

EYE OPENER 'People who are coming here and seeing it are gobsmacked'



Sex and death rolling on the river

Thousands of interstate tourists are flocking to Hobart's Museum of New and Old Art (MONA), which has rapidly gained a reputation for its provocative collection of works.

BY ROBERT UPE
TOURISM REPORTER

VICTORIANS are among thousands of interstate tourists flocking to a controversial new museum which has become one of Tasmania's biggest tourist attractions.

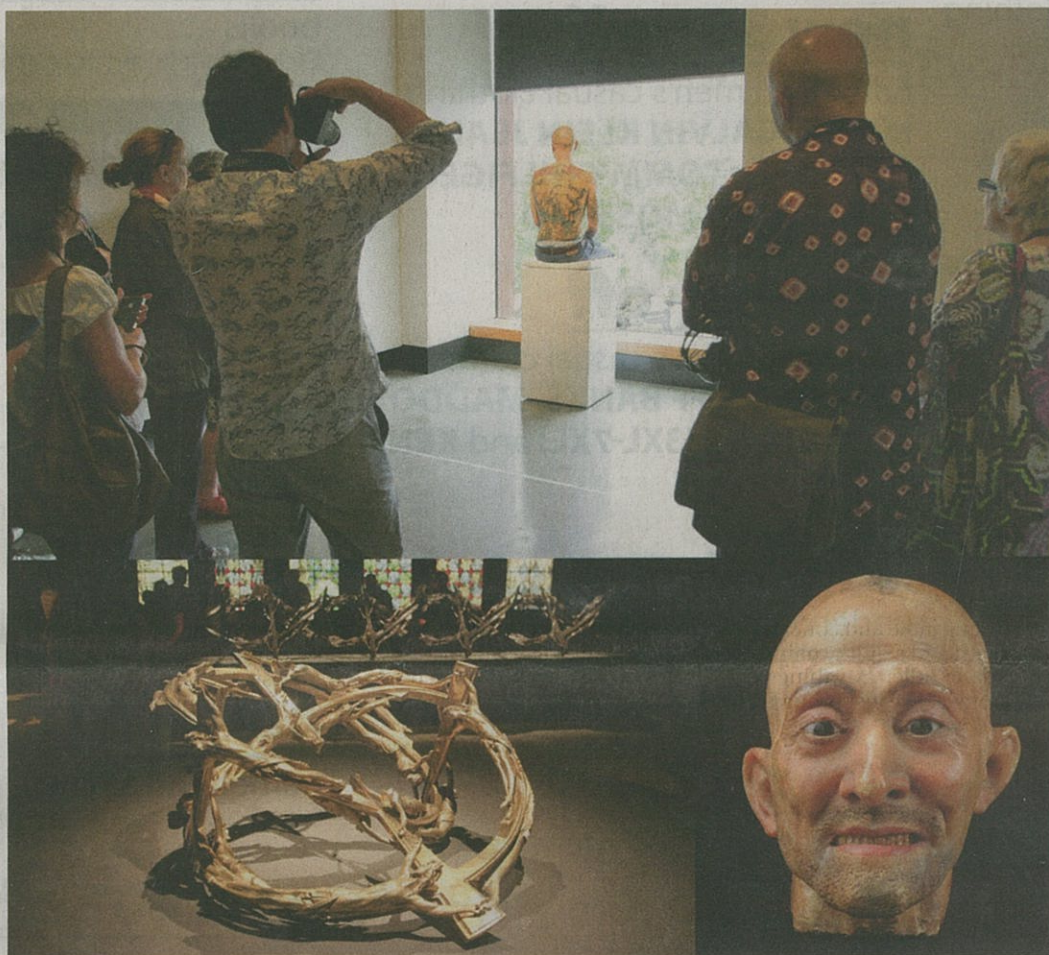
In just under a year after opening, in January last year, 330,000 locals and interstate tourists have been through the doors of MONA, the privately owned Museum of New and Old Art on a headland of the Derwent River outside Hobart, outrating the city's famous Saturday morning Salamanca Place market and Port Arthur.

The museum, owned by eccentric philanthropist David Walsh, is never short of shock value with a sex-and-death section, a wall of porcelain vaginas and a machine called *Cloaca* that replicates the human digestive system and produces faeces.

The controversial pieces are mixed with antiquities, rare coins and a spectacular 45-metre-long Sidney Nolan artwork called *Snake*. All up, the art collection is valued at more than \$100 million.

Last month, MONA took a further step into the bizarre with the opening of a four-month exhibition by Belgian artist Wim Delvoye, whose work includes X-rays of people having sex, a close-up movie of a pimple being squeezed, a gothic concrete truck, tattooed pig skins and a tattooed man, Tim Steiner, who has been sold as a piece of art.

Tattoo Tim, as he is called, sits on a pedestal throughout the day so museum visitors can view the tattoos on his back. He will be at the museum daily for at least the



next month and will take guided tours once a day through the Delvoye exhibition. When he dies, he will be skinned and his tattoos displayed in a more traditional frame.

"That could be tomorrow, but I hope it's not," the 35-year-old from Switzerland says with a smile.

The museum's research curator Delia Nicholls says many Victorians are making the journey to MONA, some staying

overnight but others visiting on a day trip. Taxi drivers report a constant stream of jobs between MONA and Hobart's airport.

Among the first to see the new Delvoye exhibition when it opened were John and Mary Van Den Broek, Kate Stapleton and Kerry Leatham, who flew from Melbourne to Tasmania to visit MONA for their end-of-year work Christmas break-up.

"I like the fact that there's everything from antiquities to

works by well-known Australian artists," said Mr Van Den Broek.

"If you go to a gallery and it's all one period of art, you get over it quickly. There are not many spaces that cater for art of this sort and variety. What people can make art out of is endless — there's even a collection here of the paraphernalia of a drug addict."

Also among the first into the Delvoye exhibition — in the three-level underground

museum that cost \$75 million to construct — was Hobart local Gretchen Meares.

"I've been a few times before and I think it's incredible. Today I've brought my mum for a treat," she said.

"I think Hobart people have generally accepted the museum, but if it was in Melbourne or Sydney it would be absolutely revered. It's flown a bit under the radar here because it is Hobart.

"The interstate and international people who are coming here and seeing it are gob-smacked."

Ms Nicholls said 46 per cent of visitors were from interstate and mostly they were couples.

"A lot of people may have thought for a long time that they would come to Hobart, but now there is a real conversion because of MONA," Ms Nicholls said.

A Tourism Tasmania source confirmed MONA as the "hot attraction at the moment" and said many of the visitors were from Victoria, but no official figures were yet available.

Thomas Barker, the manager of Hobart's five-star Islington boutique hotel, said MONA had boosted the hotel's bookings by 15 per cent.

"It's bringing artistic, moneyed-up 35-to-55-year-old travellers. They're coming from the east coast, mainly Melbourne, and they are going out and eating at good restaurants like Garagistes and drinking good wine.

"MONA is a megaphone to the other attractions of Hobart."

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