

## The Museum of Everything at MONA is a Private Art Eye-Opener

BY NICHOLAS FORREST | JULY 02, 2017



Untitled (all) Calvin and Ruby Black 1955–1972

David Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart, Tasmania is renowned for presenting ground-breaking exhibitions that push boundaries, challenge conventions, and confound expectations. And its latest exhibition is no different. From June 10, 2017 until April 2, 2018, MONA is hosting the now legendary project [The Museum of Everything](http://www.musevery.com/) – the world's first travelling museum dedicated to the work of non-academic artists and private art makers.

For its most expansive and ambitious show to date, The Museum of Everything has hijacked MONA's temporary exhibition space with a showcase of almost 2000 works by almost 200 artists spanning the genres of drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, environments, and assemblages – and it's a sight to behold.

The Museum of Everything was founded in 2009 by British filmmaker James Brett with a mission to promote and showcase the work of artists working outside the boundaries of the cultural mainstream – in their words, “the untrained, unintentional, undiscovered, and unclassifiable artists” of the world who would otherwise be ignored or sidelined by the arbiters of artistic achievement.

Since its beginning as a temporary exhibition in a former recording studio in London, The Museum of Everything has held major exhibitions in London, Moscow, Paris, Turin, Venice, and Rotterdam, attracting over a million visitors and counting.

“The Museum of Everything was a way to step aside from the terminology of ‘outsider art’, which I felt was wrong-footed. It had become a bigoted and restrictive term, and it allowed mainstream curators to just deny that material a place in the art world,” Brett explains.

"I think that in the beginning there was a need to create differentiation – for example, if you have a child who is autistic you need to know that they are autistic; it helps with their education. But at a certain point that person doesn't want to be known as an autistic kid any more. And I think that's the same with outsider art: it helped in the beginning to define something which needed definition; but then it just became very restrictive as a term. That whole inside/outside thing became what everyone wanted to talk about. So I just avoid it. I just think that there are all these unusual, often private makers and that their work is incredibly illuminating," says Brett.

Before tackling The Museum of Everything exhibition it's important to understand the context in which it was established. Since it has existed, the art world, as defined by its commercial and institutional roots, has nurtured a culture of what some would perhaps call elitism. This inner sanctum of artistic production favours artists who have taken the traditional route of academic training and adhere to the beliefs, philosophies, standards, and agendas of the so called "mainstream."

The Museum of Everything focuses on those artists who are not able to conform to the standards of convention and tradition, whether it be because of a mental or physical illness or impediment, a life of isolation or seclusion, a lack of academic training, divergent or conflicting views or philosophies, or because of a number of other reasons.

By identifying this dichotomy of the art world I am not attempting to pass judgement on its merit or value, but merely stating that it exists. The Museum of Everything exhibition is proof of this.

According to Brett, mainstream museums generally, but not always, don't allow non-academic makers to be included in their shows. "Tate Modern in Britain is about Fine Art – modernism. They won't show Henry Darger for that reason. They won't show 99 percent of these artists for that reason," he says.

"Because these makers are not taught. These makers are not making art about art. So within the known cultural histories they often don't exist – they are invisible."

It's interesting to note that there's very little formal evidence that the artists in The Museum of Everything exhibition are working outside the boundaries of convention and tradition. The existence of obsessive mark making, the repetitive depiction of particular motifs, the abundant and sometimes overwhelming textual elements, and the expressions of rather unconventional views, beliefs, and ideologies that sometimes venture into the realms of fantasy and fanaticism are the only real indications that what you are looking at is not what you usually encounter in a mainstream museum or gallery.

There's also some dominant themes that emerge as the exhibition unfolds, in particular themes encompassing topics relating to religion, spirituality, politics, sexuality, and gender. These themes are not unusual in themselves, but the way the artists approach and address them sometimes is – not that this is a bad thing in any way!

