

ART
FROM
MONA
that gives
Elizabeth
the shits



MUSEUM OF OLD
AND NEW ART





This gives me the shits because my boss, David, finds it a turn on. I know that because he told everyone. A beautiful young woman lies helpless before us. Icy blades spear her naked back. Blank eyes and outstretched arms mimic a death pose, subtly inscribing female pain with sexiness. If I really wanted to go to town on this image I'd suggest that the texture of her pubes continues the texture of the grass that surrounds her; this subtly evokes a longstanding association between women and landscape, each equally prone to male possession. David isn't sexist. I have been given more opportunities under his leadership than I can keep up with. Of course, my experience is one of many; but my assessment, on the basis of knowing him almost half my life, is that he doesn't treat people differently on the basis of their sex. Isn't that the important part? He isn't sexist, but he is sexed, and he's allowed to be turned on by whatever he wants, so long as it's not hurting anyone. But nonetheless, it gives me the shits, not only because male sexuality mystifies and frightens me at times, but also because she's much prettier than me.

INDIA (FROST), 2013
Ryan McKinley



This film (in my reading) is about the way modernity—science, knowledge, progress—has disciplined the human body, alienating it from its natural systems and responses. The choice of a beautiful, blonde, sometimes-nude woman as a stand-in for the human race could work, but doesn't, because the filmmaker betrays no awareness of the tendency (in history and, arguably, currently) for women to be dehumanised as objects for male visual consumption. Nor does he realise that you can't portray violence against women in a way that's a bit of a turn on. At least, not if you don't want to give me the shits.

SECRET MACHINE (still), 2009
Reynold Reynolds

I've got the weirdest boner right now.
—Anonymous O user



Case in point: Brett Whiteley's depiction of himself at work in his studio (see the top right corner). An all-seeing eye, a creative hand; in contrast to the female object of study, his wife Wendy, shown here as a series of disassociated body parts, faceless and in recline.



THE NAKED STUDIO, 1981
Brett Whiteley



This is Rita, the victim of a serial killer. I don't think Whiteley is wrong to portray her. But in this part of the gallery, the painting contributes to a general woman-as-victim vibe.

All four of these offenders are congregated (at time of writing) in a part of Mona that's a little on the rapey side, and that seems to be totally at ease with the historical divide between women as objects of art, and men as creators of it.

RITA NELSON, 1964-65
Brett Whiteley

THE NAKED STUDIO, 1981
Brett Whiteley

INDIA (FROST), 2013
Ryan McGinley

RITA NELSON, 1964-65
Brett Whiteley

SECRET MACHINE, 2009
Reynold Reynolds





Ta-Sheret-Min: taken from her culture and family to satisfy our curiosity.

MUMMY AND COFFIN OF TA-SHERET-MIN (detail)
Egypt, Late Period, end 26th–28th Dynasty, c. 664–399 BCE



I don't want to rewrite history. Nor do I support some sort of imposed 50–50 gender policy. The reasons for male dominance in this area of human cultural life, as in many others, are complex, and anyone who says otherwise is a fuckwit.

LEDA AND SWAN, 1960
Sidney Nolan

Leda: may or may not have been asking for it.

The point for me is to afford women equal subjectivity. That doesn't mean they aren't every bit as grubby and self-serving (on average) as men, just that their perspective is in accordance with humanity generally.

Treating women as more vulnerable, virtuous or creditable than men is reactionary, regressive and ultimately counterproductive.
—Camille Paglia

Greg Taylor made some lovely cunts. Each is sculpted as a personal homage; he wants to restore the cunt to its proper status as 'the face of God', the place 'where we all start'. I don't mind this ardent rhetoric as I think it is an authentic reflection of his passion for the vulv. But he does carry on a bit about how men are such awful pricks, and the implication is that women are their spotless prey. His simplistic view (men=bad, women=good) is in accordance with much of modern feminism, so I don't really hold it against him, but it does give me a touch of the shitsies.

That's the difference between you and I.
You give life. We take it away.
—Greg Taylor





We have, of course, shown a great many works by women in our museum. Here are a few of them.

DIALOGUE WITH ABSENCE, 2011
Chiharu Shiota

Gives me the shits.

CUT PAPERS #15, 2003-13
Sachiko Abe





Doesn't give me the shits.

