

Culture Wars: Then & Now

University of Minnesota
Walker Art Center
Patrick's Cabaret

March 26-28, 2015



History & Context

In 1994, queer performance artist Ron Athey performed “Four Scenes in a Harsh Life,” under the aegis of the Walker Art Center, at the then-underground performance venue Patrick’s Cabaret. Athey’s infamous performance, which involved ritual incision, sparked a national debate around art and censorship, ultimately leading to the slashing of the National Endowment for the Arts budget, the near-complete elimination of grants to individual artists, and a powerful chilling effect on controversial artwork. An editorial by then-Walker curator John Killacky written in 2014 delves into the specifics of the performance and its subsequent cultural import:

<http://www.flynncenter.org/blog/2014/01/blood-sacrifice>.

We feel the need to have the conversation: 20 years later, how does this controversy reverberate in our current local and national cultural landscape? Over the past year, a partnership formed between Patrick’s Cabaret, the Walker Art Center, and an ad hoc team at the University of Minnesota to present a weekend of events exploring this question in multifaceted ways. The combination of high-profile artist talk, paper presentations, community panels, and multidisciplinary performances represents a unique opportunity for engagement.

Project Activities

- **Thursday 3/26** - Conversation between performance artist Ron Athey & scholar Jennifer Doyle at the Walker Art Center (evening)
- **Friday 3/27** - Univ of MN symposium (daytime) featuring paper presentations by graduate students and facilitated discussion; performance by local artists exploring themes of censorship, queer expression, and radical embodied performance at Patrick’s Cabaret, followed by a brief talkback about the Culture Wars and an opening night reception (evening)
- **Saturday 3/28** - A second night of the local artists’ performance at Patrick’s Cabaret and a different talkback about local queer performance

Funding

The University team seeks financial participation, at any level, from university units and interested individuals to support \$1,500 for travel, accommodations, and speaker fees for Jennifer Doyle. If an additional \$1,500 can be secured, we will also be able to bring renowned performance studies scholar Amelia Jones to present a keynote lecture for the symposium, and to coordinate a secondary panel at the symposium composed of local artists, curators, and arts funders.

Contact

University of Minnesota ad hoc team:

Kevin Murphy - American Studies - kpmurphy@umn.edu

Jigna Desai - Gender, Women, & Sexuality Studies - desai003@umn.edu

Aron Lorber - Art History - lorbe012@umn.edu

Emmett Ramstad - Art - emmettramstad@gmail.com

Lauren DeLand - Art & Art History (UMN & Macalester College) - delan104@umn.edu

Scott Artley - Patrick’s Cabaret - scott@patrickscabaret.org