One of the most astounding aspects of The Museum of Exhibition is just how many of the works in the exhibition could be said to rival or even outshine the work of some of the world's most famous contemporary and modern masters. Gifted blacksmith and self-taught sculptor Georges Liataud's Calder-like silhouettes, the Gauguin-esque paintings of Serbian artist Sava Sekulić, Pietro Ghizzardì's Beckmann and Picasso-rivaling expressionist portraits, and Russian artist Viktor Kulikov's Hockney-style daily recordings of the weather are just a few examples. There are many more.

Identifying highlights of an exhibition where pretty much every work is amazing and eye opening in its own way is difficult, but some of the other works that really stand out include German artist Hans-Jörg Georgi's fantastic cardboard models of aircraft, Julia Krause-Harder's cable-tied found object creatures, both from Atelier Goldstein in Germany, and self-taught Indian artist Nek Chand Saini's enchanting figurative mosaic sculptures, to name but a few.

Brett says he sometimes feels like Dan Akroyd and John Belushi in The Blues Brothers, sitting in front of James Brown or Cab Calloway, saying: "We're on a mission from God". "I don't mean to sound like a minister, but The Museum of Everything is on a mission" he says. "We inherited that from our artists, like Sister Gertrude Morgan. Her mission was to preach the Gospel, ours is to preach an alternative visual culture. I do believe that we human beings were made to make, it is inherent in our DNA. It gets programmed out of us as we get older, but creative being and functioning is there for us all. Me, I used to make films - but today my outlet is The Museum of Everything. The Museum of Everything has become my format!"

He adds, "What the artists in the museum also show us is that no matter how humble one's circumstances or origins, creative expression is absolutely universal. When visitors enter The Museum of Everything, they often find themselves more elevated by the material than in contemporary art exhibitions. That's why we travel the world, it's why we encourage other museums and curators to take this material seriously and it's why we try to provide a platform for our artists, so that they can all have a voice and say: 'What I do is valid, what I do means something in the world of visual culture.'"

The fact that many of the works on show in The Museum of Everything exhibition at MONA would not look out of place hanging alongside the greats of art history in the world's top museums and institutions is testament to the foresight, vision, talent, and dedication of their creators. The genius of the exhibition seems to lie in the motivation of most of its participants, which is related to the personal rather than the commercial.

This dedication and commitment to creating art for personal satisfaction, expression, and exploration rather than commercial or institutional fame manifests itself in incredibly honest, engaging, insightful, dynamic, visionary, and unique works of art that have the ability to forever change one's perception and perspective of art history and its protagonists. There's such a unique sense of deep engagement, unwavering commitment, and art historically untainted motivation and inspiration, that it's almost impossible to not be enchanted and inspired by the works on show.

And at the centre of this pioneering movement is none other than James Brett – a modern day hero and champion of the "alternative" art scene and a man who deserves to be congratulated and cheered for his dedication and commitment to such a worthy and much-needed mission.

At the end of the day, Brett's The Museum of Everything is proof that the historically termed "outside" is one of the richest and most fertile grounds for creative expression.

It's proof that academic training is not a prerequisite for artistic achievement nor technical proficiency.

It's proof that a disability or impediment – whether it be physical, mental, behavioural, or social – is not necessarily a barrier to creative expression, and can actually be a factor in engendering creative diversity and uniqueness.

And finally, it's proof that creative genius is not solely to be found within the academically, commercially, and institutionally defined "mainstream."

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#### CALLING PRIVATE ARTISTS OF AUSTRALIA

Are you a non-professional or private art-maker? Do you draw your visions and dreams? Have you invented a visual language? Is your home your personal gallery?

#### IF THIS SOUNDS LIKE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW PLEASE BRING YOUR ART TO THE MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING

The Museum of Everything is coming to Australia to look for non-traditional Australian artists. In every city they visit, they will curate exhibitions of art by the local artists we meet. Some may even be included in a book and considered for their final show at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in 2017

The Museum of Everything invites EVERYONE to submit art to this unique and democratic project. Dates will be announced soon!

To find out who can enter, please click >[HERE](http://musevery.com.au/en/how/) (http://musevery.com.au/en/how/)<