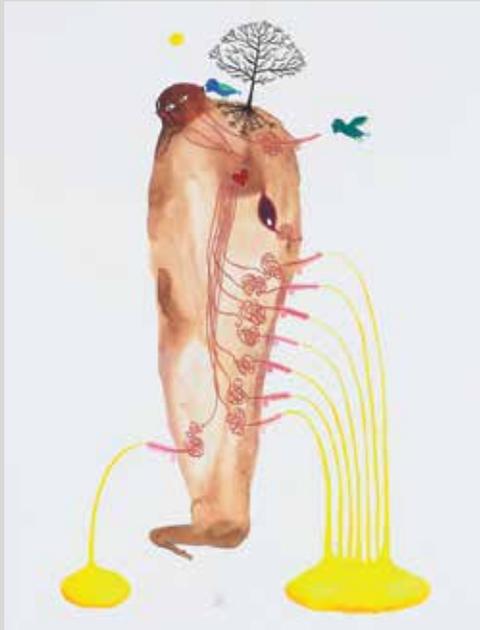


**ART  
FROM  
MONA**  
that your  
child could  
have made



MUSEUM OF OLD  
AND NEW ART



UNTITLED, 2007  
Balint Zsako

Skill is a thing. It isn't a big thing, at first. Two young kids aren't widely divergent in their capacity to learn, though they might be very different physically. Most of us assume that because size, strength, skin colour, hair, eye colour and other physical characteristics vary so much, the stuff we can't see, like the ability to do sudoku, also varies. But it's the physical stuff, the out-there-on-the-surface stuff that is sampled from the enormous number of genotypes (that thus express an enormous number of phenotypes—our observed characteristics) that enables us to respond to the environment.

The environment isn't on the inside, so much. So we're all pretty much the same on the inside (except for sex differences). Talent starts to appear through opportunity, training, repetition and serendipity. So a few of us get really, really good at something—like painting, or walking on stilts. Many of us, most of us, don't get any good at anything.

Good means a number of things. Good at chess doesn't mean the facility to move the pieces. And good at painting doesn't only mean putting paint on paper or canvas. Good does have a biological purpose, though. When you are good at something you are signalling that you were able to expend the time to acquire expertise, and that you were genetically blessed (i.e. a little bit better to begin with). For the most part, 'good' is a signal to a potential mate. Although the signals are created within you, and through your skills, you don't have to be aware of them. Usually, you ascribe your endeavours to something else ('I like painting, it makes me calm.' Or, 'This is how I make my living'). That's called a proximate motive, and it's real for you. The evolutionary principles that made you, however, inadvertently have ultimate motives. If you, and thus your traits and your genes, don't execute these ultimate motives well, your genes won't get into the next generation (and therefore your ancestors did OK, for their genes hung around). You don't have to be seeking a mate to behave in a way that enhances your chances of finding one. The signal is decoupled from the stimulus. You just need to seek pleasure because pleasure will, ultimately, be circumscribed by those things that get your genes into the next generation.

Addictions, though, circumvent the evolutionary mechanism by giving you pleasure while bypassing the signalling process. They work because they are too much of a good thing, like cheesecake, or chocolate. We aren't designed to live within an environment that satisfies every temptation. In our ancestral environment, it was hard to get calories. So getting calories

became very pleasurable. That pleasure is signalled through dopamine release, for example. But it's a bad plan to get the dopamine without the evolved mechanism.

All this signalling is really subtle, and skills are better than biology. It's better to be handy than hot (hot is secondarily useful—it signals reproductive fitness). That's because being hot attracts everyone, but a filter that attracts only appropriate mates is more useful (read: it has produced more successful outcomes in our genetic history). So if you are really good at getting the perfect note from the engine of an SLR Torana, you will attract those that can recognise the value and difficulty of that tuning. Likewise, if you can extract the perfect note from Bach's *Toccatà and Fugue in D Minor*, you will attract appropriate suitors. This thing we call 'taste' saves such a lot of time and effort. And that's biologically useful.

