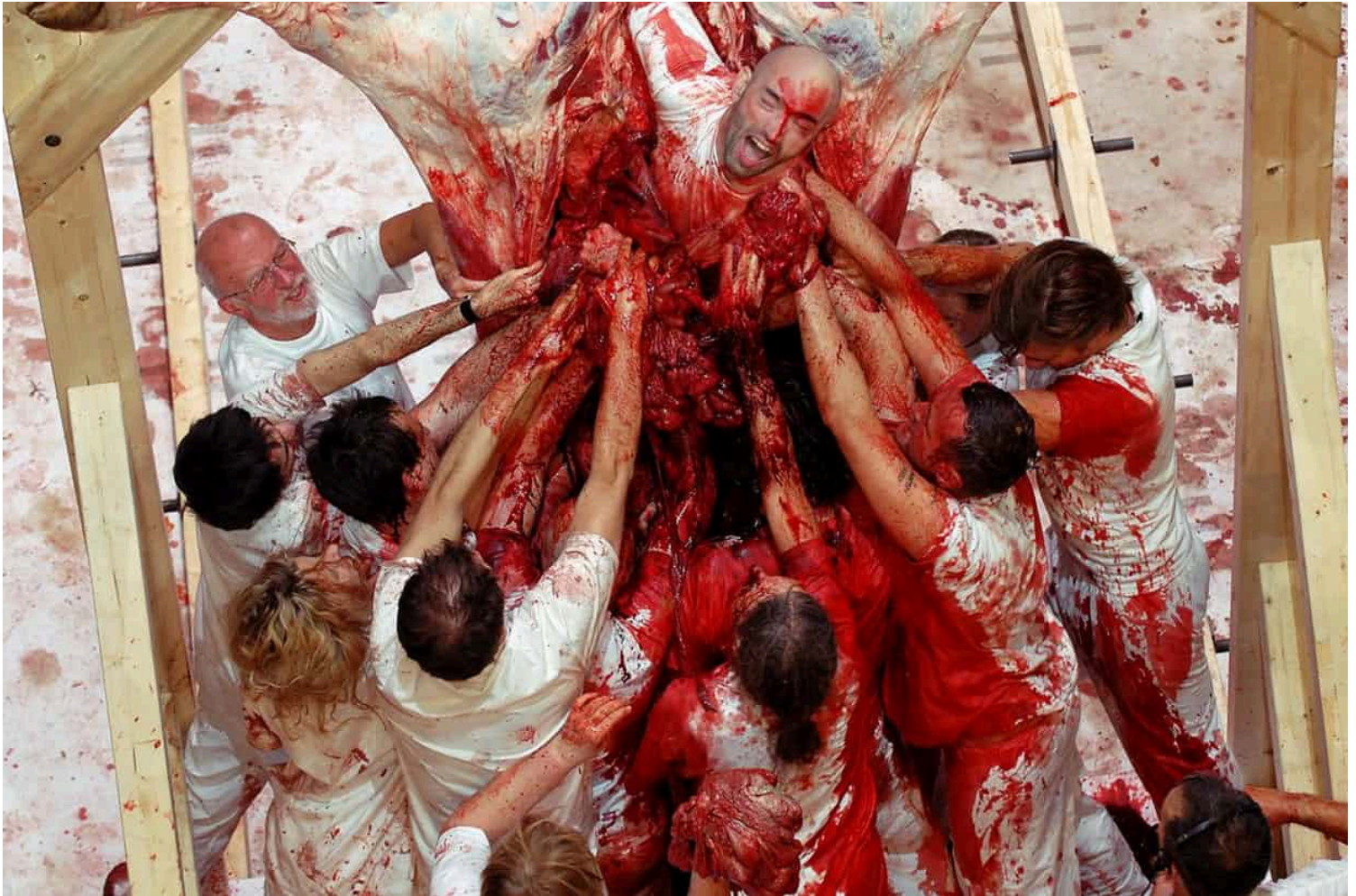


Bloody Dark Mofo artwork using slaughtered bull 'crosses the line', RSPCA says

Centrepiece of performance created by Austria's Hermann Nitsch is a beast killed at a local abattoir then taken to the site



A scene from Hermann Nitsch's artwork. The RSPCA has accused Dark Mofo of trying to be controversial. Photograph: Hermann Nitsch/Dark Mofo

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A bloody art installation involving a slaughtered bull is disrespectful to the animals involved and “tap dances across the line” of what is acceptable even for a modern art museum, the head of RSPCA Tasmania has said.

