

A week at Dark Mofo

21st June, 2015 Written by: Anne-Marie Peard

As Melbourne rugs up for Winter Solstice, Hobart celebrates the last weekend of the Dark Mofo festival. Anne-Marie Peard had to come home to Melbourne, but there's one more night of the amazing [Winter Feast](#), time to play in [Dark Park](#), music, performances, and the [Nude Solstice Swim](#) on Monday morning.



Dark Mofo Winter Feast entrance

Hobart's, and David Walsh's, third Dark Mofo festival promised to be darker and weirder. It was! But its weirdness was welcoming and there was fire, warmth and mind-blowing light waiting around every dark corner.

I asked some of the Melbourners who were Dark Mofoing, as artists and/or visitors, what they thought.



The Fire Organ.

Angus Cerini was performing in [The Rabble's Orlando](#).

One of the reasons I went to Hobart was to see *Orlando* again, and to see Cerini in it because he wasn't in the original. I was dumbstruck at its [opening night in 2012](#) at the Melbourne Festival, and to see this work again in the pastel wedding-cake-layered Theatre Royal theatre that was built in 1837 (by convict labour) was such a different experience – and possibly more wonderful. It's darkness and hope and pool of freezing water – that actor Dana Milkins survived! – was perfect for this festival. (Can we see *Story of O* next year, please. Maybe performed at Mona.)

Cerini said, "Hobart is an incredible place. Dark Mofo seemed to be just about everywhere. I saw just about fuck all of actual events but it's evidence was everywhere. Constantly. With red lights being the signature and one the entire city (of only 200,000) seem to embrace. It was quite incredible to feel like one was actually inside Dark Mofo purely by being in Hobart. In terms of arts festivals, it was like Adelaide festival time but in a way way way cooler place, with fuckloads less fuckwits (none), with absolutely staggeringly finessed artistry and curation in a place that has so much natural beauty and staggering history with weather consisting of freezing cold but crystal clear sunshine. I would not hesitate in going next year – for the fabulous environment, for the friendliness, for the seafood, for the sheer warmth of the place and its embracing of the art. Mona, although I only went at night and didn't go into the gallery, is kinda mind blowing. And to think this entire festival and the sheer weight of its impact both cultural and economic on a city and a state comes from one dude with asbergers is just fucking brilliant. I feel really fucking privileged that I got to be part of it. But in truth all of Hobart is part of it. 10 motherfucking stars."

I saw more of the festival and can only add another heap of mofoing stars.

Dark Mofo is small, but it's all over the city. I was staying in North Hobart and the local pubs had a Dark Beers for Mofos. I talked about Tasmanian stout with a bar dude who knew his beer. And it was great beer. I tried another one at another pub in Battery Point.

Dark Park and the opening night

Anastasia Ryan, Melbourne arts administrator, was at opening night on Friday 12 June. "The one night I experienced the festival, there was an amazing buzz. No-one seemed 100% sure what was going on, and people were just joining queues and following strangers, stumbling around in the dark looking for these pockets of red light. We drank hot gin cocktails (and then even better hot gin cocktails), got smoke in our clothes, and watched a giant confection of metal and pipes shoot flames into the darkness. Dark Mofo, I will be back for you."

Oh, that hot gin cocktail! A mug of hot spicy and sweet gin poured over fresh fruit; on a cold dark night, it was soul warming.

The gin bar is in Dark Park at Macquarie Point. There were cabaret performances, but the thrill was walking around in the dark and finding the hidden light exhibitions.

My highlight was UK-born, New York-living Anthony McCall's *Solid Light Works*. Walk into a dark door, in a warehouse at the end of the street, along a dark corridor and come into a huge space filled with haze and conical shafts of light. As a work, it was beautiful, but what made it come alive was being allowed to play in the light and discover how light and dark work together.



Dark Beer for Mofos.

McLaughlin Cafferty said, "I loved that almost everything was interactive, which was especially spectacular after a hot gin and a taco from a truck. I also really loved how most of the events were free and within walking distance of each other and allowed for a really beautiful and art-filled weekend."