CHORAL FIELD 5, 2014-6
Emma McNally

Gives me the shits.



Doesn't give me the shits.



ALL FURNISHED BY A DILATED VICTORY, 1971
jacqueline de long

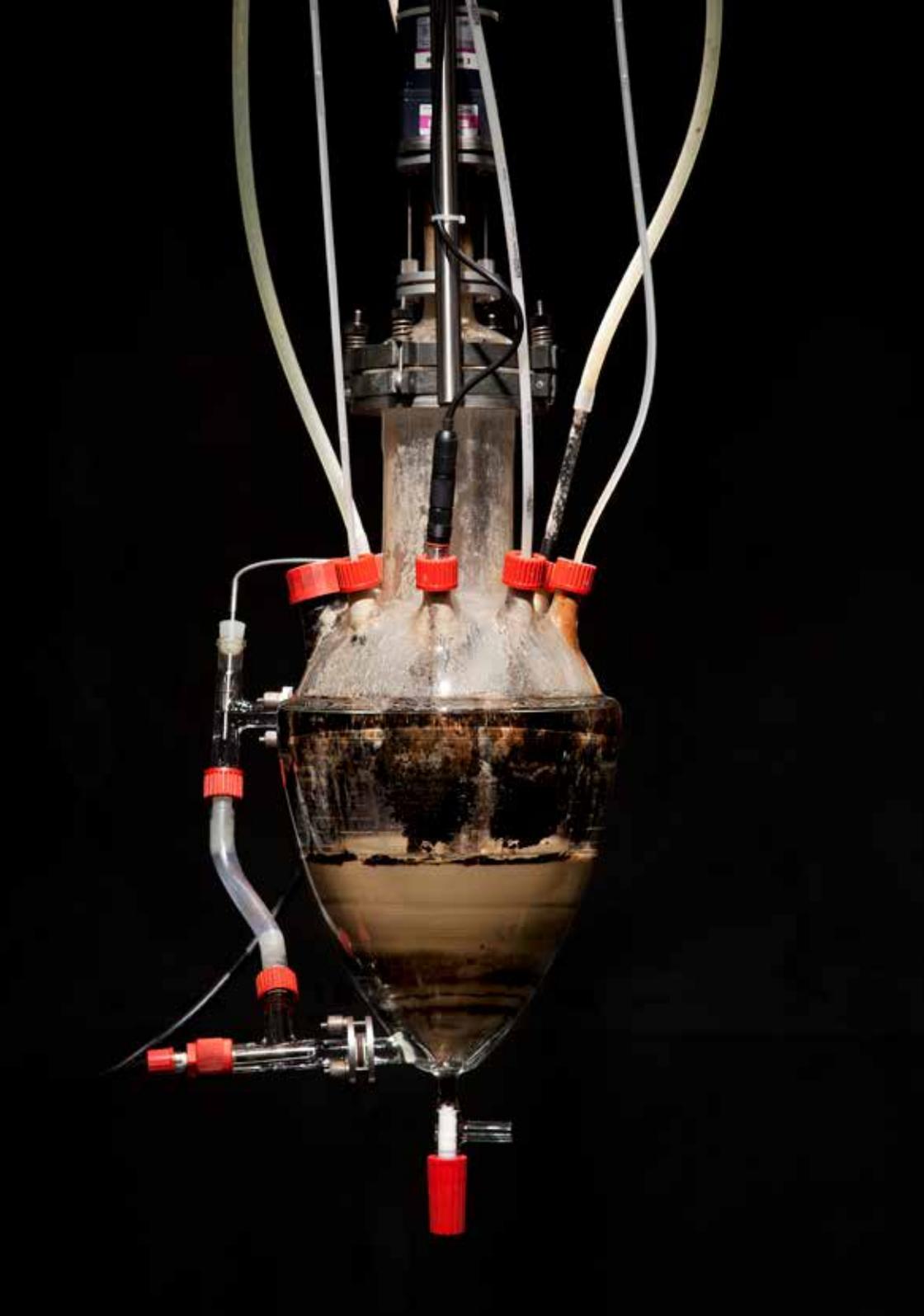
Doesn't give me the shits.

AMOUR, 2017
Pat Brassington





Not sure.



There's one thing left, my main gives-me-the-shits work of art:
Tim, by Belgian conceptual artist Wim Delvoye.

