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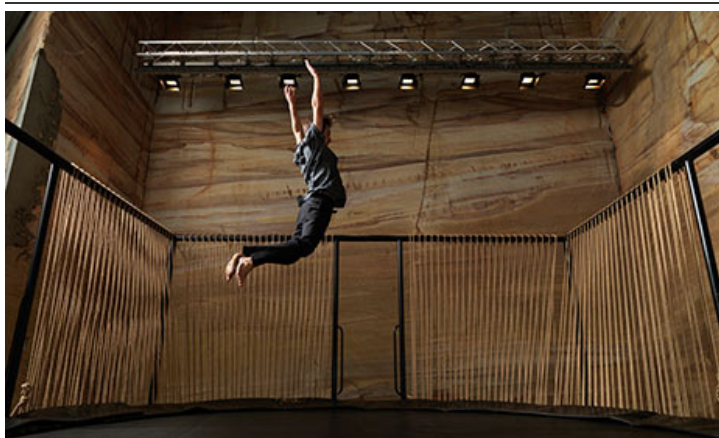
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The Red Queen – MONA, Hobart

This new exhibition from Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art aims to discover the impulses that drive humans to make art



Danser la Musique: Chen Zhen's trampoline makes music as you bounce Photograph: MONA

“Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!” So explained the Red Queen to Alice, in a line that has since seen Lewis Carroll's royal adopted

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as figurehead for the theory that we do not evolve to progress, but [to keep pace with our changing environment](#).

Now she is also heading the bill at MONA, opening as [part of winter festival Dark Mofo](#), for an exhibition that questions why humans create art: where does our creative drive spring from; why do we continue to have creative impulses? It is unsurprising of course, that David Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art, dedicated to death and sex, wants to tackle such a question. And equally unsurprising that you won't find a neat answer in the Red Queen's galleries.

The curatorial team suggest that central question functions mostly as a filter through which works can be viewed; that their primary concern was bringing together a collection of interesting pieces. That is surely the right approach. Certainly it creates some exhilarating moments.



Berlin Buddha: Zhang Huan's work is made from ashes Photograph: MONA

Exhibits are loosely grouped into “chapters” referencing the potential motivations of humans to create such as play, language, pattern and memory. Some feel rather forced, while others hang together in a more natural way: the belief component includes, amongst other pieces, an Egyptian sarcophagus, an intense, meditative composition from Tasmanian Christopher Townend, and Zhang Huan's powerful Berlin Buddha, sitting nearly four metres high, composed of incense ashes and slowly starting to return back to dust.

Red Queen winds its way through MONA's three subterranean levels, interspersed with the museum's existing collection – partly for reasons of space, partly because it would be odd to exclude some works from the question of why art is made – creating new dialogues and, on occasion, some surprising

story



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absences. Eighty percent of the gallery has been rehung, and some of the museum's big hits rested. Most notably Sidney Nolan's Snake has been replaced for the Red Queen by Ryoji Ikeda's data.tron/ data.matrix pieces.



Data.tron: Ryoji Ikeda's huge installation visualises data Photograph: MONA

These data visualisations, the largest of which is hung on a vast wall with visitors viewing at two levels, are hypnotic; both familiar and awe-inspiring. Against an electronic soundscape, a great screen of figures and commands scrolls past, patterns form and reform, before ever-changing digits cover the whole space, moving so fast they resemble a giant swarm of insects.

Amid the loans and rehanging for the Red Queen are five new versions of existing works and 11 new commissions – including a mechanical weather-powered drawing machine by Cameron Robbins which provides an interesting response to “why create?”. Together they unfurl into a stimulating discussion about the motivations and practices of artists.



The Depraved Pursuit of a Possum: Tessa Farmer's installation sees insects and arachnids setting upon a possum Photograph: MONA

In a room dedicated to the notion of display, Tessa Farmer has meticulously hung a great army of bees

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(and helper insects) in the playful Depraved Pursuit of a Possum, while Cut Papers #15 sees Shachiko Abe's pile of cuttings grow ever deeper as she carefully adds to her installation. Francis Alys' video documents the making of his piece When Faith Moves Mountains. "At first I thought it was silly to move a dune," says one of those who volunteered to do so. "But then I thought, it's just doing something with a bunch of people, no?"

Lindsay Seers' large video installation, housed within an upturned boat, forms part of the memory "chapter" of the Red Queen, alongside two works from Kutlug Ataman, Paradise and Küba. In Küba a room of old-fashioned armchairs are placed directly in front of televisions showing individual life stories; the words of a Turkish campaigner repeatedly targeted for his beliefs, particularly resonant.



Kutlug Ataman: the artist's Küba and Paradise works are showing as part of The Red Queen Photograph: Mona

The Red Queen delivers fewer shocks that one might perhaps expect, based on MONA's reputation, although there is of course fun to be had: a table-tennis table riven with deep valleys; a trampoline that creates a unique soundtrack for your bouncing thanks to the bells tied underneath.

But the team admit that as the museum settles and matures, it is perhaps emerging from its teenage phase. "I think we're growing up slowly. Our skin is clearing up," says curator Nicole Durling. "I think this is the most honest exhibition that we've done. It has the most of our voices within it."

• [The Red Queen to April 21, 2014, MONA, Hobart](#)



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Linzoftassietimes

20 June 2013 11:15pm

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top reviews darl. nice to meet you in hobbit. pointed to your words on little tassietimes: <http://www.tasmaniantimes.com.au/> blessings, Linz!x



SteveHvdl

20 June 2013 11:57pm

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Haven't seen this yet, but Japanese artist Ryoji Ikeda's Spectra light tower at Dark Mofo has been casting an ever changing illumination in the winter clouds over Hobart. With last night's crystal clear sky gave us an entirely different image.

Well worth a weekend trip to Hobart.



Chicothecat

21 June 2013 6:59am

I think what is missing here is the viewer. Nobody denies the urge to create; what is less certain is the demand to be appreciated once the creative urge has been satisfied. This is further corrupted, given the inflated prices that are charged for these pieces (many of which, of course, cannot be hung on anybody's wall). Art should be useful, as well as, obviously, beautiful. Can much conceptual art fulfill that?

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