

## MONA's David Walsh defends 'slaughter' art show, says public outrage good for business, Tas economy

ABC Radio Hobart By James Dunlevie

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PHOTO: MONA founder David Walsh, as pictured on his museum's website. (Supplied: Museum of Old and New Art)

**David Walsh, millionaire founder of Tasmania's acclaimed Museum of Old and New Art, responds to the controversy surrounding an upcoming performance featuring a freshly slaughtered bull by saying that outrage is good for business and the public's morbid fascination with "disaster tourism" is a benefit to the economy.**

Walsh suggested the backlash to a three-hour "installation" directed by Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch, titled 150 Action, had served his purposes and "spiked a conversation" about meat.

The work is described by MONA 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 MONA's Dark Mofo festival.

**Warning: this story contains graphic content**

Walsh, 56, took to social media after a public backlash over the use of the animal widened, with an Animal Liberation Tasmania online petition against the event garnering almost 12,500 signatures.

Walsh, whose gallery has exhibited a "suicide machine" invented by voluntary euthanasia campaigner Dr Philip Nitschke, and other controversial works, said he wanted the audience to "ponder why meat for food is OK but meat for ritual or entertainment isn't", and suggested "disaster tourism" was good for the state economy.

In a blog post, published on Wednesday, he wrote: "Imagine I, David Walsh, go down into the gallery, kill someone at random, and call it art. A lovely ironic way to do this would be to put the suicide machine on display, but make it work. My defence would be: It's a work of art — a lesson in the complex consequences of immorality.

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"What would happen to the Tasmanian economy? My guess is MONA would go from being well known globally to being a household word. Disaster tourism would drive MONA to the top of the charts, and Tasmania's economy would go along for the ride.

"I'd see the spectacular increase in dark tourism from my prison cell, of course. And, as they dragged me away, you would probably hear me shouting something about the greater good ... I might well end up in the cell next to Martin Bryant."

Nitsch, whom Walsh described as a "fat, demented sloth, a good bloke, and in my opinion, a great social artist", has used blood and animal entrails to explore the themes of ritual and sacrifice in his performance works for decades.

The Dark Mofo show will be Nitsch's first performance in Australia.



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

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If you or anyone you know needs help:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
  - Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
  - MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
  - Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
  - Beyond Blue on 1300 22 46 36
  - Headspace on 1800 650 890
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**PHOTO:** "Some use paint, he (Nitsch) uses blood and meat," explained Dark Mofo's creative director. (Supplied: Georg Soulek/Hermann Nitsch/Dark Mofo)

Walsh, who built MONA from the proceeds of his gambling operation, added: "I still don't know whether Nitsch's performance is justified."

But he challenged its opponents to "get out there and stop it".

"Recently, there has been a rising tide of opposition to a Hermann Nitsch project planned for Dark Mofo. He uses a bull marked for slaughter to ritualistically cover a bunch of people in blood ... I expect the tide to keep rising," he said.

"If Nitsch's performance is wrong ... get out there and stop it. It won't be a disaster for Tassie, since it'll just generate a few headlines and a bunch of Facebook discussion.

"But stopping Nitsch won't stop me doing the sort of self-serving, status-enhancing, biologically bound good that I do through MONA. You should be protesting that, too.

"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). And you should take all the cash you squander and spend it buying mosquito nets, or some other efficient life-saving interventions.

"For, as the Bible also says, 'why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?'"

Walsh thanked one critic of the show by name, and said her opposition had resulted in "spiking a conversation ... about the appropriateness of slaughter and Dark Mofo hasn't even happened yet".



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

"That isn't what the artist intends, but MONA has a history of repurposing art to serve its own psychological or political purpose," he wrote.

Walsh said even if Nitsch's performance at Dark Mofo was scrapped, he stood to benefit financially.



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

## Mayor likens performance to 'snuff movie'

Lord Mayor Sue Hickey, who has acknowledged Walsh had reinvigorated the Tasmanian economy, described the show as "brutal" and "just sick".

"He (Walsh) has always said he wants to push our buttons and challenge us, well I think (with this performance) we are pushing toilet buttons and vomiting — this is really one step to far," she told ABC Radio Hobart today.

"These are naked women and naked men on slabs pretending to be dead, and they have got animal blood pouring out of their vaginas. Is that art?"

"If we allowed people to pay for tickets and go to a snuff movie where people are murdered for the sake of art, is that acceptable?"

"I am not being hypocritical. This is brutal. It is just sick."

