

What speaks to you?

On the Origin of Art
Mona
Berriedale
Until Monday, April 17

One of the best features of this new exhibition is its presentation of four possible answers to the question, "We need art, but for what?", and the implicit suggestion that a range of explanations is possible.

On the Origin of Art is the latest in a series of curator-driven shows developed by Mona that suggest some kind of idea or thesis – from *Theatre of The World* in 2012 to *The Red Queen*, which examined art as an evolutionary adaptation, in 2013.

Three years later, *On the Origin of Art's* impressive realisation as a show demonstrates how much work has gone into developing these ideas. This kind of idea and way of presenting art is something David Walsh is clearly deeply committed to. He is interested in intellectual heavy lifting, but also assumes Mona's audience is, too. And while it is his soapbox, there's always an assumption that anyone who walks in the door can engage with art and ideas if they so wish.

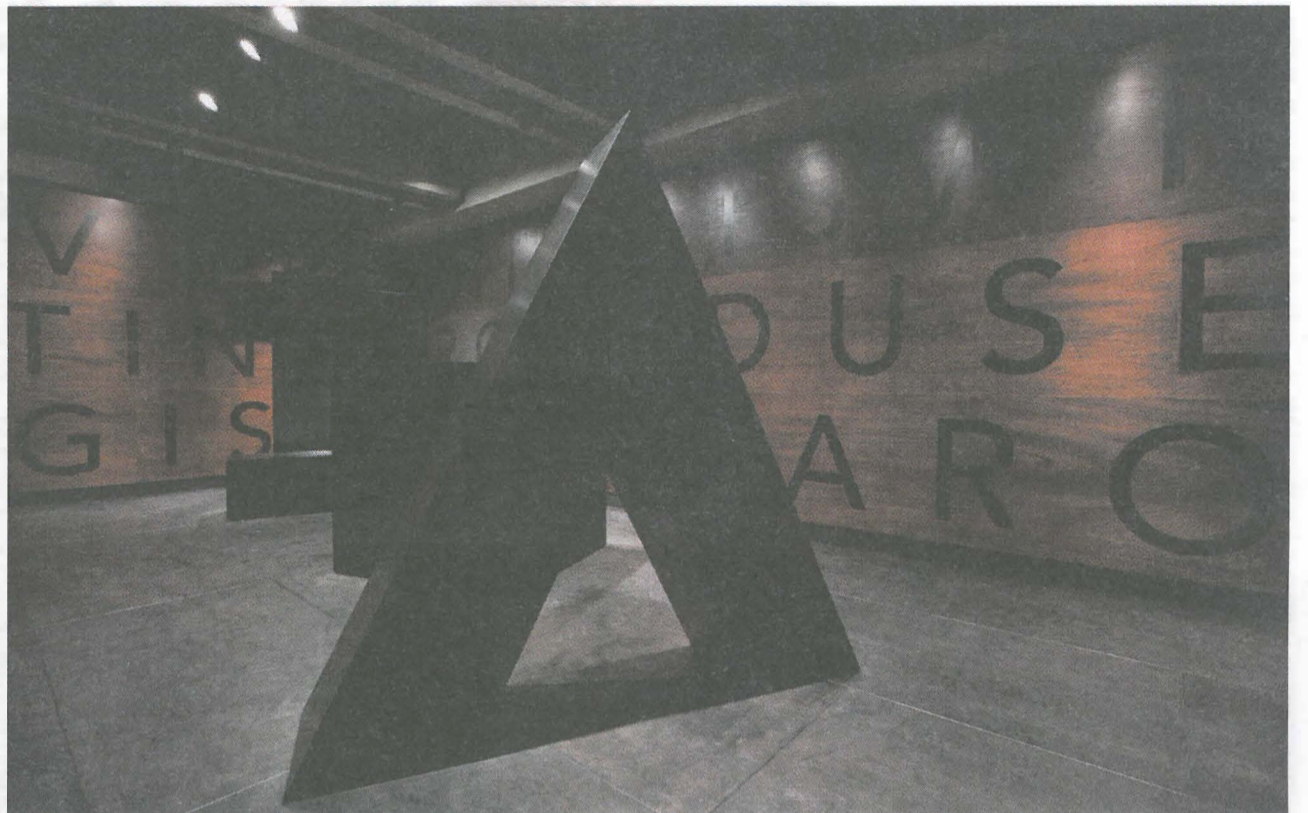
All of the curators are from scientific backgrounds: Mark Changizi is an evolutionary neurobiologist and cognitive scientist; Geoffrey Miller is a professor of psychology; Steven Pinker is a professor of psychology, linguist, cognitive scientist and experimental psychologist; and Brian Boyd is a professor of literature at the University of Auckland.

