

## Dark Mofo's 'bloody, sacrificial ritual' blasted by animal rights group

ABC Radio Hobart By Rhiannon Shine and James Dunlevie

Updated Wed 19 Apr 2017, 6:53am

**Assurances an animal will be "humanely" slaughtered before its carcass is used as the centrepiece of a confronting art performance do not alleviate concerns, a Tasmanian animal rights group says.**

**WARNING: THIS STORY CONTAINS GRAPHIC CONTENT.**

The three-hour '150 Action' show, directed by 78-year-old Hermann Nitsch, is described as "a bloody, sacrificial ritual performed by the patriarch of Viennese Actionism, his devoted disciples and an orchestra" and is set to take place in June as part of the Dark Mofo festival, produced by Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA).

MONA warns patrons: "Please note, this work contains distressing imagery, nudity and strong adult themes, and is not suitable for children. Parental discretion is strongly advised".

Dark Mofo creative director Leigh Carmichael told ABC Radio Hobart media reports of the live slaughter of an animal as part of the event were incorrect, but said an animal would be "slaughtered humanely before the performance".

Mr Carmichael said the blood and meat would be sourced locally.

"We will be using the carcass, the live slaughter is not what will happen," he said.

He said the over-18, non-ticketed "installation" would be held "in a shed" at Hobart's Macquarie Point, near the CBD.

"It will be intense ... I am sure it will be confronting, but I think it is something that will need to be experienced," he said.

"Some artists use paint, he (Nitsch) uses blood and meat. 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."



**PHOTO:** Hermann Nitsch's performances are almost always bloody affairs. (Supplied: ABC ARTE)

**RELATED STORY:** Dark Mofo winter festival puts a fire in Hobart's belly

**RELATED STORY:** Dark MoFo piece censored by art school that commissioned it

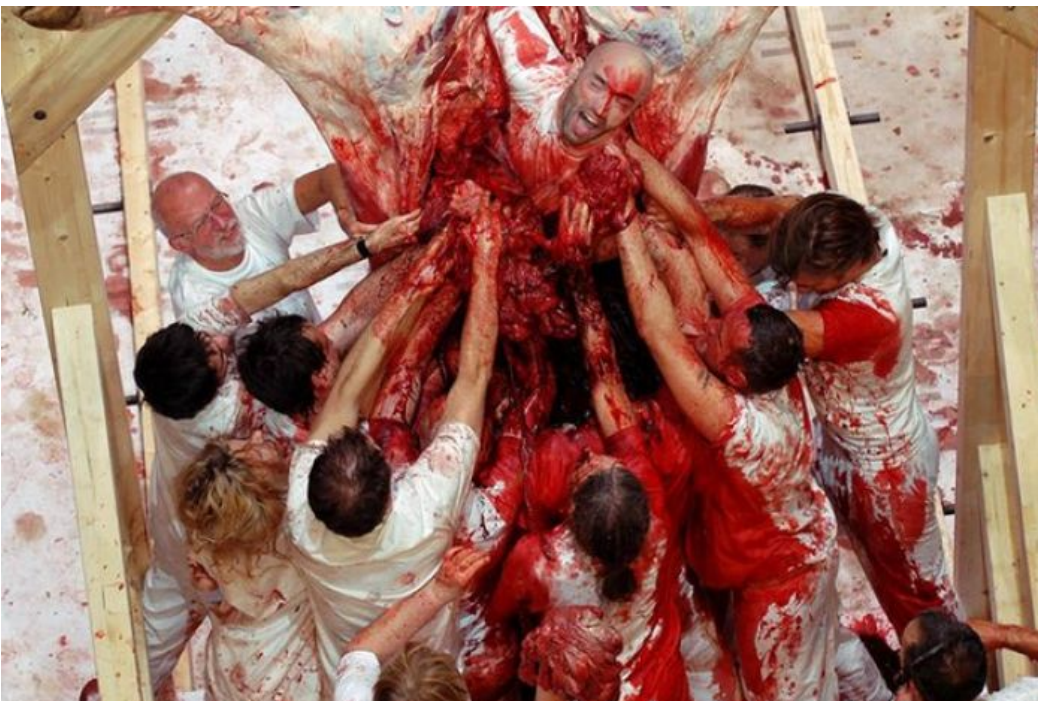
**RELATED STORY:** Dark Mofo a success the state wants to leverage off

**RELATED STORY:** Nude swimmers dash and splash in cheeky end to winter festival

**MAP:** Hobart 7000



**PHOTO:** The Tasmanian general public have not warmed to Nitsch's oeuvre. (Supplied: www.nitsch.org)



**PHOTO:** "Some use paint, he (Nitsch) uses blood and meat," explained Dark Mofo's creative director. (Supplied: Georg Soulek/Hermann Nitsch/Dark Mofo)

Mr Carmichael said there was an online callout for local "athletic performers aged 18-35, comfortable with blood and gore" to be paid to perform in the show, which in the past involved people naked or dressed in white clothing.