I know that making stuff well—art, music, bedspreads, lamingtons—is biologically useful because, although making stuff consumes resources, energy and time, every individual in every society makes stuff, and always has, ever since voices and hands evolved. We make folk art (like singing a football team song) to bind us together (communities aid survival), and we make elite art (spend two years tuning a Torana) to seek mates. Even if we are rebelling against our mates, or are gay. Again, the signal is decoupled from the stimulus. Our cues are reproductively appropriate, but they are applied across the whole organism, and sometimes in competition with other traits expressed in our social and sexual self.

Some of the stuff we do has a much more indirect evolutionary mechanism (or no mechanism at all). Arcane knowledge acquisition doesn't do us much good. It might be that we do it as a side effect of general learning being itself beneficial, but my guess is arcane knowledge has a very specific role to play. One of my mates (Robert) learned Papiamentu, a Caribbean language with less than three hundred thousand speakers. He never got to speak Papiamentu, so it never did him any good. Except with us. It accrued more brownie points than his ability to speak German. He also put his library catalogue online, and the CIA wanted to buy his book on the Kandahar dialect of Pashtu. We told that story to everybody, so my mate's prestige grew. I told that story at his funeral. How did that benefit him? It didn't, but it may well have enhanced my status. Ultimate motives are often concealed.

Arcane knowledge enables us to signal to those who don't possess that knowledge that we have something going on. Art academics write essays that nearly no one understands, using jargon that serves no academic purpose, and lecture kids who are desperately seeking a glimmer of understanding simply to pass the course. Unless they became academics themselves they'll never use their newly acquired spurious knowledge. My brother called this sort of knowledge 'bones of fact'. There's no meat on those bones, but they serve a purpose for some. The academics build their own peer recognition and prestige, and that's attractive, even to those who aren't in the clique.

Conceptual art is the same sort of thing, at least when it abandons evolved aesthetics (signalling). It requires the acquisition of an argot to appreciate, but it enables elitists to signal their elitism with eloquent sophistries of the 'It's art because I say it is' type.

When an art academic talks about a work at Mona, and he says (it's usually blokes that are the biggest prestige-hounds) 'It expresses a naive primitivism, but the conceptual ontology can only be demarcated in its axiological purview with a rigorous reckoning of the emergent oeuvre', he means it's *ART FROM MONA that your child could have made*.

—David Walsh



FAHRRAD MIT FARBE, 1995-2003  
Roman Signer

Previous:  
FREEING THE VOICE (still), 1975  
Marina Abramović



RED LINE, 2013  
Chiharu Shiota





Previous:  
DOTS OBSESSION—TASMANIA, 2016  
Yayoi Kusama

ANAL KISS, 2000  
Wim Delvoye



ALIEN (SKULL), 2005  
John Kelly





Technician at Mona working on a copy of Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* (1601) for the exhibition *Hound in the Hunt*