Delvoye is something of a signature artist for us, because he does one of the things David wants to do at Mona, too: break the human being down into its barest constituent parts, the parts than can be broken down no further, and that form the building blocks for everything else.

His work is all over Mona.



CHAPEL, 2010-11
Wim DeKeyser



MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY, 2008
Wim Delvoye

DOUBLE HELIX DHACO 90 52 CM X 9L, 2008
Wim Delvoye



Installation view, including:
PERSONAL CLOACA, 2006
Wim DeKeyser

CLOACA TRAVEL KIT, 2009
Wim DeKeyser



In 2011, the year the museum opened, we did our first single artist show with Wim. (The image on the previous page is of a suite of Cloacas, poo machines, that briefly blessed our institution.) As a result of the Delvoye show, we met Tim Steiner, a former tattoo-parlour manager from Zurich. Wim had tattooed Tim's back a few years prior and sold it (the skin and image) to German collector Rik Reinking for a hundred and fifty thousand euros. Tim kept a third of the cash and the rest was split between Delvoye and his gallerist. The sales contract stipulates that Tim must sit topless in a gallery at least three times a year until his death, at which point the skin will be removed and handed over to whomever is the current owner. (Wim has been pushing for a resale for some time; apparently this is the moment—sitting on an auction lot in front of bidding people in suits—the work will reach its zenith.)

At Mona, Tim found something of a home. Since 2011, he has sat in our gallery for over three thousand hours, typically working (or displaying himself, whatever you want to call it) six hours per day during the week in our busiest months, and giving talks on the weekends as well. He lives with Dylan (a veritable rock of our exhibitions team), and has a special wave he uses to signal the front-of-house staff members; one such staff member stands by him, on rotation, throughout his shift, watching over him, which makes him feel safe, he says. A lady once thought he was dead. Taxidermy art. She got a fright when she saw him coming back from a break to hop up on his plinth. He says he hears horrible things said about him all day. *This is disgusting. This is not art. You shouldn't be allowed to buy people, this is slavery, this is prostitution.* He engenders pity, admiration, fascination, and profound appreciation for the conceptual potency of *Tim*, the work of art.

My own reaction encompasses all of the above. *Tim* gives me chills. 'My back is the canvas,' he says, 'and I am the temporary frame.' In this sentence there is 'I' and 'my back': a simple distinction, second nature to us all, between body parts and the self that somehow unites and transcends them. If you chop off Tim's hand, he is still himself, you haven't reached the essential part of him. But where does it stop? How many parts can you take away before he is no longer Tim, but only a diminishing assemblage of pieces? The choice of skin as organ for sale further confounds our instincts about surface and depth. The skin sits on the border between thing and nothing, an envelope (made of meat, like the rest) for the person within.

TIM, 2006-8
Wim Delvoye



Studio set-up for the Mona exhibition Hound in the Hunt, 2016–18, in which a comparator mirror device was used to recreate paintings in the style of Vermeer.



Does our love for a Vermeer painting cover the canvas itself, without which the image does not exist? Human 'essentialist' instincts come under scrutiny in our ongoing exhibition-experiment, Hound in the Hunt. We wrote a book about it, which is good but \$\$\$, compared to this book (\$).

All the sadness in the world was in his voice...
'How can he sell it? It is part of himself!'
—*Skin*, Roald Dahl

This no-thing, Tim's skin, the casing for his essential self, is now owned by another person. Tim became *Tim* with great relish; he maintains it was his passport to a more meaningful life, his chance to be part of something special. His commitment is phenomenal. His feat of endurance in our gallery is something you might begin to appreciate if you try sitting on the edge of your desk, back straight, for fifteen minutes, an hour, five hours... and repeat. He's left for dead, in terms of sitting hours over many sessions, the likes of Mike Parr and Marina Abramović, seminal performance artists who have, at various times in their careers, used endurance as mode and material for their art.



And yet, of course, he battles with the physiological reality of being owned, at least in part, by another person. The sale seeps into his selfhood in some irreversible way, just like how if you kill someone you are now 'a killer' or, if you steal, 'a thief'. 'I sold myself,' he says. 'From now until the end.' I don't know Tim well enough to know whether this has damaged him or not, but I wish I didn't have to wonder, because I don't want Delvoye to have made *Tim* in the first place, and as much as I value Tim's presence at Mona, I don't want him to be an object of display. It is not OK to turn another person into an object, not even when they consent to it, and not even for art as good as this. It gives me the shits.



