts things in the same way. What is really great is having a ridiculous name – The Museum of Everything – a name that a child thinks is funny because it's impossible, and then going into something which all the evidence tells you that in no way is this a museum.

**DS:** You're presenting museums as if they're some sort of pure, utopian field of scholarship, but of course they come from the world of showmanship, wunderkammern and department stores. There are some wonderful images that show the early days of the British Museum when it was a house in Bloomsbury, which had a very large stuffed giraffe on the main staircase and looked like somebody's attic. Museums come from that collecting, which is itself both about seeking order and about neurosis. There's something very close between those.

That impulse of controlling the world by collecting and knowing where everything comes from merges imperceptibly into that kind of place where someone has died collecting newspapers. Warhol had that thing about filling bin bags towards the end of his life, which have now been documented and catalogued and that's available online from the Warhol Foundation. So they catalogue what is one of these examples of sickness, where you'll find a piece of one of the Kennedy's wedding cake, taxi receipts, letters from cousins in Slovakia, all catalogued as if they were art.

**RA:** Like the Wellcome Collection: There's a person behind it, same as The Museum of Everything. He made his money out of drugs and spent it on collecting strange things from around the world.

**JB:** And yet the Wellcome Collection, I would say, is one of London's best museums.

**DS:** It's got a point of view.

**JB:** Going back to our first show, I definitely remember all the things I was obsessed by at the time, which were: Robert Wilson's HG [a theatrical installation at Clink Street Vaults, London, in 1995], and haunted houses with the soft floors in funfairs.

**DS:** I remember Clink, that was pretty amazing.

**JB:** It stayed with me. I'm not from an arts background and I'd never seen anything like it before. I didn't know what it was, and I was confused, and annoyed, and I liked it, all at the same time.

**DS:** That's what gave the London Dungeon the idea!

**JB:** You know in the funfair, when you go into the haunted house and it's super shallow and basically it's a bunch of squeaky toys. But the floor is soft! You come off the hard surface and you're completely freaked out. Because your perception has been shifted. Of course, you want that feeling of uncertainty because it's part of why the haunted house is good. You know it's not real: outside it says Haunted House and you know it's rubbish.

**DS:** I think it goes back to my point that showmanship and the funfair are part of what museum history is. The idea of neutral, objective scholarship is hardly there.

**JB:** When did the idea of neutral come in, in the relationship to the exhibition of things, of objects?

**DS:** I suppose there was a generation of museum directors who wanted to distance themselves from

this idea of chamber of horror and novelty. I would imagine that the first attempts at it were things like [Frederick] Kiesler with Mrs [Peggy] Guggenheim in New York, although there was music there and strange colours. Alfred Barr, in the Museum of Modern Art, was about reflecting the aesthetic qualities of the work with the spaces: neutrality in the sense that there were some fairly shocking things that went on in museums.

**RA:** A photographer will use a roll of Colorama to make a backdrop that doesn't have any corners because we want to see what we are looking at, not anything else.

**DS:** The first art gallery was probably created by Sir John Soane, the Dulwich Picture Gallery, which was the collection built up for the King of Poland who was deposed before he could ship the stuff back home. It stayed in Britain and Soane was commissioned to make a gallery for it. Before that, the picture gallery was the gallery from a country



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house or a palace – that was the original model.

**JB:** So in some sense, the potted history is one that's going from the private collections into the public arena and then at that point trying to lose a bit of subjectivity.

**DS:** Yes, although the private collection was often the monarch's, which had other purposes not just personal enthusiasm. It was a reflection of power. So much stuff was looted from other places; if you think about Napoleon's conquests, they shipped off half of Venice and Renaissance Italy back to Paris, including the lions from Saint Mark's Square, which of course had already been shipped from Byzantium, which had probably been nicked from Syria. The idea of spoil and plunder is always a recurring theme in museums.

**JB:** I'm not immune to that feeling myself! Ultimately neutrality is something I don't like.

**DS:** You mean architecturally, in a museum?

**JB:** In anything.

**DS:** Objectivity might be a better word?

**JB:** There is no such thing as an objective film.

It doesn't exist. Whatever you do is a choice: the white box, the white cube. The reason White Cube is called White Cube is because there is nothing better than a white cube to make even the smallest most insignificant object look good.

**DS:** Or expensive. The comparison between film and architecture is one that is made with some regularity. I was very struck by a book that contained the plans, real and implied, of every house in a Hitchcock film. It's called The Wrong House [by Steven Jacobs]. Of course, you see what appears to be a rectangular space actually has to have these strange projections sticking out of them to get the camera into the angle Hitchcock wanted. They are marvelous.

