

# smart arts

FEBRUARY 19 2011

**W**hen the Brazilian art collector Bernardo Paz was making plans for Inhotim, his 3,000-acre open-air contemporary art museum, back in 2003, he invited artist Doug Aitken to make a new work for the project. Aitken found himself in an extraordinarily unhindered situation. "Essentially, there were no parameters," he says. "It felt like I had a vast, blank landscape to work with, and the piece could become a permanent part of it." Six years later, in 2009, Aitken's work was completed: perched on top of a forested mountain in one of Brazil's most productive iron-mining regions, his *Sonic Pavilion* is a circular building with walls of lenticular lenses whose opacity shifts according to your position. At the building's centre is a foot-wide hole that plunges a mile into the earth, and which is lined with microphones. Way down below, it seems, the earth gives out unsettling rumbles and creaking sounds, making one's own footsteps feel insignificantly precarious.

"So much contemporary art is commodified," says Aitken. "A place such as Inhotim works against that. It empowers the artist rather than curating the artist. It's a phenomenal template for a modern museum." Unlimited by budget constraints, bureaucracy,

timescales and space, such privately owned modern museums are popping up in spectacular, middle-of-nowhere locations around the globe as moneyed art collectors turn the traditional museum model on its head. Each is as unique as the personality of the person who dreamt it up. Pig-iron magnate Paz's Inhotim (both pictured overleaf) is a kind of paradise where art and a botanic garden co-exist and interact. In Tasmania, professional gambler and self-described "super-geek" David Walsh describes his Museum of Old and New Art (both pictured on final page) as a "subversive Disneyland for adults".

In New Zealand, several major artists have created their largest works ever for amphibious-vehicle entrepreneur Alan Gibbs's project, Gibbs Farm (pictured below). And in Japan, the islands of Naoshima, Teshima and Inujima have been entirely devoted to contemporary art, overseen by collector Soichiro Fukutake, chairman and director of the Benesse corporation.

Other art pilgrimages include Donald Hess's James Turrell museum in Colomé, Argentina; Jupiter Artland in West Lothian, Scotland; and, if Swicorp chairman and CEO Kamel Lazaar has his way, an Ottoman palace will be turned into a contemporary art centre in Tunisia. These are spaces that defy the old, authoritative, heavily curated, "white cube" model of art viewing, and instead challenge artists to match the splendour of their

surroundings and make truly extraordinary art. But to see them, you'll have to travel. "The destination aspect is all part of the experience," says Jochen Volz, Paz's artistic director, who co-curated the 2004 Venice Biennale. "By the time you've flown across the globe, hired a car, submerged yourself in a different culture, you're in a different mind-set than if you just walked in off the sidewalk in a major city. Having made the effort to get here, people take their time to see the art."

This is certainly true at Inhotim, which opened in 2006, though it was Paz's home for 20 years before that. Forty miles from the city of Belo Horizonte, it is situated in a region best known for mining, with little in the way of attractions for tourists, or even locals. The last local cinema closed 20 years ago. The homes dotting the roadside are modest. Few, for example, appear to have glass in their windows. Paz, a blue-eyed, white-bearded, ruggedly eccentric 59-year-old who just divorced his sixth wife (artist Adriana Varejão) and, he quips, works out daily to help in his search for a new one, aptly describes it as the "middle of nowhere".

Except that he has created a startlingly magnificent somewhere. Paz's immaculately kept Eden includes man-made lakes, a magnificent eucalyptus boulevard, the world's largest collection of palm trees (1,200 species) and 200 species of orchid, and in which you come across 13 pavilions dedicated to single artists, four pavilions that



rotate works from Paz's collection and 20 large-scale, mainly site-specific sculptures. The meticulous paths lead you on walks through beautiful vistas, with golf carts turning up regularly to carry you up mountains and across the valley. Paz developed much of the landscaped areas with his friend, Brazil's best-known landscape architect, Roberto Burle Marx, in the 1980s.

The art at Inhotim presents a series of vivid contrasts with the natural world around it. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster has created a kind of moonscape of grey-white sand dotted with concrete bus shelters of differing designs. Matthew Barney has a vast, bubbled pavilion that inside reflects multiple views of his sculptural installation of a massive tractor and uprooted tree (pictured overleaf). *Cosmococa* (pictured overleaf), a posthumously made pavilion by the important Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica, offers heady immersive experiences in five rooms, including a pool in the dark where visitors are encouraged to strip down and swim.

Among important works from the past is Chris Burden's seminal *Beam Drop* of 1984 (pictured overleaf), which involved dropping 60 steel beams from a crane so that they sliced into a pool of concrete and the earth below, the pithy return of an industrial object to its origins. And Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Palm Pavilion*, made for the 2006 São Paulo Biennale, is a thoughtful, often funny display of the cultural history of the palm tree – from its

use in advertising to, as Tiravanija puts it, "palm trees that were witnesses" to conflicts in supposed paradises.