Wim isn't the first to meddle in this domain of course, of tattooing, buying and selling. But it is typical of him, possibly one of the great artists of our generation, that he is prepared to explode the representative realm. At the start of this essay, I argued that some of the artworks in our gallery objectify the people they depict. But *Tim* is not open to interpretation. The man—signed, sold, and put on display—is the embodied definition of 'objectification'.

And yet.

I mentioned Mike Parr and Marina Abramović a moment ago. You can probably think of a dozen others like them. Whether you think endurance/performance is good art or not is not really the point. The question I want to ask: Is Tim really so passive? He insists, in his words, that he is 'a slave'. But his actions say something else. Wim didn't mean for *Tim* to be an endurance piece. He doesn't like the talks, either. (The talks represent a classic case of an individual resisting dehumanisation; in my background in postcolonial studies, when a previously oppressed person challenges the status quo, the metaphor used is 'speaking back'.) Nor did he envision, I imagine, that Tim would embed himself in the communities of Hobart and Mona. And Tim has added another meaning to the work, which I doubt Wim (who tends not to bother with politics) would have intended: that Tim's 'job' at Mona is a reflection of the alienation of the ordinary person living in an oppressive capitalist system. Again, it doesn't matter whether you agree with this notion, or whether you think this is an effective way to explore it. My purpose is to offer evidence that Tim is not a passive receptacle for someone else's meaning but, at the very least, a collaborator—if not, now, a primary creator. Finally, Rik Reinking, the one who owns the skin, is invested in Tim's wellbeing. They're friends. And so far, he's refusing to sell. Would he take Tim's feelings into account before agreeing to do so? 'Of course.'

In March 2018, ten years after the original sale, and seven since he first came to us, I asked Tim to break the contract formally, declare himself an artist, and face the sanction (possibly legal) of Wim Delvoye. (I selflessly offered to use David's money to cover his legal costs.) He said no. Why would he want to do that? It would all be over then. He wants to stay at Mona for the rest of his life. So far, David has agreed.

TIM, 2008
Wim Delvoye

TIM, 2006-8
Wim Delvoye

ELIZABETH MEAD, 2010
Andres Serrano

Meanwhile, the performance continues, minus the talks, which Tim feels have now served their purpose. He says he goes into battle with himself every day. I think the battle is to take what others want from us and to absorb it into our landscape of desire. Complicity is a slippery little sucker. (The photo on the facing page is of me—taken by the American artist Andres Serrano in his New York studio in 2010.)

