

Museum of Old and New Art
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MONA

Museum of Old and New Art

Theatre of the World **June 23, 2012 to April 8, 2013**

All things are one thing and that one thing is, in turn, obvious and exotic and beautiful and plain and elegant and prosaic and deep and shallow and rich with a richness that makes all things grand.

David Walsh, Preface, *Theatre of the World* catalogue

Creating a dialogue between works across different cultures, art styles and times has been at the heart of Jean-Hubert Martin's curatorial passions. His latest exhibition, *Theatre of the World*, a collaboration between Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), which opens at MONA in June, adds another layer of visual challenge and provocation for museum visitors.

Martin argues that our staccato lives, our electro-static-burdened senses and the complexity of our world means we are now merely "grasping at scraps of knowledge" or abdicating responsibility for our lives to the experts. So, he hopes to help us restore our ability to see again the passion, the fear, the mystery, the darkness and the beauty of our collective preoccupations and learnings across time.

He does this by creating visual linkages and relations between disparate shapes, designs and objects spanning cultures, time and intent. He hopes to take visitors on an experiential voyage that moves them from the visceral to the symbolic, and the factual to the poetic.

In Australia's largest collaboration between a private and public museum *Theatre of the World* will present 180 works from David Walsh's private collection and approximately 300 works selected from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery's collections across 16 of MONA's galleries; alongside special commissions and selected loans from other important Australian and international collections. The works will form, in today's vernacular, a visual search-engine-result spectacular – in real time and space.

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Challenging the “docile” museum

As Walsh’s *Monanism* exhibition has already demonstrated, museums today need not be bound by the constricting conventions of art historical displays that says works must be exhibited in a particular way.

“Since the Renaissance, a hierarchal system and language has been created to help us understand and categorise all aspects of learning. Most museums want to give a scientific underpinning to their activities and have extracted works from their original contexts to make them into objects of study or pure aesthetic pleasure,” says Martin who believes that Western institutions tend to prioritise the dramaturgy of the artist’s biography over the meaning.

“These are docile museums. They place their work on a ‘scientific’ pedestal - note that this use of the word ‘scientific’ is most unusual in the Anglo-Saxon world. ‘Science’ here refers exclusively to the material characteristics of the works in the museum’s keeping and the historical and geographical data relating to those works. Anything beyond that is a matter of judgement and interpretation and thus congruent with the ‘soft’ human sciences in being much less exact than the ‘hard’ sciences.”

“*Theatre of the World* will attempt to revive visual thinking – a practical philosophy taking material form in objects. Life today is about visual images. We take so much of our learning and communication from television and the Internet but we are not learning how to analyse images. We have lost confidence in our own ability to understand and have handed responsibility to the experts, with *Theatre of the World* we hope to encourage visual thinking as a counterpoint to the abstraction of language,” Martin adds.

Objects across Time and our World

In *Theatre of the World* visitors enter a series of galleries or environments containing a prodigal and discontinuous array of objects reflecting some 4,000 years of human creativity. Works such as: taxidermied birds; parts of animal skeletons; Chinese ceramics; water colour portraits from Georgian England; First World War “trench art”; Egyptian stone carvings, mummy cases, and funerary objects; African beadwork and woodwork; Aboriginal bark painting and artefacts; natural history illustration; Melanesian shields, masks and drums; corals and shells; curiosities; contemporary art works, photographs and videos; geological specimens; scientific instruments; and teapots, along with more than 80 tapa or barkcloths from across the South Pacific.

The barkcloths became part of the Tasmania’s State Collection after they were brought to the colony in the mid to late 19th century by naval officers and returning Christian missionaries who collected them as curios during their journeys through the Pacific islands. They range in size from less than one square metre to more than four metres in length. The delicate barkcloths have been carefully protected and conserved and this exhibition will be the first time they have been displayed on such a large scale.

Works by Marina Abramovic, Alanbarra, Dieter Appelt, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Thomas Bayrle, Samuel Beckett and Marin Karmitz, Hans Bellmer, Tamy Ben-Tor, Binyinyuwuy, Mark Bishop, Michel Blazy, Arthur Boyd, Daniel Boyd, Polly Borland, Pat Brassington, John Bunguwuy, Günter Brus, Tom Chamberlain, Herbert Thomas Dicksee, Jake and Dinos Chapman, John Coplans, Wim Delvoye, John Dempsey, Bill Djartijwuy, Lee Dongwook, Max Ernst, Erró, Tessa Farmer, Jan Fabre, Peter Feiler, Lucio Fontana, Ruth Frost, Tony Garifalakis, Alberto Giacometti, Robert Gober, Francesco Graziani, Gregory Green,