She also loved *The Shadows Calling*.

"I think my favourite part of Dark Mofo was the Patricia Piccinini (and Peter Hennessey) exhibition near the heartbeat over Hobart. She created a really beautiful and fascinating world and all the pieces in conjunction with the soundscape and the spoken word in the offices were absolutely gorgeous."

The "heartbeat" is *Pulse Column* by USA-based Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. I thought it was wonderful when it was just a light shining into the sky from dusk to dawn that always let me know where the centre of the Hobart was, but it's so much more. The light is attached to a person and it pulses with their pulse. Seeing it each night and knowing that every pulse was that of the person made it as close to literally being the heart of Hobart as possible. I really wish that I'd done it.

And this was just the opening night of Dark Mofo!

Marina Abramović, *Private Archaeology*

Saturday was the opening the astonishing *Marina Abramović Private Archaeology* exhibition at Mona.



Mona ferry sheep seats.

Again, the experience of being at the opening was as important as seeing the art.

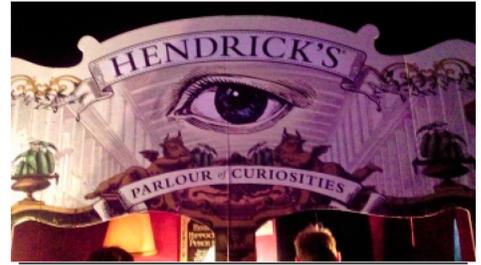
On the ferry to Mona in the dark, it was near-freezing outside, but there was a cow sculpture to lean on and sheep sculptures to sit on. And plenty of warm and wine inside.

Next was the 99 steps from the ferry and the realisation that there's a line to get into the building. Which was also fine because there were fires outside, live music underneath the James Turrell *Amarna* pavilion, food, drink and friends.

Inside, there were rumours of the famous performance artist being spotted in the restaurant and the line wait to get into her exhibition was about half an hour.

For once, waiting didn't matter because there was all of Mona to explore, lots of people to talk to and the exhibition runs until 5 October.

When I saw *Private Archaeology* on the opening night, I loved it because it was pure performance-art wank. But the deeper I got, the more I really loved it and saw beyond what I thought was self



Dark Park Gin Bar.



Tennessee at Solid Light Works. Photo by Jess McLaughlin Cafferty

indulgence. After being at Abramović's conversation with Walsh, at The Odean Theatre, I went back to Mona and saw it through the eyes and heart that created it; the heart that believes in "everything".

A lot of her early work, especially the 1970s video work, is self indulgent, but this exhibition is about seeing the development of her art. Seeing the change from filming her and her then parter, Ulay, screaming at each other to her finding the exact spot in Oslo where Edvard Munch's painted *The Scream* and inviting 270 people to scream at the camera.

Made in 2013, *The Scream* video runs for over two hours. I watched maybe 100 people scream for about 50 minutes – it's the noise that was finally too much. Some screamed with joy, but most found the pain they'd held deep in their bodies and let it free. I want to go back and watch the rest of it. Like so much of Abramović's work, it's easy to rush past and dismiss it but the truth and remarkable beauty of it comes when you spend time with it.

And all of this is before the rice and lentil counting.

Noise cancelling headphones, white coats, no cameras, a long bench with seats for 60, and white rice and black lentils to count. If the gallery didn't have to shut, I would have stayed for hours.

This is only a hint of Dark Mofo. Still to come was the food bliss of the [Winter Feast](#), where the Dark Mofo community gather in their thousands at Princes Wharf to sit at massive communal tables and feast on Tasmania's most scrumptious and indulgent treats.

Dark Mofo was energising and welcoming and during a month when federal arts funding had been slashed and artists been devalued, it was wonderful to be a part of community that knew just how wrong that decision was. I hope I can go back next year.

Photos by A-M Peard.



The line to see Marina.



Pulse Column.



Solid Light Works.