

# artnet

## Books

### ‘It’s Not a Dying Art Form, Only a Changing One’: Marina Abramović on the Transformative Power of Opera

Read the performance artist's contribution to the forthcoming book 'The Last Days of the Opera.'

**Marina Abramović**, January 16, 2023



Marina Abramović, Photo: Marco Anelli

Opera is a very old form of art. It has been developed throughout the centuries. It has its own language and rules and a very particular and enthusiastic public. But now we are in the 21st century, and it's time to change the rules and dismantle the structure and blow some fresh air into opera. In this way, we can succeed in creating a complete work of art.

In 2018 in Antwerp, I developed the concept and stage design for Claude Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. It was the first time I had worked in opera and was a very inspiring moment for me. I worked on a ballet based on Ravel's 15-minute suite *Boléro* together with the choreographers Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Damien Jalet. Compared to Debussy's opera, the work has a rigid form and is consequently much more difficult to penetrate. Debussy left a lot of space open for interpretation in his opera, which is essential for visual artists because this space leaves them room and freedom of imagination.

For *Pelléas*, my décor involved the use of large crystals; these, together with the video by Marco Brambilla, brought out the metaphysical aspect of the drama and made the invisible power of music more visible. We don't know from where Mélisande comes; Golaud discovers her in the forest. Could she be an alien from another planet? The crystals could also be interpreted as the spaceships that brought her to us. Is she human? Is her love true? Does she die for love? All these questions are directed toward the public, and they need to find their own answers.



Marina Abramović, *Pelléas et Mélisande* | Dir. / Chor. S. L. Cherkaoui & D. Jalet  
| Photo @ Rahi Rezvani

I've been thinking about this romantic idea of dying for love for a long time, and I'm a very romantic person. I almost died for love years ago. The experience was so painful and so totally absorbed my soul that I don't think I could do it again. I'm happy that I survived because now I can make this work *The Seven Deaths of Maria Callas*, which has been my secret dream for more than thirty years.



Maria Callas has been my lifelong hero, and there is a real physical resemblance between us. For *The Seven Deaths of Maria Callas*, I needed to find singers for seven signature roles of the great Greek soprano: Tosca, Violetta, Cio-Cio San, Carmen, Lucia, Desdemona, and Norma. Of course, I had help from the Bayerische Staatsoper in choosing them. I wasn't looking just for the voice but also for the energy and the type of women I needed for each role. In one case, I needed a strong and Viking-like woman, another needed to be passionate and Spanish, another delicate and Japanese. In each of these characters, the one common feature is that they are all dying for love. The singer has to believe and understand what she is doing in each of her roles—totally and absolutely.

Carson McCullers said: "I am so immersed in my characters that their motives are my own. When I write about a thief, I become one; when I write about Captain Penderton, I become a homosexual man. I become the characters I write about, and I bless the Latin poet Terence who said: 'Nothing human is alien to me.'" This is a very similar approach to the one I take. You have to be in character; otherwise, the public will feel it and lose interest.



Marina Abramović, *Pelleas et Mélisande* | Dir. / Chor. S. L. Cherkaoui & D. Jalet  
| Photo © Rahi Rezvani.

Once, I received an excellent lesson from Bob Wilson: he said that when you stand on stage, you have to be there in the present; if you are already thinking about your next move, you will lose concentration. The next move always has to come with the body and the mind simultaneously—effortlessly.

At the beginning of my performance career, I didn't think that a transformative experience was possible through theater or opera, but only through the type of long-duration performance art I was exploring. With the performance of Rhythm 10 at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in Rome in 1973 and listening afterward to the wild applause from the audience, I knew I had succeeded in creating an unprecedented unity of time—present and past through random errors. I experienced absolute freedom. I felt that my body was without boundaries, limitless, that pain didn't matter, that nothing mattered at all. I would never have thought that this could be possible in theater or opera, but after working with Bob Wilson and Willem Dafoe, and with choreographers Damien Jalet and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, and now on my opera project with Willem again, I've changed my mind. You can go so deep into a performance that you become one with the character and create a charismatic state of unity with the public.

Now that I'm in my seventies, the idea that this is the last part of my life is very present. The question of how much time do you really have and how you translate what you have done in your life for future generations becomes more and more urgent. Regarding the future of opera and what it can offer to the younger generation, if you'd asked me this question twenty years ago, I would have answered that opera is a dying form of art. But if you ask me now, I would say that opera has a lot of potential and that a future generation of artists will undoubtedly offer new solutions. I don't know if it will be called opera in the future or have a new name. Only time will tell. But it's not a dying art form, only a changing art form.

*Excerpted with permission from The Last Days of the Opera, edited by Denise Wendel-Poray, Gert Korentschnig and Christian Kircher, published by SKIRA Editore (released in the US Feb 28).*

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# THE TIMES



INTERVIEW

## My culture fix: Marina Abramovic

The artist lets us into her cultural life

Marina Abramovic | Wednesday January 04 2023, 12.01am, The Times

### My favourite author or book

Fyodor Dostoevsky. I started reading him when I was 15 and continued for all of my youth. The way he tells a story and the complexity of his characters in my eyes makes him one of the great writers. I lived in Belgrade at the time and remember reading *The Idiot*. I never left home until I finished the book. I would go to my kitchen, grab some food, and continue reading. The reality of the book became my own reality and it was my way of escaping my gloomy life in a communist country.

### The book I'm reading

*Five Modern Noh Plays* by Yukio Mishima. Mishima is such an enigmatic figure. Just the fact that he committed suicide by traditional hara-kiri is mind-blowing. I basically have read everything he ever wrote. Just recently, my partner bought me a little copy of this book from a second-hand bookshop. There are five plays which have never been put on stage. They are extraordinary, very conceptual and I am playing with the idea that I can one day direct one of them myself.

### The book I wish I had written

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce. The way this book was written and the struggles the young man experiences with his family and society, before finally leaving home, could be my own story. Different names, different backgrounds, different religions, but still so similar to my own story.



The 1969 Soviet Armenian film *The Color of Pomegranates*  
ALAMY

### **The book I couldn't finish**

*Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* by Cynthia Carr. A great book, written by an excellent writer, talking about a devastating time in gay culture through the Aids epidemic. An enormous number of artists, thinkers, writers and intellectuals died. It was painful and I knew some of these people. I started reading it many times, and one day I will finish it.

### **The book I'm ashamed I haven't read**

*A Certain Lack of Coherence: Writings on Art and Cultural Politics* by Jimmie Durham. I love Durham as an artist and thinker. His work explores the deep connections to spiritual and political questions of Native Americans. At some point I met him in the northern part of Japan. We were doing a project together and I was very unhappy because of lack of organisation and some technical problems. He looked at me and said, "Nobody has the right to put your spirit down." After he died, I bought this book and it has remained on my desk, ready to read.

### **My favourite film**

*The Color of Pomegranates* by Sergei Parajanov [a 1969 Soviet-Armenian film]. I discovered Parajanov in 1978 when I went to the Anthology Film Archives with Jonas Mekas, where he dedicated an entire week to Parajanov's movies. This was the first time I saw *The Color of Pomegranates*. I was so taken by this movie that I went to every screening again, again and again. I felt as if I had met my spiritual father.



### **My favourite play**

*Vollmond* by Pina Bausch. I recently saw this with a new cast in Wuppertal. The name translates to full moon and the play was originally made in 1978. I was so shocked at how fresh and relevant it still is today. Her work never ages and in my opinion is the closest to the physical limits of performance art.



The cast of *Green Acres*.  
GETTY IMAGES

### **My favourite TV series**

*Green Acres*. I was living in Amsterdam when I first saw this in the 1980s. I love Eva Gabor, coming from the big city in her sexy negligee to the rural country and her husband driving the tractor in a tuxedo. In the morning she said to her husband that the chicken was in the oven and she went to the peasant women to give make-up lessons. Her husband came back hungry and exhausted, he opened the oven, and a chicken walked out. It's funny, silly and wonderful at the same time.

### **My favourite piece of music**

*Goldberg Variations* by Johann Sebastian Bach. Profound, emotional, moving.

### **The last movie that made me cry**

*Doctor Zhivago* by David Lean. Omar Sharif on the big screen with big sad eyes, thick eyebrows, snow in the background, there is nothing more to say. You cry, cry and cry.

### **The song that saved me**

*Casta Diva* from *Norma*, specifically Maria Callas's interpretation. It is timeless music and I know I can always listen to it in the hardest moments in my life.





Omar Sharif and Julie Christie in Doctor Zhivago  
ALAMY

**The instrument I played**

I never played any instruments. My mother once paid a teacher to teach me piano and after one year of total torture for me, he came and said to my mother, "Comrade Abramovic does not have and will never have an ear for music." I was liberated and it was one the happiest moments of my life.

**The instrument I wish I'd learnt**

The saxophone.

**The music that cheers me up**

Anything by the Andrews Sisters, especially *Rum and Coca-Cola*.

**If I could own one painting it would be ...**

*The Starry Night* by Vincent Van Gogh. The energy and electricity radiating from this painting is incredible. I could look at this painting for hours.



The Starry Night by Vincent Van Gogh  
ALAMY

### **The place I feel happiest**

West of Lake Disappointment [now known as Kumpupintil Lake] in the Western Australian desert. I spent one year with my partner Ulay there, living with two aboriginal tribes. It was an experience that profoundly changed me and one I will never forget.

### **My guiltiest cultural pleasure**

Bad Christmas movies with a happy ending.



Pina Bausch's Vollmond  
MARTIN ARGYROGLO

**I'm having a fantasy dinner party, I'll invite these artists and authors . . .**

Mahatma Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, Franz Kafka, Vincent Van Gogh, Yukio Mishima, James Joyce, Maria Callas, Frida Kahlo, Susan Sontag.

**. . . and I'll put on this music . . .**

Sad Russian songs.

**The movie that I'm looking forward to**

*The Whale* by Darren Aronofsky. I just saw this film and it was absolutely incredible. A huge metaphor for life itself and the ending made me cry uncontrollably.

**I wasted an evening listening to . . .**

Donald Trump's speeches.

**The film I walked out on**

*Planet of the Apes*.

*artnet news*

30th September 2022

## artnet news

### On View

## Marina Abramović Plumbs Mindfulness and Witchcraft in a Pair of New U.K. Shows

The artist is having two new shows at Modern Art Oxford and the Pitt Rivers Museum.

**Torey Akers**, September 30, 2022



Still from the video 'The Witch Ladder,' Marina Abramović, 2022. Copyright Marina Abramović and Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Legendary Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović is bringing her flair for bodily immersion to the U.K. this fall with a site-specific exhibition at Modern Art Oxford, as well as a video installation at the nearby Pitt Rivers Museum, where the artist undertook an experimental research residency last summer.

"Gates and Portals," on view at Modern Art Oxford until March 5, 2023, marks something of a homecoming for Abramović. The Pitt Rivers collection, where her work is on view now through April 2,



2023, inspired the creation of her famous video trilogy *Cleaning the Mirror* (1995), which in turn paved the way for her 2010 durational performance at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, *The Artist is Present*.

During her most recent month-long stay at the Pitt-Rivers, Abramović spent the residency curating objects from its global collection—taking particular interest in items that hint of magic or supernatural beings—and then interacting with them on camera. Those include a round pebble once used as a love charm in Australia, a Nigerian divination figure, and a glass bottle that's said to contain a witch. In the process of selecting museum materials to draw, think, and film with, the artist said, “I did not choose the objects. They chose me.”



Marina Abramović, *Time Energizer*, from the series “Transitory Objects,” 2000/2012. Copyright Marina Abramović. Image courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives. Photo by Fabrizio Vatterli.

The artist’s focus on viewer participation centers embodied experience throughout “Gates and Portals.” In keeping with her much-touted “Abramović Method,” the artist’s pseudo-metaphysical, standardized preparation for endurance-based performance, “Gates and Portals” features trained facilitators that guide viewers through a series of meditative exercises. Visitors trade their phones and watches for noise-cancelling headphones as they move through each room, concentrating on a ritualistic animation of silence in space.



“What’s really going on with Marina Abramović’s work is what the present is and *can* be, and how one can become utterly focused on the present moment in time within one’s own body,” “Gates and Portals” curator Emma Ridgway recently said on the “Temporary Admission” podcast. According to Ridgway, “Gates and Portals” does more than live up to its title; the show leads visitors through “various forms of consciousness,” shifting perception through sustained, rhythmic convergence of the tactile and esoteric.



Marina Abramović, *Portal*, 2022. © Oak Taylor-Smith for Factum Arte and Marina Abramović. Image courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives.

Abramović’s preoccupation with “energy” draws from a vast pool of influences, ranging from Tibetan Buddhist prayer cycles to more New Age-inflected concepts of mindful contemplation. In a conversation with Pitt Rivers Museum curator Clare Harris, Abramović foregrounds her discussion of the work by emphasizing that the Modern Art Oxford exhibition only features two physical pieces—“a set of gates and a portal.” It is up to the viewers, as it often is in Abramović’s work, to collaborate with her and co-create the show’s meaning.

As virtual and meta-reality start to factor more and more into the fabric of the blue-chip art world, Abramović’s signature ability to center immersion, digital or analogue, is keeping her fixed at the center of the cultural conversation.

The two current U.K. shows anticipate Abramović’s long-awaited retrospective at the Royal Academy, opening in September 2023.

*The Telegraph*  
24th September 2022

## The Telegraph

### Marina Abramovic on 'New Age bulls---' and kissing Harry Styles

The Serbian performance artist once gave audiences a gun to shoot her. Now 75, is it true she's going to zap herself with a million volts?

By Alastair Sooke, CHIEF ART CRITIC

24 September 2022 • 12:00pm



"When you die, you're not going to darkness, you go to light": Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović | CREDIT: Sébastien Mické/Paris Match

In one of the more surprising tributes to Queen Elizabeth II, The Art Newspaper compared her to a [75-year-old Serbian performance artist](#). By executing her duties with such consistency for so long, Her late Majesty was, the paper suggested, "a Marina Abramović for the ages".

Hang on, what? As in, the same Marina Abramović [whose early performances from the 1970s were intense, violent affairs](#), in which she (or, at her invitation, members of her audience) inflicted pain upon her often-naked body?

In one, she stabbed manically at the spaces in between her spread fingers with a knife,

frequently nicking her own flesh; in another, she brushed her hair with such frantic force that clumps of it came out. Once, she lay down in the middle of a five-pointed wooden star that she'd set alight. Deprived of oxygen in the middle of the inferno, she passed out, and had to be saved by an onlooker.

I'm no royal historian, but I don't think our late Queen ever did anything quite like that. Still, when I put the ostensibly preposterous comparison to Abramović herself, she doesn't bat an eyelid. "I was very honoured," she says in heavily accented English, adopting the magnanimous tone of a head of state accepting praise from a foreign dignitary – albeit one surrounded by boxes in a back office at Modern Art Oxford, where her new exhibition, *Gates and Portals*, opens today. "I really admired her. The discipline she exercised is fascinating."

Ah, discipline: now that is something which Abramović knows a lot about. Not that her hardcore approach to making art won her much sympathy when she was starting out. In the "old days", as she puts it, her performances were dismissed by critics as exhibitionist bacchanals. "I love bad reviews," she tells me. "If you [make] good work, you have two possibilities: they love you or they hate you. I hate indifference."



For 12 years until 1988, Abramović collaborated with her lover Frank Uwe Laysiepen, the German artist known only as "Ulay", whom she met in Amsterdam in 1975. They travelled around Europe in an old black Citroën police van performing scores of astonishing new pieces, distilling the complex, timeless dynamics of male-female relationships; when they weren't performing, they survived by, for instance, working on a farm in Sardinia's mountains, milking goats and sheep in exchange for food.

Although Abramović and Ulay (who died two years ago) subsequently split up – by walking from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China before meeting in the middle to say one last, epic goodbye – and fought each other over royalties (in 2016, a Dutch court ordered her to hand over more than £218,000), she still looks back fondly on those years of "living in the van, with nothing". They never had children.

