

On Sunday mornings at 9:30 am I walked down Harrington St, Hobart. Breathlessly, since I was being naughty, and breathlessly, because I almost always had asthma.

I was being naughty because I was missing Mass, by then, to me, an empty ritual. But I was missing Mass because I was on my way to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, then always depicted by those strong sandstone and concrete words, no plastic abbreviations, the certainty of Tasmania as an outpost and a bastion of western culture in those words.

This was between 1976 and 1978, so I was between fourteen and seventeen. I should have been chasing floozies (as they were then known) but my mother thought it a huge concession to let me go to mass alone so the opportunity to explore more contentious Catholic taboos was limited.

TMAG (now the abbreviations are *de rigueur*) inculcated in me a respect for history, and inoculated me against trivial perspectives. Most displays changed rarely. Many are changing for the first time since I saw them, now—thirty-five years later—after an injection of public funds. But that didn’t matter, it meant that I learned them like one learns a song, through repeated exposure, and as I sang them to myself my interest grew deeper. Coins were big at TMAG, now coins are big with me. There were taxidermied mammals everywhere: a whale, a diprotodon that I remember being a rhino-sized wombat. Now I’m obsessed with evolutionary biology.

There were maps of Hobart, in relief, but these maps showed Hobart in 1848. The place where mum and I lived was built on top of a Jewish cemetery. Who knew? Who cared? I knew, and I cared, and I learned to care at TMAG. TMAG seemed to have everything, bits of everywhere, but mostly it seemed to be a repository for Tasmanian things, weird personal things. Hobart was home to me but these exhibits made Hobart my place, as if Hobart was meant to be home to me. It made Hobart seem adapted to me in the same way pre-evolutionists thought that the Earth was peculiarly adapted to humanity. And so I’m here still.

Thirty years later I started building a museum. Most of what we learn we know by comparing similar things and highlighting their differences. The domain of my museum is all of time, and so I survey disparate things and highlight their similarities. And it looks and feels different. During construction, four years ago, I went to Venice, to the Biennale as all pretentious arty types do, and I saw a show, *the* show as far as I was concerned, co-curated by

Jean-Hubert Martin and Tijs Visser, and it was grand. And Jean-Hubert saw the world not as a chaotic mass but as a series of signals, and those signals were signalling the same message. All things are one thing and that one thing is, in turn, obvious and exotic and beautiful and plain and elegant and prosaic and deep and shallow and rich with a richness that makes all things grand. All this without a touch of New Age sentimentality. All this without a sliver of the usual contrived banality of belief. All this without a shred of commitment to any practised method for seeking truth, no bias to disturb the apprehended reality.

The earth isn't peculiarly adapted to humanity, we are particularly adapted to the earth. That's what evolution does. And our perceptual systems are designed, through the blundering efforts of evolution, to extract principles from stimuli. Our understanding deepens through time, our hypotheses grow more profound, but what remains the same, and all our creations are saturated with, is the need to understand. What we see as beauty is mostly the phenomenon of order, extracted from complexity, chaos or caprice.

Jean-Hubert knows this, whether he knows he knows this or not.

I asked Olivier to find out who curated "Artempo", the wonderful show in Venice, and see if he wants to work for us, to do something for us. You probably don't know Olivier but Olivier is a national stereotype in a way that only the French can be. Maybe that's why he only contacted the French part of the team. That's ok though, because Jean-Hubert brought Tijs along. We rounded out the team with Nicole Durling, whom we had already abducted from Melbourne to work on Mona.

Getting back to Olivier; he likes a challenge. That's why when we were in Malaga for one day, and the Picasso Museum was shut, he had them open it for us: "... a matter of national pride, Picasso may be Spanish but he is a French artist, and the French should be allowed to see his work, and show it off, as a matter of entitlement ..." Which, incidentally, may have helped us pull off the unbelievable coup of convincing the National Gallery of Victoria to lend us Picasso's *Weeping Woman*.

Olivier feigned modesty when asked how he arranged a private visit to the Picasso Museum. "Easy", he said, "the real challenge would be to get a private tour of the Louvre on Tuesday". The Louvre is shut on Tuesday. And it's in France so the French advantage is nullified; immovable arrogance meets irresistible audacity. And it's the Louvre.

Jean-Hubert chose Olivier to contribute to the Moscow Biennale, and now “Theatre of the World”. And recently I was thinking about that while wandering about the Louvre with Olivier. Jean-Hubert didn’t choose him because they had become friends, or because Olivier is relentless in his pursuit of interesting art and artists, he chose him because we visited the Louvre on Tuesday.

Some time before, Olivier had arranged my first meeting with Jean-Hubert. We were having lunch in a classic bistro in the Marais, in Paris. I could see the Pompidou when glancing over my shoulder. “I saw the masterful ‘Artempo’, in Venice”, I said. “Can you tell me about some other things you’ve done?”. “Well that, for a start”, he said, gesturing at the Pompidou. I thought I was interviewing him, but it soon became apparent that he was interviewing me. Apparently I got the job, and I’m so glad I did, because “Theatre of the World” is profoundly important to me, as is Jean-Hubert.

During my childhood perambulations to TMAG the seed of “Theatre of the World” must have been sown. From Mona, from TMAG, and other repositories of “wisdom”, Jean-Hubert and his colleagues have caused it to germinate. The resulting bloom is, like beauty, like the phenomenon of order, in the mind of the beholder.

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