BABY AUGUSTE, 1957  
Charles Blackman





ENGPASS, 2000-II  
Roman Signer

UNTITLED (detail), 2002  
Jannis Kounellis



THE SOURCE, 2002-3  
John Olsen

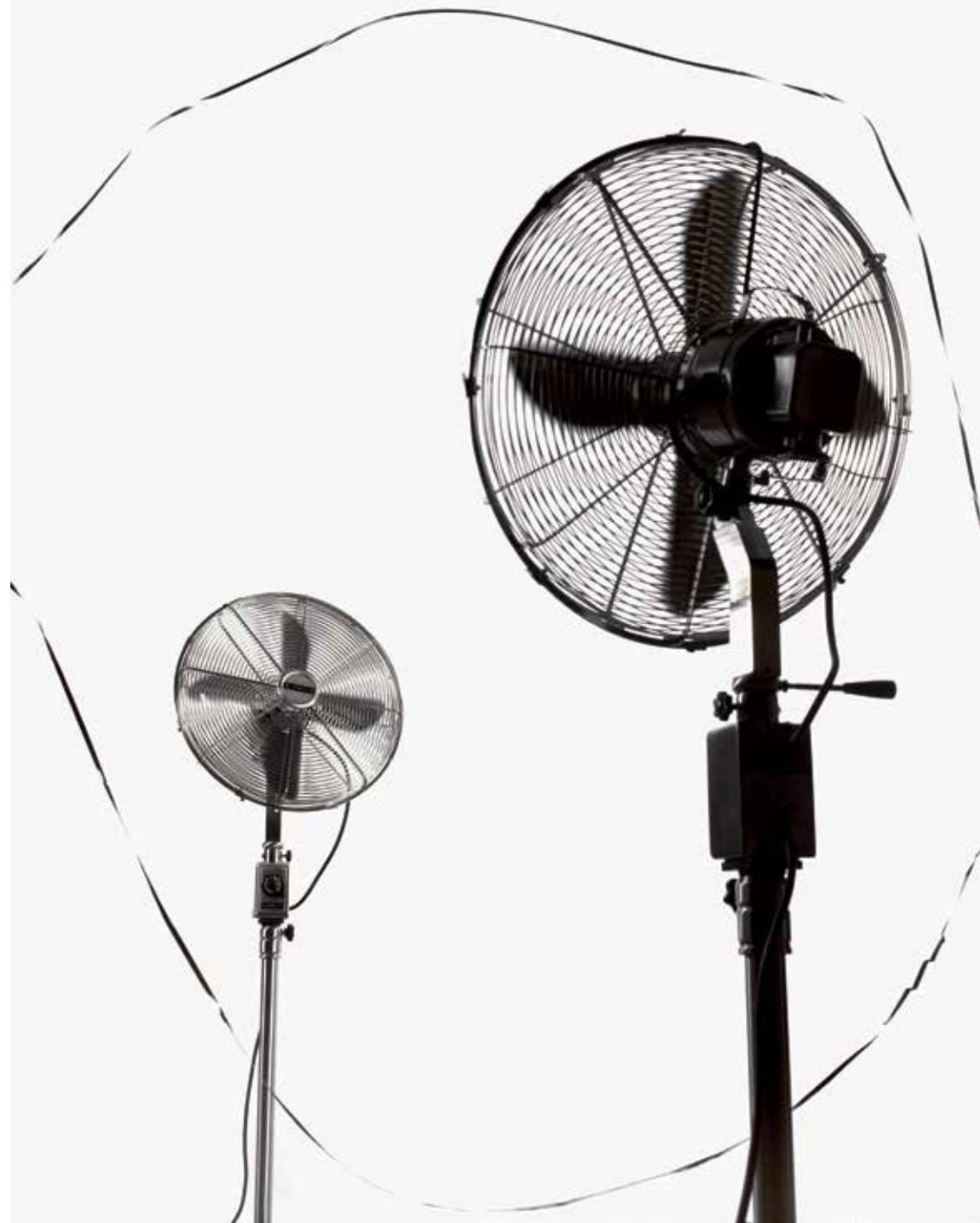




SLEEPING (still), 1998  
Kathy Cavaliere

CANDLE DESCRIBING A SPHERE, 2006  
| Jason Shulman







**Broom** (brūm), *sb.* [OE. *brōm* (from WGer. *\*brama-*), pointing to ŌTeut. *\*bræmo-z*: cogn. with BRAMBLE.] 1. A shrub, *Sarothamnus* or *Cytisus Scoparius* (N.O. *Leguminosæ*), bearing yellow papilionaceous flowers. Also the genus to which this belongs, and the allied genus *Genista*, including the White Broom, and Giant or Irish Broom, etc. 2. Any one of various other plants used for sweeping, or fancied to be akin to the broom proper; as BUTCHER'S BROOM, SPANISH BROOM, q. v. 3. Any implement for sweeping, a besom: orig. one made of twigs of broom, heather, etc., fixed to a handle. Cf. BESOM *sb.*<sup>1</sup> 2. ME. Also *fig.* and *transf.*



MUR DE PELLICULE (WALL OF FILM), 2002  
Michel Blazy

CHOLERA.  
SEED.  
THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT THOMAS, 2003  
Damien Hirst



