



Gianni Colombo, Spazio Elastico / Elastic Space, 1966-7. Image courtesy Museum of Old and New Art (Mona).

Incarceration and time's passing are eloquently explored at Dark Mofo

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Review: A Journey to Freedom, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery/Zero at MONA.

The gig that drew the big crowds on the opening weekend of Hobart's 2018 Dark Mofo festival was a free party to launch Zero, the new exhibition at MONA. More than 5,000 people flocked to the museum on the promise of "fire, feasting and general wild abandon". However the very first event of the festival was a much more intimate affair — a performance of Olivier Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time at Port Arthur, the remote penal colony that is emblematic of Tasmania's brutal colonial past.

An audience squeezed into the cold, candlelit space of the Separate Prison to hear a piece first performed on decrepit instruments in a German prisoner-of-war camp in 1941. Messiaen composed the quartet for the instruments and the musicians available to him behind the wire of Stalag VIII-A — a combination of piano, violin, cello and clarinet. One of the most evocative and haunting musical works of the 20th century, the Quartet elegantly combined Dark Mofo's dual themes of incarceration and time.

The affective dimensions of this soft opening not only signalled the key concepts of the festival but also showed us how artists respond to difficult times with creativity, determination and ingenuity. These ideas are reiterated throughout the program, including the two main visual art offerings, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery's exhibition *A Journey to Freedom* and *Mona's Zero* — a reprise of the post-war expression of optimism where artists used whatever materials came to hand.



Ricky Maynard, *No More Than What You See* series, installation view. Dark Mofo/Rémi Chauvin

The 13 artists in [*A Journey to Freedom*](#) give expression to the often unseen experience of incarceration from different personal, political and cultural perspectives. Ricky Maynard's brutally accurate black and white photographs in *No More Than What You See* show us the ravages of imprisonment on the bodies and psyches of Indigenous inmates in Australian prisons, while Sam Wallman's animated comic, *A Guard's Story*, documents the mental deterioration of a reluctant worker in an immigration detention centre.

Projected on the wall, Wallman's disarming glimpses are rendered with spare detail and animated so that both text and image quaver like the voice of an unconfident narrator. The whimsical becomes chilling as the inhumanity unfolds.



Sam Wallman with journalist Nick Olle, producer Pat Grant and Pat Armstrong, *A Guard's Story: at work in our detention centres*. Still image, Illustrated narrative video 2014.

The male body is at the centre of Jhafis Quintero's 10-part video work *10 years in Jail*. Each screen enacts a performance against boredom, revealing the role of ritual action in surviving confinement. The tedium of time passing is amplified by the different registers of rhythmic sound — of breathing, counting, or pacing.



Jhafis Quintero, *Mirror* (video still, cropped), 2013. Author provided

The artist group ZERO were not seeking to escape the tedium of incarceration, but they did want to leave the past behind and escape the heavy mood of post-war Germany.

They worked with readily available materials such as metal, cardboard, glass, plastic, cloth, mirrors and smoke, and focussed on themes of light, space, movement, reflection, vibration, structure and colour. The founders, Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker, believed that their era offered a new beginning for art, and this aspiration attracted artists from beyond Germany, including Yves Klein, Lucio Fontana and Yayoi Kusama.

Yves Klein, Pigment bleu sec (Dry Blue Pigment) 1957; recreated in 2018. Image courtesy Museum of Old and New Art (Mona)

Mattijs Visser, founding director of the international ZERO Foundation, curated this show for MONA to reflect the ideas of the founders, and at first glance, vibration, rather than time, seems to be the organising theme.

Yves Klein's vast, floor-based carpet of dry blue pigment flickers and shimmers and many other artworks incorporate light and movement. But they also use ephemeral, everyday objects that resist preservation that were not easily commodified by the art market. The theme of time is thus addressed by the impermanent nature of the artworks.

Gianni Colombo's Spazio Elastico is a room geometrically defined by multiple pieces of string lit with ultra-violet. Enrico Castellani's Il muro del tempo: seven metronomes count time but are out of time with one another; without intervention, they must wind down and stop.

In observing Henk Peeters' Akwarel, a wall of water-filled plastic bags that glitter like jewels, we become conscious of the labour of filling and hanging the bags, and then emptying the water out again when the work is de-installed. We know too, that if the work were left in place indefinitely, the bags would eventually leak or break or drop and fall.

Akwarel (watercolour), Henk Peeters, 1966, recreated 2018. Julie Shiels

Ideas about time, containment and release are addressed and expanded symbolically and conceptually in performative works by Mike Parr and Tanya Lee. In [Underneath the Bitumen](#) from Thursday, Parr will have himself interred for 72 hours beneath a busy road in Hobart's CBD to memorialise the victims of totalitarianism and raise questions about isolation, oppression and the legitimacy of the things that slip from view.

Isolation and disappearance — in the out-of-sight, out-of-mind sense — was also a theme in Landing, where Lee invited swimmers to join her at the Hobart Aquatic Centre for a 24-hour relay. The distance swum — 431-kilometres — equivalent to the separation between Australia and Manus Island.

The Dark Mofo festivities will be over by the end of June, A journey to Freedom will be bumped out in July and ZERO will return to Europe when it closes in April 2019. However, one new work commissioned by MONA and launched during the festival will continue to produce art 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the next 50 years. Cameron Robbins' Wind Section Instrumental builds on the kinetic legacy of the ZERO artists and harnesses the randomness of weather patterns.

Cameron Robbins, detail, Wind Section Instrumental, 2018. Julie Shiels

His wind-powered drawing machine transcribes air currents onto paper, materialising the invisible and ephemeral forces of nature. This complex feat of sculptural engineering will produce one five-metre-long, black-and-white drawing every month.

From the delicate and enigmatic lines of light breezes to the dark, densely overwritten snarls produced by furious storms, Robbin's wind drawings articulate another enduring reflection on the passing of time — a theme that shapes Dark Mofo 2018.

Zero at Dark Mofo runs until Monday 22 April 2019.

A Journey to Freedom is at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery until 29 July.