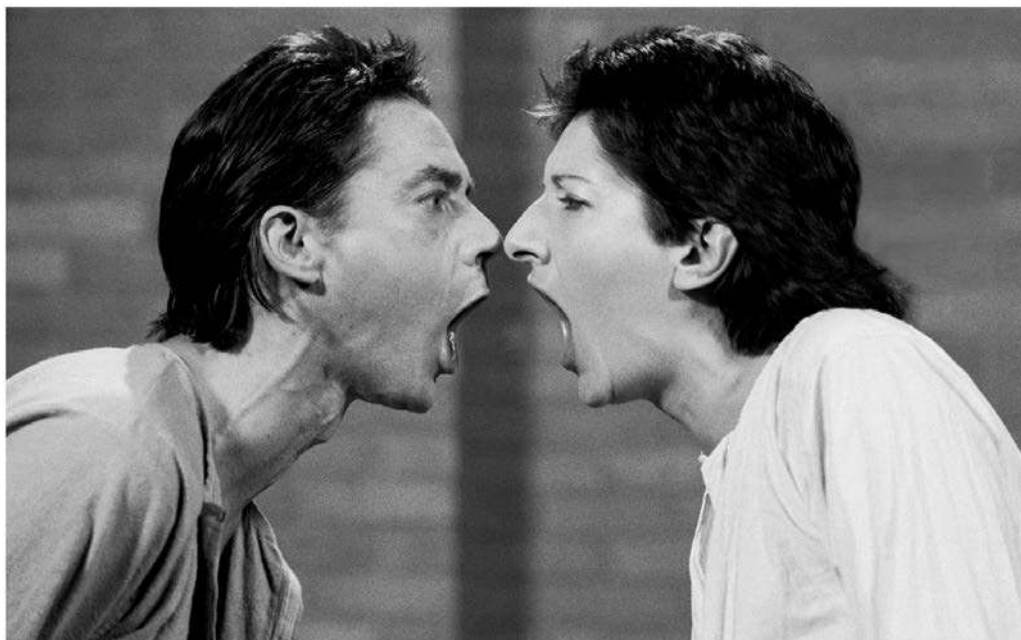
"I'm not really the mother material," Abramović tells me wryly. Does she regret this? "No," she replies. "I never had this ticking [biological] clock. Mostly, the work occupied my mind." She had a strained relationship with her own mother, Danica,

who, like Abramović's handsome, unfaithful father, Vojin, fought the Nazis as a Yugoslav Partisan under Tito, and was rewarded, after the war, with a position in his Communist government. Abramović grew up in Belgrade in comfortable, bourgeois circumstances, but her mother frequently beat her. "It was very difficult," she recalls. "Basically, I was never good enough for her. Yet," she adds, with a hollow laugh, "that cold, strict military control was really to make me a warrior. And, in many ways, she achieved that."

After Ulay, her performances, though still intense, became less obviously bellicose. "In the beginning," Abramović explains, "I was interested in the limits of the body. More and more, I became interested in my mind." Next year, several of her "greatest hits" will be re-performed (by younger artists) at the Royal Academy. Abramović will be the first ever woman to take over Burlington House. "The pressure is very big," she tells me. There will be new work, too – although rumours that she's going to zap herself with one million volts of electricity are, she says, "fake news".

Perhaps she will end up doing something like her most famous performance, *The Artist Is Present* (2010), which she still considers the fulcrum of her career. Every day for almost three months, she sat, silent and immobile, in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, gazing back at each of the 1,545 visitors (including Lou Reed, Alan Rickman and Bjork) who took it in turns to sit opposite her.

"People think that sitting on a chair, 'Oh, it's so easy,'" Abramović tells me. "But eight hours [per day], and 10 hours on Fridays, never leaving for the bathroom? It is hell on Earth. I could never make this kind of work when I was 20 or 30, even 40: I didn't have the determination, willpower or concentration."



'I love bad reviews': in her youth, Abramović performed with her lover, Ulay | CREDIT: TCD/Prod.DB / Alamy Stock Photo

Many who queued to sit with Abramović wept before her sorrowful pale face. "When people have that kind of attention, and [sense that] you're there for them, they open to



you,” she explains. “I have a friend, an American [art] critic, who says, ‘I hate your art: you always make me cry.’ And that’s the thing. My work is truly emotional. You can’t escape those emotions that deal with deep things inside.”

In Britain, I tell her, the past fortnight has been exceptionally emotional. The state funeral prompts us to revisit Abramović’s unconventional plans for her own. She wants three different ceremonies to be staged simultaneously in the cities that have meant the most to her: Belgrade, Amsterdam and New York, her home for the past two decades. “Nobody,” she continues, should know which of the coffins “is the real one”; everyone should tell jokes and wear “vibrant” colours. If you’re lucky enough to have had a “good life”, she believes, “then you should have a good death, too.”

The transition from life to death also plays a part in her new exhibition, which draws on her residency last year at Oxford’s Pitt Rivers Museum. For Abramović, who says that she is “not influenced by artists, [but] by nature and ancient cultures”, its anthropological displays are “like treasure”. She decided to study how ancient cultures used gates and portals to convey “different shifts in consciousness” and “mental transformation” – and a new video, as well as several drawings responding to objects, will be shown at the museum from today.

At Modern Art Oxford, though, she will exhibit “my own gates”: seven open-sided copper kiosks with in-built magnets, each approximately the size of a telephone box, which date from 2012. Visitors enter these so-called Time Energisers after handing in their smartphones and watches, and donning noise-blocking headphones. The show’s dramatic finale, in a separate gallery, is an illuminated crystal “portal” constructed from selenite, a mineral, she explains, which “amplifies everything: energy, light”. “This is like a portal between life and death,” she says. “I think that when you die, you’re not going to darkness, you go to light.”

But portals, crystals, visions of the afterlife: isn’t this all a bit mystical for a sceptical British audience? “Every time you do anything labelled ‘spiritual’, it is dismissed as ‘New Age bullshit,’” says Abramović, who resists the notion that “art always has to be so intellectual”.



Doors of perception: Abramović's Time Energisers (2012) are on show in Oxford | CREDIT: Fabrizio Vatterli



Ordinarily, I'd be cynical. But Abramović can make almost anything sound compelling. Yes, she can be melodramatic, a touch diva-ish, even vain. One minute, she is showing me a letter from the Ukrainian first lady Olena Zelenska, thanking her for demonstrating "solidarity with Ukraine". (A few months before Russia's invasion, her Crystal Wall of Crying, a 130ft-long Holocaust memorial, was unveiled in Kyiv.) The next, she is scrolling through pictures of her meeting Harry Styles backstage at Madison Square Garden. She giggles. "He saw me and said, 'I love your work.' We kissed each other. It was just so sweet."

Her baka, or grandmother, a deeply religious woman who lived to 103, once told her that life begins at 70 – and Abramović it seems, is having a ball. She cheerfully tells me about her many recent magazine shoots: "When you're 70, and you're on the cover of a fashion magazine, it is so much fun." The flak she started taking after *The Artist Is Present*, for being excessively (as she puts it) "jet-set" and "glamorous", doesn't seem to bother her.

Underneath, Abramović remains a sincere and original artist, whose Spartan methods can yield revelatory, moving results. Rightly, she remains "very proud of my early works, before Ulay, because I went very far". [Rhythm 0](#), for instance, which she performed in Naples in 1974 (it's now in the collection of the Tate), involved 72 objects laid out on a table – including a bullet and a gun – which, for six hours, her audience was invited to "use on me as desired". "I was in my 20s, and I was ready to die for art," she says. "I was lucky I didn't."

Even if her peers remain ambivalent about her work – "My generation sucks!" she tells me – she is revered by a younger crowd, mostly under 40. Earlier this year, she gave a lecture in Lithuania that proved so popular it had to take place in a sports arena. When she arrived, she recalls, she found "this incredible sea of people. I mean, honestly: artists don't speak to 6,000 people. Rock stars, yes, but not artists." Who wouldn't love such attention? Especially since, as she points out, "when I did performances in the 1970s, [there were] maybe 10 people. Thirty was like, 'Oh my god, big audience.' Fifty was a huge crowd."

Why does she think people today respond to her in such large numbers? "My work is very direct," she replies. "I never lie. I don't make compromises to the market of any kind." I wonder, though, if her popularity also has something to do with her art's underlying message. Slow down, urge her performances. Resist the franticness of modern life. "If we don't go back to simplicity," Abramović tells me, "we are going to be really lost."

*Wallpaper\**

22nd July 2022

# Wallpaper\*

## Marina Abramović's debut NFT drop celebrates heroes of the Web3 era

*The Hero 25FPS*, a collaboration between Marina Abramović and digital art and culture platform Circa, will reward ideas that 'make the world a better, more beautiful place'



Marina Abramović, *The Hero 25FPS*, 2022. Image © CIRCA

**T**he NFT hype may have dampened since its stratospheric rise in 2021, but Serbian artist Marina Abramović, ever the forward thinker, is looking beyond with the release of her first performance in the Web3 space. Launching Monday 25 July at 2pm UTC on the energy-efficient Tezos

blockchain, *The Hero 25FPS* is a digital reworking of one of the artist's most personal and autobiographical works, featuring her stoically clad in black, astride a white horse and holding a large white flag.

'*The Hero* was filmed in 2001, around the time of the death of my father Vojo,' Abramović explains. 'He was a national hero from the Second World War and I wanted to create an homage to him.'

milan\_luxottica\_piazzale\_cadorna\_the\_hero\_by\_marina\_abramovic\_c\_circa.png



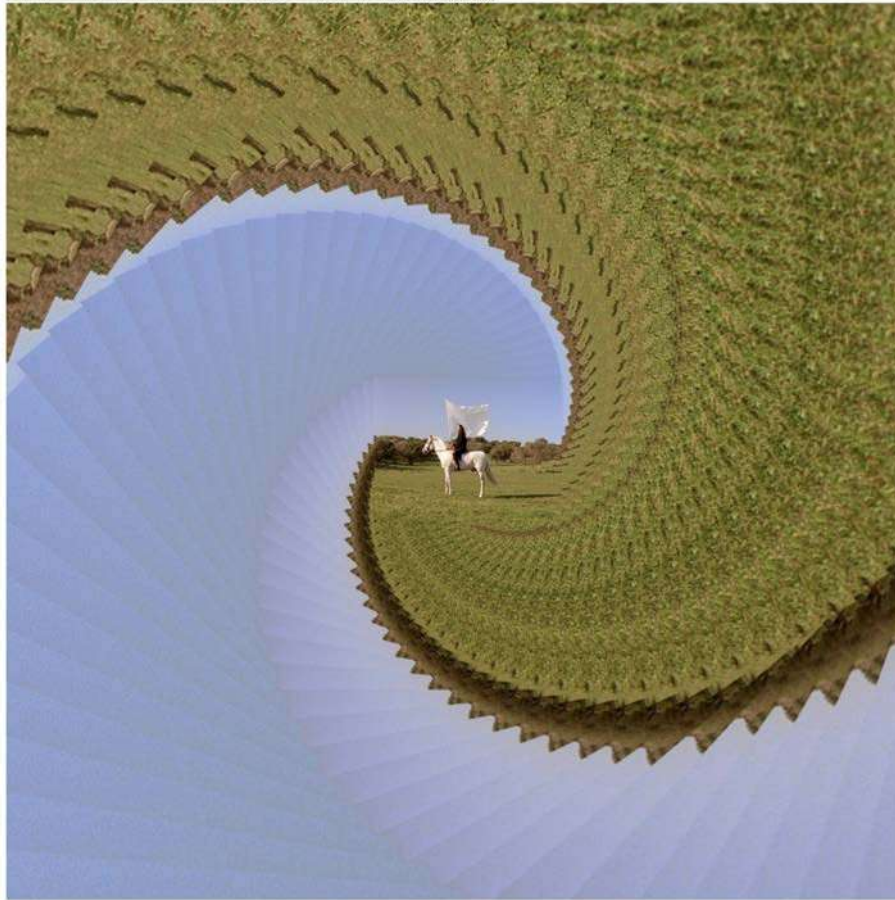
Marina Abramović, *The Hero* at Piazzale Cadorna, Milan. Image © CIRCA

Abramović's debut NFT drop is a collaboration with the Cultural Institute of Radical Contemporary Art (Circa), which describes itself as 'a digital art and culture platform with purpose'. It coincides with the broadcast of *The Hero* on an international network of screens, spanning London, Seoul, Milan, Berlin, Japan and New York, at 20:22 local time every evening for three months.

'When [Circa artistic director and founder] Josef O'Connor invited me to participate in Circa 2022, I immediately thought of *The Hero* because right now, we are facing a Third World War. We never set out to create an NFT – it came as a surprise,' the artist says.



marina\_abramovic\_- the\_hero\_- \_13.jpg



Marina Abramović, *The Hero* 25FPS, 2022 (still). Image courtesy the artist

Originally filmed in PAL (4:3 aspect ratio), the video work required several months of post-production, each individual frame edited to adapt it for widescreen. 'I really wanted the image to envelop the audience,' says the artist. 'As with all my work, the audience completes the work. My first performance on the blockchain will invite people to collect either a single frame (.jpg) or a sequence of frames (.gif) to acquire time. They decide how much of the movement and experience they can have with the work.'

So why has the artist chosen to revisit a two-decade-old work – and what relevance does it have today? 'Right now, we are in such a strange moment in our world. We are destroying our planet where we live, our real home, the Earth, and there are all the wars that are going on in the world. We need heroes,' she asserts, naming Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskyy and climate activist Txai Suruí, the only Indigenous woman to speak at the COP26 climate conference, among her 'new heroes'.

The term Web3 (originally Web3.0) was coined in 2014 by computer scientist Gavin Wood, founder of blockchain infrastructure company Parity Technologies and a co-founder of Ethereum, to describe his vision for a decentralised and more democratic Internet. 'For me, the entire world has always been divided into two categories: originals and the ones who follow,' reflects Abramović. 'The originals are visionary – they're always thinking out of the box. And often in the time they are alive, they're not understood at all. Sometimes it takes years after they are dead, even hundreds of years, for them to be properly understood. Today, we need people with this vision to create new ways of learning and forms of art.'

art\_must\_be\_beautiful\_artist\_must\_be\_beautiful\_1975\_2010\_courtesy\_of\_the\_marina\_abramovic\_archives.png



Marina Abramović. *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, 1975. Courtesy of Marina Abramović Archives

Abramović has previously been vocal about her skepticism of NFTs, but draws parallels to the acceptance of video and performance art as new artistic mediums, which both faced similar criticisms and resistance in their early days.

'When we started to work in the immaterial [in the 1970s], galleries and museums couldn't sell anything because there was nothing [physical] to sell,' she says. 'Likewise, video was a mess when it was invented. Then came Nam June Paik and video art was born. Paik once said, "I think the best technology, information, has to do with our education – our thinking.'"



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Nam June Paik

For Abramović, the potential of Web3 extends beyond NFTs. ‘In many ways, we are beginning to see how this new tool can make a difference in the world,’ says the artist, citing Bail Bloc as an example. The app, developed by *The New Inquiry* magazine, allows anyone to volunteer computing power to mine cryptocurrency that is used to pay for Americans without bail funds to get out of jail. ‘The work [Pussy Riot co-founder and social activist] Nadya Tolokonnikova is doing with UnicornDAO is also very inspiring to me,’ Abramović adds. The cryptocurrency investment fund raised \$6.7m for Ukraine earlier this year and recently launched [legalabortion.eth](#), where people can donate crypto to be fully distributed to reproductive rights organisations following the US Supreme Court’s reversal of *Roe v Wade*.

Similarly, Abramović is donating a percentage of the proceeds of her NFTs towards 'Hero Grants', inviting people working within Web3 to submit ideas 'that make the world a better, more beautiful place' via the Circa website. She says: 'I want to see what other ideas people have in this Web3 space to help save our planet. People who demonstrate heroic vision will then receive a grant in the coming months. The grants we shall award from *The Hero 25FPS* is my small way of contributing to this future.'

Ultimately, the artist is seeking to empower the next generation. 'The future of performance art sits within the hearts and minds of this new generation who are working with these new technologies. They are experimenting with this new Web3 space and testing its potential. They are taking risks and building new worlds,' says Abramović. 'We have to guide and nurture the future. I am not an expert [on Web3] but I am learning, and what I fundamentally understand is that blockchain technology provides artists with sovereignty over themselves and their work – this is very important to me. This is a very challenging time for young people, especially artists. Art is always going to exist. And in 2022, the white flag I held all those years ago stands for peace.' ✱

*The Guardian*  
16th July 2022

# The Guardian

## On my radar: Marina Abramović's cultural highlights



Marina Abramović in Berlin, April 2022. Photograph: Tobias Schwarz/AFP/Getty Images

The artist on an exhibition made by spiders, cryptocurrency activism and her love of astrology

**T**he performance art pioneer [Marina Abramović](#) was born in 1946 in Belgrade, Serbia (then Yugoslavia). She moved to Amsterdam in 1975, where she began collaborating with Frank Uwe Laysiepen ([Ulay](#)) on works such as *Imponderabilia* (1977). In 1997 she won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale, and in 2010 the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York held the retrospective *The Artist Is Present*. Her latest work, *The Hero*, is being shown on screens worldwide until 31 August. The public mint for her first NFT, *The Hero 25FPS*, will take place at 2pm UTC on 25 July.

## 1. Exhibition

### Tomás Saraceno: Particular Matter(s) at the Shed, New York



📷 'Interactive and innovative': Webs of At-tent(s)-ion by Tomás Saraceno, on display at his show Particular Matter(s). Photograph: Courtesy the artist; spider/webs; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York/Los Angeles; and Neugerriemschneider, Berlin.