FRECCIA LASER, 1988  
Maurizio Michetti



MAP 2, 2006-10  
Tamuna Sirbiladze



THE MOTH COLLECTION, 2003-7  
Stephen | Shanabrook

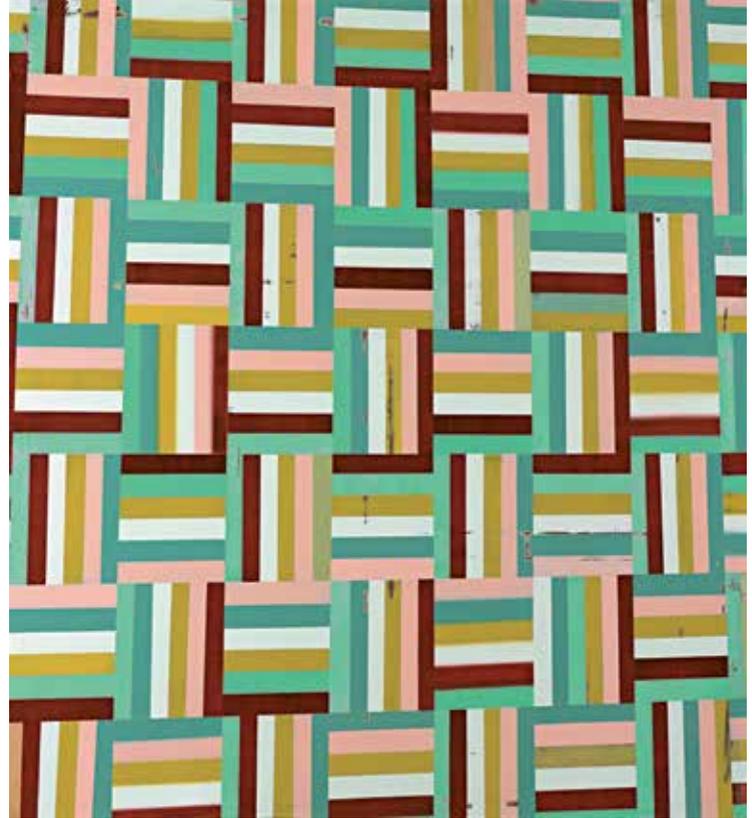




SKIN FLINT, 1984  
Jean-Michel Basquiat



TAKE OFF, 2012  
Roger Ballen



WEAR NO. 4, 2001  
Neil Haddon  
ROBE STREET, ST KILDA, 1945  
Sidney Nolan

LOVE IS NOTHING BUT A SORE, 2008  
Dasha Shishkin



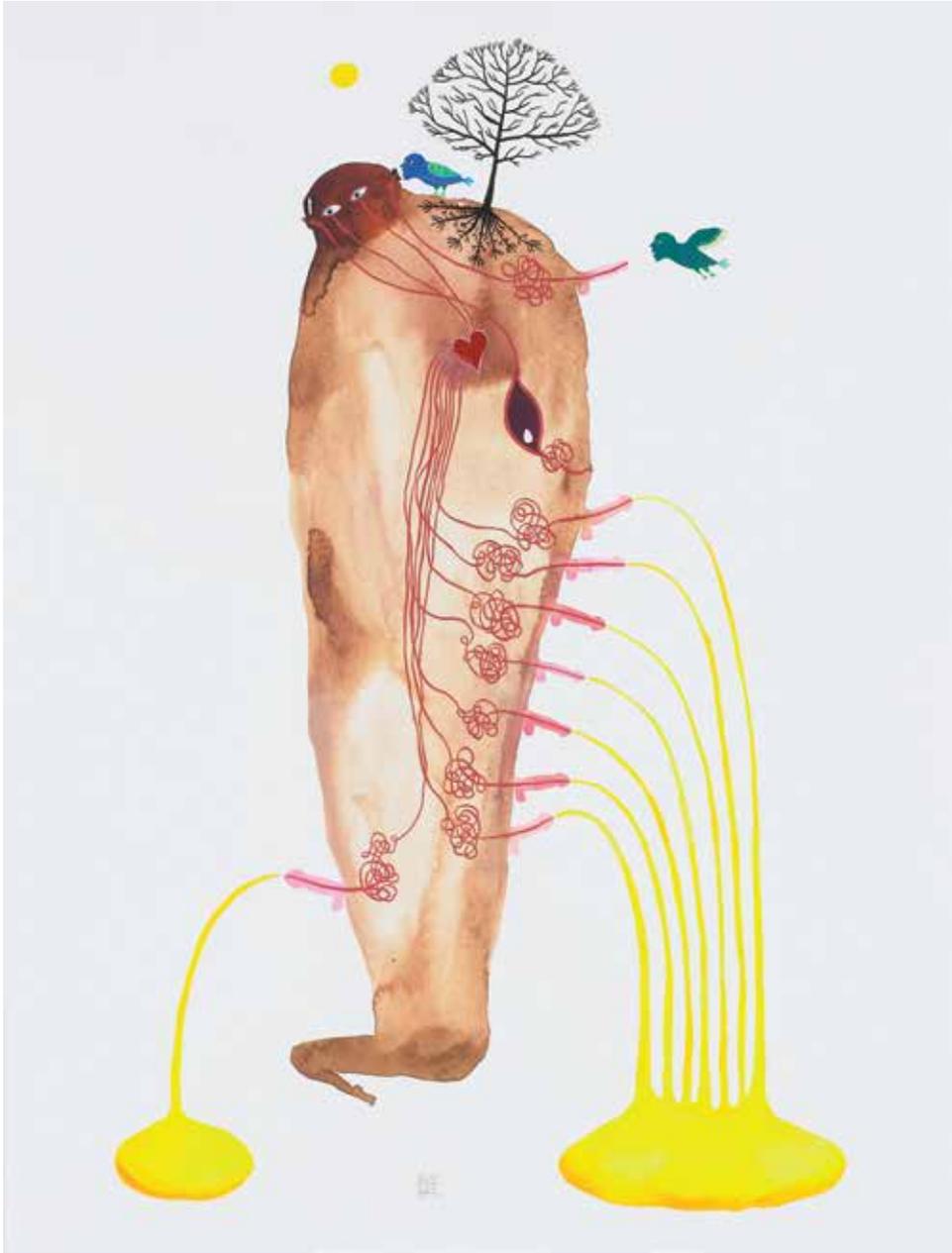


Previous:  
I AM MAKING ART (stillis), 1971  
John Baldessari

FERTILITY FIGURE  
South Caspian Region, North West Iran, c. 10000 BCE



HAND AXE  
France, Acheulean, c. 500,000 BP



UNTITLED, 2007  
Balint Zsako

Marina Abramović / John Baldessari /  
Roger Ballen / Jean-Michel Basquiat /  
Charles Blackman / Michel Blazy /  
Kathy Cavaliere / Wim Delvoye /  
Neil Haddon / Damien Hirst /  
John Kelly / Zilvinas Kempinas /  
Joseph Kosuth / Jannis Kounellis /  
Yayoi Kusama / Maurizio Mochetti /  
Sidney Nolan / John Olsen /  
Sam Porritt / Jon Pylypchuk /  
Stephen | Shanabrook /  
Chiharu Shiota / Dasha Shishkin /  
Jason Shulman / Roman Signer /  
Tamuna Sirbiladze / Balint Zsako

## 2

UNTITLED  
2007  
Balint Zsako  
Born 1979, Budapest, Hungary;  
lives and works in Brooklyn, NY,  
USA  
Watercolour and ink on paper  
40.6 x 30.5 cm  
Mona  
2007.092

## 6–7

FREEING THE VOICE (still)  
1975  
Marina Abramović  
Born 1946, Belgrade, Yugoslavia  
(now Serbia); lives and works in  
New York, NY, USA  
Performance  
Student Cultural Centre,  
Belgrade  
3 hours  
Courtesy of the Marina  
Abramović Archives

## 8–9

FAHRRAD MIT FARBE  
(BICYCLE WITH PAINT)  
1995–2003  
Roman Signer  
Born 1938, Appenzell,  
Switzerland; lives and works in  
St Gallen, Switzerland  
Bicycle, rope, metal reservoir,  
paint  
Dimensions variable  
Mona  
2008.010

