
Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_14

Recommended Citation

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education: National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996) at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Briefing Book: National Endowment for the Arts (1994) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu.
A Bloody Good Show?

Over the years the federal arts agency has enthusiastically supported the work of the Walker. In the last three years, the museum received more than $1 million from the NEA. Last year it received $104,000 for its performance arts programs and museum officials say only about $150 went to the Athey performance. The artist declined to say what fee he had received, but general admission was $10.

Athey says he knows his work isn't for everyone and says the performance is meant to evoke strong reactions. "I have been doing ornate cutting for a few years. It is very common for people who do cutting to do a print. I believe it's a way of connecting the performance to the audience," said Athey, the assistant to the editor at L.A. Weekly.

He said, "I'm HIV-positive and healthy... People always leave. They have come out of curiosity. They can't handle the live blood and live pain."

As part of its mission, the Walker presents both acknowledged masters and experimental artists in 400 annual events. "We strive for a balanced and inclusive program and we feel it is our responsibility to present a diversity of artistic voices," said Kathy Halbreich, the museum's director. In 1963, she recalled, the museum was roundly criticized for presenting Merce Cunningham and John Cage who were called "anarchists" by the local media. Halbreich said the museum had received 50 telephone calls and a number of letters over Athey's performance, reflecting that "the issues are quite confused in people's minds."

A press release on Athey described his body as his canvas and said "when pierced and covered with his own blood [he] is evocative of Saint Sebastian. Medical paraphernalia and bondage and discipline toys and techniques are also used in the performance. Due to the nature of this material, viewer discretion is advised."

John Killacky, the curator of performing arts at the Walker, said Athey's performance "raises the questions we all share about HIV, the fear and the anxiety." After the scarification, which Athey and Killacky tied to African traditions, the pattern was blotted on towels and then clipped to a clothesline. "They were raised slowly to the top of the ceiling and over the audience's head," said Killacky. He estimated that the prints were never less than eight feet above the audience.