Saraceno works with spiders and made these huge glass cases for which spiders created different types of webs. It was really to do with the planet and the human condition and so on. It was a fascinating show that took months and months to put on, because he started with the empty glass cubes and the spiders had to create the work. It was interactive and innovative - I liked it a lot.

## 2. Gig

### Sigur Rós



📷 'Tornado of energy': Sigur Rós at the Beacon theatre, New York City, June 2022. Photograph: Mark Martucci



The last concert I saw was Sigur Rós from Iceland. I've followed them for a long time and this was a rare concert they performed in New York at the Beacon theatre. What's so interesting about the lead singer, Jónsi, is that he has invented his own language. The performance started very slow. Jónsi went into a trance and created this kind of energy vortex - a volcanic tornado of energy - which the public became part of and could not escape. It had a really frenetic quality that I liked.

### 3. Art NFTs



📷 Pussy Riot's Nadya Tolokonnikova speaks on Activism in the Age of Cryptocurrency at Consensus 2022 in Austin, Texas, June 2022. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

For me right now, NFTs are something of great importance. The work that Nadya Tolokonnikova [of Pussy Riot] is doing with Unicorn DAO - a decentralised, autonomous organisation that markets NFTs from female, non-binary and LGBTQ+ artists - is very inspiring to me. They raised \$6.7m for Ukraine earlier this year and recently launched legalabortion.eth, a wallet where people can donate crypto that will be fully distributed to seven reproductive rights organisations following the supreme court's Roe v Wade reversal.

### 4. Theatre The Orchard at the Baryshnikov Arts Centre, New York



📷 'Amazing': Mikhail Baryshnikov in *The Orchard* in New York. Photograph: Roy Rochlin/Getty Images

Last month I saw *The Orchard*, directed by Igor Golyak. This radical hybrid production was a new interpretation of *The Cherry Orchard* by Chekhov, and the audience could decide between watching either an in-person theatre show or a digital piece at home. I thought this was very inspiring. Baryshnikov himself was cast as the lead and did an amazing job. Normally, dancers don't play characters in Chekhov, and this really captured my attention. This very modern approach gave a completely new life to a classic play.

## 5. Practice

### Astrology



📷 The full moon over Marseille last week, which was the brightest of the year. Photograph: Gerard Bottino/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

I have loved numerology and astrology for a long time. There's lots of bullshit in this area but somehow I was lucky to find the right people. There are some in India who are very precise about reading the stars, so that in fact they can predict things with extreme precision. I have a friend in Vienna called Nada van der Laan, and in November she predicted what is happening in Ukraine now. If I want to do something important - work or exhibitions - I will always consult her: where are the stars? Is it a full moon or not a full moon?

## **6. Restaurant**

**Omen Azen, New York**

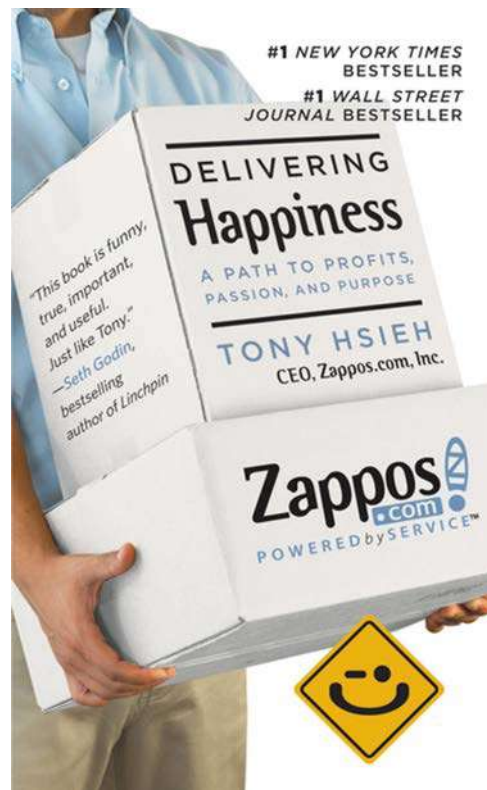


📷 'Run for generations by the same family': Omen Azen, New York. Photograph: Omen Azen

This was the first Japanese restaurant in SoHo, Manhattan in the 80s. It has been run for generations by the same family. The food is always the same and there is no music playing loud so you can talk. The decor is unchanging and this was the place where Lou Reed, Patti Smith, Andy Warhol, the Velvet Underground, all these people would go. And these people - whoever is still alive - are still coming. It's not a superficial place and it's one of my favourites.

## **7. Book**

**Delivering Happiness by Tony Hsieh (2010)**



This is about Tony Hsieh's company Zappos (which produces shoes) and about his philosophy: how workers have to be happy in order to actually deliver happiness around the world. Two years ago he died a tragic death in his own house - he was reportedly taking too many drugs - so it's kind of amazing to read this knowing he could not use his own theory to change his own life. It's very interesting to see how we can create a system that can make other people happy.



*The Art Newspaper*  
15th July 2022



## THE ART NEWSPAPER

### Marina Abramovic: 'We need less artists and more heroes'

As the performance artist launches her Circa 2022 commission, she opens up about her father, her new "hero" grants, and why she is dropping her first NFT collection



Marina Abramovic's *The Hero* 25FPS  
© Circa Hero (2022)

When I filmed *The Hero* in 2001, I was grieving the loss of my father. Vojo was a national hero, a soldier who fought the Nazis with the Yugoslav partisans, communists led by Tito. He was a very handsome man, with a strong, stern face and a thick, powerful-looking head of hair. In pictures of him from the war he is almost always riding a white horse. He fought with a group of guerrillas who made lightning raids on the Germans. It took impossible courage. Many of his friends were killed alongside him.

In *The Hero*, I am sitting on a white horse, just as my father so often did, and holding a large white flag that flutters in the wind. Why a white flag? My father never surrendered to anything. But he was capable of surprising me. I remember, in 1968, as students in Yugoslavia protested against the government to demand freedom and rights, he did something heroic that impressed me not just with its bravery but with its solidarity and its compassion. Handsome in his raincoat and necktie, his hair piled up majestically, he stood in the middle of Marx and Engels Square and gave a passionate speech renouncing his membership with the Communist Party and denouncing Yugoslavia's "Red Bourgeoisie", who controlled the government. At the climax of his oration he threw his party membership card into the crowd—an amazing gesture. Everyone applauded wildly. I was so proud of him.

In 2001, Vojo died, and white is also the colour of death. In the end, we must all surrender to change.



Marina Abramović's parents, Danica and Vojo Abramović in 1945  
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives

Today, the work I made as an homage to my father has a brand new life. A work I originally recorded in 2001 is now being presented every evening for three months on London's Piccadilly Lights and other important screens in Seoul, Milan, Berlin, Dublin, Tokyo and New York, as part of my Circa 2022 commission. It appears with a new narration I have written to echo the *Artist's Life Manifesto* I completed in 2011, called *The Heroes' Manifesto*.

This change—from writing a manifesto for artists to one for heroes—has happened



now, because courage and heroism are the qualities that the time we live in demands. Right now, we are at such a strange moment: we are destroying our planet and seeing wars going on all over the world. What can an artist do? Art is not going to save us. Today, I am telling people that we have to be adaptable. Right now, we need heroes; less artists but more heroes.

Our planet needs uncorrupted heroes with morality, who embody courage and bring real change. Every day is a shaky, uncertain, constantly changing landscape. On the Circa network of screens, we have this white horse. This white flag. This beautiful land. We need heroes that can bring new light to illuminate us. Heroes that can inspire us to be better, and to work together, not against each other. Heroes who care.

Today, a hero could be Txai Surui, a young climate activist who was the only Indigenous woman to speak at the Cop26 climate conference, who challenged world leaders to take strong action and reminded us that "it is always necessary to believe the dream is possible." It could be Nadya Tolokonnikova of Pussy Riot who raised \$6.7m in the first days after the Russian invasion to support Ukraine. Or it could be President Volodymyr Zelensky, who stands alone as a leader with courage, at a time when the morality of our politicians is at such a low. In 2022, the white flag I held all those years ago stands for peace.



*The Hero* by Marina Abramović at Piccadilly Lights  
© Circa

This work is now a global call for new heroes. Today, heroes can come bearing white flags. They can come in many forms: pacifist, feminine, self-sacrificial, collective. The first thing you see on the screen is a woman on the horse. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that, next time, he is not going to reincarnate as a man but as a woman. Finally. Women have a different type of energy. But there is more than

this. It has always been very important to create strong images. I can't predict what each person looking at *The Hero* will take away. As Marcel Duchamp said, the public has to complete the work. Why this heroic posture, with the horse that dominates the landscape? Why is this landscape there? All of this is unanswered, I want the public to complete the work with their own interpretation, to see in it their own ideas of heroism.

## **My first NFT**

My favourite philosopher Noam Chomsky once said: "We shouldn't be looking for heroes, we should be looking for good ideas." Right now, I think we need both. First, we must ask who can bring the solutions we need. The heroes—the ones who sacrifice everything—can bring new light to illuminate this world. These new heroes are the ones I have set out to support, starting today. It's really about finding solutions to these catastrophes. These solutions are why I am creating my first NFT collection, *The Hero 25FPS*. [I](#) never set out to create an NFT—it came as a surprise. Like all of my previous performances, there is always an element of risk involved. I didn't do an NFT for a while, because I needed to find the right idea that really worked. This is such a new medium for me that I was immediately thinking of how to connect with some kind of history or performance art.

The first thing that came to my mind was 1959, when Yves Klein, on a bridge over the Seine, sold to his collectors *Zone de Sensibilité Picturale Immatérielle* to achieve perfect immaterialisation. This simple work involved the sale of empty space, in exchange for gold. If the buyer wished, the piece could then be completed in an elaborate ritual in which the buyer would burn the receipt, and Klein would throw half of the gold into the river. All that was left was just ashes in the river. If you think about performance art, too, it's always about immateriality. You can't frame and hang a performance on the wall. In my opinion, this ritualistic moment ignited conceptualism and influenced me very early on in my development as a performance artist.

I am selling each individual frame of *The Hero* (2001) as part of *The Hero 25FPS*, which stands for frames per second. As with all my work, the audience completes the work. My first performance on the blockchain will invite people to purchase either a single frame (.jpg) or a sequence of frames (.gif) to acquire time. Following this, a percentage will fund new heroism. How? I am inviting people working within Web3 to submit ideas on the [nft.circa.art](https://nft.circa.art) website. Ideas that make the world a better, more beautiful place. People who demonstrate heroic vision will then receive a grant in the coming months. I want to see what other ideas people have in this Web3 space to help save our planet. The grants we shall award from *The Hero 25FPS* is my small way of contributing to this future.





Marina Abramović  
Photo: Marco Anelli © 2022

I do not know how the hero grant winners will look. I am throwing the net out wide. Gavin Wood, who coined the term Web3 in 2014, said decentralised technologies are the only hope to save liberal democracy. We're beginning to see how they can make a difference in the world. Bail Bloc Project, an app developed by culture magazine *The New Inquiry*, allows anyone to volunteer computing power to mine cryptocurrency that is used to pay for Americans without bail funds to get out of jail. I've been interested to learn about DAOs, "decentralized autonomous organisations" that are owned by members and operate transparently on the

internet. One of these organisations, Cowgirl DAO is raising funds for abortion rights through the sale of cowgirl art NFTs. Beginning in May in Dallas, with the work of the photographer and artist Molly Dickson, it aims to challenge the terrible news of the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade, and continue to provide access for all to abortion rights.

If Web3 projects can give aid to victims of war, reunite families divided by jail, and restore access to reproductive health, I want to find out what other heroic impacts they can have in the real world. I'd say to the young kids of Web3, just don't give up. Because you're the future. You have the vision but it takes time for this to become a vision of greatness. It doesn't happen overnight and can take lots of work.

To me, the entire world has always been divided between two categories: the originals and the ones who follow. The originals are not just made up of artists, but scientists, doctors, fashion designers, film-makers, and writers, too. When I founded the Marina Abramović Institute it was dedicated to incubating a dialogue between science, art, technology and even spirituality, all of it immaterial. Many originals produce tangible things but other practices—music, theatre, and the study of the natural world—are essentially immaterial. Today, we need people with this vision to create new ways of learning and forms of art that haven't even been invented yet. We need people who can bring new light.

I said before that art is not going to save us. But ideas will save us. And art can contribute to fomenting these ideas. Strong images can help. And a hardcore message. The rest I will leave open. I will never turn away from art but I am excited by the possibilities that lie alongside it—and beyond it. Art is always going to exist. Since humanity exists, art exists. Today, we need heroes.

*Harper's Bazaar Italy*  
13th July 2022

## BAZAAR<sup>Harper's</sup>

### “The Hero” becomes Marina Abramovic's first NFT work

The snapshots in gif and jpg format will be available for purchase from next July 25th.



**I**t was 2011 when one of the most iconic performance artists in the world, the Serbian - then naturalized American - Marina Abramović, made *The Hero*, a video directed by Jimena Blasquez Abascal and dedicated to her recently deceased father, who had fought during the second world war and that her daughter had paid homage with inspiration and sensitivity: the camera framed Abramović herself riding a horse, while she was looking at the horizon and holding a white flag in her hand. The scene, strictly in black and white, was embellished by a female voiceover singing the anthem of the former Yugoslavia, and this year it was transformed for the first time into an NFT collection.



Filmed in a period when smartphones did not yet exist, Abramović's famous work has become a symbol of his approach to art and the interactive and dialogic relationship with the public, and now that more than twenty years have passed - as the artist told the *ARTnews newspaper*- "I found myself experimenting on how to express my old work with a new medium". The initial idea, however, was not to create a series of non-fungible tokens, i.e. unique tokens that attribute digital ownership on the blockchain network exclusively to those who buy them: at the beginning the performer said she was skeptical of this practice, and as she stated in some interviews she realized she wanted to go down the path of NFT by observing the results of her attempts one frame after another. "We discovered how the movement of the flag in the wind took on a new beauty and a new meaning from time to time", she explained to *ARTnews* , not surprisingly , underlining that essentially there will not be even two frames of *The Hero* equal to each other: "From a single job we are creating thousands of unique NFTs. Which seems very modern to me ". The initiative, presented in June on the occasion of Art Basel 2022, provides for the launch of an NFT performance entitled *The Hero 25FPS* on the Tezos blockchain platform, which makes available previously unreleased videos of the project dating back to 2001.



ADAM BERRY GETTY IMAGES



The snapshots in gif and jpg format will be available for purchase from July 25th, while from July 13th to August 13th *The Hero* is projected every evening at 8:22 pm on the big screen of a different city - from London to New York, from Seoul to Milan - thanks to the collaboration with the *Cultural Institute of Radical Contemporary Art* (Approx.) Of London. "It was important to me that these NFTs were accessible and respectful of the environment", added Abramović, wishing to specify that all the proceeds will be reinvested to create a network with a reduced energy and environmental impact, funding a community of young talented intentions to fuel the circular economy and to finance public art projects. Thus, although it took months to adapt the square format of the video to the bright billboards of many metropolises, the result promises to be fascinating so much for those who have already had the opportunity to appreciate *The Hero* years ago as well as for those who will discover its value in this new graphic design. "You have to consider the future, when you make art", it was not by chance what he observed in the interview with ARTnews, because "experimenting means entering a territory where you have never been before, [...] and it is essential to find the courage to face the unknown".

*Right Click Save*  
11th July 2022



## AN INTERVIEW WITH MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

The legendary performance artist speaks to Alex Estorick about her genesis NFTs and the new age of heroes



Credit: Marina Abramović, (Still from) *Body of Truth*, 2019. Courtesy INDI FILM

Throughout her career, **Marina Abramović** has pioneered performance as an art form, putting her body at the center of events in space and time to engage with contemporary artistic, social, and political circumstances. This month sees the launch of her first NFT project, ***The Hero 25FPS***, a collaboration with CIRCA due to be minted on Tezos on 25 July, 2022.

Described as “a performance hosted on the blockchain,” the work revives the central theme of 2001’s ***The Hero***, to be presented across the **CIRCA global network of screens** in London, Seoul, Milan, Berlin, Tokyo, Dublin, and New York — appearing every evening at 20:22 for three months. Filmed at 25 frames per second, unreleased material from the original work has now been separated into thousands of unique frames. Audiences will be invited to collect either a single unique frame (JPEG) or multiple unique frames in the form of a GIF. Given the artist’s centrality to the world of

contemporary art, her decision to embrace the NFT community has profound implications for the future of the art world.



Marina Abramović, *The Hero 25 FPS*, 2022. Courtesy CIRCA

**Alex Estorick:** Are there any ways in which NFTs and blockchain technology change the way you view performance, or indeed time-based media?