North by Northwest is the film one has to see at least once every six months. It, of course, begins with the famous elevation of the United Nations building, which begins as a grid and turns into a building. So, you would say that filmmaking teaches you what about spaces?

**JB:** I think it has taught me narrative. The director Antonioni was a man (at least this is the myth) who would go into a restaurant and rearrange his seating position repeatedly in order to have the right perspective and environment. I think film is a key in terms of analysing the use of space and narrative. When it does it well, it manipulates how you feel. Louise Bourgeois at Tate Modern – I really loved the work and was taken on a journey. I was held by a narrative, maybe her life, which is a particularly strong narrative through that show. That's what I think film does. And exhibitions often don't do.

**DS:** The most overused word of the year is definitely 'curator'. Everyone's invited to curated dinners and curated spaces.

**RA:** A filmmaker is not a curator. It's the filmmaker's work. A curator is normally dealing with other people's work. It's a different thing.

**JB:** At the moment you're curating your project at the Roundhouse – Curtain Call [August 2011].

**RA:** I wouldn't say I'm curating. I invited some friends to take part in something I thought other people could use. I had a choice, I had my wish list. But I don't pretend that there's anything important about the selection other than I hope it's going to be interesting and enjoyable.

**JB:** Would you call it an exhibition? What is it?

**RA:** It's an installation. I could of course do a spectacular thing there, without asking anyone, and I would enjoy it on the first day, the second day. But I thought, let's see what other people will do with it. Everyone I invited, I tried to imagine what they might do with it and to my delight, I was wrong each time!

I thought about the Roundhouse and remembered it has 24 columns and thought maybe this is the chance to see Christian Marclay's film The Clock in one go, one hour per column, you can decide which hour you want to look at. But he's doing something completely different with keyboards: he's put six cameras over the keyboard of the piano so you can see the hands of the pianist from the top.

At Freud's House [Freud Museum, London] I saw an amazing show of Matt Collishaw. They had the zoetrope that he did. It was round, big and stroboscopic. For Curtain Call he's doing something completely different: animating Dürer's watercolours.

**JB:** So is it a museum, this show?

**RA:** It's everything but a museum, because there's nothing pompous about the Roundhouse.

**JB:** Are you saying that museums are pompous?

**RA:** No, absolutely not. What I mean is that, >>

advertisers divide people up into groups A, B and C. They look at how many books you have at home, how many times you were taken to a museum by your parents. There's questions to find your socio-economic place.

**JB:** So it'll have lots of different things, so it could be called a group show?

**RA:** It could be a group show.

**JB:** It's happening in one place?

**RA:** It's happening in a fantastic place.

**JB:** And it's not a movie?

**RA:** There are some movies.

**JB:** And it's not a show?

**RA:** There are some shows.

**JB:** And it's got art?

**RA:** It's got amazing art.

**DS:** It's like what Piano [Renzo] and Rogers [Richard] wanted on the art side of the Pompidou, if they could have done it.

**DS:** The original design for the Pompidou [Centre Pompidou, Paris] was the whole wall with the escalator being a living wall of things. It was an idea of that moment of the Sixties. You've actually taken it into an internal space and given it much more a physical character, from what I've seen from the renderings. It is truly extraordinary.

**RA:** It started as Marcus [Camden Roundhouse director, Marcus Davey] from the Roundhouse asking me what is the next thing we can do here? I said: why don't we do a curtain that's 8m tall and 20m in diameter and project moving images and people can go through the images? He said that sounded like a good idea, but I wasn't serious, I was just on the way to Marine Ices!

**JB:** What I'm interested in getting at is that you're doing this thing that's evolved, that doesn't really have a name, where a lot of different activities are taking place, but in some ways you're the one who's selected them because they're people that you know or like, or who have something to say or something to communicate. It's there, it's this thing that's going on. You've given it this name. It's at the Roundhouse. Ultimately, it's a museum. It has all the functions of a museum, without all the terminology.

**DS:** It's in a place to do with performance, hence Curtain Call.

**JB:** But you've managed to skew it away from pure performance, which is also the point. You've turned it into an exhibit form.

**RA:** I imagine David Shrigley, sitting there with a Wacom tablet and drawing cartoons on the curtain. He came here and said: 'I'm not a performer!' So he's doing an animation, a film. Another friend, Ori Gersht, went to Spain to take pictures at a bullfight. We're going to see a bullfight through the eyes of a toro.

**DS:** Wow!

**RA:** That was his plan. But once he was there he just documented the matador getting dressed up. My contribution is going to be called 'Wet', which is, by the way, also the name of my show at Holon. I tried playing here with the cameras and feedbacks and stuff you can do some amazing things without trying! Its nickname in this place is WET: Without Even Trying. I don't want to show my pieces. I want to show things like...

