

Blood and Guts Artist at Stella, Over 21s Only

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Hermann Nitsch at the opening of his exhibit, "Orgy Mystery Theater." Visitors can watch videos of the theater's performances. Not for the weak of heart.

Hermann Nitsch has worked in blood and guts and shock for close to 50 years. Considered one of the founders of the Viennese "actionism" movement, which produced in-your-face performance art in the 1960s that shocked with its nudity, violence and rejection of society, Nitsch's work is now on show at Stella Art Foundation's gallery.

Visitors can see a mix of paintings, videos and photographs. In one, blood flows down a victim's shirt as a crowd celebrates around, but then with one move, the observer sees that this bloody ritual is actually taking place in a theater and the music for this violent orgy is being played by musicians dressed in tails in the orchestra pit.

At the start of his career, Nitsch was once sent to jail for two weeks and even banned from working as an artist for six months for offending religious sensibilities. Today, he is a living

legend in the Austrian art world — the exhibition is part-funded by the Austrian Cultural Forum Moscow — and lives in a castle where the latest performances of his Orgy Mystery Theater take place.

Nitsch has created 130 of his Orgy Mystery Theater's actions. The 100th, "Six Day Play," involved 1,000 liters of blood, three bulls — slaughtered during the performance — and 13,000 liters of wine in a show that itself lasted six days at his castle.

Visitors to the exhibit have to be at least 21 years old, and a sign warns that parts of the show may "provoke aesthetic and emotional protest."

"The theatrical effect does not mean that it is false. The Nitsch theater is utterly naturalistic and not every viewer will have the strength or the desire to watch it to the end. The main differences between the bloody shows of Nitsch from the scenes of violence that you see in contemporary cinema is that the artist does not joke with blood. All that he creates is serious and meaningful," wrote Vedomosti critic Olga Kabanova.

The exhibition, however, has been met with skepticism in some quarters.

"It is nothing but an image," a critic for the Izvestia newspaper wrote, discussing the illusion of violence that Nitsch creates with his work. "But how repulsive it is! Almost as repulsive as the author intended it to be."

"Hermann Nitsch. Das Orgien Mysterien Theater" runs till Nov. 14 at Stella Art on Skaryatinsky, 7 Skaryatinsky Pereulok. Metro Barrikadnaya. Tel. 691-3407, www.safmuseum.org.

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