INFORMATION DESK

THE ART OF EXCITEMENT

A generous gambler has turned his dream into reality with the bold opening of Hobart's MONA

The biggest private museum collection in Australia opened near Hobart in January. Spectacular and controversial, the amazing MONA — brainchild of brilliant eccentric David Walsh — is delighting and challenging visitors. Whichever way you sway, it's an experience not to miss. We chat to MONA's chief curator Nicole Durling about the museum and its other highlights.

WHY MONA?

It's the Museum of Old and New Art. We have pieces here that span 60 centuries — the oldest work being about 6,000 years old, and the newest completed just before the museum opened in January. Then there's the 200 to 250 million-year-old Triassic sandstone that's also part of the museum building.

IS IT TRUE IT'S ABOUT SEX AND DEATH?

It's been said, but I'd like to debunk that. MONA has a much broader curatorial focus. It's a non-linear exhibition of international and Australian ancient and contemporary art. It's about Darwinism, it's utilitarian, it's about portraiture and ritual, and it's also about coming to terms with one's own mortality. MONA is about the whole experience — the building as well as the art — and the ideas behind the art; it's also interactive.



Snake (1970–1972, mixed media on paper, 1,620 sheets) by Sir Sidney Nolan (Carlton, Victoria, Australia, 1917-1992)

EAT DRINK SLEEP

MONA is set on Morilla Estate, famous for its brilliant wines, Moo Brew beer and fantastic food. You can eat in the MONA café; have a drink in the Void Bar down inside the museum; hang out in the estate's fabulous Wine Bar; and enjoy fine dining with amazing water views at The Source. Afterwards, go down and slip into bed in one of their eight wonderful pavilions.

WHO IS DAVID WALSH?

He's someone who's extremely passionate and has some amazing ideas. He's got a gift for mathematics and art. He has an amazingly different way of approaching problems and that's how he made his fortune. He's also an extremely generous individual, to allow people to come here and look in his "lounge room" so to speak.

THE MUSEUM BUILDING CLINGS TO A CLIFF-SIDE ABOVE THE RIVER DERWENT, AND COST AU$75 MILLION TO BUILD?

Yes, it's built over a sandstone cliff that's 12m from top to bottom, covering three levels of the building, allowing a 6,000m² gallery space. Cutting away the side of the cliff and refilling it had its challenges. The sandstone wall weeps and breathes; it lives.

WHAT ARE THE EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS?

For me, a piece called *Pulse Room*, by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer which uses 108 light globes that capture visitors' heartbeats. And *Pausiris*, an Egyptian mummy and sarcophagus. It's set on an island in a room filled with black water, and there's a projection of a CAT scan of the mummy itself: quite surreal and wonderful. And the museum at MONA is completely free and always will be. We're committed to that. ★

MONA, Moorilla Estate, 655 Main Rd, Berriedale, Hobart; open daily 11am–7pm.

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