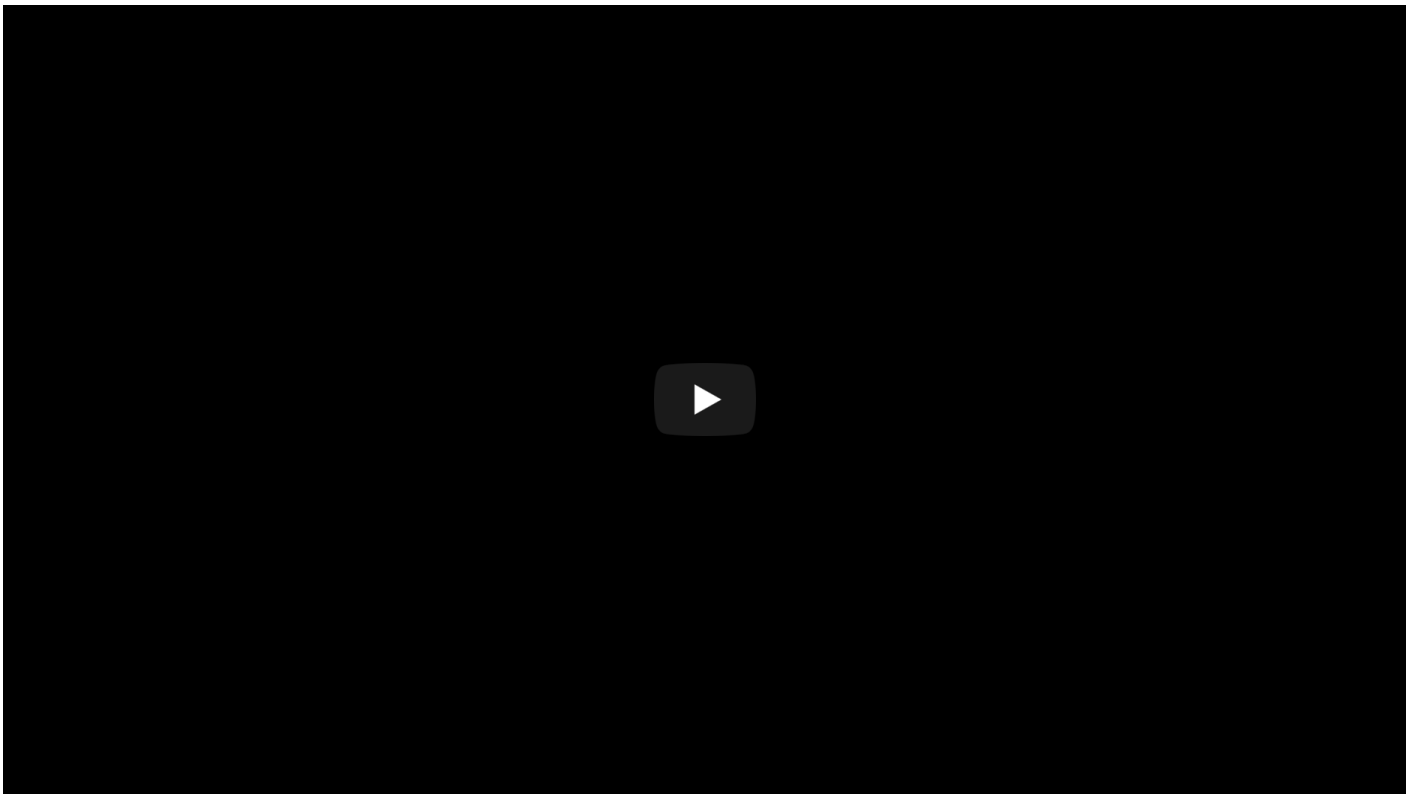
"This is emulating violence to women; (in the performance) they have got their throats pretending to be slashed and blood coming from their private parts."

Yesterday, Alderman Hickey said she had signed the online petition which called for council to "cancel" the show and said she would investigate council's options, including sponsorship of Dark Mofo.

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) has also put its weight behind calls to cancel the event.

ACL Tasmanian director Mark Brown condemned the show, calling it "horrific" and "debauched", and called on the State Government to withdraw its financial support.

"If MONA want to put on shows like this, they should do so with without State Government partnership and taxpayers' money," he said.



**YOUTUBE:** David Walsh pointed to this example of Hermann Nitsch's work - WARNING: CONTENT MAY CAUSE DISTRESS

**Topics:** animal-welfare, performance-art, contemporary-art, social-media, arts-and-entertainment, local-government, tas

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