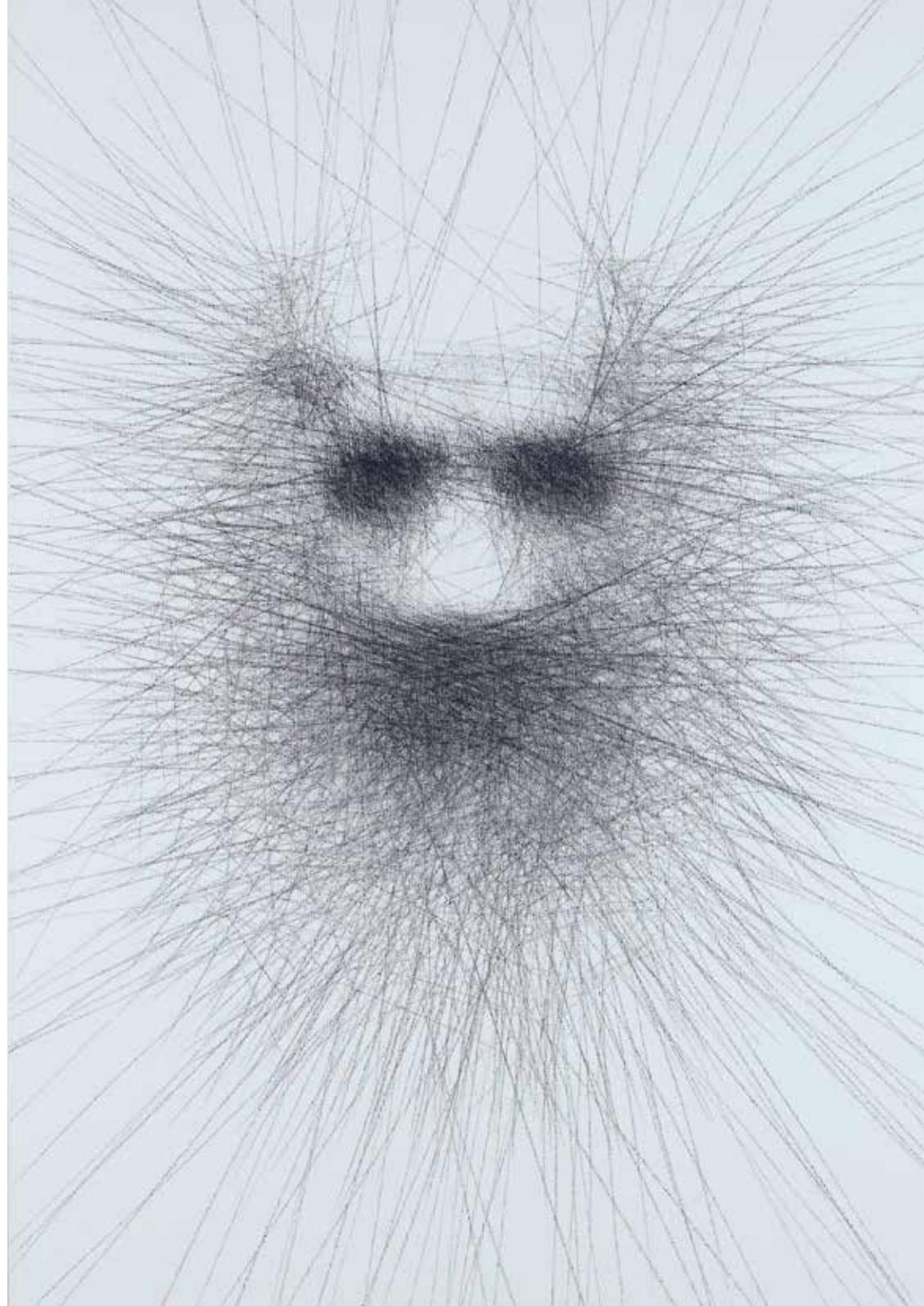


UNTITLED, NEW YORK (N.406), 1979
Francesca Woodman



But the idea that the man is just the frame for the artwork he carries around on his back? I'm not buying it. I look at Tim (no italics), and I see something that maybe I just really want to see, I can't know for sure. I see the eternal return of human subjectivity.

You can buy people and sell them, subordinate their sense of self to your external view of them. You will get away with it for a while. We did in the past, on a mass and devastating scale.



But sooner or later the 'object' will sit up and speak.

Tim Steiner, 2018
Photograph by Jesse
Hunniford



P.S. Two people told me, after reading a draft of this mini book, that I needed to say whether or not my nude portrait gives me the shits. Of course it does. My boobs are saggy. But it also doesn't, somehow, as well. I don't know why, I can't explain it, but I like the look of myself. I also love the photo as a piece of art. It helps that it was taken by an artist I admire (my admiration for him somehow seeps into the image and alters how it looks, at least to me).

Andres Serrano has this way of revelling in the surface of an image but also somehow making that surface its depth (again, that one isn't easy to explain, it's just something that I feel). I'm also very proud of the circumstances under which it was taken; or, at least, proud of what later became of me, because it was around this time (a day or two before or after, I can't exactly remember) that I started to confront myself (aged twenty-six) for the first time.

The photo was supposed to be part of a book and exhibition; I rang Serrano at the airport on the way home to Tassie to ask him to please not use it. He said yes, of course, whatever you'd like. That was the right decision. I was too young to know whether or not I was comfortable with my nude body and how that might relate to my feelings about the representation of women generally. I still don't know. But I'm old enough (thirty-five) to be happy in the not knowing.

The photo might also have been used in *Monanisms*, our first book about Mona, which David thinks of as 'our book'. That's lovely of him, but really it was his book, his first formal, written attempt (aged forty-something, I forget) to confront himself, too. This book is different. It is small, but it is mine.

