

## 104th CONGRESS: 100-DAY COUNTDOWN

## S&amp;M 'art' video exceeds shocking stage version

By Rod Dreher  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Congress was so steamed last year over a government subsidy of a bloody sadomasochistic performance that it cut the National Endowment for the Arts' budget by 2 percent—despite NEA Chairman Jane Alexander's protestations that news accounts of the performance had been grossly exaggerated.

A videotape obtained by The Washington Times of Ron Athey's autobiographical "Four Scenes in a Harsh Life" shows that Congress didn't know the half of it.

Miss Alexander is expected to face questioning today regarding NEA's subsidy of the Athey performance when she goes before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, which authorizes the arts agency.

The NEA did not directly fund the Athey work, but \$150 granted to Minneapolis' Walker Art Center was used to sponsor his performance there.

The show received a great deal of press attention after some patrons panicked as blood-soaked paper towels were sent sailing over the audience on a clothesline.

## NEA's Alexander must justify subsidy

The scene in question, "Human Printing Press," featured Mr. Athey ritualistically carving designs on the back of an assistant, whose head is burrowed submissively in Mr. Athey's crotch. Mr. Athey blotted the blood with paper towels, which he affixed to the moving clothesline.

In an interview yesterday, Mr. Athey called those using his Minneapolis performance against the NEA "desperate." He pointed out that his show only featured excerpts of the four-act performance on the video, which is for sale in stores and by mail order.

The rest of "Four Scenes" contains acts of intense sadomasochism and what many would consider blasphemy. In one scene, a naked man sits in a spotlight fondling his scrotum, which is connected to an IV unit and has been swollen with saline solution to the size of a grapefruit.

In another, three performers, known as "Dagger Brides," are given mock Holy Communion by Mr. Athey in the guise of a minister performing a wedding. The trio, clothed only in ornaments affixed

to their bodies with hooks in their skin, spit out the unseen host, then open their mouths so Mr. Athey can run foot-long needles through their cheeks.

They then begin a frenzied, screaming dance, with blood eventually streaming down their torsos as the hooks tear at their flesh.

In interviews, Mr. Athey has spoken about the liberation he found by rejecting traditional religion in favor of ritualized sadomasochism.

Mr. Athey said he and a small troupe performed two of the play's four acts in Minneapolis — "Human Printing Press" and "Dagger Brides." Months later, he performed the entire "Four Acts" repertoire at PS. 122, a performing arts venue in New York City that receives generous support from the NEA.

When asked this week if Miss Alexander had seen the video, NEA spokeswoman Cherie Simon said she didn't know.

The Rev. Donald Wildmon, president of the American Family Association, said he would be shocked if the arts endowment

chairwoman was unaware of the full content of the performance she has been defending.

"But if she's not, then someone in her position should get a copy of that video immediately, watch it and give an immediate response to it," he said.

Mr. Wildmon said his group would "absolutely with a capital A" send copies of the Athey video to districts of congressional members who oppose efforts to stop funding the NEA.

Mr. Athey warns activists against pirating his video. "If they're violating copyright infringement, they'll have a lawsuit on their hands as soon as it can be put together," he said.

When told of the tape's existence and content, a Christian Coalition official said his organization would be interested in viewing it and possibly incorporating the video in the Coalition's anti-endowment lobbying strategy.

"No matter how eloquent Jane Alexander can be in defense of the agency, [this video] speaks volumes of rebuttal," said Marshall Whitman, the Christian Coalition's director of legislative affairs.

William Donohue, president of



NEA Chairman Jane Alexander

the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, said his group was trying to obtain a copy of the Athey video. Mr. Donohue grumbled about the hypocrisy of the NEA's subsidizing art mocking Holy Communion, the central act of Roman Catholic worship.

"If it had been the revered symbols of some native American religion, you can bet your bottom dollar we'd never have heard the end of it," he said.

