

HYPERALLERGIC

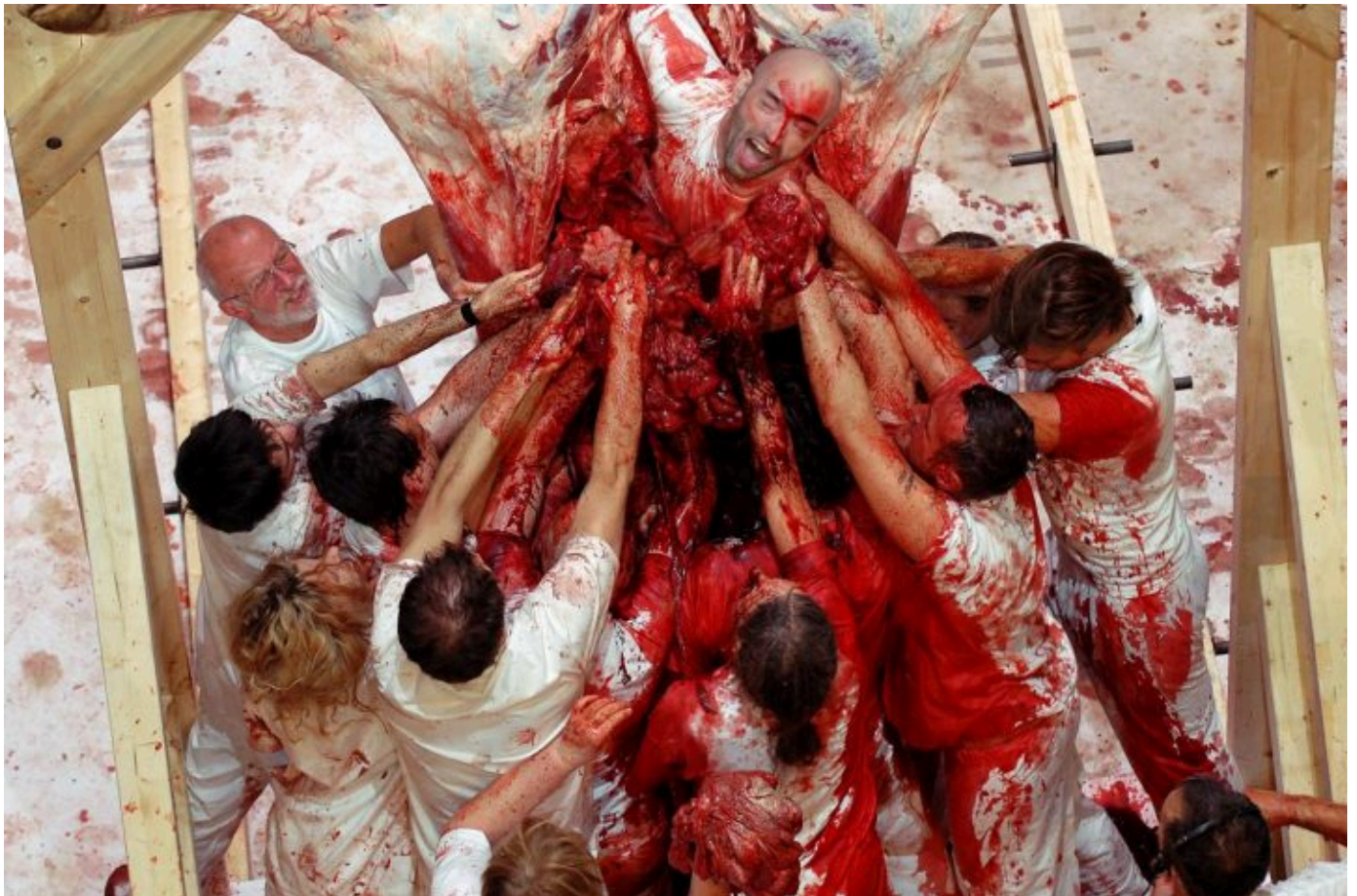
In Brief

Australians Have Beef with Hermann Nitsch Performance Involving Bull Carcass [UPDATED]

The Viennese Actionist's latest bloody ritual is set to take place in Hobart, but an animal rights group and a local politician are calling for its cancellation.