Sachiko Abe / Marina Abramović /
Vernon Ah Kee / Pat Brassington /
Wim Delvoye / Jacqueline de Jong /
Ryan McGinley / Emma McNally /
Tracey Moffatt / Nell / Sidney
Nolan / Mike Parr / Reynold
Reynolds / Andres Serrano /
Chiharu Shiota / Greg Taylor /
Brett Whiteley / Francesca
Woodman

2-3, 14

INDIA (FROST)
2013
Ryan McGinley
Born 1977, Ramsey, NJ, USA;
lives and works in New York,
NY, USA
Type-C photograph
182.9 x 274.3 cm
Mona
2017.009
Courtesy of the artist and Team
Gallery

6-9, 15

SECRET MACHINE (stills)
2009
Reynold Reynolds
Born 1966, Central City, AK,
USA; lives and works in Berlin,
Germany and New York, NY,
USA
HD video projection transferred
from 16mm and digital stills;
single-channel duration
00:14:00; two-channel duration
07:00:00
Mona
2008.158

10-11, 14-15

THE NAKED STUDIO
1981
Brett Whiteley
Born 1939, Sydney, Australia;
died 1992, Thirroul, NSW,
Australia
Oil, paper collage, hair, glass
eye, charcoal and ink on two
plywood panels
190.9 x 490.4 cm
Mona
2005.049

12, 15

RITA NELSON
1964-65
Brett Whiteley
Born 1939, Sydney, Australia;
died 1992, Thirroul, NSW,
Australia
Oil and mixed media (wax and
brass) on wood panel
45.7 x 35.5 cm
Mona
2007.005

16

MUMMY AND COFFIN OF
TA-SHERET-MIN
Egypt, Late Period, end 26th-
28th Dynasty, c. 664-399 BCE
Human remains, linen wrappings,
wood, plaster, pigment, beaded
net covering
Mummy 154 x 29 x 18.5 cm;
coffin 174 x 47 x 39 cm; bead
mask 16.2 x 22.5 cm
Mona
2003.185

18-19

LEDA AND SWAN
1960
Sidney Nolan
Born 1917, Melbourne, Australia;
died 1992, London, England
Polyvinyl acetate on hardboard
95.5 x 126 cm
Mona
2004.050

21

CUNTS ... AND OTHER
CONVERSATIONS (detail)
2001-II
Greg Taylor and friends
Born 1959, Bega, NSW,
Australia; lives and works in
Melbourne, Australia
151 life-size porcelain portrait
sculptures of women's cunts
Dimensions variable
Mona
2009.003

22

DIALOGUE WITH ABSENCE
2011
Chiharu Shiota
Born 1972, Osaka, Japan; moved
in 1997 to Berlin, Germany,
where she lives and works
Pumps, tripods, dress, tubes,
coloured electrical cables, glass
test tubes, red liquid
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

25

CUT PAPERS #15
2003-13
Sachiko Abe
Born 1975, Nara, Japan; lives
and works in Fukuoka, Japan
At Mona as part of The Red
Queen exhibition, 18 June-15 July
2013, Wednesday to Monday:
90-minute performance
installation with paper and
scissors; bench; drawing; three
times daily
Courtesy the artist and Waugh
Office Productions

26

CHORAL FIELD 5
from the series 'Choral Fields
I-12'
2014-16
Emma McNally
Born 1969, Nazeing, Essex,
England; lives and works in
London, England
Graphite on paper
214 x 304 cm
Mona
2016.058

29

CHAIR FOR HUMAN USE with
CHAIR FOR SPIRIT USE
2012
Marina Abramović
Born 1946, Belgrade, Yugoslavia
(now Serbia); lives and works in
New York, NY, USA
Wood and black quartz stone;
wood and crystal quartz stones
160 x 35 x 80 cm; 75 x 25 x 28 cm
Courtesy of the Marina
Abramović archives

30

ALL FURNISHED BY A
DILATED VICTORY
1971
Jacqueline de Jong
Born 1939, Hengelo, The
Netherlands; 1942 to Zurich,
Switzerland; 1946, Amsterdam,
Netherlands; 1957 to Paris; 1958,
London; since 1970, lives and
works in Amsterdam; from 1996
also in the Bourbonnais, outside
Paris, France
Acrylic paint on canvas; wood
and metal
52 x 106.6 x 3.9 cm
Mona
2017.032

33

AMOUR
2017
Pat Brassington
Born 1942, Hobart, Australia,
where she lives and works
Pigment print, edition 1/8
Sheet 55 x 48 cm
Mona
2017.031

