

Sex

Things I Learned Watching People Tear a Bull Apart

By Julian Morgans

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On Saturday afternoon, between the hours of 12 PM and 3 PM, a bunch of people in Hobart tore the organs out of a dead bull and flung them about a shed in a sort of ritualistic playfight. This was art, by a 78-year-old Austrian guy named Hermann Nitsch, who is known around the world for this brand of sexually charged, blood soaked crucifixion theatre. *150.Action*, as the piece is called, marked the 150th time Nitsch has staged this particular “acti

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internationally. But this is the first time it's come to Tasmania. And many Tasmanians weren't thrilled.

By 10 AM on performance day, there were protesters out the front—members of Animal Liberation Tasmania picketing the entrance and holding up mirrors so the ever-growing line of attendees could see themselves. Despite this, Mona was unapologetic about Nitsch and his macabre performance. “We will not shy away from presenting work that challenges us to consider the ethical implications of our actions both today, and in the past,” the museum’s creative director Leigh Carmichael told the local paper.

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Standing in line, I wasn't sure how I felt. I'm a vegetarian so I feel like I got it. But then there was the fact that this bull was raised and slaughtered by the meat industry. It was a doomed beast from the start, which is the whole point according to Nitsch. As the artist said in 2015: “I am a dramatist and a dramatist has to work with the tragic, with death. I try to show the death of

animals, the slaughtering of animals. Everybody who knows me knows that I am an animal protector. From my point of view factory farming is the biggest crime in our society.”

So I went along to learn about tragedy and death.



We filed into a big shed to wait and start drinking. I wandered around asking people why they'd come. It seemed an even split between “I don't know” and “I have strong and obsessive reasons.”



This is Rakini Devi. She's doing her PhD on the role of ritualism in secular society, and she'd come down from Wollongong just to see the show. To her it was about exploring the crossover between her Hindu background in which "religious ritual is part of everyday life" and her Australian home, "where it's not." For Rakini, the show seemed less about death for meat, and more about death for sacrifice.



Eventually, we were ushered over into another cavernous port building and gathered around a white runway. Then an old man looking like George R R Martin hobbled into a seat at the front. This was Hermann Nitsch. Mona's owner and money maker was there too, David Walsh. The smell of blood and fish was strong.



The show went like this: An older guy would start by blowing a whistle, and then they'd carry out someone naked on a stretcher, pour blood down their throat, and then carry them away. This happened a few times, until another guy started cutting open fish on a table and pouring blood over them, followed by milk; followed by more blood. Everyone wore white. A brass orchestra honked long, single notes.



This isn't the photo I really wanted, but I wasn't allowed to take my own. What I wanted was a photo of David Walsh not giving a fuck about getting blood on his shoes. It was amazing. See there was this guy who was sprinting around the runway, drizzling blood over the floor. Everyone else stood back to let the blood-drizzler past, but David—who had front row—just stood there looking bemused as blood splattered over his Nikes (iridescent Free Run 5.0s) and his pants (jeans, dad-style).



After this they started putting naked people on crosses and pouring more blood on them. Nearly two hours in, I started feeling hungry. I hadn't had breakfast, just hot toddies, and all this blood and nudity was working. I wanted to eat some kind of meaty sandwich, and I wouldn't have turned down an orgy.

Actually, the fact I was got hungry was my only criticism of the show. See, Hermann Nitsch was clearly reaching for provocation by jabbing at some very familiar buttons, and it's weird how everyone still gets excited about the same stuff. Why are we *still* offended by death, sex, and religion? We live with those thing twisted together all the time. So that's a complaint about people, but also also a complaint about art. Because controversial art always comes with the same handful of ingredients, in no particular order:

- Blood
- Crying
- Boobs
- Weird music
- Crosses
- Random muttering

- Poo
- Chocolate syrup that looks like poo
- Nazis
- Screaming
- Strobe lights
- Dutch people

Actually, again, that's more a complaint about people, because controversial art can only use ingredients society finds controversial. So come on everyone, go eat a salmon bagel while getting a rim job. The geometric symmetry is divine and you won't know yourself.