Claire Voon April 19, 2017



Hermann Nitsch, “135.Action part 2” at the Havana Biennial (photo © Fondazione Morra, courtesy Museum of Old and New Art)

A forthcoming performance by [Hermann Nitsch](#) in Australia that involves 500 liters of blood and the remains of one freshly slaughtered bull may be cancelled following protests by an animal rights group. As Tasmanian daily *The Mercury* [reported](#), [Animal Liberation Tasmania](#) has called for the removal of the Austrian artist's “[150.Action](#)” from the lineup of Dark Mofo, an annual arts and culture festival presented by the [Museum of Old and New Art](#) (MONA). Described as “a bloody, sacrificial ritual” — the specialty of the 78-year-old Viennese Actionist

— the three-hour performance is set to premiere on June 17, accompanied by an installation. As its title relays, it would be the artist’s 150th staging of such a ritual — and not the first to draw outrage.



“We are opposed to this event, which trivializes the slaughter of animals for human usage, and condemns a sentient being to death in the pursuit of artistic endeavors,” the protestors [write](#) in their Change.org petition, which had collected over 10,000 signatures as of press time. The petition was delivered to Lord Mayor of Hobart Sue Hickey, who is now planning to speak to Premier of Tasmania Will Hodgman to prevent the performance from occurring. The Tasmanian government is [funding Dark Mofo](#) at least through 2021, providing it with an annual budget of 2.1 million AUD (~1.6 million USD).

“I don’t know when art ceases to be art, when it crosses that line and becomes something really perverse, but I think we’re very close to that mark now,” Hickey told *The Mercury*.

“I’m a great champion of Mofo — they’ve

Hermann Nitsch (photo courtesy the artist)

really stretched our boundaries and tested our senses and put Tasmania on the map — but they’re not God unto themselves and they should be pulled up when they cross that line.”

In a press release, Dark Mofo’s creative director, Leigh Carmichael, clarified that no living animal will be slaughtered as part of the performance; rather, a carcass will be sourced locally, from a site that kills animals “humanely, adhering to Australian standards,” he wrote.

“The Hermann Nitsch work in question uses meat, fish, fruit and blood, live performers and an orchestra as part of the performance,” Carmichael stated. “The animal to be used is specifically on the market for slaughter ... It is the artist’s intention that the meat be eaten after the event, and we are working through addressing the health and safety regulations to achieve this outcome.”



Hermann Nitsch, "135.Action part 2" at the Havana Biennial (photo © Fondazione Morra, courtesy Museum of Old and New Art)

Also chiming in on the controversy, in a [long rant](#) on MONA's website, is the museum's founder, David Walsh, who noted that he still hasn't decided whether "150.Action" is justified.

"For my purposes, it is good art," Walsh wrote. "I believe that it has already spiked a conversation ... about the appropriateness of slaughter and Dark Mofo hasn't even happened yet. That isn't what the artist intends, but Mona has a history of repurposing art to serve its own psychological or political purpose.

"If Nitsch's performance is wrong (and I've been unable to find anything but moral equivalence arguments to suggest that it might be ok), get out there and stop it," he adds. "And you also should have a crack at getting your own 'house in order' (as the Bible says). You should, of course, stop eating meat, and rapacious crops, and you should stop doing anything that has cost (economic, social or environmental)."

Unless the Tasmanian Government decides to intervene, it seems the bloodbath will proceed, communal meat eating and all. Nitsch's work has been called off once before: in 2015, the Museo Jumex cancelled what would have been his first-ever exhibition in Mexico, citing "an administrative situation," as Hyperallergic's Matt Stromberg [reported](#). Many suspected that the pressure came from the thousands of people who signed an online petition asking the museum to abandon the show.

Update, 4/27: The organizers of Dark Mofo have confirmed that the planned performance of Hermann Nitsch’s “150.Action” will go ahead as planned. ““We understand why the community outrage has been so passionate,” Dark Mofo Creative Director Leigh Carmichael said in a statement. “The Hermann Nitsch “150.Action” will take place as scheduled on Saturday 17 June. The artist will appear in conversation the following day at Federation Concert Hall. Tickets will be available online from Friday 5 May. We urge all Tasmanians, both for and against this work, to show respect to each other as we discuss the ethical implications of this project.”
