**MEDIA RELEASE**

**DEATH COMES TO NARRYNA**

**Narryna’s Dark MOFO exhibition, Ashes to Ashes, brings the magical and mystical to the 1840’s colonial town house.**

Following the success of Narryna’s participation in Dark MOFO 2014 which attracted almost 5,700 visitors, Narryna has crafted an exhibition, Ashes to Ashes, curated by Scott Carlin and Lana Nelson, featuring photography by Lana Nelson and Angela Waterson, that appeals to the interests of MONA’s demographic – interests in physicality, mortality, fashion, pattern, symbolism and the ‘foreignness’ of the past.

‘MONA’s themes are sex and death’ says exhibition co-curator, Scott Carlin, ‘our 19th century collections reflect a time of high mortality and risk of sudden, violent death through conflict, shipwreck, sickness and ‘acts of God’. Georgians and Victorians created elaborate rituals and a rich symbolism that gave expression to grief, loss and anxiety about the afterlife’.

Ashes to Ashes features Narryna’s collection of mourning costume and jewellery. The Victorian widow was expected to wear full mourning – non-reflective black bombazine or crape for 2 ½ years, transitioning to public life through purple or mauve. Queen Victoria set the fashion for extended mourning – remaining in black from the death of her beloved Prince Albert in 1861 until her own death in 1901.

Private collectors have generously loaned precious Tasmanian colonial portraits and *memento mori*. The subject of one of the portraits, Janet Anderson of Barnbogle, wears full Victorian mourning garb but also her deceased husband’s watch and fob chain. She has clearly embraced the challenge of securing her family’s future prosperity, sailing to Tasmania to take up a land grant for her sons.

Victorian mourning jewellery typically contained mementoes of the deceased. Ashes to Ashes features a collection of necklaces, brooches, earrings and bracelets made completely of human hair.

Some Tasmanian inheritors of pre-Christian magical traditions carved talismanic symbols ‘hexafoils’ into the door and window surrounds of their houses and concealed objects to ward off sickness and death. We explore this tradition as we approach the mystical Winter solstice.

Ashes to Ashes has quirky, fun activities. Millingtons has provided a coffin for the dining room, indicative of lying in state. The Narryna forecourt will have the ambience of a wake with a bar, food sales and light projections. Visitors will be able to don mourning sashes for photography for uploading to social media.

**Where:** Narryna Heritage Museum, 103 Hampden Road, Battery Point

**When: Evenings** (6pm – 10pm) Friday 12 June – Sunday 14 June and Thursday 18 June – Sunday 21 June. **Days** Tuesday – Saturday 10.30am – 4.30pm and Sundays 12 noon - 4.30pm

**Note:** Bar, food service (Barista Sista and Food2U) and illuminations evenings only.

**Admission:** $5 per adult (over 18). Bar and food sales. Bookings: <http://www.trybooking.com/HXQK>

**Contact:**  Scott Carlin, Scott.Carlin@tmag.tas.gov.au, 0419 622 658

See the Dark MOFO website: <http://darkmofo.net.au/program/ashes-to-ashes/>

Public Program, the Day of the Dead with Robert Morris-Nunn and Dr. Neil Cameron 5pm, Friday 19 June - Sunday 21 June (dates to be confirmed).

**Media angles**

* Anne Schofield has lent a brooch in the form of a dove, indicative of the Holy Spirit descending to take the soul of the deceased. The brooch has been posted on the Narryna Facebook page. We are keen to find out its Tasmania story
* Dr Ian Evans has pioneered the study of talismanic symbols (such as those at Shene and Redlands) and concealments in Tasmanian houses. See his thesis <http://www.academia.edu/659306/Touching_Magic_Deliberately_Concealed_Objects_in_old_Australian_Houses_and_Buildings>
* An exciting discovery – exhibition co-Curator Lana Nelson has furthered Dr Evans’ work by discovering an additional apotropaic mark carved into several Tasmanian buildings.
* Millingtons, Tasmania’s longest running funeral home, is a supporter of the exhibition and will be delivering a coffin and bier to Narryna on Tuesday 9 June (good photo opportunity).
* Robert Morris-Nunn and Dr. Neil Cameron will be running a popular public program on the Mexican day of the dead as part of the event
* Narryna will be closed July. We encourage Hobartians to come to the Dark MOFO special exhibition

**Further context - SEE DEATH AS A TRIUMPH, NOT A FAILURE**

‘The Victorians cared about the mortal body; its very mortality mattered profoundly to them. Today we try to deny the body’s movement toward death, its inevitable decay. The Victorians, instead of fearing the process of dying and the corpse, felt reverence. These were stages in the life of a beloved body and should be treasured.

Indeed, the image of the corpse was worthy of fixing with the art of the death mask, painting or photography. A snippet of hair was often turned into jewelry. What was beautiful – and tragic, but more lovely for all that – was the body’s ephemerality, its being always on the way to disappearing. The Victorians recognized that death’s presence was woven into the texture or life, giving that life one of its essential meanings.

Religion, of course, played a role in this attitude. Evangelical revivals early in the 19th century reinvigorated the tradition of the good death ... Even the sinful might be the saved in the end, and this salvation could be seen in the face of the dying and heard in their words. Dying was something to be watched – a triumph even.

By the beginning of the 20th century, however, these views of the dead body began to change. Doctors and scientists acquired a deeper understanding of bacteria and disease; death became medicalized. God hadn’t called the individual to him; rather, a malady had overtaken the body. Rather than dying at home, the sick were carted off to hospitals.

In addition, fewer people believed in the afterlife. No longer in triumph, death became a failure – of the physician’s skill, of the patient’s will. It was to be avoided at all cost.

Cremation grew in popularity as a way to “cleanse” with fire the last shameful disintegration ...’

Deborah Lutz ‘See Death as a Triumph, Not a Failure’ *New York Times*, 9 May 2015