

ART

## A Britpop Star, a Gallerist and a Former Barbershop

By AIMEE FARRELL OCT. 6, 2016



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The Gallery of Everything

Alexander Coggin

The friendship between the musician Jarvis Cocker and the gallerist James Brett first flowered some six years ago in a onetime recording studio in Primrose Hill, London. It was here that Brett, a certified Pulp fan, first displayed the dizzying assortment of self-taught art that drew more than 35,000 visitors to the Museum of Everything, following its opening in 2009. Among the wondrous works on display was a screening of the little-known '90s television documentary "Journeys Into the Outside," in which Cocker had tracked down some of the marginalized creators of so-called outsider art. Ever curious, Cocker came along to the museum: "I'd heard that they were putting together an exhibition at the studio where I used to record," he recalls by phone from France. "I liked the way Brett mixed everything together. He seemed to have found a good way to show that type of art that kept the spirit alive. It doesn't work if it's too reverential. The museum had an entertaining aspect to it, not too serious or formal. It was an occasion to go there."

The pair stayed in touch, sharing what Brett calls “Trekkie tendencies” when it comes to their mutual passion. It was after a chance meeting while holidaying in central Italy this summer that they struck on the idea for the inaugural exhibition at Brett’s newest venture, the Gallery of Everything. A former barbershop on London’s Chiltern Street is now the permanent home for an evolving collection of the works that draw these two enthusiasts together, with Cocker’s television art series as its starting point. There are the biblical brush marks of the Georgian minister Howard Finster, which feature on canvases, a clock, a bed frame and a decorative box that even has hand-scrawled instructions for how to change the little light bulb housed inside (“He was very controlling,” Brett explains). In the back room is a sample of the apocalyptic creations of W.C. Rice, whose Alabama “Cross Garden” Cocker first visited during the making of “Journeys Into the Outside.” “The crack has been opened to an alternative art history,” says Brett, whose intention is to draw this type of nonacademic work further into art’s wider conversation (and, Cocker quips, “to fund his own collecting habit”).

The gallery opens at a hectic moment for Brett, who is concurrently presenting his debut historical show, an exploration of the early collecting of Jean Dubuffet, at the Frieze Masters art fair, which runs until Sunday. In 1947, the artist and Art Brut founder staged “Le Foyer De L’Art Brut,” filling the basement of his Paris gallery with works he’d acquired on hospital and prison visits, which he considered to be art in its rawest and truest form. Brett’s loose restaging includes a duplicate of the original guest book from that show, which reads like a Who’s Who of 20th century art: Everyone from Joan Miró and Jean Cocteau to the surrealists turned out. It points, perhaps, to the underlying — yet pervasive — influence of work created on the peripheries. “Contemporary art has been turned into an alternative form of currency, it’s a thing that people invest in,” Cocker says. “Art wasn’t invented to do that. These artists created for themselves, to make their lives more bearable. When you get to see this work, you’re getting that human expression in its purest human form.”