

# National Review of Live Art

Various venues, Glasgow

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The naked, muscled figure crouching like an animal on a podium and caged by several glass panels is clearly a man. But there is something disconcertingly feminine about his long blond wig, which he brushes with care. For a moment I am reminded of Snow White in her glass coffin, but the bloodshed that follows is much more than a pinprick: it's like a bloody, masochistic version of Cinderella with no happy-ever-after. Ron Athey raises a hand and cuts his own head: his blood, copious and brilliantly vermillion, sprays all over the glass.

For those of us who watch – or bear witness, as it so often feels in Athey's performances – it is as if he is trying to obliterate our vision of him with his own bodily fluids. One penetration of the body is followed by another as Athey fists himself; eventually he is quiet, lying hunched in the bloodied glass cage while rock salt pours from above. Each tiny lump must be a vicious blow on his skin, but he never flinches. He is perfectly still, like an ancient battered rock: immense, blind and immovable. Buried alive.

Athey's savage, eye-scorching performance was just one of many at this year's National Review of Live Art to make you blink and take notice. Another was Zoran Todorovic's *Assimilation 7*, in which the human fat from liposuction is made into a Balkan delicacy for the delectation of the audience. Todorovic's savoury human-fat jellies have been consumed all over the world, but not in Glasgow, where health and safety officials said you could sniff but not taste.

Still, there was plenty to savour – from Marcia Farquhar's wonderfully ebullient and dotty 30-hour performance to Geraldine Pilgrim's lighter-than-air installation. Rosie Ward's Breathing Space made me convinced I had seen a ghost; Third Angel's Words and Pictures was a dip into an autobiography that has not yet been written, a reflection on obsessions, passions, and empty park benches waiting to be filled.

The past was charted in Marty St James's Homage, Alastair MacLennan's Ink Ash and Anne Seagrave's self-portraits. But I saw the future, too: Kate Stannard cycling 860 miles to nowhere on a fixed bike over five days in RAW, a reflection on over-achievement and physical perfection; Aine O'Dwyer crawling along a carpet of earth, nose in the loam but bottom defiantly in the air and feet encased in red stilettos; The Paves project, in which 19-year-old Iraqi artist Posha Kaki, refused a visa to attend, was beamed in live via Skype. NRLA celebrates its 30th anniversary this year: this was a birthday bash to remember.