

Ron Athey was born in Groton, Connecticut on December 16, 1961 and has lived in Los Angeles since 1963. He began performing at underground galleries with Rozz Williams in 1981, in a collaboration known as Premature Ejaculation. In 1992 he began staging what was to become a performance "torture" trilogy: Martyrs & Saints, 4 Scenes In A Harsh Life, and Deliverance. Additionally, Athey works in visual arts, journalism, and is writing a book based on his Pentecostal upbringing entitled Gifts of the Spirit. A feature length documentary film, Hallelujah, made by filmmaker Catherine Gund Saalfield, follows the troop's '95 tour of Mexico City up to summer of 1997 in Zagreb, Croatia; just finished showing in national cinematic release. Currently, Athey is developing Judas Cradle, an opera performance with soprano Juliana Snapper and sound designer Sean Griffin. In 2005, Athey will have a gallery show at Western Project in Los Angeles.

If the inside of your head gets pummeled with enough emotional blunt force trauma to splinter the psyche, you develop ways to punish the body, that fleshy prison which houses the pain.

When the agony of life's relentless frustration is steeped in the malignant tyranny of deception and abuse, and the ones closest to you deny not only their culpability, but worship at the feet of false idols to justify the perpetuity of their violence, your trusty friend, the razor will never tell a single lie.

The sight of your own blood, brought forth from your own hand, spells an almost immediate relief, a release to the pressure valve. It's a violation that you yourself now control, providing a temporarily satiation which stifles the nauseating screams and endless insinuations of a world turned inside out.

The undeniable aroma of skin melting under the Cigarette's ugly kiss localizes the all consuming daily irritants until it fills yellow with pus and the scab is picked clean, eventually revealing a fresh growth of virgin pink. As the visual wounds heal, and the blistered skin renews with life, these marks of identity play as time capsule which can serve to further separate you from the original antagonist, only once you decide to own your self flagellation, not simply as revenge or repetition of the crimes committed, but in celebration as ritual to all that has been willfully overcome.

Throughout the 1990's, Athey's TORTURE TRILOGY was both a pageant to and a lurid slur against classic religious imagery and it's relationship to the eternal themes of death and disease. The 1991 production of MARTYRS AND SAINTS illustrated the cruel and impersonal nature of supposed Ocare-givers'. Three nurses, lips sutured closed, lead 3 mummified bodies on gurnies, into the Operating theater, where the bodies are violated with enemas, speculums and genital piercing.

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1994's *FOUR SCENES FROM A HARSH LIFE* opens with an androgynous St Sabastion, pierced with arrows and annointed with oil. Athey acting as Holy Woman proceeds to anoint the audience in the saint's greasy runoff. The second act, entitled *STEAKHOUSE MOTHERFUCKERS* is a twisted pantomime to Oasshole redneck culture. A sleazy strip club, drag kings lining the gangplank, howling in macho delight as a trio of gaudy strippers parade obscenely by. The last temptress is portrayed by Divinity Fudge, a 300 pound black man in drag, who the frenzied patrons attacked in what Camille Paglia has coined: the giddy abandon of a gang rape. The third act which reclaims violence as ritual, by Otaking from the wounds and giving to the audience, involves a series of deep cuts meticulously patterned on Divinty's back, whose blood is blotted onto paper, strung, sometimes over 100 feet on clothes lines, and sent floating above the audience. Athey follows by performing a solo suicide scene, inserting 16 large gauge hypodermic needles in a geometric pattern up his arm and attacking his face with a needle the size of a stiletto, attempting to reclaim through passion and ritual, the violations he had previously committed against himself in anger and frustration.

1997's *DELIVERANCE* examined faith healing and the Filipino phenomenon of psychic surgery. On a stage covered in hundreds of pounds of dirt, three men on crutches come to see the Healer. They end up suspended on meat hooks and bled, undergo simulated surgical castration via genital stapling, are mummified and eventually buried. Throughout the performance, images are culled from Santeria, Buddhism, Catholicism, and the Jewish Faith. Even Kali makes an appearance. In a light hearted scene of double sodomy, she uses a pair of garden shears to sever the offending dildo in half.

For the past five years, Athey has been focusing on *JOYCE*, a multi-media theatrical presentation, whose premise, like most of his previous work summarizes the insane beliefs and outrageous behaviors of his family's religious perversity.

Raised in an extremely dysfunctional Pentecostal household the young ORonnie Lee, was sainted as young prophet messiah who proselytized in tongues, and whose tears were coveted by the entire congregation. The adoration bestowed upon him in the revival tent, did little to alleviate the daily nightmares heaped upon him as unwitting victim of his mother's schizophrenia, his aunt's hyper-sexualized insanity and his grandmother's channeling of other worldly specters.

*JOYCE* debuted at the prestigious Kampnagel Theater in Hamburg, Germany, Feb 2002. As Athey's most accomplished work, the stark beauty and emotional impact of this production all but defies description. Three immense screens project images of the young Athey self mutilating, his aunt Vena undergoing an agonizing betadine douche turned fist fuck for Jesus, his high strung mother, Joyce squirming and maniacally lint picking, and his grandmother Annie Lou summoning the ectoplasmic angels, whose beseeching shrill is exorcised in a series of automatic writing and aktion paintings.

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The stage is platformed above the video screens, and divided into four rooms where the main characters repetitious compulsions escalate into an orgiastic frenzy. Mother Joyce, unable to withstand another moment of the voices within or the chaotic surround, smashes through the plasterboard walls suspended upside down. (Who for the duration of the performance has been trapped in a makeshift one room insane asylum, which mimics her unfortunate real life). The video screens vortex Joyce into infinity, an endless, unbelievably moving, visual spiral which reveals the vulnerability of body as prison inside a prison, whose only possible escape is through repeating dangerous acts of near suicidal physical devastation.

Ron Athey forces the body to transcend its confines. His brilliance manifests as exorcism not only of, and for, the cauterizing of his own pain, but by pushing the boundaries of endurance through artistic expression, he shares his compassionate epiphany: We all need to break free from the shackles placed upon the individual by society, family, religion and gender. And possibly through the catharsis of performance, and ritual, we might finally be able to lay to rest the demons who've sent us in search of the respite only a knife or needle could at one time provide.

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