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Analyzing Athey's art

The Walker Art Center-sponsored show of Ron Athey (Star Tribune, March 24) is a symptom of a sick society, where more and more of "new" and the outrageous has to be done in the name of art. Creativity, beauty and quality is what makes art Art — not degenerate, sadistic machinations. Tax money is too valuable to be used on "art" that makes people nauseous, faint and rush for the door.

Kathryn Matson, Golden Valley.

In the March 24 article describing a Walker Art Center blood-letting performance, one of the performance spokespeople compared this celebration of mutilation to Christ's crucifixion. This profaned the most sacred sacrifice of my Lord and Savior. In my hurt, I am driven to pray for that spokesperson by using the prayer of Jesus Himself. The first time He was mocked and crucified by the wise ones of His day, He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The Rev. Dave R. Garwick, Christ Lutheran Church, Maple Plain.

It has been more than three weeks since I saw Ron Athey's moving performance at Patrick's Cabaret. To me his show was influenced by Asian ritual and culture. He wasn't just piercing his body for the fun of it; each needle represented his pain and agony pinching on his life and his health. It was so challenging for the audience to witness "death" and "after death."

As an Asian and Buddhist I found that Athey's piece indirectly put me closer to the Buddha's teachings once again. Death is just a state you have to pass through; the body is not yours, but the spirit stays with you forever. I grew up in Asia, where ceremony and ritual were a part of our daily life. The ceremony's dates are always written in the calendar just like any holiday here. To me, Athey's piece wasn't shocking or disgusting; it was powerful, real and enlightening. I wasn't afraid the blood would come in direct contact with me. The cut and the blood are necessary for Ron to make his case about AIDS, life and death, and the show was handled professionally. Furthermore, people weren't knocking over chairs to get out. They could leave anytime: Some left at the beginning, some in the middle and most people stayed to the end for the discussion.

I lived in Asia for 25 years and New York for eight years. Mary Abbe's front-page article reinforced my belief that there is a lack of diversity in Minnesota, and an ignorance about ritual and culture. Using people's fear of contacting disease is old-fashioned, tacky and narrow-minded. Athey's piece is one of the most exciting and thought-provoking performances I've seen since coming to Minneapolis two years ago.

Nicky Tamrong, Minneapolis.