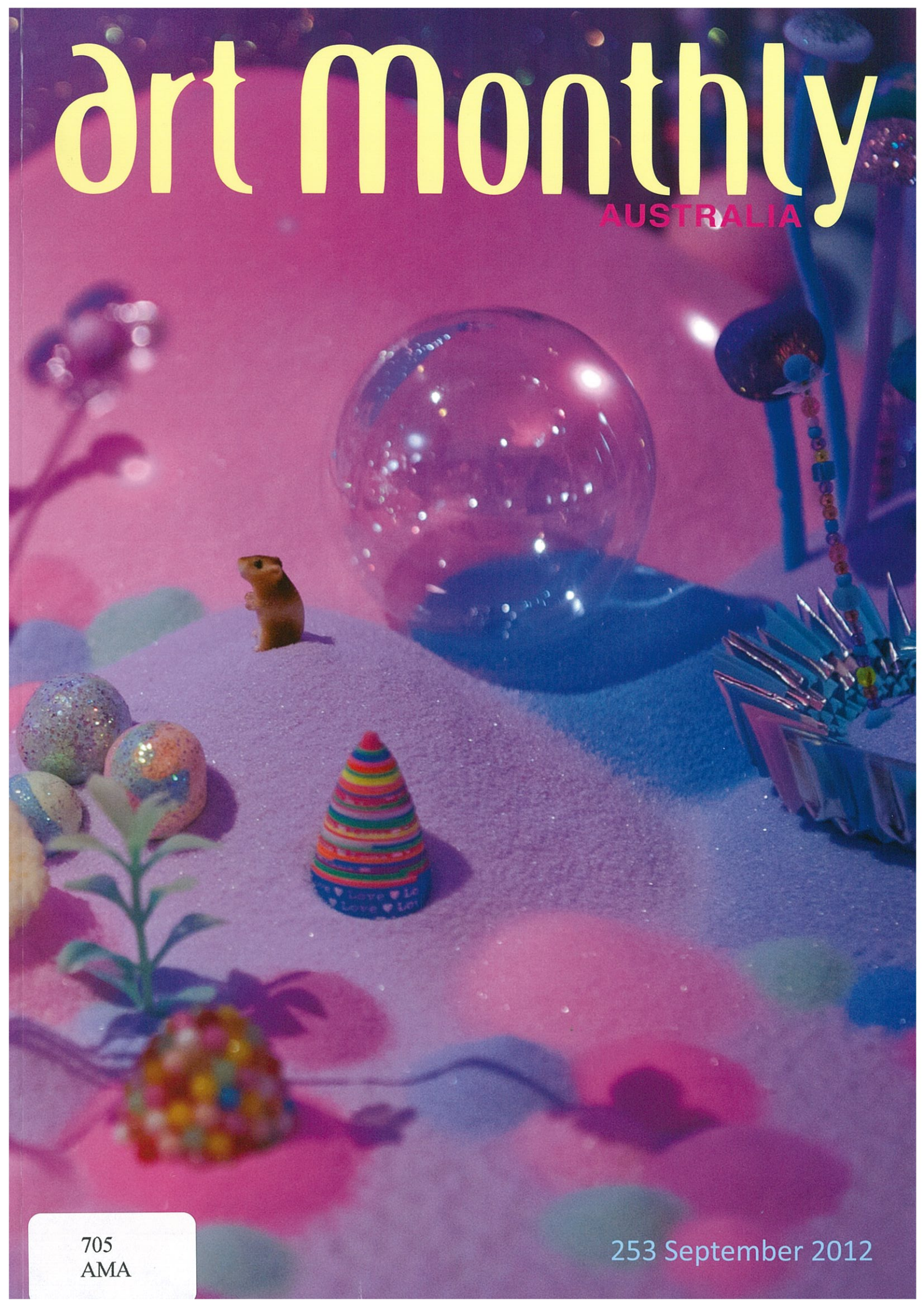


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Theatre of Memory referencing Italian philosopher, Giulio Camillo (1480-1544). During the 1530s, Camillo began to construct for the French King François I (1494 – 1547) a memory theatre now known to us only through a text he is said to have dictated towards the end of his life. It took the form of a small wooden amphitheatre and contained a galaxy of texts and objects representing the history of knowledge at that time; juxtaposed to trigger, systematically, if the viewer had enough knowledge and understanding, the wonders of god and man.
All images this article installation views *Theatre of the World*, 2012, Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart; images courtesy MONA; photos: MONA/Remi Chauvin

