

## THE AUSTRALIAN

# MONA's take on art about sexual evolution in the Red Queen exhibition

ROSEMARY NEILL THE AUSTRALIAN JUNE 19, 2013 12:00AM



One of MONA's senior curators, Nicole Durling, prepares for the opening of The Red Queen exhibition in Hobart yesterday. Picture: Peter Mathew Source: The Australian

**WHY are so many artists chick magnets? This question is raised in typically provocative fashion in The Red Queen, the latest exhibition from Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art , which is funded by the professional gambler David Walsh.**

The Red Queen, which opens today, explores different theories about why people make art. According to sex selection theory, art developed as an ornament that advertised an individual's excess capacity. As MONA's press release puts it: "The artistic bloke got the girls and spread his genes more generously than his less creative competitors."

The idea appealed to MONA senior curator Olivier Varenne yesterday. "Why not?" he said. "Do you think art is for mating? Why not?"

Varenne said the broader issue of what drove creativity was also "a very interesting question. Why for 20,000 years all humans, all populations from everywhere in a continuous way, have always made art. We don't have answers in this exhibition, but we are raising many questions."

The Red Queen exhibition, comprising more than 100 artworks by 46 artists, has involved a radical rehang of 75 per cent of MONA's collection. The wildly eclectic show juxtaposes ancient Indo-

Greek coins with works including a life-sized trampoline, a deconstructed ping-pong table and Ghanaian voodoo dolls.

The exhibition also features unsettling watercolours by the late American artist Henry Darger, which depict small, naked girls with penises being strangled by Asiatic-looking invaders.

Another of MONA's senior curators, Nicole Durling, yesterday downplayed sex selection theory, arguing that it was just one of many ideas that explained why art evolved. "Of course, it (making art) is about procreation and furthering your genes, but human beings have so many impacts on us," said Durling. Art was also created, she said, for cultural and environmental reasons.

She said The Red Queen showed how MONA - nicknamed the "sex and death museum" and now Tasmania's leading tourist attraction - had matured since it opened 2 1/2 years ago. "We have changed. We have evolved. This exhibition is an expression of that evolution within our own small group," she said.

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