**Marina Abramović:** This question reminds me of an important story.

When I was 14, I asked my father to give me oil paints — because oil paints mean you are a serious artist. My father didn't really care about art but he knew this soldier, Filo Filipović, who became an abstract painter after the war. Filo came with me and my father to the shop and we bought canvases, pigment, some plaster, cement, and lots of different things. We went home and he gave me my first painting lesson, which I will never forget for the rest of my life. First of all, he cut the canvas and placed it on the floor. Then, he threw some glue on top and then some white paint and then yellow pigment and lots of red pigment. Then he put some cement on the back and began to pour gasoline all over the place.

*Finally, he took a lighter and lit the whole thing and everything literally exploded in front of my eyes. He looked at me and said: "This is a sunset!" And left.*

This was a really important lesson. I then waited a long, long time until everything dried before hanging Filo's sunset on a nail on my bedroom wall. This was around August time and so I went on summer holidays with my parents. When we returned a few weeks later, the light was hitting the canvas so that all of the glue, cement, and pigments melted away and left behind only a pile of dust on the floor. Nothing was left apart from its memory.

It is really important for artists to understand the best tool for them to use when making their work. Painting is a great tool, as is sculpture, writing, filmmaking, photography, and now especially this new form of digital art including NFTs. Any of these mediums — these are just the tools. What is most important is the concept and what you do with these tools. A good idea will stand the test of time and remain invaluable, regardless of technological advancements. Strong ideas are universal.



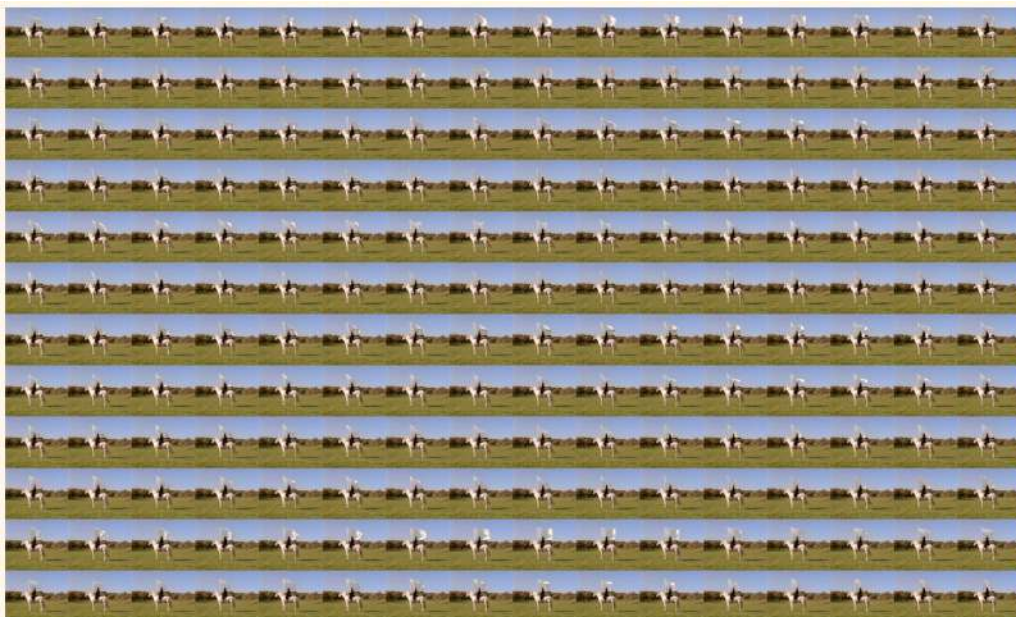
Marina Abramović, *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, 1975. Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives



The first time I performed, I stood in front of the public and felt electrified. It was something that I had never experienced before. Energy ran through my body like electricity. After that, I could not go back to the studio and make something two-dimensional. I had to perform. And I understood that this was really a tool for me. I also realized that performance is a time-based art. You have to be there to experience it, otherwise you don't see it. But also it's the kind of art that you can't hang on the wall. Filo's sunrise lives on forever, minted into the minds of anyone who hears this story. It is immaterially-immortal. If you are not in the time and space when a performance is happening, you just miss it.

*Performance in relation to NFT is a mental and physical construction that you make at a specific time within a digital space, in front of a digital audience and where energy dialogue is happening. Most importantly, you then use that energy of the audience to do new things — build new possibilities.*

What excites me the most about *The Hero 25FPS* aside from the way it engages with time is that we have created the **Hero Grants** — awarding a percentage of the funds generated to people working within Web3 to support new ideas that will make the real world a better place.



Marina Abramović, *The Hero 25FPS*, 2022. Courtesy CIRCA

**AE:** You've spoken of the importance of Web3 communities that are currently seeking out new ideas. Many participants in these communities have been historically excluded from the art world. Do you feel an affinity with crypto artists and, if so, what advice would you share?

**MA:** You know, the older generation of artists likes to ridicule these Web3 artists and likes to think that "this is nonsense, this is just bullshit" and so on. The same happened to me in the 1970s. Same with all performance artists in the 1970s. When we invented performance art and when we started to work with immaterial work — when neither the galleries nor

museums could sell or show anything — everybody was thinking this is ridiculous. This is counter art. And this is happening today with the Web3 community. I didn't do NFT for a while because I needed to find for myself the right concept that really worked. With *The Hero 25FPS* [25 frames per second] we have achieved this by dividing *The Hero* footage into seconds, so that the people who want to have the work can collect as many seconds as they want. And they can decide how much of the movement and how much experience they can have with the work. So it's interactive, you interpret it yourself, and it's emotional, because this work is emotional.

It's really important to create a space where this Web3 community can be creative and figure out how we can change our consciousness. How we can move forwards, and how we can stop this violence. Art by women sells for 50% less than that of art by men and I recently read that as few as 5% of NFT sales go towards projects from female artists. We must change this. And, you know, creating these **Hero Grants** for the people who can be our new heroes within this new space is very important to me, because that's the future. We need new heroes.

When you take a risk — like when Columbus braved superstition and ignorance by sailing across the Atlantic when his skeptics thought he would fall off the edge of the Earth — you just have to make a conscious decision to go somewhere you've never been before. This is heroism. How do you know that you will not fail? This is what all artists and all human beings should be ready to do today. Take risks. Go out of the safety zone of your own life and see what is there for you. Sail to the edge. Today, we need new heroes.





Marina Abramović, 2018. Photography by Carlo Bach. Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives

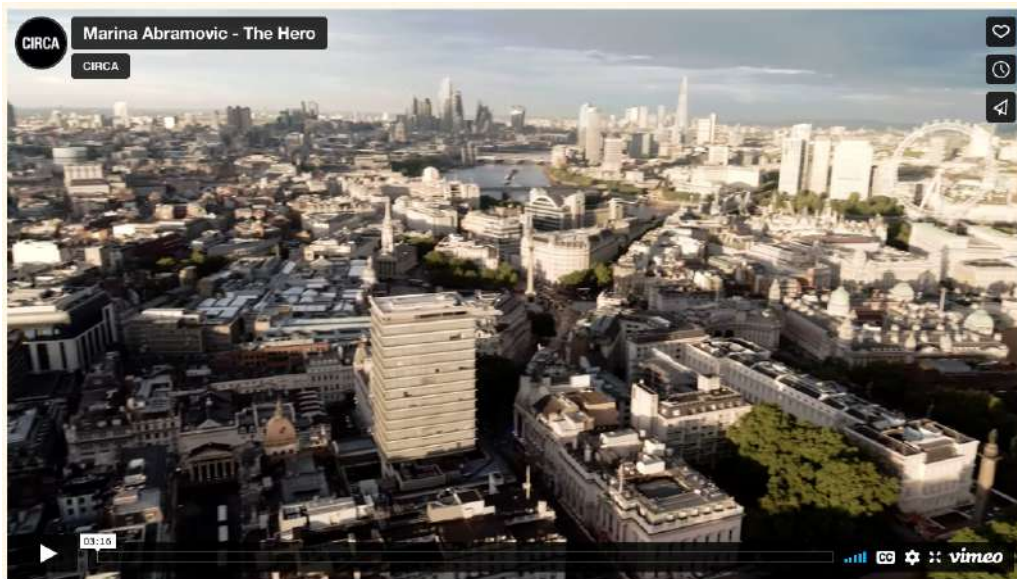


**AE:** What do you see as the potential of the NFT as a medium rather than simply a sales mechanism?

**MA:** In 1985/86, I was asked: “What is the future of art in general?” I said that I see the future as the completely immaterial transmission of the artist’s experience to the audience in an immaterial way. An exchange of energy. That was then and now it looks like this prediction is coming true.

*I see NFTs as becoming the foundation of all human architecture because the technology allows for total trust and transparency.*

I recently watched **this interview** with David Bowie from 1999, where he spoke about the Internet and the influence it would have on all of our lives. This was 23 years ago before YouTube and Google. He spoke about the “demystification process going on between the artist and the audience” which is far greater than any sales mechanism. I don’t care about sales. I care about ideas. Which reminds me, Bowie also wrote a very good song called *Heroes* (1977). He said “Tomorrow belongs to those who can hear it coming” and I couldn’t agree with him more. We need new heroes.



Marina Abramović, *The Hero* 25 FPS, 2022. Courtesy of the artist

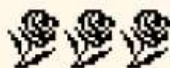
**AE:** Your work, *The Hero* (2001) is set to be broadcast every evening for three months across the **CIRCA global network of screens**. How do you view the relationship between large-scale social events of this kind and the personal experience that NFTs afford?

**MA:** When Josef [O'Connor, Artistic Director at CIRCA] invited me to participate in CIRCA 2022, I immediately thought of *The Hero* because, right now, we are really facing a nuclear Third World War. There is nothing quite like the CIRCA platform in terms of scale and audience and we are showing this work for three months. That's a long time. A lot of my most important works have been durational and we felt this moment in time called for something extraordinary. An extended pause.

*I love the fact that a woman is holding the flag and appearing center stage on all of these screens around the world at this moment in time.*

*Especially with what is happening now in America, where I live, with Roe v Wade. It is terrible. All of this toxic masculine energy belongs to the past. The Hero is facing the future. It is important for art to find new avenues to engage with new audiences, especially now, otherwise we are all fucked.*

I decided to embrace NFT because it enables artists to become sovereign. The Hero Grants will also help to fund new ideas within this Web3 space and I am excited to see what new ideas emerge from within this space. Art doesn't have the power to change the world but art can ask the right questions. Art can show the way. But there is not something else that can change you, every individual has to change themselves first. It's up to us. It's not that some kind of miraculous force will come and then everything will stop. We always put this responsibility somewhere else. Responsibility is us, ourselves, what we can do right now, today, to change something. The Hero Grants are my small way of contributing to this future.



*With thanks to Josef O'Connor and Anika Meier.*

**Marina Abramović** has pioneered performance as a visual art form throughout her career, developing some of the most important early examples of the practice. These include *Rhythm 0* (1974), in which she offered herself as an object of experimentation for the audience, as well as *Rhythm 5* (1974), where she laid in the center of a burning five-point star to the point of losing consciousness. These performances married concept with physicality, endurance with empathy, complicity with loss of control, and passivity with danger.



In 2012, she founded the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), a non-profit foundation for performance art, that focuses on performance, long durational works, and the use of the “Abramović Method.” She was one of the first performance artists to be formally accepted by the institutional museum world with major solo shows taking place throughout Europe and the US over a period of more than 25 years. In 2023, Abramović will be the first female artist to host a major solo exhibition in the Main Galleries of the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Her first European retrospective “The Cleaner” was presented at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden in 2017, followed by presentations at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark; Henie Onstad Art Center, Norway (2017), Bundeskunsthalle, Germany (2018), Centre of Contemporary Art, Toruń, Poland (2019), and concluding at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, Serbia (2019). In 2010, Abramović had her first major US retrospective and simultaneously performed for over 700 hours in *The Artist is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

She has been awarded the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Biennale; the US Art Critics Association Award for Best Exhibition of Time Based Art; the Austrian Decoration of Honor for Science and Art, Vienna; Honorary Royal Academician status by The Royal Academy of Arts, London; Officier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres; TIME Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People; and the Princess of Asturias Award for the Arts.

**Alex Estorick** is Editor-in-Chief at Right Click Save

*The Hero 25FPS NFTs by Marina Abramović. Public Mint: Monday 25 July, 2022 at 2 pm UTC. Visit **NFT.CIRCA.ART** to subscribe for updates and apply for a Hero Grant.*



*The New York Times, T Magazine*  
8th July 2022

## T THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

### Being Marina Abramović, Even When No One's Looking

Despite her success, the performance artist has chosen a monastic life in upstate New York, where she falls asleep to Canadian television and eats baby food.



The performance artist Marina Abramović in the library of her expansive archive in upstate New York, which houses sculptural works, exhibition posters, press clippings and other ephemera from her storied career. Portrait by Emiliano Granado. Hair and makeup by Nana Hiramatsu using MAC Cosmetics.



By Thessaly La Force

Published July 8, 2022 Updated July 11, 2022

The New York-based artist Marina Abramović is sitting in the kitchen of her house just outside of Hudson when she invites me — over FaceTime — to join her in Greece this August for a workshop organized by the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI). “It’s only five

days. No food, no talking and heavy exercise,” says the artist, 75, with a chuckle. Abramović founded the institute in 2007, originally intending to convert a derelict theater built sometime around the 1930s nearby into a top-of-the-line Rem Koolhaas-designed performance space, archive and education center. But when the project’s budget ballooned out of her control (Koolhaas’s plans alone were estimated to be \$31 million, which didn’t include the handling of the theater’s pre-existing asbestos problem) and her fund-raising efforts fell short (a Kickstarter only got her to a little over half a million dollars), Abramović decided to turn it into something that didn’t depend on a physical location. Its new slogan? “Don’t come to us; we come to you.”

Today, the MAI travels the world — stopping everywhere from Brazil to Bangkok and engaging its participants on the topic of performance art (it costs around \$2,000 for a five-day workshop, and anyone able to pay is welcome to enroll). Its pedagogy is focused on enlightening its students about what’s physically and mentally required of oneself to create art, principally with the Abramović Method, a set of durational exercises created by the Yugoslavian artist (who first began to teach performance art in the 1980s in Europe) that involve whimsical (and totally serious) instructions such as: “Choose a tree you like. Put your arms around the tree. Complain to the tree.”



A corner devoted to the artist's documents: correspondences, sketches and academic papers written about her. At left, a rack of clothing includes gifts from Riccardo Tisci, the chief creative officer at Burberry. Emiliano Granado



A version of this workshop is depicted in Matthew Akers's 2012 documentary, "Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present," which shows her at her home with about 30 young artists she's invited to re-perform five of her historical artworks for her retrospective of the same name at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2010. "The whole idea is to slow down your mind," Abramović says in the footage about activities such as swimming naked in a river, chanting and sitting blindfolded in a chair as she paces around beating a pellet drum.

Abramović has referred to herself as the "grandmother of performance art," which she has been making her entire life. Born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia (now Serbia), in 1946, she was creative from an early age, eventually studying at the city's University of Arts. In 1976, she met the German performance artist Ulay and began spending more time in Europe. The pair, who became lovers, collaborated on a significant body of performance art over the course of 12 years, living for some time nomadically out of a small Citroën van (which was featured in one of their [works](#)). They even, at one point, dressed like twins.



Abramović's studio is in the process of cataloging old reels of her filmed performances. Emiliano Granado



Stacks of gray boxes contain newspaper clippings about the artist dating to the 1960s. The thicker ones include material specific to past exhibitions. Emiliano Granado



Abramović's work often tests her own physical limits and the intentions of her audience: she has allowed the people around her to do whatever they want to her with 72 objects including a gun loaded with a single bullet ("Rhythm 0," 1974); had her hair braided into Ulay's, after which they sat conjoined for 16 hours ("Relation in Time," 1977); lost consciousness while lying inside a burning five-point star ("Rhythm 5," 1974); lived in a museum with only water for sustenance for 12 days, during which her single means of egress was a ladder made out of knives ("The House With the Ocean View," 2002); stood in front of an arrow held by Ulay that pointed directly at her heart, which was amplified by a microphone ("Rest Energy," 1980); and recreated the works of other great performance artists, including "Seedbed" (1972) by Vito Acconci, in which the artist lies hidden beneath a wooden ramp and masturbates ("Seven Easy Pieces," 2005).

By the time she was in her 50s, she was a respected but relatively minor name — an "artist's artist," as the curator Klaus Biesenbach put it in a 2016 profile of her for New York magazine. That all changed, of course, the following decade, after the success of her retrospective at MoMA, where Abramović sat motionless for six days a week, seven hours a day, for a total of 700 hours, allowing anyone to take a seat across from her and gaze into her eyes. The work became a phenomenon, with people lining up around the block for a chance to participate.

Since then, Abramović — who has appeared in a Jay-Z music video, worked with Lady Gaga and has a fondness for the clothes of the fashion designers Walter Van Beirendonck and Riccardo Tisci — has become something of a celebrity. Here, she answers T's [Artist's Questionnaire](#).



