



# The Art of Controversy

Australia's answer to the Tate Modern, the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), lies within the Moorilla winery on the Berriedale peninsula in Hobart, Tasmania. Combining winery, brewery, restaurant and hotel, this is no 'normal' museum.

The relatively new museum presents antiquities, modern and contemporary art from the private collection of multi-millionaire, David Walsh who is himself far from ordinary. Walsh is a professional gambler who made his fortune by developing a gambling system that he uses to bet on sports. This is a fact the Tasmanian government are now examining in regards to Walsh's taxation but that is a different story. This is the story of MONA.

Walsh describes the museum as a 'subversive adult Disneyland.' It is

perhaps the Disneyland of a slightly twisted and most definitely fascinating mind. The Age newspaper in Australia, on the other hand, described it as 'macabre and ungodly.' This may be why people are flocking to the establishment; to test the inbuilt human fascination with the macabre. MONA may be shocking, it may be outrageous, and it may push the boundaries of what many would consider to be 'taste' but there is one thing it will never be, and that is dull.

Even the setting is a little out of the ordinary. You can drive or catch a



All images courtesy of MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania



gallery spaces, but you can in the Void which also houses some artworks. An unconventional entrance to an unconventional venue that covers over 100,000 square feet. One wall of the museum is the sandstone cliff. From there the structure juts out toward the river using steel and concrete. The architecture is a strong feature of the building and the materials used on the outside are similar to those inside, such as the Corten steel staircase and waffled concrete ceilings. The interior is stark with no natural light leading the art to jump out of the blackness to attract attention. This dramatic presentation deliberately disorients, encouraging visitors to get lost in the work.

None of the exhibits at MONA are labelled and old are displayed alongside new. Navigation and information is presented through iPhone touch screen technology, referred to as the O device, that determines where the visitor is and offers detail on the nearby works. Each visitor chooses the amount of information they want about each piece, from general information to artist biographies, the curators interpretation and extraneous

information. Included is the ability to 'love' or 'hate' pieces of art. Unsubstantiated rumour has it that the pieces that are loved the most are removed from the display.

The art on show covers three main areas. Firstly, there are the antiquities Walsh started buying twenty years ago. His collection includes Egyptian mummies, Roman mosaics, Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets and thousands of Greek coins. Then there are the Australian modernists such as Sidney Nolan, Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd and John Perceval. It includes Nolan's monumental work *Snake*, made up of 1,620 individual panels which cover a 45-metre curving wall designed specifically for the work.

Finally, there is the international contemporary art, much of which is large scale, some of which features sex, death or defecation. Some of the more controversial pieces include a new version of Wim Delvoye's *Cloaca*.

This machine simulates the human digestive process and creates excrement which is apparently indistinguishable from the real thing.

ferry to the entrance of the museum, which is almost hidden, sitting across the other side of a tennis court. Walsh describes the entrance as 'deliberately underwhelming.' The entry portal leads to a staircase and elevator to whisk visitors three levels underground. While most galleries greet the public with an information desk, after the reception desk the first thing visitors to MONA encounter at the entrance to the gallery proper is a bar, the Void Bar. You can't drink in the

TOP LEFT: MONA, Museum of Old and New Art; MONA/Leigh Carmichael TOP RIGHT: *Fat Car*, 2006: MONA/Remi Chauvin  
INSET: *Bible Bomb #1854 (Russian style)*, 2005: MONA/Leigh Carmichael

Other works likely to produce strong responses include Stephen J. Shanabrook's *On the Road to Heaven the Highway to Hell*, a chocolate sculpture depicting the body of a suicide bomber, and Gregory Green's *Bible Bomb #1854* (Russian style), a mixed media 'bomb' encased in a Bible.

Not every piece is designed to shock however. Confronting pieces are offset with work that is haunting and sensitive, such as *Tracing Time* by British artist Claire Morgan. This installation consists of hundreds of four metre long threads which run from the ceiling to the floor. Over 3,000 dandelion seeds have been glued on to the strings individually by hand. Another beautiful installation is Cuban artist Wilfredo Prieto's *Untitled (White Library)*, which consists of 6,000 white books and newspapers in a library which fills an entire room. Every single publication is blank.