Finally, *finally*, they brought out the bull. First they tore out all its organs (which were also mixed in with fruit, and then they rubbed all the organs around in a big, fun pile, and then started rubbing the organs over each each which made the whole thing look like a Spanish tomato fight with subtle overtones of Running of the Bulls. The smell was overpowering by this point, and a lot of the audience looked sick. Actually, watching the audience was fantastic. You could play spot the serial killer.



Finally, after all that, I left with great haste to go find a reuben sandwich. I had developed a real lust for meat, even though it's been a few years since I'd eaten it. And the reuben came out with lots of life-giving milk rendered as molten cheese, and pastrami encased in an aura of death. It was incredibly satisfying, but it was a special occasion and I won't do it again for a while. Because seriously you guys, factory farming is fucked. And I think... or I'm pretty sure, that's what I learned.

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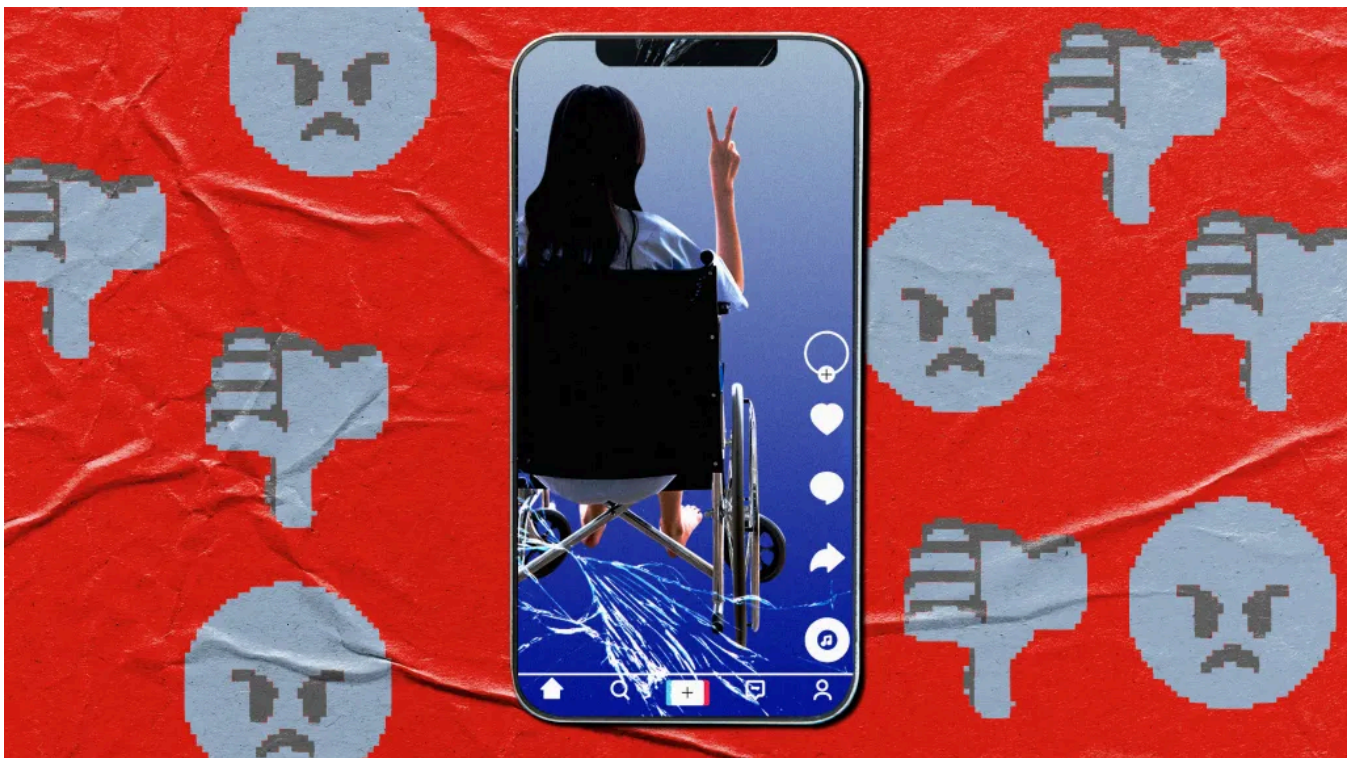
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