## 10–11

RED LINE  
2013  
Chiharu Shiota  
Born 1972, Osaka, Japan; moved  
in 1997 to Berlin, Germany,  
where she lives and works  
Oil pastel on paper  
138 x 200 cm  
Collection Olivier Varenne,  
Geneva  
Courtesy of the artist

## 12–13

DOTS OBSESSION–  
TASMANIA  
2016  
Yayoi Kusama  
Born 1929, Matsumoto, Japan;  
lives and works in Tokyo, Japan  
Mixed media installation  
Room 343 x 550 x 876 cm  
Commissioned by Mona for the  
exhibition *On the Origin of Art*  
Courtesy of the artist

## 15

ANAL KISS  
2000  
Wim Delvoye  
Born 1965, Wervik, Belgium;  
lives and works in Ghent,  
Belgium  
Lipstick print on hotel stationery  
Studio Wim Delvoye

## 17

ALIEN (SKULL)  
2005  
John Kelly  
Born 1965, Bristol, England;  
in Australia 1965–96; lives and  
works in Ireland  
Oil on linen  
198.1 x 261.6 cm  
Mona  
2005.029  
Courtesy of the artist

## 18–19

A participant of Mona's  
exhibition *Hound in the Hunt*  
working on a copy of  
Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*  
(1601)

## 21

BABY AUGUSTE  
1957  
Charles Blackman  
Born 1928, Sydney, Australia;  
lived and worked in Melbourne,  
Brisbane and London, England;  
died 2018, Sydney, Australia  
Enamel paint on paper on  
hardboard  
112.8 x 86.2 cm  
Mona  
2004.063

## 22–23

ENGPASS (BOTTLENECK)  
2000–11  
Roman Signer  
Born 1938, Appenzell,  
Switzerland; lives and works in  
St Gallen, Switzerland  
Installation with car  
Concrete bunker 240 x 1700 x  
650 cm  
Mona  
2009.025

## 24–25

UNTITLED (detail)  
2002  
Jannis Kounellis  
Born 1936, Piraeus, Greece;  
1956 to Rome, Italy, where he  
died in 2017  
Jute coffee bags, coal; three  
parts  
Dimensions variable  
Mona  
2009.027

## 26–27

THE SOURCE  
2002–3  
John Olsen  
Born Newcastle, NSW,  
Australia, 1928; moved in 1935 to  
Sydney, Australia; lives and works  
near Bowral, NSW, Australia  
Oil on marine plywood, five  
panels  
249.5 x 610 cm  
Mona  
2005.006

## 28–29

SLEEPING (still)  
1998  
Kathy Cavaliere  
Born 1972, Sarteano, Tuscany,  
Italy; moved in 1976 to Australia;  
died 2012 in Sydney, Australia  
VHS video; duration 00:26:00  
Estate of the artist

## 30–31

CANDLE DESCRIBING A  
SPHERE  
2006  
Jason Shulman  
Born 1963, London, England,  
where he lives and works  
Burning candlestick in  
fabricated room  
Dimensions variable  
Mona  
2007.180

## 33

O (BETWEEN FANS)  
2006  
Zilvinas Kempinas  
Born 1969, Plunge, Lithuania;  
lives and works in New York,  
NY, USA  
Magnetic cassette tape and  
electric fans  
Dimensions variable  
Mona  
2006.071

## 34–35

ONE AND THREE BROOMS  
1965  
Joseph Kosuth  
Born 1945, Toledo, OH, USA;  
lives and works in New York, NY,  
USA and London, England  
Gelatin silver photograph,  
broom and screenprint  
149 x 190 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Purchased 1979  
EA3.a-c-1979

## 36–37

MUR DE PELLICULE  
(WALL OF FILM)  
2002; recreated at Mona in  
2012 and 2017  
Michel Blazy  
Born 1966, Monaco; lives and  
works in Paris, France  
Agar-agar, tumeric and water  
370 x 459 cm overall  
Mona  
2008.157

## 39

CHOLERA.  
SEED.  
THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT  
THOMAS  
from 'The Cancer Chronicles'  
2003  
Damien Hirst  
Born 1965, Bristol, England; lives  
and works near Combe Martin,  
Devon, England, in London and  
in Baja, Mexico  
Flies and resin on canvas  
163.8 x 128.2 x 15 cm  
Mona  
2006.030