Among the miscellany being sorted, a photograph from Abramović's 2010 durational performance, "The Artist Is Present," at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Emiliano Granado

## **What is your day like? How much do you sleep and what is your work schedule?**

I love routine. It gives the day order. I feel good when I follow a routine. If I don't — when I'm traveling, and my schedule gets crazy — I become unbalanced. I love the regularity of a monastery: The monks wake up before sunrise, then they go to the toilet. Then they do the meditation. Then breakfast. Then they will do physical work. I try to follow a very similar schedule. I like to wake up early. It's very funny to talk about going to the toilet — Western culture is ashamed of this, but I want to discuss this. Is that OK?

**Sure.**

When you go to sleep in the evening, all the energy in your body is in a state of rest. When the sun rises, everything in you wakes up. If you don't go to the bathroom before sunrise, all the toxins rise from your feet to your brain. This is why so many people wake up tired. In some Eastern cultures — like in India, Japan, China and so on — they learn from an early age to go to the bathroom before sunrise. It's not easy to do it if you're not used to it. I had to train

myself. Then I drink a glass of warm water. Sometimes I put ginger in it, sometimes not. Then I make tea and read the news.

### **How many hours of creative work do you do in a day?**

My old friend Rebecca Horn is a wonderful German artist. After she has lunch, she goes to sleep. Except she'll say: "I'm going to work." When she wakes up, she will have had a dream. And then she'll make her work. So, she counts her sleep as working hours. Many artists get their best ideas from their dreams or in a state of complete tranquillity. I hate the studio. It's a trap to me. Ideas come from life.



When they're not being exhibited, sculptural works by the artist are crated and stored in the roughly 10,000-square-foot space. Emiliano Granado

### **What is the first piece of art you ever made?**

I had my first exhibition of paintings when I was 14. I painted my dreams. I remember being so jealous of Mozart because he started composing when he was a young child. I knew it was too late for me to be a genius, but I tried my best. I remember my first painting. It was of a candle from which there were streaks of light that were different faces, and one face fell on the table — it was my



face. It was about how you inherit an image of yourself. Or something like that. It was all in green and blue.

**What was the first work of art you sold and for how much?**

When I lived in Yugoslavia, we had no money. I wanted to be independent from my family, to be able to buy books and go to the cinema and do my own things, but I never had the pocket money. Since I was always painting, my aunts and relatives and friends of my relatives would order pieces from me. They would come and say: “We would like to have sunflowers, an open window and a full moon.” Or another would say: “I would like more tulips with the fish, cut a little onion, cut a little lemon and make the curtain move in the wind.” In 20 minutes, I was done and then I got some money. Now this was in dinars. In terms of dollars, it would have been about \$10, maybe \$15 — \$50 would have been a huge commission. I’m embarrassed to say I signed them all with a very big “Marina,” like Picasso. I thought they would just disappear. But my mother got sentimental in her old age; she didn’t like that I was doing performances instead of paintings, so she bought back all my paintings from my relatives. She died and now I have maybe 50 of them. Maybe I’ll burn them one day.

**When you start a new piece, where do you begin? What’s the first step?**

The first step is to get an idea. Not an easy idea but one that makes me go, “Oh my god. No, no, no, no.” An idea that gets stuck in my stomach. Then, I get obsessed and, finally, I say, “OK, I’m going to do it.” That moment of decision is very important. Then I do it. But a piece always starts with an idea that I don’t like — something I’m afraid of — and going into the unknown.



A pair of Eames rocking chairs in front of the artist's book collection, which includes mostly monographs and other art-related volumes. Emiliano Granado



Roll-up promotional posters and a stack of wooden shelves from an older version of a piece titled "Personal Archaeology" (1997-99), which has since been remade. Emiliano Granado

### **How do you know when you're done with a piece?**

When I don't have a gram of energy left in my entire body or soul, then I know. Therefore, criticism doesn't affect me anymore. My early works were heavily criticized; now, they're all in the most important museum collections. But at the time, if I read criticism, I couldn't leave the house, even though I knew the work was good. At the same time, I can tell when a work is not good, even if it's being called a masterpiece. It's a gut feeling.

### **How many assistants do you have?**

Until I had the MoMA show, I had only one assistant. I made that entire MoMA show with only one assistant, which is unbelievable. I come from a different part of the world, where even one assistant is a huge luxury. After the MoMA show, I ended up with seven. But it became too much work. Now I have four.

### **Have you assisted other artists before? And if so, who?**

I cut garlic and cleaned onions for [the American composer] John

Cage, but I don't think I was his assistant. He was macrobiotic and while he cooked, I would sit in his kitchen and listen to his wisdom and love every minute of it. He lived in a big loft — he was with [the pioneering dancer and choreographer] Merce Cunningham at that time — that was full of cactuses. He had this wonderful routine: He took four hours a day to prepare his food. Macrobiotic food takes a long time to make. Then, for another four hours, he maintained the cactuses. They were so fragile. Some of them needed only a drop of water, some needed you to talk to them. Some only flowered once a year. He made a list of everything about the cactuses. Also, he had names for them.

### **What music do you play when you're making art?**

I love Mozart, Bach and Satie. I really like classical music. I grew up with it. Later, I started liking world music more. I like the rusty voice of the Costa Rican Mexican singer Chavela Vargas. Lately, I listen a lot to Anohni, who is a friend of mine. I'm currently touring my work "7 Deaths of Maria Callas," so I'm listening to Maria Callas a lot as well.



An unfinished room with exposed insulation accommodates larger works. Emiliano Granado

### **What is the worst studio you've ever had?**



The most difficult time was in the '80s, when Ulay and I lived in a car for five years. We had stuff, but we couldn't keep it all in the little car we had, so we stored things with other people. At least 25 different people had our stuff: boxes filled with drawings, ideas, unfinished works, winter clothes, summer clothes, that sort of thing. We had to have a list because otherwise we didn't know where anything was anymore. That was really the worst because I don't like chaos. Here in upstate New York, I have 10,000 square feet where everything is perfectly organized. I'm very proud of it. I think it's because I come from communism.

**When did you first feel comfortable saying you are a professional artist?**

Very early. I'm lucky I never doubted who I was. As a child, I was always painting the walls until my parents gave me a studio, which was just a small little room where I could do whatever I wanted.

**Is there a meal you eat on repeat when you're working?**

I like baby food. There's a Dutch baby food company called Brinta that makes rice powder, which you mix with milk. That's the kind of food I like. I also like mashed banana or apple sauce, any kind of food like that.



"I clutter everything to the point that it's disgusting ..." says Abramović. "And then I clean everything until there's nothing left." Emiliano Granada

### **Are you bingeing any shows right now?**

I just finished this documentary about Andy Warhol [“The Andy Warhol Diaries” (2022)]. I found it very interesting. He appeared on “The Love Boat” TV series, which was the trashiest thing of the ’80s. People would say, “You’re all about glamour, money and excess, anything else?” And he was like, “No, nothing else.” He never denied who he was. He embraced everything about himself. He saved himself in that way. He created his own world. And he is about glamour, money and trash — but he’s also so much more. When I can’t sleep, I like to watch a television show that has lots of seasons. I was looking for the longest show I could find, and I came across one called “Heartland.” It’s a Canadian show that’s many seasons long about a family and horses and nothing ever happens. A horse breaks a leg, another one has a baby. The family eats. They wash dishes. They make a pie. It’s absolutely wonderful.

### **How often do you talk to other artists?**

With artists, you can cross paths and so many things happen while you’re together. Then years can pass where you don’t see them anymore. We’re like clouds. Right now, I’m very close to Anohni. I’m not so much into my generation — they complain too much. They’re always too tired, too sick, too old. I prefer young artists.

### **What do you do when you’re procrastinating?**

Cleaning is very important to me. I clutter everything to the point that it’s disgusting, and I go into a moment of denial, and then I clean everything until there’s nothing left. I teach a course called Cleaning the House — not the physical house but your own body. I do this twice a year. I go to India to an Ayurveda hospital, and I eat only the cleanest food for 21 days. I’ve done it every year for 30, 40 years. But yes, I postpone things because I don’t want to think about them, and that only makes it worse. But I don’t think I’m unique in that.



One of two main rooms in the archive, decorated with a row of drawings related to "8 Lessons on Emptiness With a Happy End," a video piece she shot in Laos in 2008. Emiliano Granado

### **What is the last thing that made you cry?**

I recently made a work called "Crystal Wall of Crying" (2021). It's 40 meters long and made out of coal and 150 healing crystals. It's about the 1943 genocide in Ukraine that killed 130,000 people in less than three days. There's never been any monument in Kyiv about it. Recently, the Russians bombed the TV station only half a mile from where the wall, which is still there, was installed. It will survive. The monument will now serve two purposes: as a remembrance of what happened in 1943 and today. What's happening is terrible. Putin is a madman.

### **What do you usually wear when you work?**

I'm very jealous of Julian Schnabel, who decided at one point to wear pajamas. I like comfortable clothes with holes and old T-shirts. This isn't the Hamptons. When I stay in the Hamptons, you have to put on makeup just to go buy bread. Here, nobody cares. And I don't see anybody except for the deer.

### **What is your worst habit?**

Chocolate. I'm so good at many things: I wake up early; I do yoga. But chocolate — I love it too much.



*Dazed*  
25th May 2022

# DAZED



Marina Abramović Via Wikimedia Commons

25th May 2022

Text Dazed Digital

## **Marina Abramović's long-delayed UK retrospective is set to open in 2023**

**The performance artist's career-spanning show at the Royal Academy of Arts has been postponed twice due to COVID-related risks**

Last year, the work of Serbian performance artist [Marina Abramović](#) appeared in a [number of exhibitions](#) across London. However, her first major UK retrospective at the Royal Academy of Arts (RA) – initially planned for 2020, then postponed to autumn 2021 due to COVID – was pushed back once again, thanks to the risks of its “performative and participatory elements” amid the pandemic.

Now, we finally have a new date for the twice-delayed show at the RA, which has announced that it will open in September 2023, running through to December of the same year.

The blockbuster exhibition is reportedly set to feature works created across Abramović's 50-year career, spanning film, photographs, [objects](#), installations, and “re-performances” – that is, recreations of the performance art for which the artist is best-known, featuring younger performers.

The actual works that are set to feature in the upcoming RA show are yet to be revealed. Given the intimate nature of many of the artist's most iconic performances, however, it's easy to see why the gallery has put off the show to coincide with the easing of COVID restrictions. In 2019, for example, the retrospective was said to include *Imponderabilia*, a once-banned nude performance by Abramović and her partner, Ulay, which required visitors to squeeze between their naked bodies.

"It became clear that autumn '21 was still a potential risk," says a Royal Academy spokesperson (via the Art Newspaper). "So to mitigate that risk, we decided to reprogramme it two years later when we felt we could be reasonably certain we could present the exhibition as we and the artist had originally intended."

Earlier this year, Abramović also resurrected her seminal performance piece *The Artist Is Present*, first staged at MoMA in 2010, for an auction to provide support amid the war in Ukraine. Winning bidders were offered the opportunity to participate in a restaging of the work, with proceeds benefiting Ukrainian war casualties.

The Royal Academy of Arts' Marina Abramović retrospective will open September 23, 2023, running until December 10, 2023.



## THE ART NEWSPAPER

### **Twice-postponed Marina Abramovic show will finally come to London in 2023**

The performance artist's exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts was announced along with shows on Impressionism, Black artists from the American South, and Hispanic art

José da Silva

24 May 2022



Marina Abramović, whose exhibition will be coming to London's Royal Academy of Arts in 2023

Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives; Photo: Paola + Murray ©, New York, 2015



A much-anticipated exhibition of the Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic has been confirmed at the Royal Academy of Arts (RA) in London. The show, which was originally due to open in September 2020, was first postponed to autumn 2021 due to the pandemic, before being rescheduled again. It will now open 23 September-10 December 2023.

The “performative and participatory elements” meant it was difficult to programme the show when potential Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions were still likely. “It became clear that autumn ’21 was still a potential risk, so to mitigate that risk, we decided to reprogramme it two years later when we felt we could be reasonably certain we could present the exhibition as we and the artist had originally intended,” says a spokesperson.

The exhibition will be the artist’s first major retrospective in the UK and follows similar blockbuster shows given to major contemporary artists in the RA’s main galleries, including Anish Kapoor in 2009, David Hockney in 2012 and Antony Gormley in 2019. The exhibition will feature more than 50 works including photographs, videos, objects, installations and so-called “re-performances”, where some of Abramovic’s previous performances will be carried out by younger performers.

Abramovic is famed for her durational and sometimes risky performances such as *Rhythm 0* (1974) where visitors were invited to do whatever they wanted to the artist using one of 72 objects laid out on a table, which included a feather, a flower, some wine, a scalpel and even a loaded gun. Another of her most talked about performances, which was spun off into a feature-length documentary, was *The Artist Is Present* (2010). Visitors could take turns sitting opposite Abramovic, who sat silently at a table for eight hours a day during the three-month run of her retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The exact works that will feature in the RA show are yet to be revealed.



Francisco de Goya's *The Duchess of Alba* (1797)  
The Hispanic Society of America

The RA also announced the rest of its 2023 schedule, which will kick off with an exhibition of Spanish and Latin American works from New York's Hispanic Society Museum & Library (*Spain and the Hispanic World*, 21 January-10 April 2023), which will include paintings by El Greco, Diego Velázquez and Francisco de Goya. Textiles from the quiltmakers of Gee's Bend will be one of the highlights of a show of Black artists from the American South (*Souls Grown Deep like the Rivers*, 17 March-18 June 2023), which will also include pieces by artists including Thornton Dial, Hawkins Bolden and Bessie Harvey. The Swiss architectural practice Herzog & de Meuron, whose £135m Royal College of Art campus was unveiled this week, will be the subject of a show exploring more than 40 years of its designs (*Herzog & de Meuron*, 14 July-15 October 2023). The year will be rounded off with a survey of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works on paper that will including pieces by Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh (*Impressionists on Paper*, 25 November 2023-10 March 2024).

# Interview

## Marina Abramović Is Forever Young

By **Ernesto Macias**

March 31, 2022



Photo by Marco Anelli © 2019. All images courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery.

For Marina Abramović, the best art is “a non-commodity,” she tells us over the phone, “You can’t sell it for millions of dollars. You have to be there to experience it.” Over her five decades-long career, the Serbian performance artist has dedicated herself to making work you can’t touch—exploring the flexibility of our boundaries, the depths of our emotions, our capacity to endure physical and emotional pain—by crafting fleeting moments that unfold



in real time. Last week's opening of *Performative*, Abramović's new exhibition at Sean Kelly New York, offers fans of the 75-year-old artist to view a selection of her past works in one place, from 1976's *Rhythm 10* to *The 7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, her new opera-turned-film. The exhibition reflects Abramović's decades-long obsession with the audience-artist relationship—but this time, she's turned her focus to younger generations, who are highly skilled in the art of performance themselves. Below, *Interview* spoke with Abramović about why young artists should never compromise, her 50-year career, and living in the present. "Don't ever call me the grandmother of performance art," Abramović says, "Just call me a warrior."

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ERNESTO MACIAS: How's it going?

MARINA ABRAMOVIC: I'm just putting some oat milk in my tea. I'm going to the spot in my house that isn't a mess. Okay, now I'm ready.

MACIAS: How's your day going, besides the renovation?

ABRAMOVIC: I'm incredibly busy. I wake up at 6:30 every morning and I still can't do everything. I have to go to Lithuania for a big show, but unfortunately I have to transfer flights in Poland, which is not the safest place right now. Then I have to go to a small little city in Denmark to receive an award. Then I have to go to Copenhagen to present the movie I made about Ulay and me. Then I have to go to Berlin to do my opera, then I'm back home. Then the summer and fall are mostly free.

MACIAS: Oh wow. I was at the gallery opening for your show. Why did you decide it was the right time to host a retrospective?

ABRAMOVIC: You know, retrospective isn't really the right word—I think of retrospectives in museums. It was more of a compilation—to see very early work and new work and everything in between. Basically, I showed four different sides of my work. So many young people have never seen these works. I wanted to give the public an opportunity to reflect on the moment in which we are living. I don't want to say retrospective because it just sounds so definite. I had a huge retrospective in New York and it had a huge amount of work.

MACIAS: I heard that *Performative* is your first show in New York in seven years. How does it feel to be back after such a long time?

ABRAMOVIC: New York is a strange place. Since Trump was elected, I didn't want any work in America, I only wanted pieces in Europe and Asia. That's not just me—so many artists felt that way, because the culture had changed so drastically. But I love the energy and my connection to the public, so I was very happy to see lots of people at the gallery. I kissed everybody and nobody had to wear masks, and god, it was great. I really had a good time, because I've hated all of this virtual connection in the past two years.

MACIAS: There was such good energy in the exhibition space.

