

HOW I MAKE IT WORK

JAMES BRETT

James Brett, 40, is the founder of the Museum of Everything, a travelling exhibition of "outsider art" that staged its first show in an old dairy in Primrose Hill. The museum is currently residing at Selfridges in London, and is running a show to coincide with the Frieze Art Fair

WHAT IS "OUTSIDER ART"?

It's by regular people not educated in art, who want to express something. It sounds hip and mysterious, but the more I got into it the less appropriate it seemed as a name. Sometimes it's by people with mental-health issues. I prefer the underdog: people making work for themselves, containing very private ideas and emotion. It's the visual equivalent of jazz and blues.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO IT?

I used to work in film, and was living in LA directing music videos, commercials and documentaries for MTV. I found it very competitive — like running up the down escalator — and very disappointing. The exhibition began instinctively. I'm not a collector, I just got interested in the work. Then a few people said I should formalise it. We never thought so many people would come [55,000 at the first exhibition].

WHY DO YOU THINK IT'S SO SUCCESSFUL?

Interesting people are interested in interesting things.

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

Since I've been doing this exhibition, I've had no fixed abode. I found myself homeless because my house is being done up and I don't have the time to finish it, so I've been sleeping in hotels — I stayed at Claridge's for a bit when they were doing special midnight deals. I quite like it. I'm so busy at the moment, I don't have time to relax, so, basically, I run until I sleep. It helps me focus. I've simplified my life down to 12 Muji boxes in my office.

DESCRIBE A TYPICAL DAY

I wake up at 6am. There's too much to do — 25 hours would be helpful. I cycle to my office where I see about sales, what's gone wrong or right, check everything is tickety-boo. We have put together a new show for Frieze, so I'll see how the hang is going. I might go and do some exercise, which is a substitute for rest. I used to run, but I think

my body has decided it doesn't like running, so now I'm cycling everywhere. You can see me going up and down Baker Street, sometimes the wrong way. For lunch, I'm a regular at Yo! Sushi. My record for going in and out is 90 seconds. In the evening, I might go to an art event. For dinner, I'll drop in on someone else's plan, but I'd rather eat somewhere down-at-heel than Scott's.

DO YOU HAVE A CONVENTIONAL APPROACH TO WORK?

I might do some sunbathing on my balcony, but that's frowned upon by my office. It's not formal museum behaviour. They say, "You wouldn't sunbathe if you were running Tate Britain, would you?" It's considered a little gauche, but I don't care. It's fun to compose emails while you're baking.

HOW DO YOU LIKE TO DRESS?

I wear three-quarter-length trousers most of the time. Perhaps it gives me better circulation. I'm a fan of Jean Touitou of APC, for his world view and his taste in music. I liked Agnès B for a long time, and American Apparel does the best white T-shirts.

DO YOU NEED TO BE COMPETITIVE TO PULL OFF SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

You need a bit of "alpha" to give it visibility, but this still feels like an out-of-control hobby, so I'm quite relaxed about it.

WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH TO MANAGING A TEAM?

If I say anything inappropriate, they are good at putting me in my place. It's a very open operation, a lot of inter-management — everyone looks out for each other.

ARE YOU FAMILY INCLINED?

I'd love to have a family, but with the

amount of activity going on right now, I'd need there to be a bit of a slowdown. It takes time and effort, and if you don't put it in, it doesn't come. I seem to have 40 godchildren, though.

DO YOU HAVE A GRAND VISION?

With all the economic complications, I think people like art that is humble in origin and intent. I'm very keen to communicate the truth of that during these times. Like a great film, for me, this isn't just about expressing ourselves, it's about changing the way people think and feel. ●

musevery.com. Exhibition #4 at Selfridges and Exhibition #4.1 at the former Selfridges Hotel, until October 25. The Frieze Art Fair ends today

MY STUFF

Vintage Triumph motorbike. 'To travel across undiscovered continents looking for undiscovered artists.' An old Talmudic scholar. 'For his wisdom, history and a sense of gravitas. Ideally, he'd sit in the ticket booth of the museum.' Kaweco fountain pen, £35, from the Museum of Everything. 'My preferred writing implement.' Plasters, £2.30; boots.com. 'I constantly seem to need them for paper cuts.' Rice milk, £1.58. 'The breakfast of champions'

