

News

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MONA owner David Walsh apologies to Tasmanian Aboriginal community offended by Southdale display

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The Southdale exhibition at Dark Mofo.

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MONA owner David Walsh has apologised to members of Tasmania's Aboriginal community who were offended by a display at the gallery's controversial Southdale exhibition.

Mr Walsh posted the apology on the MONA blog last night.

The offending piece -- a display offering free DNA testing with the words "Are you of Aboriginal descent?" -- has been removed from the exhibition.

Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre administrator Heather Sculthorpe said she didn't know the point of the DNA testing, but said it was "reminiscent of the way museums have treated us in the past, as specimens to test and to put on display".

"We don't need DNA testing to know who we are," Ms Sculthorpe said.

Aboriginal writer and former Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre lawyer Michael Mansell said he didn't think the DNA testing was meant to offend, but was more satirical.

"But there are very few members of the public who would pick up on the intended satire," he said.

Southdale, which is MONA's latest exhibition, opened last weekend to coincide with Dark Mofo.

MONA ART GETS A MALLING (<http://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/mona-art-gets-a-malling/story-fnj4f7k1-1226961881585>)

It represents the utopian vision of Victor Gruen, who built America's first shopping centre, called Southdale.

The identity of the exhibition's creator, Swiss artist Christoph Buchel, was kept a secret at his request until his name was revealed by a journalist last week.

Mr Walsh said during the exhibition planning, MONA had categorically rejected some of Buchel's material.

"Christoph holds the intellectual property for the exhibition, and when we offered (threatened?) to take down some material we were uncomfortable with, he maintained his confrontational viewpoint. In his opinion, the exhibition is a conceptual whole," Walsh said in his blog.

"His position: if we take any of it down we must take it all down.

"Obviously, that puts us in a difficult position.

"Christoph has demonstrated (for the most part) the facile nature of certainty.

"Those who believe in utopias, and attempt to engineer them, repeatedly fail and generate unintended consequences.

"They fail because their path becomes the only path, and the required outcome, the end, is sought regardless of the means.

"Christoph's hypocrisy is that he parodies that position while taking the same view. He knows what he wants, and while he pursues his goals he doesn't care what the consequences are for others.

"We do. We will engage with affected individuals and redress the situation.

"If Christoph fails to approve our action he will have the right to legal process, of course.

"We're sorry we pissed some people off. And we will find a way to resolve reasonable unaddressed issues."

Mr Mansell said he believed MONA should have contacted the Aboriginal community before the exhibition to check on its response to the display.

MONA senior curator Delia Nicholls said Mr Buchel had already left Australia.
