

S*x, Death and Taxes

A rough guide to MONA

By Miriam Grundy

It is fair to say that David Walsh obsesses about the first two, and disdains the latter. As a result, the Museum of Old and New Art and the collection it houses centers around the former two and has come to fruition due to the latter, or rather the lack of it. Walsh is the creator of MONA, a local Tasmanian equipped with a profoundly macabre sense of humor, a fierce art collecting habit and a gift for writing algebra to beat betting systems. Left to flourish for several decades, Walsh's habits have resulted in what we now know as MONA.

Walsh has created a subversive Disneyland for art and artifact, quickly becoming one of the biggest tourist attractions in Tasmania with close to a quarter of all travellers to the Apple Isle reporting to have visited MONA. Not only has it also established a new Sydney/Melbourne/Hobart arts triangle, in its short existence MONA has achieved what no Australian institution has been able to by giving Australia a voice on the international arts stage, keeping company with progressive galleries such as the Guggenheim, Getty and Saatchi. A visit to MONA ensures a truly world-class art experience just across the Strait, so here are a few tips on exploring the temple of Walsh:

Take the ferry. The MONA ROMA ferry is the best way to start your MONA journey allowing you to take in the beautiful River Derwent and see the building emerge from the harbor, like a tip of a rusty, angular iceberg, it deceptively hides the mass that lies beneath. It is a good idea to book the ferry online ahead of your trip so you can be sure to secure a seat on the early and late trips to allow for maximum time in the gallery or a sunset drink.

Allow yourself time. An entire day at least, two days is optimal to fully absorb the entirety of the collection and the scale and presence of the building. MONA is best done slowly with plenty of time allocated to getting meaningfully lost in the myriad of passages, rooms and enclaves that will carry you through the space. For your unplanned route, you will be equipped with an 'O' that will inform, guide and amuse you the entire way through. The O is MONA's version of the wall plaque, audio tour, artist's statement and amusing ramble all in an easy to use iPod device, tracking your stops, likes and hates and then sending your tour to you at the end of the day.

Spend your time unwisely. MONA does away with notions of viewing hierarchy and sequence. You can walk for hours through the exhibitions, take rest on a giggling sofa, lounge in the library or in my case; it may just take you a day to find the Anselm Keifer room. MONA is a museum that you discover gradually, revealing itself incrementally through both understated detail and grand display. The best way to explore MONA is through guesswork and experimentation,

activating a sense of play and adventure that is a pivotal part of the viewing experience.

Be hungry and thirsty. Starting from the ferry kiosk to the basement bar, MONA has many ways to tempt you away from the subject of art and onto the much more serious subject of eating and drinking, which appears to be David Walsh's second obsession in life. Take a casual lunch in the café, dine in the restaurant or sprawl with some BBQ and beanbags on the lawn. All venues feature local produce and beverages from MONA's own Moorilla Winery and Moo Brew brewery. Discuss your day is over a wine or beer tasting, available at The Source restaurant where you will be expertly guided through a liquid tour of Tasmania, plus MONA seems to make much more sense after a few wines.

Stay, one night at least. MONA has a selection of pavilions inspired and named after Walsh's favorite architects and artist such as the Sidney, Walter and Brett options. These elegant quarters continue the conversation from the gallery and allow you to fully experience MONA and its surrounds. Each pavilion features works from the MONA collection inspired by or by the very hand of its namesake. MONA has a selection accommodation and activity packages that will ensure a memorable holiday. If timing is your thing, MONA has regular events, concerts, screenings and annual festival, MONA FOMA that will give you even more reason to leave the mainland.

For more information go to www.mona.net.au