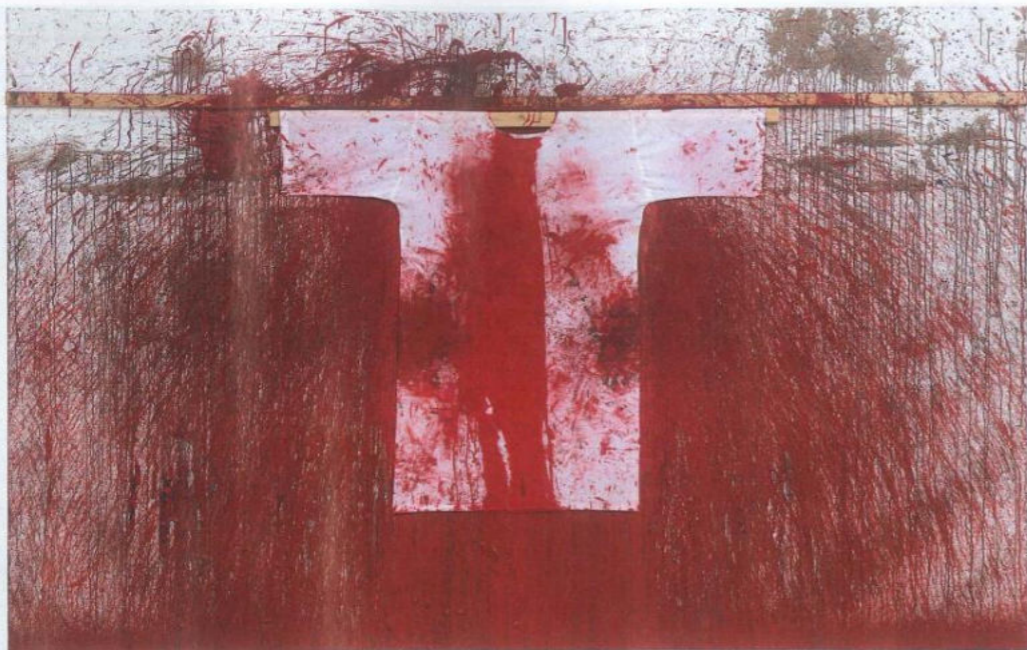


Art

WHAT IS IT...
Gory, blood-spattered ritual art from Austria.

WHY GO...
All that death doesn't half make you feel alive.

→ Massimo De Carlo.
⊖ Bond St. Until May 25.
Free.



Hermann Nitsch

★★★★★

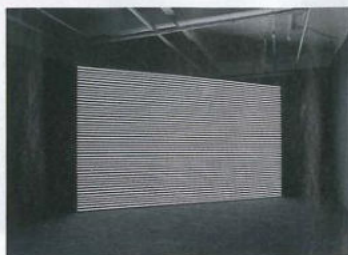
DOWN IN A Mayfair basement, a video shows hands rummaging through burbling innards and blood dripping across naked bodies as an immense, heaving, discordant clash of notes screams out of a church organ. Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch is not a man you want to take home to mum and dad. 'Hi, guys. This is my new boyfriend Hermann – he's a revolutionary European performance artist who mock crucifies people and drenches them in animal blood as part of an ongoing engagement with religion, ritual, philosophy and mysticism! The sex is fab!' Nitsch came to prominence in the '70s as part

of a movement of radical Austrian artists – the actionists – who used their own bodies to create shockingly confrontational art in the wake of WWII. Nitsch has always been the most mystical of them, causing endless controversy with his use of animal carcasses and blood as part of his performance rituals. The video here details one of those events, as part of his 'Das Orgien Mysterien Theater' series: blood, guts, religious iconography, jugs and genitals. You can see how Catholic old Austria may not have been too into it. The rest of the show is made up of massive canvases doused in paint and blood, covered in

priests' chasubles and bloodied smocks. The whole thing feels like a collection of heretical altars, and that's sort of what they are. By ripping into the imagery of Catholicism and squidding through the just-dead entrails of huge beasts, Nitsch actually celebrates life. These are a cult's altars to vitality, to the lived moment, to breathing and bleeding. Nitsch performs these works as a sort of sacrifice to being alive. It's cathartic desecration, it's violence and death. Yes, it's over the top, and it's ridiculous, and it's stomach-turning. But your revulsion is just proof that you too are alive. ■ Eddy Frankel

BEST OF THE BEST

The top exhibitions you have to see in London right now



Marianna Simnett

The installation in Simnett's show combines the sound of hyperventilation with strobing lights and it's awesomely terrifying. → Zabludowicz Collection. ⊖ Chalk Farm. Until Jul 8. Free.



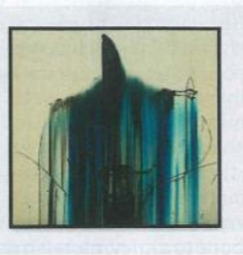
Monet & Architecture

Urgh, yet another Monet show? Yes, but it's a doozy, promise. Get ready for some seriously gorgeous visions of London and Venice. → National Gallery. ⊖ Charing Cross. Until Jul 28. £18, £16 concs.



