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JUNE 18 2017

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Dark Mofo: Hermann Nitsch's arty Hobart bloodbath not cowed by animal rights protesters

Hannah Francis

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Naked bodies adorned with offal and drenched in blood; a frenzied crowd tearing at the bloodied insides of a cow carcass with their bare hands. Sound like a fun weekend out?

On Saturday Austrian "Aktionism" artist Hermann Nitsch and a team of performers staged a controversial "action" in Hobart as part of the annual Dark Mofo festival.



Hermann Nitsch and a team of performers staged their controversial 'action'. Photo: Dark Mofo/Lusy Productions

Organisers had anticipated the event – featuring a cow carcass and 500 litres of animal blood – would be disrupted by animal rights activists.

But the decision to cancel and then reallocate tickets to the free event appeared to have thwarted their efforts.

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Despite a 20,000-strong petition calling for the event to be shut down only about 50 protesters appeared at the entrance to the event. Any who may have made it inside failed to make a peep.

Meanwhile the line for those who had booked tickets stretched around the block.

While protesters held up pictures of cute cows and mirrors – perhaps inviting punters to take a good, hard look at themselves – those at the centre of the art couldn't see a thing.



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In a massive shed at Hobart's docks, one by one blindfolded performers – some naked, some clothed in white robes – were brought to a space covered in white.



Participants in a Hermann Nitsch performance art piece at Burgtheater in 2005. Photo: Moorilla Gallery

Some of them were prostrate on stretchers; others were strung up like Jesus on the cross.

They stayed motionless as litres and litres of sticky, dark blood, alternating with water and a creamy coloured liquid, was poured into their mouths and on their bodies.

Then there was the cow carcass – headless, skinned and footless – strung up with its hind legs wide open and half a dozen men pulling at the sides of its gutted stomach.

It was all backed by an eerie soundtrack of discordant brass and what could only be described as a demented church organ.

"I'd like to know what it all



means," one punter said.

Nitsch – who at nearly 80 has been staging these events for well over half a century – silently looked on in a chair, giving the occasional direction or nod of approval.

Nitsch has said he identifies as an animal rights activist himself, having developed his works in reaction to the atrocious sacrifice of lives during World War II.

The sheer amount of blood spilled on stage at 150.Action was confronting, standing for the three hours of ritualistic repetition a hard slog.

Even some of the performers – blood smeared on their faces, offal wedged in their hair – appeared bewildered at times.

Cartoon: Matt Golding



Hermann Nitsch. Photo: Moorilla Gallery

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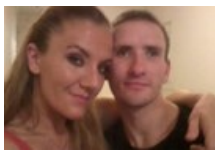
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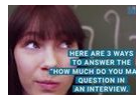
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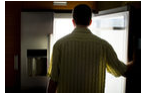
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