## COVER, 40–41

FRECCIA LASER  
(LASER ARROW)  
1988  
Maurizio Mochetti  
Born 1940, Rome, Italy,  
where he lives and works  
Carbon fibre, metal, plastic,  
laser and transformer  
Dimensions variable  
Mona  
2004.083

## 42–43

MAP 2  
2006–10  
Tamuna Sirbiladze  
Born 1971, Tbilisi, USSR (now  
Georgia); lives and works in  
Vienna, Austria  
Acrylic paint on canvas, four  
movable panels, on wood  
supports  
Dimensions variable  
Mona  
2010.056

## 44–45

THE MOTH COLLECTION  
2003–7  
Stephen J. Shanabrook  
Born 1965, Cleveland, OH,  
USA; lives and works in New  
York, NY, USA and Moscow,  
Russia  
Remnants from heroin and  
crack use  
49 x 61.5 x 5 cm  
Mona  
2008.067

**46**  
**SKIN FLINT**  
 1984  
 Jean-Michel Basquiat  
 Born 1960, Brooklyn, NY, USA;  
 died 1988, New York, NY, USA  
 Acrylic paint, oilstick and  
 coloured transfer collage on  
 canvas  
 217.8 x 172.7 cm

**47**  
**TAKE OFF**  
 2012  
 Roger Ballen  
 Born 1950, New York City, USA;  
 lives and works in Johannesburg,  
 South Africa  
 Archival pigment print  
 90 x 90 cm  
 Courtesy of the artist

**48**  
**ROBE STREET, ST KILDA**  
 1945  
 Sidney Nolan  
 Born 1917, Melbourne, Australia;  
 died 1992, London, England  
 Enamel paint on hardboard  
 90 x 121 cm  
 Mona  
 2006.001

**49**  
**WEAR NO. 4**  
 2001  
 Neil Haddon  
 Born 1967, Epsom, England;  
 1990–96 in Spain; moved in  
 1996 to Australia; lives and works  
 in Hobart, Australia  
 High-gloss enamel paint on  
 canvas  
 210 x 190 cm  
 Tasmanian Museum and Art  
 Gallery  
 Purchased with funds from the  
 Art Foundation of Tasmania,  
 2004  
 AG8087

**50–51**  
**LOVE IS NOTHING BUT A  
 SORE**  
 2008  
 Dasha Shishkin  
 Born 1977, Moscow, USSR; lives  
 and works in New York, NY, USA  
 Acrylic paint and ink on canvas  
 191.1 x 261.6 cm  
 Mona  
 2008.172

**52–53**  
**I AM MAKING ART (stills)**  
 1971  
 John Baldessari  
 Born 1931, National City, CA,  
 USA; lives and works in Santa  
 Monica, CA, USA  
 Video, black and white, with  
 sound; duration 00:18:40  
 Mona  
 2008.011

**54**  
**FERTILITY FIGURE**  
 South Caspian Region, North  
 West Iran, c. 1000 BCE  
 Terracotta  
 30 x 16 x 7.5 cm  
 The Vizard Foundation  
 Collection of Antiquities, on  
 loan to the Ian Potter Museum  
 of Art, University of Melbourne  
 2222.0045

**55**  
**HAND AXE**  
 France, Acheulean, 500,000 BP  
 Flint  
 16.3 x 10.2 x 4.2 cm  
 The Nicholson Museum,  
 University of Sydney  
 NMR1178.1

**56**  
**UNTITLED**  
 2007  
 Balint Zsako  
 Born 1979, Budapest, Hungary;  
 lives and works in Brooklyn, NY,  
 USA  
 Watercolour and ink on paper  
 40.6 x 30.5 cm  
 Mona  
 2007.092

**57**  
**UNTITLED**  
 2007  
 Balint Zsako  
 Born 1979, Budapest, Hungary;  
 emigrated in 1989 to Canada;  
 lives and works in Brooklyn, NY,  
 USA  
 Watercolour and ink on paper  
 40.6 x 30.5 cm  
 Mona  
 2007.095

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