ABRAMOVIC: Some of the public was super young, all these kids. There was this young girl who was crying and showed me her huge tattoo of "Rest Energy," my work with Ulay—my god! That's a big thing, to have the entire performance tattooed. So, I love this relationship with young people. To be there for them and offer advice about the world.

MACIAS: That was my next question actually. For a lot of people, including myself, this is the first chance to experience your work in person. Was it intended to draw in younger crowds? What do you want them to take away from this?



Installation view of Marina Abramović: *Performative* at Sean Kelly, New York.

ABRAMOVIC: No, they came by themselves! *[Laughs]* They came with my books for me to sign. I could hardly walk through the gallery, from talking and taking selfies. They hug me and I hug them and we all get very excited. But for me, it was very important to show art from *The Artist is Present*. More than 500 people were part of that, and it was filmed in real time, so this installation took years of editing. You see all these people vibrating and changing, but you see me as a constant, not moving, not drinking water, just observing. When you watch this installation, you can feel the really strong here and now of being in the moment. Every person that was in the installation is now 12 years older, and now they can go back and see themselves.

MACIAS: That's incredible. One that I was particularly interested in was "Rhythms 10." Why is that work important for you?



Rhythms 10. Installation view of Marina Abramović: *Performative* at Sean Kelly, New York.

ABRAMOVIC: I wanted to show how I started as a performance artist, my first piece. I was only 23 when I started this work, and a Super8 camera was too expensive, all we had was a little tape recorder. So what you have is a photographic performance and tape-recorded sound and that's it. In the piece, I'm playing that game where you stab a knife between your fingers, and every time I cut myself I would record the sound on a tape recorder. Then I would take a second tape recorder and try to repeat the mistake from the first time. I only missed twice. The whole idea of the piece was to bring past mistakes into the present. I was

going very deep for only 23 years old. I think it's interesting to see the evolution of my work, because it's only 50 years later—it's insane. I have no idea how it all went so fast.

MACIAS: And you've done so much. Like you said, there are so many kids following you now, what advice would you give an aspiring performance artist?

ABRAMOVIC: First of all, they have to be afraid of nothing and nobody. They have to follow their heart, they can't look at their friends, they have to find the message in themselves. Not everybody can do every performance, so it's very important to find what type of art is best for the person. It's very hard to do performance art, and most of my contemporaries, when they came to age 30, stopped and did something else. I don't know anybody still performing at my age—they're either dead or sick. To me it's one of the hardest types of art, because it's immaterial, it's time based, it's very much to do with emotions and the public, and a non-commodity—you can't sell it for millions of dollars. You have to be there to experience it.

MACIAS: That's an important message. How have you done it for so long?

ABRAMOVIC: *[Laughs]* My dear, lots of discipline. It takes unbelievable will power and lots of discipline. I am like a soldier, a warrior. Don't ever call me the grandmother of performance art, just call me a warrior. The title of my biography, which is translated in 22 languages, is *Walk Through Walls*. I am not standing in front of the wall, I am walking through it, and I never give up.

MACIAS: Your film, *The Seven Deaths of Maria Callas*, features a lot of Willem Dafoe. Can you tell me about that?



Installation view of Marina Abramović: *Performative* at Sean Kelly, New York.

ABRAMOVIC: Somebody told me that I should never do opera, because it's old fashioned and it's too long. But I am so secure in performing that I want to experience all kinds of theater. I noticed that in a lot of operas, women die a lot, so I focused only on the dying. I showed seven operas' worth of dying in one hour and 36 minutes—I showed the knifing, the jumping, the burning, suffocation, heart attack, everything. In my mind, for an artist to perform so emotionally over and over again, I said, "Who could be a better villain than this wonderful, charismatic talent [Willem] Dafoe?" He has a face for it and we're real friends, so I asked him to do it. Did you ever get a chance to see a bit of "Opera"?

MACIAS: I went twice.



ABRAMOVIC: There are seven acts, all shot different ways. I adapted it to today. Willem helped me learn how to act, and I'm really grateful for that. Riccardo Tisci made the costumes, which are masterpieces.

MACIAS: You basically created a feature film.

ABRAMOVIC: We did everything in Hollywood, and the opera is going to be performed at the Armory in New York. It's touring Europe and then America, so you will get to see it next year.

MACIAS: I cannot wait to experience it in real life.

ABRAMOVIC: I would lastly like to mention Ukraine. This, for me, is a very strong moment in human history. A few months ago, I made the biggest installation of my life—a 40 meter long wall that was an homage to the Holocaust in 1943, when they killed 130,000 people in three days—gay people, Jewish people, gypsies. It's at the Zelensky Jewish Memorial, and it's called "The Wall of Crying and Feeling." To me, it's almost a prediction of what's happening now, and I hope it becomes the Wall of Healing. I give my complete support to Ukraine. People are dying, and in this kind of situation, we all—especially artists—have to be very strong with our voices. We all need to be on the same page, against this barbarian thing. Putin is a 19th century brutalist.

MACIAS: It's true.

ABRAMOVIC: But that's really it. Let's enjoy this moment before the world explodes, though I am very worried.

MACIAS: I'm worried every day, I don't know where the world is heading and I wish I felt and knew that it was going to be okay. I think that everyone feels that way, but we must keep going because that's the only option we have.

ABRAMOVIC: It's so uncertain, because this guy can press the button at any minute. Like I depict in "Balkan Baroque," which is about the Balkan war, you can never wash your hands from war. How old are you?



*Balkan Baroque, 1997. Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives.*

MACIAS: I am 29.

ABRAMOVIC: That's my favorite generation. My generation is so boring, always complaining. I just can't stand it. I can't relate to them, but I can with you.

MACIAS: Well, I hope I stay 29 forever, then.



# Marina Abramović Will Restage Her “The Artist Is Present” Performance to Support Ukraine

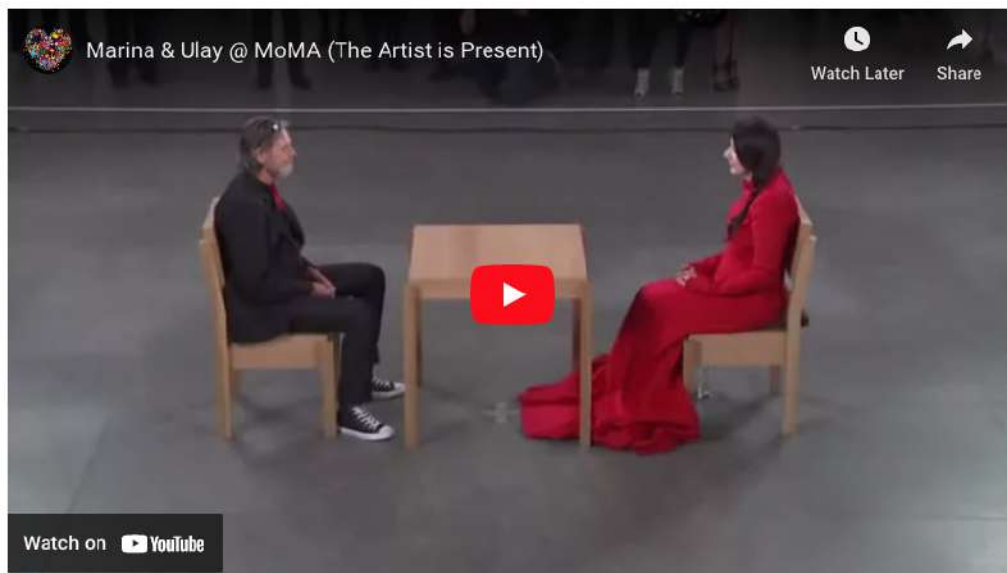
by **Stephanie Eckardt**  
03.18.22



Photo by Andrew H. Walker/Getty Images

Over the course of nearly three months in 2010, Marina Abramović spent eight hours of nearly every day sitting silently across from what amounted to more than 1,500 visitors to New York City’s Museum of Modern Art. Titled *The Artist Is Present*, the performance art went on to inspire a documentary and become her most famous work. (Thanks in no small part to her encounter with her ex Ulay, whose surprise appearance had both of them in tears, not to mention visits from celebrities like Lou Reed, Jay-Z, and Björk.) Now, a dozen years later, Abramović is offering those who didn’t make it to the MoMA another chance to participate (and likely also end up in tears).

On Friday, the 75-year-old artist announced that she is restaging the performance to support victims of Russia's war against Ukraine. Sean Kelly Gallery has teamed up with the auction platform Artsy to offer bidders the chance to sit across from Abramović at [the gallery's current survey exhibition of her work in New York City](#) on April 16. Bidding, which ends at noon on March 25, will no doubt be fierce: [Just two encounters are up for grabs](#), with one for a single person and another for two people. The lucky winners will get to have the moment memorialized by Marco Anelli, who photographed nearly every participant of *The Artist Is Present* back in 2010. The proceeds will go to Direct Relief, which has partnered with groups such as Ukraine's Ministry of Health to provide requested medical aid and preparing to aid people displaced or affected by the war in the long term.



For Abramović, the conflict in Ukraine is personal. Born and raised in Serbia, and her ties to Eastern Europe have always been a deep influence on her work. Take, for example, “Crystal Wall of Crying,” which she recently completed at the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center in Ukraine’s capital of Kyiv. [In an interview with W](#), she said that the recreation currently on view at Sean Kelly is an homage to the country. “I really hurt. It hurts so much because war hurts in general,” she said. “Ukraine can be Syria, anywhere. When you make the work and you make the message for the art, you have to create something that is actually transcendental, that can be used in so many different ways, as the society needs at the time.”

Abramović is far from the only artist to support Ukrainians through her work since Russian President Vladimir Putin declared war on February 24. Photography print sales have proven particularly popular—and particularly lucrative. One recent East London-based [sale](#), for example, generated more than £135,000 for the British Red Cross and Ukrainian Crisis Appeal through £50 prints. You can find our running list of print sales, ranging from more affordable options to pricier ones that support multiple charities, [here](#).



LISSON GALLERY

*Observer*

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# OBSERVER

ARTS

## Marina Abramović Wants People to Stop Destroying the Planet

Marina Abramović talks to Observer about the healing power of crystals, the Ukraine-Russia conflict, and her military edge.

By [Nadja Sayej](#) • 03/17/22 2:25pm



Marina Abramović. Carlo Bacci.

When Marina Abramović traveled to Kyiv in September of last year, she didn't know that her monument would be at the heart of the war. Her piece, *Crystal Wall of Crying*, set at the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial, commemorates Jews killed in the Babyn Yar massacre, which was unveiled on the 80th anniversary since Nazi troops gunned down nearly 34,000 Jewish men, women and children in 1941. At the time, the Serbian artist said: "I want to create the image that is transcendental about any war at any time at any place."

Now, it feels prophetic, but the artist is no stranger to that. In her film installation *Seven Deaths*—set to the seven Maria Callas solos—she walks through a dystopian world wearing a hazmat suit, escaping an invisible poison. It was shot in 2019, but it feels relevant to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Abramović is 75, but she's a busy artist. She recently opened an exhibition at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City, called "Performative," which runs until April 16. The exhibition showcases a select number of works from her 50-year career, including her famous 2010 piece, *The Artist is Present*, where she sat for three months looking at one gallery goer at a time seated before her at the Museum of Modern Art, gazing into the eyes of over a thousand strangers (many were moved to tears).

She also recently released a deck of cards called The Marina Abramović Method and will tour with her opera-performance art piece *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, to the Deutsche Opera in Berlin on April 8, and at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples from May 13 to 15. She is also slated to be the first woman to have a solo exhibition at the Royal Academy of Art in London, in 2023, breaking a new record in the Royal Academy's 250 year history.

Abramovic just partnered with photographer Marco Anelli for an auction to support Ukraine for an auction on Artsy starting March 17, with all proceeds going towards Direct Relief's emergency response fund. She took time out of her uber busy schedule to talk to Observer about the healing power of crystals, the Ukraine conflict, and her military edge.

**Hi Marina, is now a good time to chat?**

**Marina Abramović:** Yes, and you're one minute late, which is perfect. It's 9:46 a.m.

**Ooh, you're exacting. Have you always been that way?**

I've been in a military family all my life. So, I'm not surprised. It's simply the control.

**That's the key to your success in many ways.**

It's so important to be organized. I've never been spoiled in my life. I learned that if you go to Japan, and you're on time, you're late because you're supposed to be 15 minutes early. In Germany it's the exact same. In France, if you're on time, they're embarrassed because you're supposed to be at least 45 minutes late. In Brazil, you only make appointments after the rain, whenever the rain stops.

**What did you have for breakfast?**

Orange juice and tea. And watching the news, that's depressing. [Sigh].



## **How do you feel about the situation in Ukraine?**

You know, I'm very involved in this situation. I have been in Ukraine recently many times, as I built this memorial for the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial, my work is called *The Crystal Wall of Crying*, can you imagine? It has another meaning, now. It's made of the black coal and quartz crystals, meant to purify and to heal. When we opened this in October, the President of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier and the President of Israel Isaac Herzog were there to commemorate the 80th anniversary since one of the worst massacres of the Holocaust, engaging in this moment of silence, it was very touching. The whole area has been bombed. The memorial is untouched. This is happening all over again. In 1943, 130,000 were killed in three days. And Russians came. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is Jewish. I think it's incredibly dangerous what's happening. It's not just for Ukraine but the whole world. We're talking about a man who is trying to create a great Russia, he's trying not to show his weakness. He will go to death. The more NATO and America get involved, it's going to get worse. War is a very possible option.

## **It's unbelievable your piece is still there, what can be done?**

Nothing can be done. NATO and America are incredibly guilty for the situation. If they left Ukraine alone and neutral, this would not happen. It's not just one side. Geopolitically, there's so many elements. It started in Georgia in 2008. Everything was there, you could see it coming. Russia is so dangerous, and it has China. Just Covid-19 finished and now this. What can be done? Everyone has to do their part. Artists have to do their part. Politicians must do their part. As an artist, when the Balkan War happened, I made this piece called *Balkan Baroque*. Humans historically just continue killing each other, this is something so painful to realize. History is repeating. I always try to have some kind of big picture, looking from the outside, we have this wonderful planet and we're destroying it.



"Performative" at Sean Kelly Gallery Jason Wyche

**Crystals are also a part of your *Wooden Chairs* on view at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York, right? The public is invited to sit on the chairs, too.**

Yes, it's all about healing. I call them transitory because they're there for the experience, I don't call them sculptures. It's to sit in silence and look at the wall or amethyst and reflect on yourself and the world. It's a quiet piece, quiet moments and especially in a city like New York.

### **What about the other pieces?**

I show my first performance in the show *Rhythm 10*, and my latest video piece, *Seven Deaths*. And my piece *The Artist is Present*, it was crazy editing down this piece from 760 hours. I'm constantly on one side and the public is changing every day. It's a mini-show I'm pretty proud of.

### **Where was *Seven Deaths* shot?**

In Los Angeles, it's a video installation of the *Seven Deaths of Maria Callas* with more elements. It's shot in a reconstruction of the room where Maria Callas died in Paris. There's singers, an orchestra, the whole thing. We're going on tour with operas in Munich, Berlin, Amsterdam, and Naples. Then it's coming to New York.

### **What's the best part about collaborating with Willem Dafoe and costume designer Riccardo Tisci?**

Oh, it's a dream team to have. I already worked with Willem Dafoe on my piece *The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic*, he played everyone from the crazy joker to the lover. It was so important talking to him finding out about acting. Acting was something totally unknown to me. Performance art, everything is real. Acting you have to get into the role. Especially for dying. He explained to me how to become a character and be believable. That it's possible. In the end, women always die for love. Callas psychologically died from a broken heart, she didn't want to live anymore. This is why Dafoe is killing me over and over again.

### **My favorite part is when you're throwing flower vases against a mirror, breaking the mirror over and over again. You're not superstitious, are you?**

I was Lucia, not me, it was taken from a scene in the Callas opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor*. If I break a mirror in my home—I'm very superstitious! Not as Lucia. That was not me. That's the magic. She lost everything in love. She died of a broken heart. Lucia was the longest of all operas in the film because there's a dying scene. She needs to destroy everything.



**What about the scene from the film called *The Poison*, taken from Act III of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, where you're in a dystopian nightmare where everyone has to wear hazmat suits to protect themselves from green fog? Was that filmed before the pandemic?**

It was! And it became such an ominous piece. I always think there's something about art that sometimes has this quality you can reach, where you can sometimes predict the future. In some ways, it's a good future, in others, it's a bad future. It's happened to me so many times in life. In *The Poison* it's the radiation, in *The Wall of Crying* it's the war, it's a miracle it's still there. But they can bomb it any minute now, we'll see what will happen. Parts of the city that are just 300 meters away have been destroyed, including the nearby Jewish cemetery.

**Why did you use crystals like quartz?**

It's not mumbo jumbo. It has been proven they have energy. Let's hope this wall will survive. It's called *The Wall of Crying*, but after crying, you have healing. There's so much to heal.