The artwork by the Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch will be performed in a warehouse at Hobart's Macquarie Point as part of the Dark Mofo festival put on by the Museum of Old and New Art in Tasmania in June.

According to Dark Mofo's creative director, Leigh Carmichael, the three-hour performance called 150.Action will involve "meat, fish, fruit and blood, live performers and an orchestra" and entry will be restricted to people over 18 years of age, "due to the difficult nature and themes of the work".

"Firstly, and most importantly, there will not be a live animal slaughtered as part of any Dark Mofo performance," Carmichael said. The centrepiece of the performance is a bull that will be humanely slaughtered at a local abattoir and taken to the site.

Pagan overtones have been central to the two-week long midwinter festival since it began in 2013, but the 500 litres of blood required for Nitsch's performance are a new extreme.

It has already drawn criticism from animal rights activists and 2,000 people have signed a petition by Animal Liberation Tasmania calling for the Hobart city council to ban the performance.

RSPCA Tasmania's general manager, Peter West, said that unlike some other animal rights groups, the RSPCA did not object to an animal that was bred for slaughter being killed humanely and in accordance with Australian standards.

"I think the difficulty we have is the respect shown to the animal with this action, that's the challenge that we have with this particular artwork," he told Guardian Australia. "It's clearly not respectful to the beast and even though it has been humanely and respectfully dispatched, what happens after that is anything but respectful."

West, who was previously the deputy director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, said Dark Mofo had been a "godsend" to Hobart but Nitsch's work crossed a line.

"I consider myself to be a fairly liberal person but I don't find there to be anything redeeming about this at all," he said.

"We can wrap it up in all sorts of art-speak but at the end of the day it's not showing respect and really this just seems like Dark Mofo is looking to be controversial and looking for some hype to get free media."

Carmichael defended the work on ABC radio, saying Mona would "not shy away from presenting work that challenges us to consider the ethical implications of our actions both today, and in the past".

"Some artists use paint, he uses blood and meat," he said. "It is pretty powerful stuff, it is confronting, and it certainly makes me question my own ethical take on the work.

"We do deal with strong themes and tough issues and controversial issues from time to time and I guess this is one of those and I am not entirely surprised by the reaction."

Mona's founder David Walsh, who dedicated his world-renowned art gallery to the themes of sex and death, called 78-year-old Nitsch a "fat, demented sloth, a good bloke, and in my opinion, a great social artist using sordid spectacle to make a point that no amount of Facebook frivolity will ever drive home".

Walsh told News Corp that he was "not an anti-meat missionary - I am simply seeking an

engagement with its nature.

“I don’t expect those repulsed by Nitsch’s ritual to change their habits, but I do wonder at the moral hypocrisy of those who oppose cultural killing of minke whales (a sustainable resource and a relatively stupid large beast), but will still eat bacon.”

Nitsch began his Orgien Mysterien Theater series in the 1960s, in which young spectators, dressed in white, were encouraged to slaughter animals, handle entrails and bathe in blood as part of an “aesthetic tableaux beautifying the horror of death, before the whole ordeal celebrates life with the eating of the animals at a feast towards the end”.

He has been arrested three times for his art and has hosted the performances at Prinzendorf Castle, which is also his home, for more than 40 years.

Nitsch intends that the meat used in his Dark Mofo performance be eaten after the event too, but Mona is still working out how to comply with Australian health and safety regulations.

Carmichael said Nitsch’s work was “as relevant today as it was when it was first performed in Vienna in 1962”.

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