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SOUTHBANK  
CENTRE

# Shaping the world into a place fit for the likes of us

## EXHIBITION

The Alternative Guide  
To The Universe  
Hayward Gallery

**T**here was always that kid in school. The one who obsessively drew in notebooks, filling every square inch with intricate inky diagrams, tiny writing, plots and plans, insignia, maps, aliens. Islands. Tower blocks. Cityscapes. Brutalised bodies.

When he grew up he headed for the garden shed to pursue his theories. He was disturbing, admirable, self-confident, urgent, visionary.

His ultimate destination, apart from immortality, was *The Alternative Guide To The Universe*, the spellbinding and strangely moving exhibition that brings the eccentrics and the outsiders in from the cold.

"These brilliant mavericks expand the spaces in which our own imaginative thinking about the world may venture," says Hayward Gallery director Ralph Rugoff.

"However far-fetched or outlandish it may seem, their work possesses an intensity and bracing originality that gives it a compelling reality all its own. It invites us to think outside of our conventional categories and ultimately to question our definitions of 'normal' art and science."

Self taught, these artists are often discovered late in life but their work is imbued with a conviction and compulsion that professional works often lack.

Take, for example, Marcell Storr. He was born in 1911, abandoned and possibly abused. Went to a nunnery, worked down the mines. Illiterate and deaf, he found himself sweeping the streets in the Bois de Boulogne in 1964.

He married and, in secret, at night

continued drawing his breathtaking pencil-and-ink churches and landscaped cities.

Needle-sharp nibs created minute arches and spires, which, when coloured and varnished, are mesmeric. When he wasn't looking, his wife showed his works to art-loving friends and he found an audience.

Storr's story is a theme of the exhibition - perhaps the most poignant theme. Another title for the show could be *Paradise Found* for these landscapes and systems, buildings and theories are also sanctuaries; they answer a need.

In Morton Bartlett's rather disturbing outlet, his plaster models of children supply his orphaned younger self with a family. Homeless Lee Godie's doctored photo booth portraits provide a sense of presence and identity.

The work's attraction lies in their contradiction. They are necessary and frenzied in concept, often with a message, often the product of a fractured brain, and yet at the same time they are ordered and tranquil in execution. They are places of relief, islands of serenity, escape pods.

You can almost hear the sigh of relief as the artist freed him or herself from the confusion of modern life and retreated to their Willa Wonka wonderlands.

Take Achilles Rizzoli, a draughtsman, who suffered a mental breakdown.

He created a fantasy land "Yield To Total Elation" and drew with an architect's blistering precision the layout, with annotated notes describing the whys and wherefores of his gentle

new world order. This cache of marvels was found only after his death, never shown, which makes them both bold and intimate.

The exhibition is vast and sprawling from the makeshift robots of Chinese

farmer Wu Yulu to the wonderful, earnest theories of James Carter and Philip Blackmarr, the former positing the theory that atoms are octahedral and the latter than Circlons are the fundamental building block.

After a while, it becomes too much. The heady assault of so many unusual visions and shapes and ideas is like a night down the pub with that yapping conspiracy theorist.

If that's the case do what the artists did. Return to the works, to Storr's stellar cities, to calendar savant George Widener's numerical Megalopolis or Bodys Isek Kingeler's candy-coloured cardboard creations.

Find the solace they found, the serenity they sought. In doing so *The Universe* finds another dimension.

This is the most extraordinary, intimate and haunting exhibition.

**Giles Broadbent**

Until August 26. Ell, go to



Paul Laffoley's  
*Thanaton III* (1989)

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Marcel Storr, *Untitled* (1975)  
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Emery Blagdon, *Healing Machine* (c.1950-c.1980)  
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