Wunderkammering Down Under

LISA SLADE

A Frenchman rifling through the collections of Tasmanian museums – here we go again, Europe is making the antipodes. There is an historical symmetry in Jean-Hubert Martin's curating of *Theatre of the world* at David Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art on the shores of the Derwent – the French were among the first Europeans to be titillated by Tasmania (the antipode of the antipodes) when Baudin and his two young artists Charles-Alexandre Lesueur and Nicolas-Martin Petit recreated in watercolour antipodean *naturalia*.¹ But long before Baudin and his *confrères* visited the isle, the antipodes, as idea more than reality, and relation rather than place (as Bernard Smith insists), was present in European collections known as *Wunderkammern*.² From the second half of the 16th century onwards an influx of *naturalia* (natural objects), *artificialia* (art and artefacts) and *exotica* (ethnographic items) from the new world made their way into the collections of European *cognoscenti*. Beginning with the first voyages to the Americas by Cortes, these items included treasures made in gold and silver, feather work, textiles and masks of turquoise. Defined by their difference, these curiosities (many of which share David Walsh's revelling in sex and

death) offered the beholder a vicarious experience of the new world. The hero image used in *Theatre of the world* where a South American owl butterfly jostles an Ancient Grecian urn could well be Cortes's loot – it snaps us right back to the 16th century *Wunderkammer*. The inclusion however, of Belgian artist Jan Fabre's *Skull* (2001) made from beetle carapaces tells us that this is a 21st century *Wunderkammering* – the return to curiosity in contemporary art.³

The title of the exhibition *Theatre of the world* draws its inspiration directly from the world of *Wunderkammern* – specifically from the Baroque desire for total knowledge or pansophism, the yearning for a theatre of the world, one constrained to the cabinet and controlled within it. But Martin's *Wunderkammering* didn't begin down under.⁴ In his *Magiciens de la terre* at the Pompidou in Paris in 1989, Western art found its visual counterpoint in art from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and included a large ground work from Yuendumu in the Australian Central Desert. In 1991 Martin commenced his contemporary art project at the Château d'Oiron, in France, where he used the *Wunderkammer* classificatory model of the world (*naturalia, artificialia, exotica*, etc.) to curate contemporary

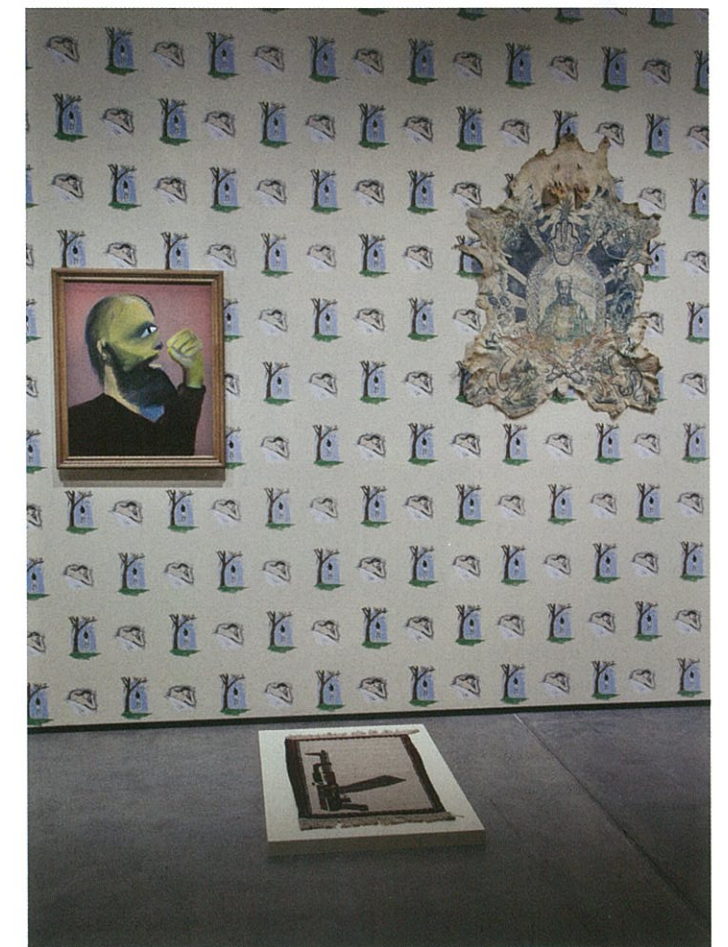
art responses by artists including Hubert Duprat and Daniel Spoerri to the Renaissance building and its collection. This play of art and natural world can also be found in Martin's *Theatre of the world* where Emily Kame Kngwarreye's *Untitled (Awelye)* (1994), a five-part painting in vivid pink and red, is sequestered into a small, dark space that one enters by crouching through a small doorway. The painting is juxtaposed with a sample of the mineral crocoite – these are but two of the 300 or so objects selected by Martin from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), a veritable *Wunderkammer* and one of the few remaining combined natural history and art collections in the country. Reminiscent of red coral, one of the star talismans of the Baroque cabinet, crocoite is often associated with gold and on cue, Lucio Fontana's *Spatial concept* (1964-5), on loan from the National Gallery of Victoria's collection, provides the third visual counterpoint in this cloistered space.