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Merv Grey, Patrick Guns, Neil Haddon, Fiona Hall, Patrick Hall, Brent Harris, Ivor Hele, Petr Herel, Ricardo Hernández, Damien Hirst, Thomas Hirschhorn, Elizabeth Mary Hocken, Wayne Hudson, Adelaide Ironside, Paa Joe, Wassily Kandinsky, Vernon Ah Kee, John Kelly, Killoffer, Taiyo Kimura, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Jannis Kounellis, Juul Kraijer, Oleg Kulik, Robert Scott Lauder, Fernand Léger, Sol LeWitt, Laith McGregor, Robyn McKinnon, Alasdair McLuckie, Allan Mansell, Gordon Matta-Clark, Louisa Anne Meredith, Boris Mikhailov, Manolo Millares, Matthew Monahan, Maw Mununggurr, Nell, Hermann Nitsch, Sidney Nolan, Adam Putnam, David Noonan, Stieg Persson, John Perceval, Pablo Picasso, Francis Picabia, Sam Porritt, Peter Peri, Joe Rose, Julie Rrap, Claude Rutault, Markus Schinwald, Sinibaldo Scorza, Andres Serrano, Petroc Sesti, Jason Shulman, Roman Signer, Jacqui Stockdale, William Strutt, Walter Tjampitjinpa, George Tjapaltjarri, Felice Varini, Nicolaes Visscher, Ruth Waller, Mithili Wanambi, Judy Watson, William Wegman, Brett Whiteley, Patricia Wilson-Adams, Pedro Wonaeamirri, Erwin Wurm, Yirawala, Ah Xian.

Two major national institutions are sending significant works: the National Gallery of Victoria is lending its most-loved work: 'Weeping Woman' (1937) by Pablo Picasso and Lucio Fontana's 'Concerto spaziale' (1964 – 65). The Art Gallery of New South Wales is sending Max Ernst's 'L'imbécile' (1961) and Fernand Léger's 'l'a bicyclette' (1930). Internationally, from Fondation Maeght, in France, will be an Alberto Giacometti, 'Grande figure (Femme Leoni)' (1947).

Special commissions include a work by French contemporary artist, Claude Rutault and Swiss artist Felice Varini, known for his extraordinary geometric perspective pieces.

A 16th Century Inspiration - Giulio Camillo's Memory Theatre

The importance of universal knowledge was a preoccupation of Renaissance intellectuals such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Galileo Galilei and Copernicus. Another was renowned Italian philosopher, Giulio Camillo (1480 – 1544). During the 1530s, Camillo began to construct for the French King François I (1494 – 1547) a memory theatre now known to us only through a text he is said to have dictated towards the end of his life. The ideas were kept secret because, in the king's eyes, Camillo's theatre was an instrument of power. It took the form of a small wooden amphitheatre, sitting opposite the king's throne, and contained a galaxy of texts and objects representing the history of knowledge at that time; juxtaposed to trigger, systematically, if the viewer had enough knowledge and understanding, the wonders of god and man.

Almost five hundred years later, Jean-Hubert Martin with Tijs Visser, Olivier Varenne, Nicole Durling and the MONA and TMAG teams have created a 21st century *version*.

A 351-page catalogue published to coincide with the exhibition includes essays by Jean-Hubert Martin, Tijs Visser, David Hansen, Thierry Dufrêne, Kirsten Brett and David Walsh.

The Curators

Jean-Hubert Martin and his co-curator/exhibition designer, **Tijs Visser**, have worked together on a number of exhibitions including the Visser-inspired, *Artempo*, in the Palace Fortuny for the 2007 Venice Biennale and the Moscow Biennale (2009).

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Artempo looked at how humans have engaged with and interpreted the passage of time across cultures, history and art forms, and it inspired David Walsh to team up with Martin for MONA.

Jean-Hubert Martin has served as director of the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Kunsthalle Bern, the Kunstpalast Dusseldorf, and the Paris Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie. He is best known for the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* and, more recently, *Artempo*, the Moscow Biennale (2009); and in 2011 he was curator for Christian Boltanski’s work at the French Pavilion for the 54th Venice Biennale.

Mat(tijs) Visser started his career in architecture and theatre in Holland. He was head of exhibitions at the Museum Kunstpalast Dusseldorf (2001 – 2008). For the 2009 Venice Biennale he curated, together with Daniel Birnbaum, the Gutai show at the Central Pavilion. In 2008 he established the Zero Foundation.

Olivier Varenne has been a senior curator and international art buyer at MONA since 2006 and worked with Martin as co-curator for the Moscow Biennale 2009. In 2010, he curated *On and On* at Casa Encendida Museum, Madrid.

Nicole Durling has been a senior curator at MONA since 2006. Based in Melbourne, Nicole was Sotheby’s contemporary art specialist before signing on with David Walsh. Working directly, in Australia, with emerging, mid-career and established artists, she has curated, developed and supported projects including music festivals, sound art performances, ephemeral interventions and permanent commissions.

The Collaborators

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery is the second oldest museum in Australia, having its origins in Australia’s first scientific society, the Royal Society of Tasmania (established in 1843), and it became Tasmania’s state museum in 1885. TMAG remains Tasmania’s leading art, natural history and cultural and heritage organisation, and is one of only a few institutions worldwide that combine a museum, art gallery and herbarium. TMAG’s collaboration with MONA is not only its most extensive but also the first time many of the pieces have been displayed.

Mona, Museum of Old and New Art houses the David Walsh private collection, in Berriedale, near Hobart. Since opening in January 2011 more than 410,000 people have visited. With the museum’s location, its subterranean structure built into the sandstone banks of the Derwent River, the owner’s personal approach to displaying his collection, and the public’s response, we will continue to challenge the mainstream.

Ends

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