

## Huffington Post November 13, 2011

### Billy Childish Talks Van Gogh and His Definition of the Word "Amateur"

By Susan Michals

Billy Childish is a renaissance man with quite a sense of humor. The British artist and former member of [The YBA](#) opened his latest artistic extravaganza last week in New York at Lehmann Maupin Gallery - and when asked about the good, the bad and the great of said opening, Childish responded "The opening was well attended. I did a reading that was good, with poems about when I was bad, and everyone thought I was great."

This particular exhibition is curated by longtime friend Matthew Higgs, a British artist, writer and curator based in New York. "This is the sixth exhibition of Billy's work I've been involved with," said Higgs. "It's unusual to have so many opportunities to engage with one artist's work, and my connection to his work - as an artist and a curator - gets deeper on each occasion."

Higgs has put together a motley melange of Childish's work: Downstairs one will find paintings of mountains and volcanos, as well as an homage to Germain mountaineer Toni Kurz, who died tragically scaling the North Face of the Eiger, and classical music composer Jean Sibelius. Upstairs, one will find 55 of Billy's albums on display (his musical range includes the genres of punk rock, blues, folk, classical/experimental, spoken word and nursery rhymes) as well as various poems and books he has written.

Childish was born and raised in Chatham, Kent in England in 1959. He did go to art school briefly, but was expelled in 1981. Obviously that had no bearing on curtailing his artistic endeavors and over the past 35 years, he has created works as a writer, a poet, a musician and a painter. He is a true creative chameleon, and a successful one - yet many times he has called himself an 'amateur'. Yet by [definition](#) an amateur is 'One who engages in a pursuit, study, science, or sport as a pastime rather than as a profession.' Childish sees it differently. "I've dubbed myself as an amateur, not because I work in different field, but because I do what I do for love. [I call myself this because] it's also to have a lightness of touch and not be a fat neck proclaiming myself as a bloated professional."

Many times, Childish's painterly style has been compared to that of Van Gogh and German expressionists, such as Edvard Munch. In light of the recent revelations on the subject of [Van Gogh's death](#) -i.e., was it suicide, or perhaps murder, I asked Childish to comment on the death of someone he has admired throughout his life. "I'm not sure I would class them as 'revelations', rather more like conjecture used to sell a new biography. I think that the mythology of Van Gogh's life, and the beauty of his paintings, is unstoppable." Considering the scope and sheer elegance of this - his most recent and certainly not his last body of work - the same could be said, of Mr. Childish.