**DS:** ...stuff you find hanging around on the floor?

**RA:** Stuff you find when you go to a place.

**JB:** This is absolutely great. Watch out for titles though. I was fully prepared for reviews like 'The Museum of Everything? The Museum of Nothing!' With 'Wet' you might get 'I wasn't even moist'.

Some of the best things are when you take two or three completely opposing ideas, which happen to be going on at the same time, and put them in the

same context. Often they're good because they weren't planned to go together. And because they weren't planned to go together, they fit beautifully. Is that related to anything we're talking about?

**RA:** It's like drawing with your left hand. This is avoiding bad habits, otherwise known as experience.

**JB:** You're allowing unpredictability to come into your choice of how Curtain Call comes together.

**DS:** But that's a predictable Arad position!

**JB:** Predictable unpredictability. No artist wants to have a dud.

**DS:** Or to be predictable.

**JB:** Deyan: You're in the middle of creating a new space [the new Design Museum at the former Commonwealth Institute]. How can the new space not only better whatever you've achieved successfully with the current Design Museum, but also be better in terms of its legacy?

**DS:** Keeping it alive into the long term. There's something weird about thinking about what a



**RON ARAD:**  
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ANYTHING WHICH DIDN'T  
BECOME INTERESTING//

building will be like in 175 years time – which is the lease we just negotiated. Maybe 'engagement' is a less provocative way of putting the same thing. The Natural History Museum got terrible stick 20 years ago because it was the first museum to send its curators off to customer care courses at Disney to see how they handled queuing.

**JB:** That's interesting!

**DS:** The traditional worry about museums is that they used to be dominated by curators who were only obsessed by the stuff and weren't terribly interested in people coming to see the things. And the balance of power shifted. Every museum has a different character that way. The Science Museum, for example, has 27 curators and an education team of 300.

**JB:** I was going to mention the Science Museum as one of my favourite museums in terms of entertaining, actually.

**DS:** The balance has tipped so far in the direction of fun, engagement and entertainment and has lost out on the fact that it has actually got an

extraordinary collection of wonderful scientific instruments, bits of engineering kit that are in themselves beautiful, and their meaning is remarkable.

**JB:** But if you suddenly show all the engineering and don't have a good narrative, no one will come.

**DS:** At the Design Museum, I've always had this belief that we have to handle the fact we're not an art museum, where, by and large, the work is allowed to speak for itself. Design needs a certain amount of explanation. The first museum of design was the V&A, which was started because the Victorians believed our manufacturing industry would very soon be wiped out by Prussian competition. How did we deal with that? We showed manufacturers how to make better stuff. Very quickly it lost that mission and became something else: a museum of decorative art. MOMA was the second, where design was allowed in, smuggled in, but only if you pretended it was actually art. We need to find another way to show design that doesn't actually preach, but does talk about what something means as well as what it does, how it does it, and that's complicated. That's storytelling, in a way.

**JB:** I think everything comes back to storytelling. The best teacher I ever had used to talk about the primates, that the only way to engage the primates (being the audience) was to somehow connect to the primal instincts, which were either reproduction – sex, survival, or violence, you know – self preservation. You don't necessarily need sex and violence in a museum situation, but engagement, narrative engagement, is a fantastic reason to hang additional things on pegs, if you can somehow create a narrative, whatever that narrative is – emotional narrative, rather than necessarily intellectual.

**DS:** People are fascinated by understanding things, but they're also frightened of going to a museum if they believe they will not understand what they are seeing. So they won't go because they feel nervous about it. They don't mind going to Tate Modern because you actually walk into the Turbine Hall and there are these remarkable physical experiences. I went to Paris a couple of weekends ago and saw the Anish Kapoor piece [Leviathan at the Grand Palais] which is a funfair on one level. It's a giant bouncy castle. It's a series of extraordinary, spectacular events, which engages a huge audience and has something going for it, but on the other hand there's a law of diminishing returns. John Soane's Museum is at maximum capacity. They don't want any more people going there because actually it would start to destroy what people love about it. I imagine that's what also could have happened to The Museum of Everything. If you have to spend an hour waiting in a line going all the way up Primrose Hill it becomes rather a different experience. Once you have five million visitors a year, which is what the Tate does, or the British Museum, if you lose a million, it's still a huge number but actually they're seen as failing, which is a terrible situation to be in.

**JB:** I've never thought about less bums on seats! But I think you're right. When I think about us at maximum capacity when we were closing, people are impressed by how busy it is, but they have a negative experience. My interest is in that experience. How can I engage someone from the moment they enter to the moment they leave while still giving them their own choice in that experience?

**DS:** The cleverness of The Museum of Everything, is that it doesn't feel like being manipulated. You feel like someone is talking to you, but not in a sneaky sort of way... ■