**Which crystals are the most powerful to heal?**

It's the type, size, and metals. I created my own structure comparing the human body with the body of the planet. I always thought clear crystals are the eyes of the planet, and the mineral tourmaline is the liver. Rose quartz is the heart. Amethyst is the mind and brain. Copper, I believe, is the nurse system of the planet. Hematite is iron, the blood of the planet. I have this imagination of the planet and how it relates to the human body, and how they can heal each other.

**What can you tell us about your new deck of 30 cards you released with Laurence King Publishing, called *The Marina Abramović Method*?**

It's a process, much like cleaning the house. Each card has an image from 30 different performances I've done, and on the other side, there's instructions to help change your mindset. One says, "Drink a glass of water as slowly as you can," another says "Listen to nature." You can enter into another state of consciousness. To make the most of the cards, pick any card by chance.

**With your piece *The Artist is Present*, which was performed at the Museum of Modern Art in 2010, looking back 12 years later, what do you see?**

When I look at the faces of all these people, I feel them. If people come and see themselves, they're 12 years older than they were in the film, you know? It was one of the most incredible experiences I had, it was so difficult. Each day could have been the last. It was three months long. It was the most difficult thing I could do, being motionless. I just was present. The emotional and physical pain of people coming to me, their emotions, it was overwhelming. When I stood up at the end, I was a different person.



Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present Marco Anelli

**There's videos of you crying in this installation, while you were sitting there at the MoMA. What made you cry?**

Them! There was so much pain in this city, there's so much loneliness in this city. When you're there you're really empty and you just try to absorb them. I felt like a receptor ready for their emotions to come out.

**Are you excited about your upcoming Royal Academy retrospective next year?**

I am! In their 250-year history, they've never had a woman solo show, I have to come. There has to be a change.





## The Legacy of Marina Abramović's "The Artist is Present" Lives On with New Generations of Artists

Ayanna Dozier



Marina Abramović

*Individual Portrait For One Person, The Artist is Present - Installation Experience, 2022*

Artsy Impact Auctions

Bidding closed

Marina Abramović is no stranger to the mythology of her artistic oeuvre. When asked about her biggest contributions to the role of performance art within institutions, Abramović responded succinctly: reperformance and long durational performance art. Abramović's ninth solo show at Sean Kelly Gallery, "Performative,"

continues that commitment of revisiting performance as a way to reopen past durational performances to new audiences. The exhibition revisits four key performance works that are central to Abramović's career: *Rhythm 10* (1973), "Transitory Objects" (1990-2015), *The Artist is Present* (2010), and *Seven Deaths* (2020).

The highlight of the exhibition lies with Abramović's restaging of *The Artist is Present* (2010). The piece was originally held at the Museum of Modern Art as part of the artist's retrospective in 2010. *The Artist is Present* featured Abramović sitting in a chair locking eyes with visitors, who sat down one by one across from her for eight hours a day, for nearly three months—the duration of her retrospective. The piece has since been instrumental in moving performance into museums and other art spaces, creating a way for curators to navigate performance as a tangible artifact beyond its ephemeral nature.



Marina Abramović, installation view of *The Artist is Present*, 2010, at The Museum of Modern Art, 2010. Courtesy of the artist; The Museum of Modern Art.

Abramović is not only revisiting this work through the exhibition. In collaboration with Sean Kelly Gallery, Artsy will host "[The Artist is Present: A Benefit Auction for Ukraine](#)," which will allow people to bid on the unique opportunity to sit with Abramović in the installation, where the original photographer, Marco Anelli, will document the encounter. Two of these installation experiences are

on offer, with 100 percent of proceeds going to nonprofit Direct Relief in support of Ukraine.

For its reexhibition at Sean Kelly Gallery, *The Artist is Present* is presented through its core elements. The same two wooden chairs that were used at MoMA stand opposite each other, while on the adjacent walls, we see video footage of the original sitters' faces as well as the artist's face, assembled in a grid corresponding to the dates of the original performance. This restaging restores Abramović's commitment to the "now" of the original piece. Gone now is the hullabaloo of the audience and spectacle of lights that shrouded the performance at MoMA, which is how it is often remembered.



Marina Abramović, installation view of *The Artist is Present*, 2010, at The Museum of Modern Art, 2010. Courtesy of the artist The Museum of Modern Art.



Marco Anelli, *Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramović*, 2012. © Marco Anelli. Courtesy of Jodie Lyn-Kee-Chow.

In the accompanying 2012 HBO documentary of the same name, the cameras capture the slow rise of the eccentric gathering, which saw audiences steadily grow and extend to lines that wrapped around MoMA over the course of the exhibition. Although not necessarily orchestrated as a spectacle, MoMA's second-floor atrium was the perfect stage for the encounter. Onlookers were able to look down upon the performance from the upper floors, in addition to the second-floor cluster of spectators who were prospective participants waiting in line. Stripped bare from the media circus, *The Artist is Present* installation at Sean Kelly Gallery reminds us of the simplicity of Abramović's intention of providing audiences access to the artist.



To return to the original work this way creates an opportunity for the visitor to time travel. Speaking at the press preview, Kelly and Abramović expressed an awareness that in the decade since the staging of *The Artist is Present*, a generation of performance artists and scholars have emerged who did not have the chance to see nor engage with the work. This restaging cannot replicate a one-to-one experience of the original but allows the audience, through recordings and installation, to feel the presence of the original.

Reperformance and long durational performance are practices that Abramović has spearheaded for other performance artists. Speaking with performance artists Ayana Evans and Jodie Lyn-Kee-Chow about their experiences sitting for *The Artist is Present* in 2010 also revealed how Abramović's work has shaped their own performance practices. Evans remarked that "while my work heavily cites the legacies of Lorraine O'Grady and Pope.L, without Abramović's work, you do not really get mine."



Portrait of Ayana Evans performing *Stay with Me*, 2018 by Jennifer Coard. Courtesy of Ayana Evans.



Portrait of Ayana Evans performing *Stay with Me*, 2014-18 by Jennifer Coard. Courtesy of Ayana Evans.

Evans recalled that before her sitting, she had tried once before to participate in *The Artist is Present* to no avail. Wanting to ensure her participation in the series, which she described as "historic," Evans asked the MoMA security guards for tips, which revealed insight

into how these participatory events are staged and curated by the institutions, with a preference for spectacle. Upon her second attempt, which was late in the exhibition's run, Evans ran through the lobby shortly after the museum opened and sat for several hours in the line. Evans remembers the entirety of the experience, which includes the brief friendship she struck while waiting with the participant behind her. She described the actual sitting as moving, for she was able to hold space with the labor of another performance artist in the moment.

Lyn-Kee-Chow also attended the performance late in the exhibition's staging. She was inspired by the increasing antics that were emerging from other artists participating and decided to wear a wedding dress to mirror what she describes as Abramović's papal presence in white. Having witnessed Abramović's reperformance of "Seven Easy Pieces" at the Guggenheim Museum in 2005, Lyn-Kee-Chow saw the opportunity as a legendary development regarding *how* performance art occupies space in the institution, a rarity before then. In 2005, Lyn-Kee-Chow was developing her own performance practice by reperforming Abramović's work, like *Imponderabilia* (1977), in grad school at Hunter College.



Marina Abramović, still from *The Artist is Present*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist; The Museum of Modern Art; Jodie Lyn-Kee-Chow.

Evans's and Lyn-Kee-Chow's practices have been on the rise since their *The Artist is Present* sittings, and both artists have brought renewed attention to the value of reperformance and long durational performance for a different generation. Evans notably has several long durational pieces that she has reperformed over the years, including the two-hour-plus jumping-jack performance in heels, *Stay With Me* (2014–18), and *Girl, I'll Drink Your Bathwater* (2015–present).

In the latter piece, Evans confronts the alienation femme bodies experience as both an object of desire and a subject. The expression is taken from her experiences in the club where men would express to her, "Girl you're so fine, I'd drink your bathwater." Evans reflects upon this expression by literally drinking dishwater, in an effort to purify her body for others. There is great discomfort watching Evans squeeze a third or even half a bottle of dish soap into a bucket of water. She gulps the sudsy liquid over the span of two hours while providing clean water in champagne glasses to her audiences. We ponder: When will it come back up?



Portrait of Ayana Evans performing *Girl I'll Drink Your Bathwater*, 2015 by Geraldo Mercado. Courtesy of Ayana Evans.



While the eventual sickness is not part of the performance—it's strategically timed to end just before—we do witness Evans poisoning herself to fit into historical internalizations of cleanliness that structure Black women's respectability politics. Respectability defines the belief that Black women needed to uplift the race through their appearance to quell anti-Black racism in the 20th century. This pursuit of respectability informs Evans's attire—her signature catsuit, her church shoes (purchased at Payless)—and even the dish soap she uses, Palmolive. Evans described her use of Palmolive as inspired by her grandmother, who swore that it was a one-stop wonder that cures all ails afflicting the body.

Similarly, Lyn-Kee-Chow has performed *Gypsies' Picnic: The Feast of Those Gone By* (2015–2016), which uses iconography across colonial images to challenge the afterlife of colonization in areas where it is not readily discussed like desire, memory, and consumption. Using the framework of potluck, Lyn-Kee-Chow's performance alters each time it is performed as it is based on what the audiences bring to the hyperreal potluck. The piece draws out the discomfort that emerges over time at the “dinner table” that cannot be replicated in a brief encounter.



Marina Abramović, installation view of *Marina Abramović: Performative*, 2022 at Sean Kelly, New York, 2022. Photo by Jason Wyche. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York.

Both Evans and Lyn-Kee-Chow were active performers at the Panoply Performance Laboratory space, which they both describe as a space where ideas around performance could be hashed out. The same commitment to reperformance that Abramović pioneered was part of the performance ethos of Panoply. Evans said that it was at Panoply that she talked with other artists about *The Artist is Present* and traded stories about their experiences. Lyn-Kee-Chow expressed her interest in the shared legacies between Abramović's path to the institution through the Lower East Side performance scene and her own through the Bushwick performance scene via Panoply.

Lyn-Kee-Chow also remarked that those outsider roots are still visible in Abramović's current exhibition at Sean Kelly Gallery, which is where the former Exit Art gallery (1982–2012) was located in Hell's Kitchen. Exit Art was a prominent venue for alternative performance and multimedia art. These connections are further built into the laboratory of performance as something to revisit, reexamine. But most importantly as something to be remembered.

The restaging of *The Artist is Present* creates an opportunity to revisit time itself. Walking through the gallery and seeing the faces assembled as calendar blocks restages time and duration in a way that cannot be repeated exactly but can be reexperienced differently. The work allows for something that many artworks can not accomplish: A return. ■



Marina Abramović wears the colors of the Ukrainian flag inside her exhibition at Sean Kelly Gallery, titled "Performative."

## The Rebirth of Marina Abramović

The artist contemplates what it means to be happy.

by **Maxine Wally**  
Photographs by **Susan Meiselas**  
03.15.22

For nearly 50 years, Marina Abramović has made art out of pain, suffering, and heartbreak. Take, for example, the very first piece of performance art the Serbian-born artist created, titled "Rhythm 10": it was a play on an Eastern European drinking game in which one participant places their hand, outstretched, on a surface, and stabs a sharp knife in the spaces between their fingers. Each time the player misses and nicks themselves, they have to take a drink. In 1973, a live audience watched as Abramović spread her hand onto a piece of white paper and played the game, her blood acting as paint, while she tape recorded her own guttural groans of pain. Fifteen years later, she and her ex-lover and artistic collaborator, Frank Uwe Laysiepen, whom she called Ulay, ended their 12-year relationship in the piece "The Lovers," by walking towards each other for days across the Great Wall of China, then breaking up once they came face to face. And the idea for "The Artist Is Present," the 2010 MoMA work that Abramović is arguably best known for, was born immediately after she suffered one of the most painful heartbreaks of her life: divorce from her ex-husband Paolo Canevari, following yet another 12-year relationship.



“It’s all very Slavic,” Abramović, who just celebrated her 75th birthday in November, says while sitting across from me at the dining room table inside her New York City apartment, snacking on a small bowl of cookies. “I was always thinking some terrible things must happen to you in order to be in solitude. If you think about Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy—they were always suffering.”



It’s an interesting time to be mulling the painful emotions that have bookended her most famous works since, for the past seven years, Abramović hasn’t put up a single exhibition in New York. Instead, she says, she’s been exploring what it means to be happy. She’s spent her time traveling, attending retreats in Sri Lanka, India; showing all over Europe; healing from a nasty bout of Lyme disease, and working on her current relationship, which has lasted five years so far, and is “stable, actually based on trust,” she says. “I’m completely regular in everything,” Abramović adds. “I go to sleep at 9 o’clock. I wake up at 6:30, I do yoga, I have my tea, I work. And I’m constantly thinking, when is the other shoe going to fall? This can’t be possible. I’ve never had this period, I have to say, ever. I’ve never been more stable than I am now. And honestly, it’s very unnatural ground for me.”

Yet this calm, peaceful mindset also allowed for Abramović to begin exhibiting again. 2023 marks the 60-year anniversary of the beginning of her career, and next year Abramović will put on a major retrospective at The Royal Academy of Arts. (She’s also opening a major solo exhibition *Memory of Being* at the Kaunas Picture Gallery in Lithuania, on March 29.) Before that, she has a much smaller, quieter, but equally impactful exhibition running at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City through April 16, titled “Performative”—an encapsulation of works that have changed and shaped Abramović’s life and outlook on performance art.

The show contains photographs and audio from the aforementioned “Rhythms 10”—a significant work not only because it highlights Abramović’s personal and cultural roots, but also because it was the first piece she made that convinced her performance art was her chosen medium—as well as a video installation of “The Artist is Present,” and a screening of the film “Seven Deaths,” which Abramović made with the actor Willem Dafoe. “Willem is killing me over and over again, forever,” she tells me, by way of explanation on the film’s content. “Can I show you one, to see what it looks like?”



Abramović scoots out of her chair and shuffles into the next room, looking for her laptop. Her home in Lower Manhattan is filled with light, the entire floor painted a shade of robin's egg blue. ("I did it during quarantine," she says, "To resemble the sea.") There are stacks of books lining the perimeter of her living room which, I note, does not have a television. "I don't watch TV," Abramović tells me, waving her hand.

The artist keeps every piece of press she's ever gotten in her home upstate, nestled inside a "10,000-square-foot- archive," but she's got some clippings here and there in the apartment. A red, leather-bound book contains every article written about "Seven Deaths" in Germany, gifted to her by the Bayerische Staatsoper opera house, which hosted her last year. Much of the ephemera scattered around the house, in fact, were presents for her: small clay statuettes of rabbits playing instruments a friend purchased in Mexico City; a black coat a young Polish designer gave to her that's lined with the image from Abramović and Ulay's 1977 work, "Relation in Time," with the young designer's face superimposed onto Ulay's. She putters around the kitchen, talking in her low, almost baritone voice at a rapid-fire pace, making jokes and laughing to herself until she finds her computer and sits back down at the table.

"Seven Deaths," she explains, is the video version of the traveling opera-slash-performance-art piece that premiered at the Bavarian State Opera, and later showed at the Palais Garnier in Paris, then Munich, in 2021. In this series of short films, Abramović is, indeed, killed by Dafoe—a former neighbor with whom she's quite close—in various manners: jumping from a building, being strangled by enormous snakes, burning at the stake, all set against the operatic stylings of Maria Callas. Burberry artistic director Riccardo Tisci, another good friend of Abramović's, designed the costumes for the series.



Abramović's love for Callas is well-documented: Abramović first heard the singer when she was 14 years old, when her grandmother turned on their Bakelite radio and Callas's voice came floating through the speakers, prompting Abramović to instantly begin crying. She sees Callas as something of a kindred spirit: they both had difficult relationships with their very strict mothers, they are both Sagittarius, they both created works from places of distress and agony. Callas, who sustained a long-running relationship with Aristotle Onassis and was physically abused by him, eventually died of a heart attack—or, as it was described in the media at that time, “heartbreak.”

“I almost died from love, from a broken heart, too,” Abramović says. “But for me, my work saved me.”

The artist admits there is, however, one thing causing her pain these days: the Russian attacks on Ukraine. It's a personal source of trauma, stemming from her own Eastern European roots; plus, Kyiv is where Abramović completed a recent work, “Crystal Wall of Crying,” at the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center. “I made the wall, which is the biggest thing I've ever done, 40 meters long, out of black coal, and there are crystals sticking out. The coal is something black, a source of energy, and the crystals are just white and pure,” she explains. Visitors who came to the site at Babyn Yar stood close to the crystals, their heads nearly touching them. At Sean Kelly gallery, she recreated the quartz crystals as an homage to Ukraine, in a section of the exhibition she says is filled with “transient objects.” “I really hurt. It hurts so much because war hurts in general,” she says. “Ukraine can be Syria, anywhere. When you make the work and you make the message for the art, you have to create something that is actually transcendental, that can be used in so many different ways, as the society needs at the time.”

