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The art of the bowerbird



by [Patrick](#)



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You might spy an unusual new installation in the Forest Gallery as part of *The Red Queen* exhibition showing at MONA, the Museum of New and Old Art in Tasmania. The installation by English artist Toby Ziegler, entitled *My vegetable love; Cultural exchange*, is in the shape of a Utah teapot fashioned from the same material used by male Satin Bowerbirds (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) to make their bowers.



Jack, the older male

bowerbird, interacting with the teapot bower.

Image: Jon Augier / Toby Ziegler

Source: Museum Victoria and MONA

The theme of *My Vegetable Love* is the interaction between the natural world (the Forest Gallery's bowerbirds) and the artificial world (a computer-generated teapot), with the object itself being a hybrid between the two. The main theme of *The Red Queen* is 'Why do human beings make art?', and this component investigates natural animal behaviours that appear, to us, artistic.



Juvenile bowerbirds are

also intrigued by Toby Ziegler's teapot.

Image: Patrick Honan

Source: Museum Victoria

It references a 3D mathematical model of a teapot created in 1975 at the University of Utah which has become a standard reference object in computer-generated imaging (CGI), and also as a regular in-joke in animated Hollywood movies. It appears somewhere in all Pixar movies and in the 'Third Dimension' episode of *The Simpsons*.



A modern render of the

original CGI teapot created at the University of Utah by Martin Newell.

Image: Dhatfield

Source: CC BY-SA 3.0

Juvenile and female Satin Bowerbirds are olive green, but males turn a deep blue upon maturity at about seven years of age. Jack, the oldest male Bowerbird, has lived in the Forest Gallery as an adult for 13 years. Errol turned completely blue earlier this year, after more than 12 months in transition from his juvenile plumage.



Errol during his transformation from juvenile to adult plumage. His unusual patterning prompted many queries from puzzled visitors.

Image: Jon Augier

Source: Museum Victoria

A new webcam streams live video of activity around the teapot into MONA and our website. One of Jack's old bowers is also takes pride of place in the gallery at MONA. The teapot will remain in the Forest Gallery as part of the exhibition until 21 April 2014.

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You'll need Windows Media Player to view this video feed. [Get Media Player](#)

Links:

[MONA](#)

[Bowerbird Cam](#)

['Birds face off for balance of bower in exhibit'](#) in *The Age*, 19 Jun 2013

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