Theatre of the world revels in a (neo) Baroque fascination for analogy, opposites, counterpoints and contradictions. These principles underpin the exhibition where chronology and taxonomy are eschewed in favour of visual impact brought about by visual thinking (*la pensée visuelle*), as Martin calls it. The objects on display inherit their meaning in the context of juxtaposition and dialecticism. Where the white cube's rarefied environment privileged one over many, here in this 21st century *Wunderkammer* one image or artefact jostles another, defining and revaluing the other. This way of thinking dialectically and analogically has a long history and one possible reading is that it was forged in response to the ontological challenge of the new world. Imagined long before it was encountered, the antipodes offered a counterpoint to Europe (quite literally in antiquity when it was believed that planetary balance depended on the great south land). *Theatre of the world* is a reminder that Australian society is a product of European vision – the antipodes are but a European collectible, one defined by difference. This point is underscored in Martin's selection and placement of objects in the exhibition – for instance, in the (dark) heart of the exhibition a paper nautilus, one of the most sought-after objects of the *Wunderkammer*, is enshrined in an illuminated cabinet. This Pacific Rim treasure made its way from Flinders Island into the Tasmanian collection as recently as 1970, its selection and display a conscious confusion of the spatio-temporal.⁵

The first room of the sixteen taken over by the *Theatre of the world* recreates the theatre of memory conceptualised by Italian scholar Giulio Camillo and re-interpreted by Frances A Yates some 400 years later in her 1966 publication *The Art of Memory*. The cabinet as a metaphor for memory and the power of objects as memory aides is as old as the *Wunderkammer* itself and in this recreation of Camillo's theatre, the beholder is positioned at the centre of an amphitheatre of objects. This centralising of the beholder at the entrance to the exhibition – centre-stage in the theatre of the world – replicates the governing perspective of the beholder/collector within *Wunderkammer* culture, and in Martin's own terminology counteracts 'the docile museum'.⁶ This model theatre conveys symbolically the beholder/collector's control of the world and like the O, the MONA



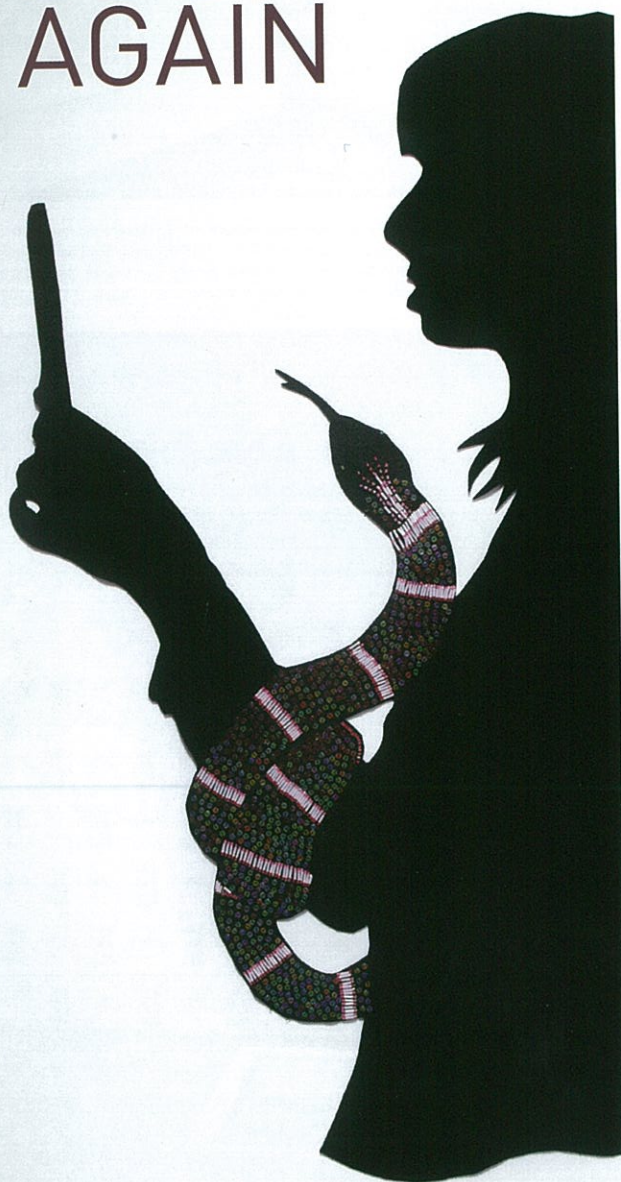
1/ (left): Sidney Nolan, *Ape and Elephant*, 1963, oil on hardboard, 120 x 120; (centre, floor): *Mask of the (spirit) Panjuri*, the tusked boar Tulu Nadu, south coastal Karnataka, India, 20th century, cast bronze, 58 x 65 x 34cm; (right): Ricardo Hernández, *Caballito*, 2006, charcoal on paper, 147.5 x 107.5cm