Locals are by and large delighted with Inhotim. Shaking his head with irritation at a helicopter flying in, evidently carrying collectors for that night's party to launch three new pavilions, Paz remarks: "I don't hate other collectors, but I don't like them, because they make a collection for themselves, or so that they don't pay taxes." By contrast, Paz employs 550-600 people, the vast majority from the nearby town of Brumadinho, to keep things running, and with two hotels and a conference centre being built for 2012, that number will rise to around 1,000. Paz has also launched an extensive schools programme that enables 40,000-50,000 students to visit yearly, bringing the total number of visitors last year to 133,000. Entrance fees provide a small revenue stream, but the bulk of the extensive costs are covered solely by Paz, though he refuses to talk numbers. Gesturing towards his surroundings, Paz says, "This is not for showing off, not for status. This is for humanity."

Paz's contemporaries and good friends such as Tunga and Cildo Meireles, both important Brazilian artists, were instrumental in the early conception of the place. These days the dialogue continues with artists such as Olafur Eliasson, who over the past five years has developed two pavilions that will open in 2012. One will be a pitch-black room with a thin

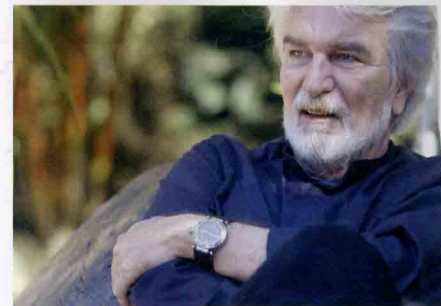


Main picture: sculpture by Anish Kapoor at Gibbs Farm in New Zealand. Inset: Alan Gibbs, creator of Gibbs Farm.



# ARTWARD BOUND

Wealthy collectors are turning the traditional art gallery on its head by creating destination museums that interact with their spectacular locations. Pernilla Holmes reports.



Clockwise from above: Bernardo Paz of Inhotim. Installation by Matthew Barney. Chris Burden's *Beam Drop*. Hélio Oiticica and Neville D'Almeida's *Cosmococa* pavilion. All at Inhotim.



band that captures the natural light of the horizon. The other will give a framed view of a sun-path in a building that Volz compares, ideas-wise, to the Pantheon. Other big-name artists with projects in development include Pipilotti Rist and Cristina Iglesias, and many more are planned. Asked where new works might go, one of Paz's team pointed far into the distance and said, "This all belongs to Bernardo."

Offering an entirely different kind of experience is the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Tasmania, just opened in January (pictured overleaf). Located on professed rampant atheist David Walsh's vineyard alongside the Derwent River, but intentionally shunning the beauty of the landscape above it, the museum is built into a cliff-side with no windows to release you from the art it throws up for your contemplation. Despite being comparable in size to Australia's state art galleries, MONA is entirely unconventional. Walsh himself has described it as an "unmuseum". There are no labels for works, the building is deliberately maze-like and difficult to navigate and instead of a reception and information desk, visitors are greeted by a bar.

Walsh loves the idea of visitors relaxing into their visit with a drink. And you may well be glad – this is not a collector who shies from difficult pieces. Consider, for example, artist Wim Delvoye's *Cloaca Professional* – a machine made to replicate the human digestive process and produce excrement that Delvoye insists is the real thing. "In China I've seen a rich man recreate Versailles almost exactly for his home," says Delvoye. "David would never fall into such nouveau-riche thinking. He has cultivated his very own approach."

Much has been made of Walsh's offhand remark that his collection is about "sex and death" and, indeed, these themes are, as in most art collections, present. Especially in the room made to look like a bordello, turning the viewer into a voyeur as you peep through holes to look at work. But Walsh's interviews are full of such flip remarks that perhaps belie his real commitment to changing the way we

