

The great entertainer

Turner prizewinner Martin Creed loves his music and art — but what he likes best is to fly by the seat of his pants, he tells **MORGAN FALCONER**

Martin Creed (*pictured*) is wandering about the stage of a packed arts theatre in New York, followed in every move by two people who appear to be his shadows. Meanwhile, a string quartet plays. Tall shrubs and vases of flowers are dotted about. Stagehands occasionally emerge to move things around. And then a young woman comes into view on the film being projected behind them, bends over, sticks her fingers down her throat and vomits profusely.

Creed thrives on performance. This week he opens a show at Hauser & Wirth's Shoreditch gallery in East London, and to celebrate he will throw a party and give the premiere of a piece of music that he has composed for a stripped-down, 18-piece orchestra. On May 11 his band play at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

He has designed the toilets for the new extension to the London Library in St James's Square, which will be completed in July. Oh, and there's his largest retrospective to date opening at the CCS Bard Hessel Museum in upstate New York at about the same time, and there's a forthcoming catalogue raisonné.

This is clearly the work of the Maximalist Creed, as opposed to the Minimalist one who rigged up an empty room in the Tate Gallery in 2001 and subsequently won the Turner Prize. But then, the more you discover of Creed's endeavours, the more you begin to wonder whether his art might be just one facet of the repertoire of a man who is simply a great entertainer.

He recently said that music and art were both so close to his heart that when he was doing one, he always wanted to be doing the other. That's no idle remark: Creed formed a band, called Owada, in 1994, and they've played consistently since then.

"I tried to write music straight after art school," he says, "exactly because the sculptures I was making were failing to communicate their message. I felt as if they were just the end result, the bit left over at the end."

The exhibition at Hauser &



Wirth will be typically understated. There will be abstract paintings, drawings, some large-scale constructions with wood ("a huge cuboid monolith") and metal ("I'm working on a piece with I-beams. The idea is to get the full range of these I-beams, from the biggest to the smallest, so it's like a pyramidal pile of them"), and a film that shows his attempts to make Orson and Sparky, a wolfhound and a long-legged chihuahua, walk across camera. But all this could change. "I like to improvise," he says, "and have a bit of a back-up plan, and then throw everything at the wall and see what happens."

Born in Wakefield in 1968, Creed moved to Glasgow when he was an infant and there was shaped by diversely talented parents. "My mum played the piano and my dad played the cello. My grandmother was a concert pianist. So it was always around."

Craft has also been in the family, his father being a silversmith, so perhaps that is why he was not unduly uncomfortable with taking on the project to design the toilets. The London Library is an eccentric and genteel institution, a subscription library that has supplied a haunt for some of Britain's writers

since the mid-19th century. Creed is an adventurous choice for them, and he's likely to deliver something singu-

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lar, a kind of rainbow swatch-book of modern and contemporary design, fitting out the rooms with off-the-shelf tiles and components every one of which is different in colour and form. If something breaks it can be replaced with, well, almost anything.

Criticism does upset him, he says, but otherwise he is fairly impervious to the kind of lampooning that his work has received over the years. *The Sun* has been particularly attentive to his oeuvre.

"It's my favourite newspaper!" he says. "Well, it's not my favourite newspaper, but it's my favourite for art writing. In a way, they embrace the art as a kind of product, they have fun with it."

Creed is an odd fish. Some times gregarious and resilient, at other times he likes to

hide away. When he became romantically involved with an Italian artist a few years ago, he started to spend part of the year in Sicily; he still does, as it gives him the solitude he likes, though the couple split some time ago. And he won't be distracted by the increasing demands on him because he knows how to handle himself, having spent several years in low-budget obscurity.

"It was hard, for a while, I was on the dole and I used to feel really guilty about things when I sold work, I felt guilty about the money," he says. "I had low self-esteem, I suppose. But I'm more confident now, less scared of making mistakes, less scared of rejection."

Some might be unsure as to what Martin Creed is doing, but Creed is pretty certain. Halfway through the performance in New York, he sat down on the edge of the stage and asked casually if anyone wanted to ask anything.

A man's hand went up. "What is the point of it?" he asked, echoing one of Creed's songs.

"Ah, I'm ready for that one," Creed laughed. "It's just to pass the time, you know?"

Martin Creed is at Hauser & Wirth Coppermill, E2 (020-7287 2300), until July 29