(left): Sidney Nolan, *Colonial Head—Kelly Gang*, 1943-46, oil and enamel paint on canvas, 76 x 63.5cm; (floor): Afghan war rug, wool and cotton, dyes, 53 x 92cm, on loan; (right) Wim Delvoye, *Untitled (Osama)*, 2002-03, tattooed pigskin, 127 x 98 x 3cm; (wallpaper): Robert Gober, *Hanging Man/Sleeping Man*, 1989, screenprint in colour on wallpaper, image courtesy the artist

branded iPod touch which invites every visitor to curate their own experience, it empowers the beholder. The O also approximates, through Walsh's own narrative Gonzo, what one would imagine to be the subjective rant of the Baroque collector introducing select visitors to his treasure trove. The key difference here lies of course in the fact that the success and power of the *Wunderkammer*,

LOOK. LOOK AGAIN



Sangeeta Sandrasegar, *Untitled (Self portrait) (detail)*, 2009
Cruthers Collection of Women's Art. Courtesy of the artist

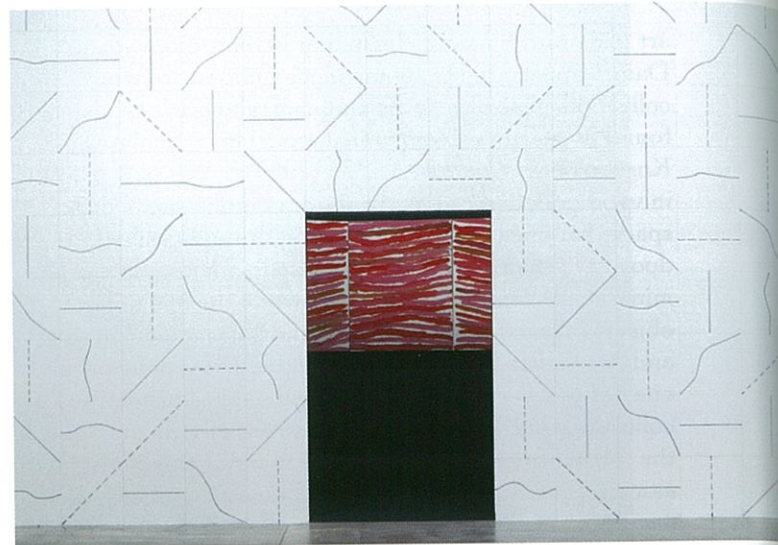
An exhibition of the work of female artists in Australia over the past 125 years from the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art.

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(foreground): Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #394 (detail)*, 'A 12 inch (30 cm) grid covering the wall with 12 inch (30 cm) square, a vertical, horizontal, diagonal right or diagonal left straight, not straight or broken line bisecting the square', black crayon, black pencil, installation dimensions variable, courtesy Estate of Sol LeWitt; (background): Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Untitled (Awelye)* (detail), 1994, acrylic paint on canvas, five panels, overall 185.5 x 331 cm, Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), Hobart



Various artworks by various artists incl. (left wall): beaded tunic, Nigeria, Yoruba people, 20th century; (right wall, top left): beaded bag - Apo ileke, Nigeria, Yoruba people, 20th century; (right wall, bottom): Pablo Picasso, *Weeping Woman*, 1937, Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; (right wall, right): shield, New Britain, Papua New Guinea, Sulka people, 19th century -early 20th century, Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery



TMAG's Barkcloth Collection from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tahiti, Tonga, Vanuatu, possibly Melanesia and Futuna, with Alberto Giacometti, *Grande figure (Femme Leon)*, 1947, bronze, 167 x 19.5 x 41cm, Collection: Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul, France

in existence centuries before the rise of the public museum, was predicated on keeping art and worldly wonders OUT of the public domain while Walsh's MONA has become a national model in audience development.