Anthea Hamilton

The artist behind that giant Turner Prize bum is back in the Tate, this time with a bunch of people dancing around dressed like squashes. Sounds ridiculous, but it's brilliant. → Tate Britain. ⊖ Pimlico. Until Oct 7. Free.



Rachel Howard

The haunting, quiet, minimal paintings in this show are based on the torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib, and they hit you very hard. → Newport Street Gallery. ⊖ Vauxhall. Until May 28. Free.

Marianna Simnett

★★★★★

YOU'RE GOING TO flinch and you're going to squirm. And that's exactly what Marianna Simnett wants. She uses her art to send jolts through the viewer: in her surreal, morosely fantastical, gore-filled films, the (usually female) body is seen as a thing that can be manipulated, controlled and owned – she wants you to think about your flesh sack, how you inhabit it, how society uses it and who is the real master of it.

The central space of the gallery contains three screens, each showing a different looping movie. In 'Blue Roses' a woman has her varicose veins treated while a science class learns how to create cyber-cockroaches. Limbs throb and explode like that guy's head in 'Scanners'. In 'Blood', a young girl has the bones in her nose removed and walks around the Albanian highlands with a woman who lives as a man. In 'The Udder', a cow's teat gives its own mastitis infection life through a sweet little blonde girl – a parable for puberty, hygiene and sexuality.

These are gruesome, visceral works of surreal art about transformation, filled with a menacingly gentle British quietness. They're a little over-long, and maybe a gallery isn't the best place for them, but they still hit you. Just not as hard as 'Faint with Light', the final work in the show. This is an all-out assault disguised as an installation. Simnett recorded herself hyperventilating until she fainted; a wall of white strip lights flash with every breath, growing in intensity as her breathing gets louder and more frantic. It strobos epileptically, unendingly, causing total panic. It's intimate, overpowering, horrible. Your own breath starts shuddering, your heart races. The anxiety is yours now. Then you realise this is an enforced state, Simnett is doing this on purpose. This is control, dominance over her body and by proxy yours. This is art that fills your body, drains your lungs, tenses your muscles and strikes you over and over again. It's breathtakingly good. ■ Eddy Frankel

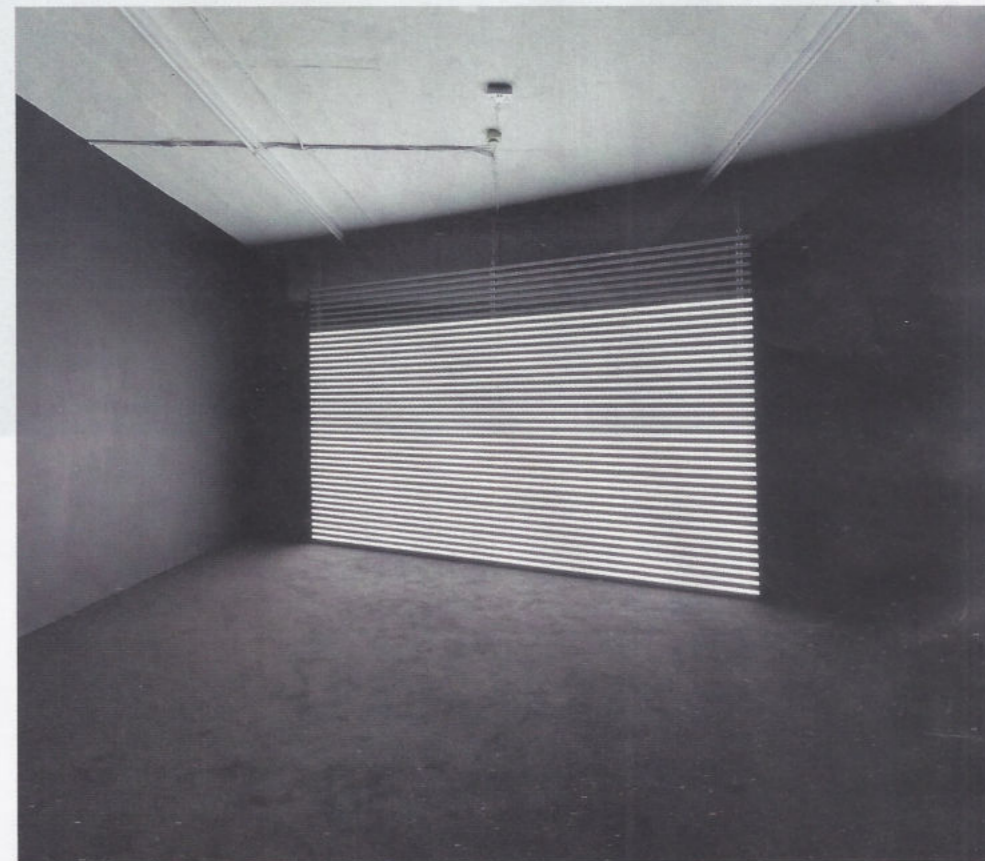
WHAT IS IT...

Gory, surreal films about the body and a seriously panic-inducing installation.

WHY GO...

Art doesn't often take your breath away, but Simnett's will leave you gasping for air.

→ Zabludowicz Collection.
⊖ Chalk Farm.
Until Jul 8. Free.



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