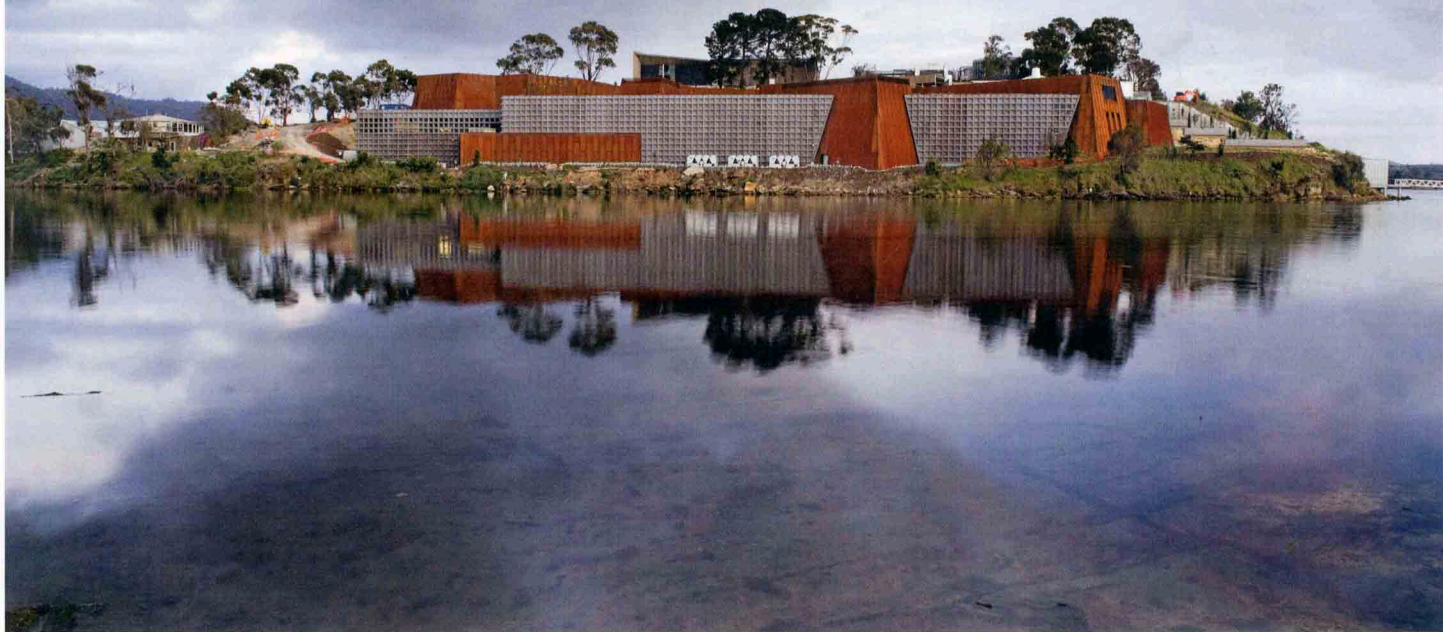
## "Inhotim empowers rather than curates the artist. It's a phenomenal template for a modern museum."

see art. Olivier Varenne, Walsh's London-based art adviser who spends about 80 per cent of the year travelling the globe in search of new work for the collection, says, "David likes things that make him react – that amuse him. The old ivory-tower, authoritative intellectual systems do not apply here." The building, designed with Walsh by architect Nonda Katsalidis, gives form to this anti-establishment ideology. Most museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York or Tate Modern in London, have impressive entrances that emphasise the weight of their grandeur as you enter. At MONA you arrive at a small entrance, and discover the scale of the place room to room as you go. Simply put by Varenne, "MONA makes you feel bigger and the museum feel smaller."

Diverging from the death theme, or perhaps poetically adding to it, MONA has taken on an unusual amount of maintenance-heavy living art. Artist Céleste Boursier-Mougenot has created a softly lit space containing five electric guitars and about 30 finches that flit about and create strange, random, never-to-be-repeated music when they land on the strings. Michel Blazy has

created an artwork out of mould. *Cloaca* is full of living bacteria that must be fed twice a day, every day, forever, if it is to survive. "I never planned to sell this work," says Delvoye. "I'm very attached to it. Every version has always relied on my technicians to keep it running. But David came to the studio and he was very persuasive." Other works depend on the viewer for their existence, such as Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's Pulse Room, which is made up of 100 lights. The public are invited to hold onto handles, which transmit their pulses to the lights. With enough people, there are lights going off at all different paces, creating a kind of throbbing life-scape. A particularly poignant piece by Japanese artists Masao Okabe and Chihiro Minato is called *Hiroshima in Tasmania – The Archive of the Future*. It's made up of five large stones taken from Hiroshima. Visitors are invited to capture their texture by running a pencil over paper, engraving the stone's history over and over. It is the Museum of Old and New Art and, indeed, there are also many important antiquities to be seen, such as Egyptian mummies and ancient coins, creating a dialogue with the existential concerns held by our ancestors that seem remarkably similar to our own.

In Japan, the island of Naoshima has since 1989 been continuously converted into a multi-museum testament to the relationship between art and nature, all under the guidance of collector and Benesse Holdings chairman and director Soichiro Fukutake. Not content with an

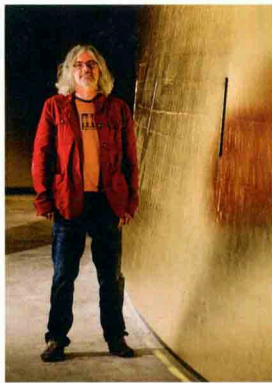


entire art island, recently Fukutake has expanded his philanthropy to the neighbouring islands of Teshima and Inujima, each with its own unique flavour. All three museums on Naoshima were built by star architect Tadao Ando: Benesse House, the first to open, with works by artists such as Richard Long and Bruce Nauman; then the Chichu Art Museum, with works by artists such as James Turrell and Claude Monet; and in June 2010 a museum dedicated to Korean artist Lee Ufan. In addition, the island has the Art House Project, in which old houses are turned into art spaces.

