

MONA's The Red Queen: Art as an evolutionary advantage

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Is there an evolutionary advantage to creativity? The Red Queen, the latest large-scale exhibition at Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), presents the work of artists both living and dead alongside the artefacts of ancient civilisations in an attempt to explore the motivation behind the creative process.

"The fact that through evolution creativity hasn't fallen to the wayside, it still remains, there must be some sort of advantage to it," says MONA curator Nicole Durling.

The Red Queen, which occupies around 75 per cent of MONA's vast 7000 square metres of gallery space, is loosely grouped into nine chapters that explore this idea from a variety of angles; data, play, imitate, language, pattern, storytelling, status, belief. Although, in true MONA style, unless visitors use 'The O', the electronic gallery guide, there are no clear delineations to the exhibition. The nine chapters in Each of the nine chapters in The Red Queen are loosely based on the texts of leading thinkers from a diverse field that includes the likes of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins and cognitive scientist Steven Pinker. These texts, and the work of biologist Leigh Van Valen from which the exhibition takes its name, provided the curatorial team a way to link works of art that were created thousands of years apart and often for different purposes.

"Those ideas are really a starting point to consider art as evolutionary adaptation, something that through evolutionary time, humans have done because it helps them to survive and procreate better," MONA research curator Elizabeth Pearce told ABC Arts on the eve of the exhibition's opening.

The Red Queen offers visitors a variety of experiences, from Ryoji Ikeda's monumental projections *data.tron* and *data.matrix*, to Zhang Chen's trampoline artwork *Danser la musique*, to a 3000 year old Egyptian Scarab that details the exploits of Amenhotep III. The objects and artworks in The Red Queen reinforce the notion that generations to come will understand this era through the objects we leave behind.

"We're not giving away any answers, only clues," says French born, London-based MONA curator Olivier Varenne.

The Red Queen runs until April 21, 2014.

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