

LA STAMPA

Rotterdam. Outsiders' creativity at 'The Museum of Everything'. At the Kunsthal Rotterdam hundreds of artworks express a malaise or the joy of making, from Chicago to China, from Holland to Sicily. Englishman James Brett has gathered them.

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Displayed at the Kunsthal Rotterdam, The Museum of **Everything** is not only an exhibition, but a fascinating journey through creativity and the human mind. The artworks on show would hardly be found in museums. In fact, they can be defined as more like anthropological artifacts rather than works of art. And they address the million-dollar question to the visitor: 'What is art?'. Because the creators of what we see - their artworks would not be out of place in more traditional shows - almost never consciously convey their artistic talent. However, they are people who reveal their uneasiness or vital matters or, quite simply, their desire to make something. As **Nek Chand**, Indian Engineer, who spent his life gathering rocks and old metal to create a secret kingdom of sculptures and objects.

James Brett has searched for these people around the world and has collected their expressions, whether they are drawings, sculptures, objects. In his forties, the Englishman is a force of nature who captivates through his passion: 'I do not like Dubuffet's definition of Art Brut, which sometimes is used to define these works. However, I believe what matters is not looking for a definition, but it is giving voice and space to these people. Of course I find it absurd that some of these artworks are not in museums.'

Six years ago The Museum of **Everything** landed at Pinacoteca Agnelli in Turin and three years ago at the Giardini of the Venice Biennale: over time it has enlarged and enriched with new 'finds' and characters, and

the exhibition in Rotterdam shows room after room tens of 'authors', many still alive, others who lived in the 1900s or the 1800s. There are artists from all over the world, from Afro-Americans to Russians, from Netherlanders to Mexicans. Among them **Ion Bîrlădeanu**, **Morton Bartlett**, **James Castle**, **Henry Darger**, **Sam Doyle**, **William Edmondson**, **Guo Fengyi**, **William van Genk**, **Paulus de Groot**, **Scottie Wilson**. At times, rooms are unsettling, as the one hosting the saga of **Henry Darger**, the singular figure of an 'unknown' illustrator, until his passing in 1973. His neighbours found a manuscript packed with drawings and watercolours, populated by young girls in their prime depicted in horrific circumstances, such as war, sexual abuse and violence of any sort, which recall the personal experience of the artist's tormented childhood. The universe of the American **Morton Bartlett**, who collected and photographed dolls and mannequins, is no less disturbing. On display we see little, almost Barbie style dresses, dolls and black and white pictures. In some way, we can also talk of obsession with the large urban drawings and the models of trams and trolleybuses meticulously made by Dutch **Willem van Genk** (he is one of the few to have his artworks on show in such a museum as the Stedelijk). The watercolours by the Russian artist **Viktor Kulikov** stand out at the end of the room, depicting the same foreshortened view of a park in all seasons for a year.

The group of Italian 'outsiders' is numerous. 'There are amazing stories - James Brett explains - and sometimes tragic ones behind many of these individuals'. For example, there is **Carlo Zinelli**, whose artworks sometimes resemble graffiti with birds and human figures that will not make a bad impression alongside Basquiat's artworks (Zinelli belongs to the Collection de l'Art Brut of Lausanne). Or Sicilian **Nicolò Scarlatella**, whose life marked by muscular dystrophy occurred between Caltagirone and the nearby Granmichele. In his adulthood, self-taught Scarlatella started drawing large cardboards with intricate city maps, self-portraits and codes. We should not forget the polychrome and dreamlike sculptures by **Francesco Cusumano**, another Sicilian outsider with a troubled life (Domenico Amoroso and Eva Stefano indicated the artists from the island), or the works by **Giovan Battista Podestà**, a Lombard peasant with a lively imagination.

'However, it would be wrong - Brett adds - to interpret these artworks only as an expression of a mental or physical distress. I prefer talking of creativity and joy of making'. The exhibition project will soon broaden to Australia: 'Here - Brett says - there is still a world to be explored. I have already started my research'. Out of curiosity: the name of the project comes from William Brett, who has never left the Isle of Wight, where he accumulates all sorts of objects creating a *Museum of Everything*. William offered his appellation to James because they both have the same surname. 'The Museum of **Everything** - Brett concludes - wants to be a museum for the museums of everything all over the world'.