"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," he said.

Mr Carmichael said since its inception in 2013, Dark Mofo had been "exploring ancient ritual and ceremony", citing Nitsch as a "highly regarded international artist who has been presenting variations of this work for five decades".

"We understand that his work will be confronting and difficult, but 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," he said.

Nitsch's artworks and performances have featured recurrent themes of blood and gore, nudity, violence, religion and rituals, with the artist stating his previous work resulted in "several court trials and three prison terms".



**PHOTO:** Leigh Carmichael said "exploring ancient ritual and ceremony" is what Dark Mofo is all about. (ABC News: Gregor Salmon)

## 'Slaughter in the name of art' condemned

Animal Liberation spokeswoman Kristy Alger said the group opposed the performance because it "trivialised the nature of slaughter".

"In Australia last year nearly 700 million land animals were slaughtered in Australian slaughter houses," she said.

"Now we have this animal adding to that number for something so trivial as what people think is art.

"It is just another facet of animal exploitation that we are very much opposed to."

Ms Alger said Mr Carmichael's assertion the animal would be "humanely" slaughtered before the show was no comfort.



**PHOTO:** A promotional image for Nitsch's Dark Mofo show. (Supplied: Museum of Old and New Art)

"As far as we are aware, Hermann Nitsch has not actually slaughtered a live animal at an art event since the mid-1990s," she said.

"However we do not agree with the notion that there is such a thing as humane slaughter. You cannot humanely kill someone who does not want to die.

"We are opposed to the notion that this animal will have to go through a slaughterhouse, endure stunning which often fails, all in the name of art. It is so unnecessary."

About 4,000 people have signed an online petition launched on Wednesday morning by Animal Liberation Tasmania calling for Hobart City Council to intervene.

"Should this event be permitted to occur it will reflect badly on the core values and image this city strives to uphold," the petition states.



**PHOTO:** Local volunteers have been invited to take part in the performance. (Supplied: Museum of Old and New Art)

## MONA bosses meat confession

MONA's owner David Walsh described Nitsch as 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", News Corp reported.

"I marvel (and despair) at the scale of the slaughter and yet I feed one of my daughters meat," Mr Walsh said.

"I'm therefore 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.

"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."





**PHOTO:** David Walsh on Nitsch: "A fat, demented sloth, a good bloke". (Supplied: Museum of Old and New Art)

## 'Just paint a picture like everyone else'

Early reaction to the show was largely negative, as the public vented their views about the event on the ABC Hobart Facebook page.

Michelle Sampson said: "Animals should not be killed for art. Who enjoys that?"

"Disgusting and wrong in my opinion. Sounds like a way of getting himself attention," wrote Danielle Ross Walls.

"What the hell?! That is so wrong," complained Rhiannon O'Donnell.

Penelope Ward implored Nitsch to "just paint a picture like everyone else".

"I'm pretty open-minded and I know MOFO like to push the boundaries but I think this is a push too far ... this is not art, it's sick," wrote Viv Sargent.

Catherine Baillie questioned the direction art in general was heading in.

"Seems to me art is just a big fat wank these days."

Rod Mason gave the artist some advice.

"Can't he just attach some paint brushes to the cow's legs and let it wander around on a big piece of paper?"

Jo Bain gave her verdict: "Sick. Sorry. Not Art."

But Nicholas Harper asked: "Why would it be any different than killing millions of cows for food?"

Darielle Bydegrees called on outraged people to "connect the dots".

"Great to see so many people objecting to the slaughter spectacle of an animal in the name of 'Art'," she said.



**PHOTO:** Hermann Nitsch has used blood and gore in his work for decades. (Supplied: Harald Peki)

"Hopefully a few of you will connect the dots and expand your disgust to include other more normalised and culturally-sanctioned versions of animal cruelty and sacrifice, which is in my opinion the sole redeeming function of this performance."

**Topics:** animal-welfare, performance-art, contemporary-art, hobart-7000

*First posted Wed 19 Apr 2017, 1:28am*

Contact Rhiannon Shine