The curators' artworks are in separate areas in the museum and are accompanied by audio, which can be listened to on headphones via Mona's O device. The scientists explain their ideas and in each case a complex argument emerges. That's the fun: which argument rings true for you? The presentation of differing ideas works really well and leads to the realisation there is no definite answer, nor can there be. It's about the arguments and evidence, and how well these are presented.

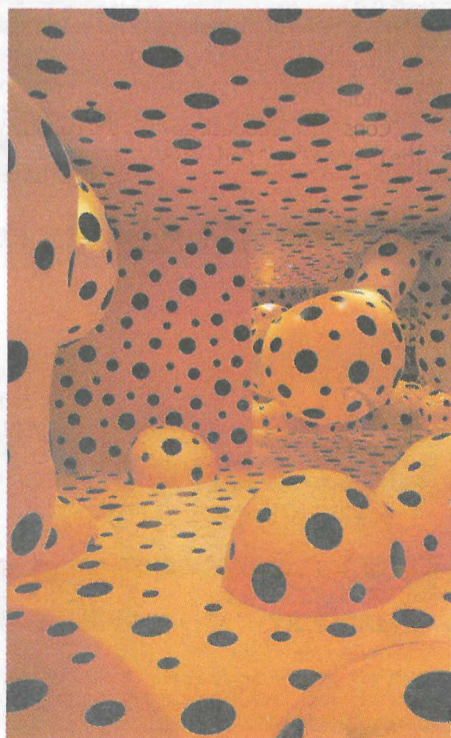
Of course, they are presented extraordinarily well.

Mona loves to say this is the biggest exhibition they've done to date, and it was probably true each time it was said in the past, but this effort is just epic. Four complex curated segments which come together to form a vast whole is an amazing feat. Everything is constructed – each wall, room, and display – from scratch. Wandering through the rooms is a heady, thrilling experience, like being subtly guided through a maze by architectural strategy and lighting.

The surprise in this exhibition is a magnificent Renoir and the moment of its discovery is so beautifully choreographed



POWERFUL: Above, Brigita Ozolins' room-size installation *Graphos*; and left, Aspassio Haronitaki's *Who Says Your Feelings Have to Make Sense*.



SPOT ON:
Dots Obsession
Tasmania, by
 Yayoi Kusama.

you can hear people gasp when they see it. This work alone is a stunning experience, and underlines something incredible about the exhibition, which might get missed.

Many works on display here have been loaned from famous national and international museums. *On the Origin of Art* is culturally significant, and signifies Mona is the real deal.

Of course, you can ignore all of that and just look at the spectacular art, from old masters that have been acquired to some riveting works of contemporary art.

There's work by magnificent Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, including a specially made commission called *Dots Obsession Tasmania*. Even among some famous (or in the case of Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami's confronting, sexually charged works, notorious) works of art, it's the commissions that really stood out. Tasmanian artist Brigita Ozolins, whose output is known to be consistent and powerful, has produced a new room-size installation that must surely be a career highlight. *Graphos* is an exploration of the shape of letters, and is a real pleasure. Equally seductive is the chaotic riot that is *Who Says Your Feelings Have to Make Sense*, by Greek artist Aspassio Haronitaki, a colourful explosion of massive, interlocking X-ray images of human organs and bodies.

However, one of the best parts for me was a conversation I

had outside Mona with some colleagues about our views of the exhibition. We all reacted differently to what we'd experienced.

There was much to say and not enough time, but there was one point we agreed on: *On the Origin of Art* encourages rich and rewarding dialogue and thought. It is bold and opinionated, but it is also a generous show that is underlined by a belief that we can all engage with art and science, no matter who we are.

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