



Walsh dismisses 'storm in a teacup'

EXCLUSIVE

MATTHEW DENHOLM

TASMANIA CORRESPONDENT

WEALTHY art gallery owner David Walsh has broken his silence over the controversy surrounding his handling of an exhibit offensive to some Aborigines, labelling it a "shit storm in a teacup".

The professional gambler and owner of Hobart's groundbreaking Museum of Old and New Art removed a component of a work by Swiss artist Christoph Buchel that purported to be a mobile DNA testing unit.

Complete with fake sponsors, it asked: "Are you of Aboriginal descent? Test your DNA here for free! Be a part of history."

Walsh pulled the work from display after complaints from Aboriginal elders.

But he retained the rest of Buchel's large-scale installation, *Southdale/C'Mona*, risking legal action from the notoriously testy artist.

He said he did not want the DNA poster up in the first place. "I took it down and apologised. Instant shit-storm. But it's a shit-storm in a teacup. People can express opinions and blame me, by all means, and that's a good thing."

His statement fell short of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's expectations, with Walsh blaming Buchel. The TAC has previously accused Walsh of "not getting" local indigenous culture, of building MONA on a midden site and failing to acknowledge their culture at the museum.

MONA insists it has followed all requirements in dealing with the middens and expressed a willingness to install a plaque acknowledging the site's indigenous history.

Walsh does not have Aboriginal works in his collection, but has borrowed indigenous works for MONA exhibitions and praised the sophistication of traditional art. And MONA has worked with local elders and artists on several projects.