



Themes of the Stone Age

Hubert Duprat at MONA
Museum of Old and New Art
655 Main Rd, Berriedale
Until April 21
Admission \$20, Tasmanian residents and
under-18s free

PRIMEVAL people sheltering in their caves would have made a kind of art that preceded the paintings from early Stone Age found in Europe, Africa and Australia.

This would have been based on the illusion of shadows cast by fire. To the present day, there are children and adults who delight in the magic of silhouettes of animals and folklore creatures on the wall. Even in an era of electricity and digital entertainment, it is an extraordinary and happy pastime that reaches back across millennia.

French artist Hubert Duprat has created not so much facsimiles, but rough-hewn references to the creatures that shared the world of early mankind in his hybridised creative and psychological space. Duprat's expressions are both ultra-contemporary and explorations into the prehistoric.

Unlike the familiar bronze statues around the city, Hubert's sculptures cross boundaries and disciplines. They are a cross-media synthesis of science, geology and art, and they literally come in all shapes and sizes.

Tiniest of all, and to be observed in a tank of fresh water, is the young of an aquatic insect related to the caddisflies that anglers use to bait their hooks.

Duprat has deprived the larvae of their usual materials from which to make their metamorphic sheath. Instead of twigs and gravel they have been given gold dust, pearls, turquoise and other precious gems. The humble insect has become a goldsmith and jeweller as it makes the case crucial to its development as an adult.

Another work of a completely different scale yet bearing some similarity is a five-branched series of cream-coloured tubes made of smooth

cement that enshroud a lining of myriad silvery-black haematite beads.

The sculpture has an echo on the floor that, translated from the French, is called both root and fruit. Made of wood and encased in a mosaic of bone that is held in place by nails, it is recognisably organic but has no beginning or end, with one phasing seamlessly into another. In its whiteness, this sculpture is at the same time the sun-reaching branches of a tree and the capillaries of its roots.

Another manifestation perhaps

expressing shelter and protection is a 1m-high cylinder made of calcite crystals. In its circle of small cubist blocks it glitters like a symbolic icon forged by a supernatural force. It can be compared to another similarly shaped but horizontal piece made of pyrite pieces that seem to interlock effortlessly, but have been as laboriously constructed as an insect's carapace.

Duprat's fervid imagination takes

us to the Stone Age again for *Tribulum*. Its green and seemingly solid verticality belies





the fact that it is made of polyurethane, the same foam used for floral arrangements. Pressed into the surface are not flowers but flints redolent of weapons and tools from ancient cultures. The small wall of stone projects a grimly pragmatic defensiveness in the manner of spines or spikes on living things, such as sea urchins, echidnas or cacti.

In contrast, there is a large, enigmatic wall made of white, smoothly contoured and moist plasticine. Its implacable solidity could be made by countless years of limestone accretions.

An equal cause of speculation is a sculpture that can be described as a three-dimensional, multi-sided polygon of synthetic gypsum plaster, in which brass pieces of the same size have been irregularly inserted. When the piece has been honed the metal shapes reveal themselves in a multiplicity of sizes according to their embedded angle.

From northern Spain comes more irregular patterning, but in the natural

form of red coral. Jewellery fashioned from these endangered marine invertebrates was prized in ancient Egypt, as well as in the Victorian age. The fragile segments are held together with white globules of bread, fusing the organic into a different context to represent something as all-encompassing as the interlocking nature of the ecological system or cellular life.

Duprat's tour de force embraces natural life in the thought-provoking unpredictability of an artist who claims an amateur and self-taught status.

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TWISTED: Some of French artist Hubert Duprat's works, which are currently on show at MONA.

