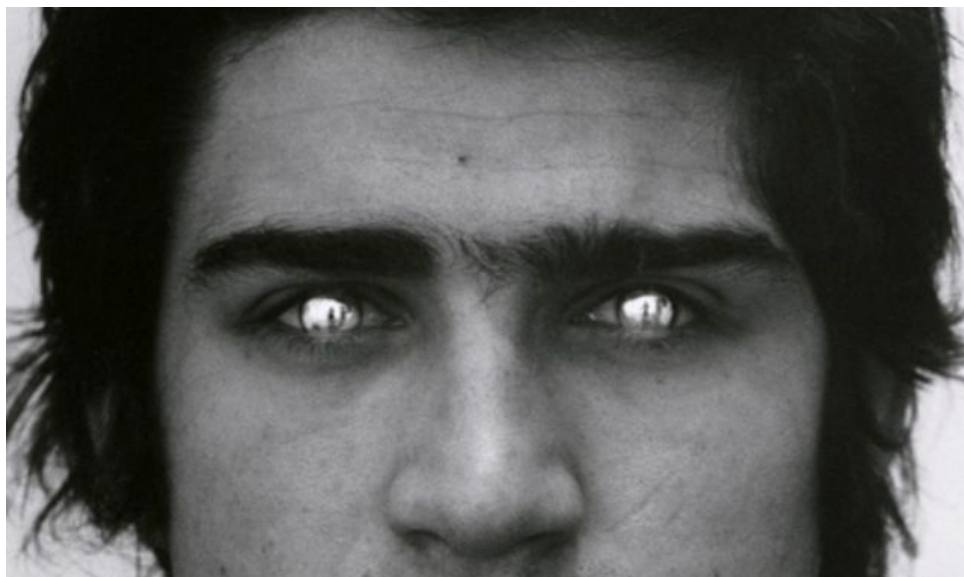


by Nicholas Forrest 11/06/13 11:51 PM EDT



Turning One's Eyes Inside Out / To Turn Upside Down Your Own Eyes 1970 by Guiseppe Penone

(Courtesy MONA)

Senior curator and international buyer at Tasmania's [Museum of Old and New Art \(MONA\)](#), **Olivier Varenne**, stops short of describing the museum's first public project, "[Beam in Thine Own Eye](#)," as a vehicle for achieving Nirvana, but only just. Nirvana might be off the menu but such is the significance of this exhibition, which Varenne describes as being "about the forces that shape the reality of our own mind," that Varenne and co-curator **Nicole Durling** make mention of empowerment, enlightenment, and existentialism – potentially apt references given the biblical title of the exhibition. If enlightenment and existentialism weren't enough to whet your appetite, Varenne also states that the exhibition is the first of its kind.

Regardless of whether or not "Beam in Thine Own Eye" is a groundbreaking project or indeed a portal to a higher level of self awareness, there is no doubt that it will be an unforgettable experience – the curatorial experience of Olivier Varenne and Nicole Durling combined with the ambition, influence, and resources of MONA founder **David Walsh** have seen to that. Through the work of 13 of the world's most exciting and influential contemporary artists such as **Ryoji Ikeda**, **Alfredo Jaar**, **Mathieu Briand**, **Guiseppe Penone**, **Michelangelo Pistoletto**, **Anish Kapoor**, **Gregorio Zanon**, **Lawrence Weiner**, **Lara Favaretto**, **Fabien Giraud & Raphael Siboni**, **Ivana Franke**, **Kurt Hentschlagler**, and Australia's own **Tim Bruniges**, co-curators Varenne and Durling have embarked on a curatorial journey to create a truly personal and introspective experience that will cause people to question the definition of art and in the words of David Walsh "let the mind's eye shine."

Fittingly, the catalyst for the exhibition was a personal moment of enlightenment for curator

Olivier Varenne. It was at the 2008 **National Gallery of Victoria** exhibition "The Triumph of Landscape: Turner to Monet" that Varenne encountered **J. M. W. Turner's** painting "A mountain scene, Val d'Aosta," an ethereal expression of atmosphere and light that is as disconcerting as it is utterly beautiful. Varenne describes his encounter with "A mountain scene, Val d'Aosta" as akin to "losing view, losing sight, and losing vision." "It is such a stark painting that you end up guessing the landscape," Varenne explains. It was after his Turner experience that Varenne decided that it would be interesting to curate an exhibition featuring sculptures that don't exist in the proper sense, i.e. works that exist in the imagination or as a phenomenon.

One of the most highly anticipated works in the exhibition is Kurt Hentschläger's immersive audiovisual environment "ZEE" which is so intense and so engrossing that it comes with a rather comical but deadly serious warning that prevents anyone other than fit and healthy adults from experiencing it. According to the warning, "due to the immersive nature of the installation, there is a danger of motion sickness, trance-like states and blackouts; and epileptic seizures may be experienced in varying degrees." Pregnant women, children and those below the age of 18 are also excluded from entering "ZEE" as are those with a history of photosensitive epilepsy.

Upon entering "ZEE," participants are immediately enveloped in a dense fog which completely obscures the boundaries of the space. Penetrating the fog are beams from stroboscopic and pulse lights which induce a hallucinatory-like state of sensory subterfuge where shapes appear that don't really exist. A minimalist ambient soundscape heightens the intensity of the experience without overpowering the dominant visual component. Hentschläger himself describes "ZEE" as a work of art that "proposes a state of tabula rasa and unfolds without a narrative or reproducible imagery" to create an experience where "time appears to stand still."

Antony Gormley's 2007 installation "Blind Light" uses a similarly enveloping and disruptive environment to "ZEE" to evoke a sense of disorientation, but not to the same extent of "ZEE," or indeed in the same way as "ZEE." Gormley's "Blind Light" consists of a large glass structure filled with a dense mist that turns the participant into the subject of the work. From the outside viewers can watch as those inside the room come into contact with the glass walls and momentarily become visible. "It is very important for me that inside it you find the outside," says Gormley.

The primary difference between ZEE and "Blind Light," and the reason that ZEE is in the exhibition and "Blind Light" isn't, is that Gormley's work is voyeuristic and focuses on the experience of observation whereas Hentschläger's installation installs the viewer as the primary participant in a private and personal experience – one of the most important and defining characteristics of the "Beam in Thine Own Eye" project.

Although each of the works in "Beam in Thine Own Eye" is very different, they all cause viewers to "question their own sense and perception of reality," says Durling. Each of the works in the exhibition have been selected very carefully by Varenne and Durling and all have their place in the exhibition from Ryoji Ikeda's outrageous 15 kilometre tall monolithic light sculpture to the infinite depth of **Michelangelo Pistoletto's** incredible glass sculpture "A Cubic Meter of Infinity" to **Anish Kapoor's** interactive massage performance "Imagined Monochrome."

At the end of the day "Beam in Thine Own Eye" is about looking at good art, as any good exhibition should be, but at the same time it has been designed to create conversations between the crowds and evoke debate. The journey that Varenne and Durling embarked upon to create a meditative but empowering experience that awakens the senses and actually encourages viewers to learn more about their body and their mind has resulted in what promises to be an incredible experience. If you are interested in experiencing works of art that go beyond the concept of art as an object and learn new things about yourself, do not miss "Beam in Thine Own Eye."

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

-Matthew 7:3

"Beam in Thine Own Eye" will take place during the inaugural Dark Mofo 2013 from June 13-23 and will then continue on until July 28. For more information visit the Dark Mofo website [here](#).



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