Wunderkammer analogies have, in recent decades, usually leapfrogged modernism - largely avoiding the 20th century in search of more convenient postmodern dialogues. The work of Sidney Nolan however, Walsh's favourite artist, is positioned in the theatre of memory and elsewhere in the exhibition along with the work of Arthur Boyd, John Perceval and Albert Tucker. The inclusion of these artists at first presents a conundrum in the transmodern *Wunderkammer* but these artists well understood the paradox of being antipodean - being defined by Europe and yet positioned to query it. Their work at the time of its making and perhaps today offers a critique of the centre, talking back to Europe; it asserts colonial modernism and reminds us that MONA is Walsh's theatre of the world and that the collector ultimately speaks through their collection.

Empire is at the heart of this exhibition,⁷ at the heart of the *Wunderkammer* and ultimately, at the heart of the museum. The lure and fetishism of the 'other' abounds in the mystical spaces of Walsh's underground museum - in the theatre of memory, in the crypt of more than eighty Pacific bark cloths, and in the cloistered room where Kngwarreye volleys with Fontana. Does *Theatre of the world* reframe or merely reconfigure the clichés of empire that intercultural exhibitions are often criticised for reawakening? The semi-circular room of masks exudes the type of potency that I imagine the Trocadero (later the Musée de l'Homme) in Martin's home city of Paris was known for. Is this how Picasso felt when Matisse introduced him to the museum and its colonial booty more than one hundred years ago? Martin's room of masks revives the drama and spectacle of the ethnographic museum in a way that feels dangerously close to neo-primitivism, however the power and presence of a mask by Benin artist Romuald Hazoumé contests the space and with it, colonisation. Made from a non-biodegradable petrol Jerri can, the type made in the West and peddled to poorer African nations, Hazoumé's mask inverts the fetishising of the 'other'. The waste of the West is transformed into a contemporary Yoruba collectible, which essentially troubles colonial representation - and this inclusion is enriched by Walsh and Martin's shared

penchant for traditional beadwork sculptures from the Yoruba, evidenced by the scores of examples studded throughout *Theatre of the world*. The enigmatic object reigns in its singularity as a contemporary Yoruba work of art, and in seemingly infinite dialogue with other wonders from this museum of enchantments.⁸

1. A selection of works by Charles-Alexandre Lesueur and Nicolas-Martin Petit was recently on display from the Museum of Natural History in Le Havre, France, in the National Gallery of Victoria's current exhibition *Napoleon: Revolution to Empire* (until 7 October). Unfortunately these are not held in the TMAG collection however *Theatre of the world* includes the extraordinary work of Louisa Anne Meredith, who was working in Tasmania from 1840.
2. Horst Bredekamp locates *Wunderkammer*, and later *Kunstkammer*, culture as proliferating across Europe between 1540-1740, in *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art and Technology*, Markus Wiener Publications, New Jersey, 1995.
3. Ian McLean coined the term 'Wunderkammering' in his essay of the same name written for the exhibition catalogue *Curious Colony: a twenty first century Wunderkammer*, 2010, Newcastle Region Art Gallery; exhibition curated by Lisa Slade. Stephen Bann further explores this idea of the return to curiosity in contemporary art in *Ways around Modernism*, Routledge, New York, 2007.4. Walsh acknowledges Martin's analogical curating as an early influence on MONA.
5. Jean-Hubert Martin was assisted by Tjjs Visser, Olivier Varenne and Nicole Durling.
6. Jean-Hubert Martin, 'Theatre of the World: The museum of enchantments versus the docile museum', in *Theatre of the world*, exhibition catalogue, MONA, 2012.
7. David Hansen made this comment to me at the exhibition opening on June 22, 2012.
8. The museum of enchantments represents Martin's antidote to the docile museum.

Theatre of the World, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, is showing at the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, 23 June 2012 to 8 April 2013: www.mona.net.au

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