34

EVERYDAY HAPPINESS
2010
Nell
Born 1975, Maitland, NSW,
Australia; lives and works in
Sydney, Australia
Chrome-plated bronze,
edition 1/5
9 x 13 x 10 cm
Mona
2010.028

COVER, 36

CLOACA PROFESSIONAL
(detail)
2010
Wim Delvoye
Born 1965, Wervik, Belgium;
lives and works in Ghent, Belgium
Mixed media
275 x 710 x 175 cm
Mona
2009.023

38-39

CHAPEL
2010-II
Wim Delvoye
Born 1965, Wervik, Belgium;
lives and works in Ghent, Belgium
Laser-cut corten steel, etched
stained glass, steel, lead
450 x 900 x 900 cm
Mona
2011.057

40-41

MONDAY; TUESDAY;
WEDNESDAY; THURSDAY;
FRIDAY; SATURDAY
2008
Wim Delvoye
Born 1965, Wervik, Belgium;
lives and works in Ghent, Belgium
Stained glass, steel, lead
Each panel 83 x 198 cm
Studio Wim Delvoye

DOUBLE HELIX DHAACO 90
52 CM X 9L
2008
Wim Delvoye
Born 1965, Wervik, Belgium;
lives and works in Ghent, Belgium
Patinated bronze
470 x 82 cm
Studio Wim Delvoye

42-43

PERSONAL CLOACA
2006
Wim Delvoye
Born 1965, Wervik, Belgium;
lives and works in Ghent, Belgium
Mixed media
100 x 68.5 x 105 cm
Studio Wim Delvoye

CLOACA TRAVEL KIT
2009-10
Wim Delvoye
Born 1965, Wervik, Belgium;
lives and works in Ghent, Belgium
Mixed media
78 x 53 x 26 cm
Studio Wim Delvoye

44, 50

TIM
2006-8
Wim Delvoye
Born 1965, Wervik, Belgium;
lives and works in Ghent, Belgium
Tattooed human skin
180 x 40 x 25 cm
Studio Wim Delvoye

49
 REST ENERGY (still)
 1980
 Ulay/Marina Abramović
 Born 1943, Solingen, Germany;
 lives and works in Amsterdam,
 The Netherlands and Ljubljana,
 Slovenia
 Born 1946, Belgrade, Yugoslavia
 (now Serbia); lives and works in
 New York, NY, USA
 Performance for video,
 ROSC '80, Dublin
 00:04:00
 Courtesy of the Marina
 Abramović archives
 Mona
 2008.079

THE EMETICS (PRIMARY
 VOMIT) I AM SICK OF ART
 (RED, YELLOW AND BLUE),
 BLUE
 1977
 Mike Parr
 Born 1945, Sydney, Australia,
 where he lives and works
 Courtesy the artist and Anna
 Schwartz Gallery

50
 TIM
 2008
 Wim Delvoye
 Born 1965, Wervik, Belgium;
 lives and works in Ghent, Belgium
 Tattooed pig skin
 240 x 168 cm
 Studio Wim Delvoye

52
 UNTITLED, NEW YORK
 (N.406)
 1979
 Francesca Woodman
 Born 1958, Denver, CO, USA;
 died 1981, New York, NY, USA
 Estate digital C-print
 Sheet 20.3 x 25.4 cm
 Mona
 2016.046

53
 ELIZABETH MEAD
 2010
 Andres Serrano

55
 UNWRITTEN (detail) #8
 2008
 Vernon Ah Kee
 Born 1967, Innisfail, QLD,
 Australia; lives and works in
 Brisbane, Australia
 Charcoal on canvas
 149.5 x 89.6 cm
 Mona
 2008.159

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48 Quote from the short story 'Skin'; part of the collection *Someone Like You* by Roald Dahl, Penguin Books Limited (UK). Originally published in 1953 by Alfred A. Knopf. © The Roald Dahl Story Company Limited



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AUTHOR
Elizabeth Pearce

CONCEPT & DESIGN
David Campbell

PUBLISHER
Siân Scott-Clash

CURATORS
Nicole Durling
Jane Clark
Elizabeth Pearce
Jarrod Rawlins
Olivier Varenne

COPYEDITOR
Linda Michael

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Remi Chauvin
Jesse Hunniford
Peter Whyte

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