Last year saw Teshima island blossoming into an art destination in its own right. In the middle of its pine forest a small museum opened that houses an installation by Christian Boltanski called *Les Archives du Coeur*. Created on the idea that each heartbeat is unique, Boltanski's work has three rooms – one that houses his archive of heartbeats, one where they can be heard, and one where visitors can have their own heartbeats recorded. Further up the island, the recently opened Teshima Art Museum is in a building shaped like a drop of water, a collaboration between architect Ryue Nishizawa and artist Rei Naito. On Inujima island, the Seirenscho project creates an impressive model for art and green industries working in harmony, as the remains of a copper refinery have been transformed into a museum and artworks. Embracing the idea of a self-sufficient society, the building is also solar-powered and has a water purification system powered by plants. The Inujima Art House Project is under way in the island's residential areas, creating three new galleries that will include works by artist Yukinori Yanagi.

In New Zealand, Alan Gibbs is less specifically concerned with tackling the way the public sees art. His 1,000-acre sculpture park (which includes his holiday home), Gibbs Farm, is situated on a harbour property about 35 miles from Auckland and is open by appointment only. "There's no curator and I still have no particular plans," says Gibbs. "We invite artists here and they stay for a few weeks and we see if we can come up with something that works. Each project usually takes three to five years." What seems to work is "big".

"In this landscape, why make anything?" questioned Anish Kapoor after completing his vast red sculpture at Gibbs Farm in 2010 (pictured on opening pages), a work that recalls his Tate Modern Turbine Hall installation,



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*Marsyas*. Here it resembles vast trumpet forms emerging on either side of a hill, seeming like entrances to Dante's Inferno, but also like vast, fleshy orifices. "It [the landscape] is beautiful enough," says Kapoor. "If you are going to do something, then it has to have the same reason to be as the hill or the mountain over there."

Richard Serra's largest ever sculpture posed numerous engineering difficulties that Gibbs and his team relished working on. The resulting 550-ton sculpture is made of touching steel plates that run 250m long and 6m high, curving along the contour line of the land. "It's my hope that people will be able to regain some consciousness of what it means to walk a landscape," says Serra. Since it was completed, in 2001, a line has formed a couple of feet up on the patina. The sheep, it turns out, love to rub against it. At present Gibbs is working with artist Maya Lin, best known for her Vietnam war memorial in

**Above: Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania. Far left: its creator, David Walsh. Left: one of the exhibits, a "bookcase" in iron, with lead books, by Anselm Kiefer.**

Washington DC, on a vast earthwork that will be made out of 100,000 cubic metres of earth excavated during the building of a lake on the property. "I didn't set out to have the biggest of everything – it's the landscape that kind of demands it," says Gibbs. "It's what artists find most challenging about working here. We have had some major artists who have just not been able to cope with it." For artists who can rise to the challenge, collectors such as Paz, Walsh, Fukutake and Gibbs offer a chance to share in their intensely ambitious, personal visions that take art out of ossified institutional settings and bring it, with all its warts and glories,

to life. This is something that artists from Marcel Duchamp to Donald Judd and even Damien Hirst have yearned for throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries. Those able and willing to travel will have the rare opportunity to experience extraordinary and vital art on their own terms. Not to mention the culture and natural beauty of each place.

As Doug Aitken put it, "It's ironic that it takes a private collector to make something so public." ♦

#### CREATIVE SPACES

**Gibbs Farm**, Kaipara Harbour, near Kaukapakapa, New Zealand (info@gibbsfarm.co.nz), by appointment only. **Hess Collection**, James Turrell Museum, Colomé, Argentina (+54038-6849 4200; www.estanciacolome.com). **Inhotim**, Rua B, 20, Inhotim, Brumadinho, MG Brazil 35460-000 (+5531-3227 0001; www.inhotim.org.br). Accommodation: until Paz builds his hotels, the nearest are about a two-hour drive away in Belo Horizonte. **Jupiter Artland**, Bonnington House Steadings, Wilkieston, Edinburgh EH27 8BB (01506-889 900; www.jupiterartland.org). **Museum of Old and New Art (MONA)**, 655 Main Road Berridale, Hobart, Tasmania 79011, Australia (+613-6277 9900; www.mona.net.au). On site accommodation: eight high-end, modern "pavilions". **Naoshima**, Naoshima Island, Japan (+81087-892 3223; www.benesse-artsite.jp/en/about). Accommodation: Benesse House Hotel is attached to the Benesse House Museum.