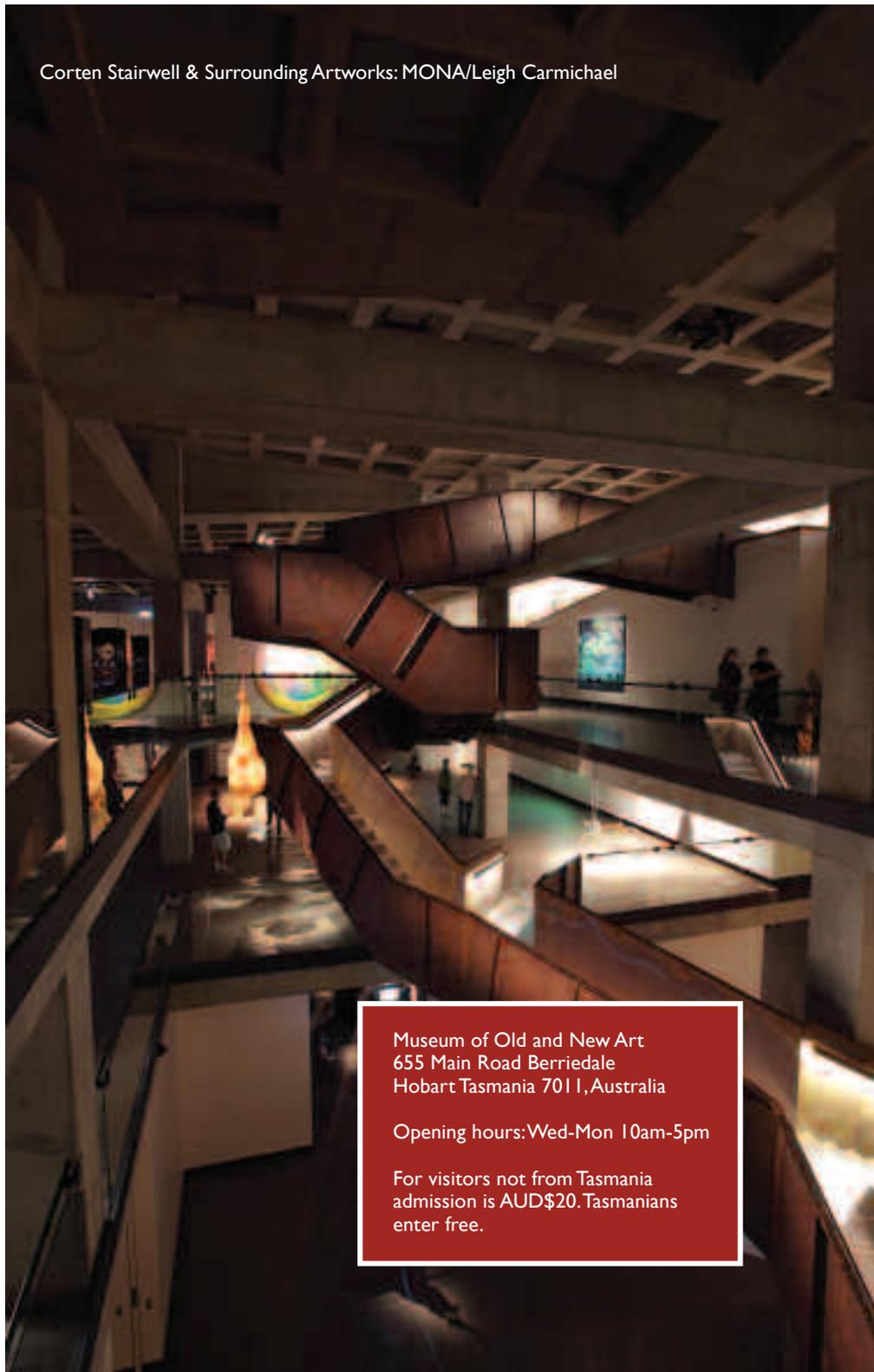
More whimsical are Erwin Wurm's *Fat Car*, a pudgy red Porsche where even the seats are overstuffed, and James Angus's *Truck Corridor*, now no longer part of the exhibition, which featured a huge truck squeezed into an impossibly narrow space. These works are included on a family friendly trail through the museum.

From bodily functions to bestiality, euthanasia to evolution, death to deviance, addiction to atheism, MONA explore them all and Walsh has a serious point to make. The self-confessed atheist genuinely wants to encourage debate about subjects such as society and faith, and, most importantly, the role of art and art museums. In this area MONA has undeniably been a success, drawing in over 300,000 visitors in its first year – more than half the population of the state of Tasmania. It seems Walsh's strategy of using controversy to create interest has paid off and will continue to do so.

Cloaca Professional, 2010: MONA/Leigh Carmichael



Corten Stairwell & Surrounding Artworks: MONA/Leigh Carmichael



Museum of Old and New Art  
655 Main Road Berriedale  
Hobart Tasmania 7011, Australia

Opening hours: Wed-Mon 10am-5pm

For visitors not from Tasmania  
admission is AUD\$20. Tasmanians  
enter free.