“Crystal Wall of Crying,” Abramović explains, is meant to be a source of healing, a way to praise “your body, your heart, and your stomach against the crystals.” She hopes visitors at “Performative” will feel that sense of healing, that journey across pain of all kinds she experienced throughout her life, until she finally unlocked her own answer to being happy: being present, which means being grateful. When she wakes up each morning to read the headlines about Ukraine, she makes sure to remind herself how grateful she is to be at peace. It's a revolutionary act, she says, to make work from a place of happiness; at least for her, an artist whose entire career has relied upon being tortured.





“The Artist is Present,” a work that transformed Abramović into a worldwide celebrity, was no different from “Rhythm 10” or “The Lovers” in that it required physical pain and endurance to be brought to completion. Thousands of attendees at MoMA watched Abramović sit in the same spot, without moving, eating, drinking water, or using the bathroom, for 750 hours over the course of three months, while guests took turns sitting in front of her. I ask her whether she considers “The Artist Is Present” the most important project of her life.

“No, I don’t,” she responds. “I still have to make more works, and I always think something revolutionary will come out of me. But I can say this was the most transformative work—this work transformed me into something else. Something happened there. It was that incredible discovery of unconditional love to any single person standing in front of me.” Maria Callas and Marina Abramović may share Zodiac signs in common, but Abramović will be damned if she lets heartbreak kill her.

# LISSON GALLERY

*Wall Street Journal Magazine*

14 March 2022

WSJ.  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL MAGAZINE

## Marina Abramović on Why the Best Ideas Are the Ones That Surprise You

The performance artist also talks about why she doesn't keep regular studio hours: "You're kind of like a bank employee, where you're going to work every day."



PHOTO: OSCAR MEYER, COURTESY OF THE MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ ARCHIVES

Marina Abramović, 75, is known for performance art that pushes the limits of the body and the mind. In one of her most famous works, *The Artist is Present* (2010), she spent eight hours a day for nearly three months sitting still and silently on a chair in a gallery at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Museumgoers could take turns sitting in a chair opposite her, looking into her eyes. “I literally changed my entire way of living for one year,” she says of her training and preparation. “I had to eat and drink water in the night because during the day; I absolutely didn’t move. It was like [being an] astronaut, adapting yourself to a totally different way.”

Marina Abramović, 75, is known for performance art that pushes the limits of the body and the mind. In one of her most famous works, *The Artist is Present* (2010), she spent eight hours a day for nearly three months sitting still and silently on a chair in a gallery at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Museumgoers could take turns sitting in a chair opposite her, looking into her eyes. “I literally changed my entire way of living for one year,” she says of her training and preparation. “I had to eat and drink water in the night because during the day; I absolutely didn’t move. It was like [being an] astronaut, adapting yourself to a totally different way.”

A version of that work—a video installation, featuring the show’s participants on one wall and Abramović’s face across from them on the other—is on view at Sean Kelly gallery through April 16, as part of a career-spanning show of her work.

Abramović, who lives in New York City and upstate New York, also embraces regimented discipline in her daily routines. Every morning, she wakes up before sunrise to go to the bathroom. “People never talk about these things,” she says. “I’m very obsessed with being healthy, [and I believe that] when the sun rises, all energy goes up, so if you don’t go to the bathroom before sunrise, all the toxins of your body go up, too.” She goes back to bed afterwards and says it took awhile to train her body to cooperate. “In the beginning, I would just go to the bathroom, sit, nothing happened. Then the body really started learning that I had to do this thing before sunrise.”

Born and raised in Belgrade, Serbia, which was then part of Yugoslavia, Abramović studied at the Academy of Fine Arts there and completed her postgraduate studies in 1972. In 1976, she met the German performance artist Ulay, who became her collaborator and romantic partner. In 1988, they commemorated the end of their relationship by walking from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China and meeting in the middle, in a performance called *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk*. (When conceiving it, they’d originally planned to get married at their meeting point.)



For decades, Abramović has also been teaching, both as a professor and at workshops through her own Marina Abramović Institute. Her performances have taken place at museums including the Guggenheim, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. Next year, she will be the first female artist to host a major solo exhibition across the entire main galleries at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Here, she speaks to *WSJ.* about her yoga routine and why she doesn't go to her studio on a regular basis.

**What do you do after you wake up for the second time?**

I like to bring tea into bed and I like to read the newspaper. I like to read what's happening in the world, what's happening in New York, the art section, real estate, climate change, the new restaurants around the world, things like that.

After that, I stand up and I do yoga. I have my routine, which takes about 55 minutes, which is not just yoga. It's a mix between yoga and push-ups. I'm very big on stomach exercises. And then I do the bicycle for cardio. Then I start the day. I make my breakfast and then it's mostly Zoom calls I have to do. When I finish, I do my own work.

**What do you eat for breakfast to start the week off right?**

It depends. Sometimes, like now, I'm eating raspberries and almonds for breakfast. Sometimes I wake up really hungry. Then I would eat rice with one egg on top and kimchi. I like porridge with lots of berries inside, very simple. In the summer, if I can get good papaya, I will only have papaya for breakfast. Papaya feels the best for the body in the morning. But the papaya in America is terrible, unfortunately. If you go to Asia—I was just in Sri Lanka during Christmas—the papaya is to die for. Mango, papaya—it's another world.

**Do you take vitamins?**

I only take them for hair and nails. Everything else I'm taking is ayurveda, it's mostly herbal powders.

**Is there a time of the day or week when you're most creative?**

Anytime after 5 o'clock, it's not productive. When I was young, I wouldn't sleep all night. [Now] I go to bed at 9:30. I don't like evenings, I don't like dinners in the evening. The ideal time that I eat the last meal is 4 o'clock. I really like to sleep eight hours or more. I really like sleeping.



Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present

**What are your routines like as they relate to working on your art? Do you have certain hours every day?**

No. I don't like the studio. I always think that if you go to the studio, you're kind of like a bank employee, where you're going to work every day. I believe that ideas have to come as a surprise. What you have to do is life. Life has to be interesting, and ideas come from life. I'm only interested in ideas I'm afraid of, ideas that are difficult or mysterious. Then I go to the studio to realize them, but not before. The idea has to come as a surprise.

**As we continue to come out of the pandemic, how do we create and foster the deep human connection that some of us have been missing?**

The pandemic has been so difficult for relationships. I have so many friends who divorced, so many friends who stopped talking. But also people get together on a much deeper level. So I think the pandemic is some kind of cleaning process for relationships. Everything that wasn't important fell off. I think the pandemic is a huge teacher for us for how we can manage life, because life is so temporary and we have to live every day like it's the last, be really full of joy.

**Have you been going to a lot of parties?**

My boyfriend took me to Detroit to see the Rolling Stones' last concert. Fifty thousand people without masks. I was thinking, *OK, this is the time I'm going to get Covid*. I was so interested to see the Rolling Stones. Mick Jagger is 78, so he's older than me. So I wanted to see how someone who's 78 could hold 50,000 people onstage and what kind of energy he had with a two-and-a-half-hour-long concert. Two and a half hours of hell. He did it. He is really unbelievable, I have to say.

And then I just go around to places to see jazz, to see concerts, whatever's available. Three days ago, I went to this burlesque place, to see that scene, which is something that I don't know anything about. I'm one of those people who are like a child, new and different every single day.

**How do you feel about the present and future of performance art?**

Performance is one of the most difficult art categories. You have to be there in the place that it happened; it's time-based art, it doesn't cost money. You can't really buy performance in the way you can a Van Gogh painting or the sculptures of Jeff Koons. Performance never can be an investment, but at the same time it's very important, because performance can lift human spirits like other arts can't.

**What do you do to relax?**

I love reading good books and I love the movies, but also [I love watching] something which is very simple. What I like about [TV] series is something that has many, many seasons. I found a Canadian series about some horse ranch which has something like 12 seasons, unbelievably long. Literally nothing happens. They wash the horse, they make the meal, they cook pie, then they wash the dishes. It's fantastic. I watch a little bit of this and then I fall asleep.

**What's one piece of advice you've gotten that's guided you?**

I like the piece of advice I got from my professor of painting many, many years ago when he said to me, "If you're drawing with your right hand and you become so good you can even make the drawing with closed eyes, immediately change to the left." And then he said, "Never repeat yourself." That's the important thing.



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# VANITY FAIR

## Marina Abramović Wants to Reboot Your Life

As she shares her method with the world, the legendary performance artist talks conquering fear of failure, advice from the Dalai Lama and Lou Reed, and aging with vigor.

BY KEZIAH WEIR

FEBRUARY 24, 2022



Portrait of Marina Abramović, April 2015. BY LUDOVIC CAREME/AGENCE VU/REDUX.

**D**rink a glass of water as slowly as you can.  
Look at your reflection.  
Stretch as if for the first time.  
Complain to a tree.

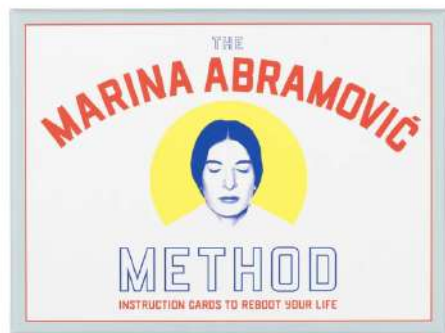
So dictates *The Marina Abramović Method: Instruction Cards to Reboot Your Life*, a 30-pack of exercises out next week from Laurence King Publishing. “I really like the cover,” **Abramović** says placidly from her New York apartment; framed by the Zoom screen, her vibrant red shirt and backdrop of pale cabinets mimic the hues on the box—all that’s missing is the golden halo. Her eyes crinkle behind her thick black glasses. “The cover looks like for the baby food cereal from the ’30s.”

Abramović, known variously as the grandmother and godmother of performance art—and also, arguably, the *only* famous performance artist—was born in Belgrade in former Yugoslavia in 1946. (“When people ask me where I am from,” she **once told a journalist**, “I never say Serbia. I always say I come from a country that no longer exists.”) In one of her best-known early works, *Rhythm 0* (1974), Abramović surrounded herself with 72 objects, ranging from a rose to a scalpel to a loaded gun, and over the course of six hours allowed her audience to use them to do as they wished to her. Her romantic and creative partnership with the artist Ulay, who died of in 2020 almost 10 years after being diagnosed with cancer, produced *Rest Energy* (1980), in which Abramović held the curved end of a loaded bow, Ulay held the arrow aimed at her chest, and the pair leaned back, counterweighting each other as their heartbeats broadcast through microphones; as a final breakup work, **they walked the Great Wall of China** from opposite ends. In 1995, Abramović performed *Cleaning the Mirror*; as she scrubbed down a dirty human skeleton, she became covered in the grime. After advising the *Sex and the City* episode in which Carrie meets Aleksandr Petrovsky at a Chelsea art show, based on Abramović’s 2002 piece *The House With the Ocean View*, the artist befriended actor **Kim Cattrall**.

More recently, between March and May 2010, visitors to MoMA (including Lou Reed, **Jemima Kirke**, and **Björk**) queued for hours to have a turn sitting across from Abramović as she **performed** *The Artist Is Present*. In 2016, early uncorrected galleys of her memoir, *Walk Through Walls*, attracted **unfavorable attention** for her depiction of Indigenous Australians, prompting the hashtag #TheRacistIsPresent. (The passage in question was changed prior to publication and she released a statement that stated, in part, that the page came from diary entries that reflected her “initial reaction to these people,” which had since changed.) In 2017, Ladurée **captured her in macaron form**. (Notes of coffee, cardamom, the feeling of seeing the line where the sea meets the sky.) In 2020, Abramović **debuted** her first opera, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, and last year she partnered with WeTransfer as a “**guest curator**” for the company’s creative arm, WePresent. “During the pandemic, I think I’m the person who traveled more than anybody else,” she tells me. “I just came back from Sri Lanka. I work constantly. So I don’t have, really, the syndrome of being locked down, and I ignore this whole thing. I get tested, I’m vaccinated, and I go and work.” Soon she’ll be heading to Rome, Amsterdam, and Madrid.

Throughout her long and varied career, Abramović has been honing, practicing, and finally proselytizing—in workshops conducted through the **Marina Abramović Institute**, and now in the deck of cards—her method, born from a process that she calls “cleaning the house.”

Each of the cards features a photo from one of Abramović's performances on one side and a directive—many of which include long periods of observation or repetitive movement, such as staring into a partner's eyes for an hour, gazing at your own reflection, opening and closing a door for three hours, drinking a glass of water as slowly as you can—on the other. Working through them, "You're actually changing your mindset," Abramović says. "You enter into another, different state of consciousness. The door is not the door anymore. It's transforming in front of your eyes into space, into void, into cosmos." To make the most of the deck, she advises, "Blindfold yourself, pick up any card, and do the exercise, so you're not making a rational choice. You're making a chance operation, like John Cage."



Preorder *The Marina Abramović Method: Instruction Cards to Reboot Your Life* [on Bookshop](#).

### ***Vanity Fair*: What prompted the cards?**

*Marina Abramović*: The cards are such a playful thing. The exercises are difficult, but they have to be playful, and you have to have the attitude of joy doing it. Cards have always been playful. Historically, for centuries. I always remember His Holiness the Dalai Lama, he said to me, *Every time you want to tell really deep truths, you always have to start with a joke. You have to start with something that opens people, the soul. They have to laugh. First they laugh, and then you tell them the terrible truth.*

**Some of the exercises, like going out in the middle of a snowstorm to be in my pajamas and stand with my feet on the ground, or walking backwards with a mirror, I felt so nervous to do because of how other people might perceive me.**

If you are the only one walking on the street backwards, looking in the mirror and seeing reality as a reflection, this is really strange. People think you're totally out of your mind. If you invite your friends for the weekend and say, "Let's walk backwards with a mirror all together," that's kind of fun. I totally understand that being a black sheep, it's strange and uncomfortable. We have to always figure out the best circumstances, and how we can adapt each exercise.



But to me, my entire work—now 50 years into my career—I dedicate to doing the things I don't like, the things I am afraid of, the things that I don't know anything about. The function of all this is to get to the other side of your own fear, and to liberate yourself from the fear. This is an incredible experience to share with all the people. I am kind of a mirror to you. If I can do this in my life, you can too.

I always like to mention this wonderful commitment that Lou Reed and **Laurie Anderson**, when they met, made to each other. The first thing they said was, *We have to have a very good detector of bullshit*. To see when you're doing bullshit in your life, and you see when people are bullshitting you. Number two, *you have to be not afraid of yourself or anybody else or anything*. And the third thing, which is the most wonderful, *don't forget to be tender*. That's it. Three things. No bullshit, not to be afraid, and be tender. If you never dare to do things, you never actually grow. You never experience something else. You never get out of your own little box that you create. So fear...it's something to confront.

**Many of your performances have confronted, very viscerally, a fear of death, from your recent opera, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, to having a stranger pick up a loaded gun and hold it against your head. After, as you say, 50 years of work, is death still a fear for you?**

I would be lying to say, "No, I'm not afraid of death." Right now, I don't think I'm afraid and I really think I can confront it because so much of my work is based on this. Every day I think about dying and I always live like it's the last day of my life. But at the same time, if I'm in a plane and there's turbulence, I'm afraid. I'm so afraid. I'd like to die without anger, without fear, and consciously, and not in a car accident, a plane accident—in some stupid shit—or being sick. I'd like to experience the passage from life to death in a waking way.

If somebody tells me I can go backwards and be young again, or be in my 20s or 30s—hell, no. Absolutely, no. This was such a confusing time. So many problems. So much emotional drama. One thing with getting old, if you are healthy—because getting old and being sick, it sucks—but being healthy and getting old, you have this wisdom that life gives you. It's so much more happiness. I've never had more fun and had a better time than right now. I'm 75. In five years, I'm 80. This is a serious number, but I don't see it. I think, Wow, it's a great time.

**One of the cards that I have been trying to work on, but I have not succeeded at yet, is one where you notice your anger, hold your breath, and release both your breath and the anger.**

This exercise is fantastic, because when you are angry, if you are suppressed, it's not good. If you express it, it's not good. So you have to figure out how to change the pattern of anger. When you're angry and you stop breathing, you really have to stop breathing. You really have to get blue to the point that you say, "If I don't breathe this moment, I'm going to die." When you breathe these full lungs of fresh air, the enjoyment of that air and enjoyment of being alive and being in your body diminishes the anger. But what happens if someone is angry with you? You can't tell him to stop breathing. So here's what you can do: you just tell him, "Before we start the conversation, please, can you just change places?" That is so unexpected. It's so confusing. You confuse his anger.



**The cards instruct that the exercises shouldn't be done under the influence of alcohol or narcotics or nicotine. I know that you've been sober throughout your life. I would love to hear your thoughts on how that plays into the work that you do.**

I don't like to drink. I don't like the taste. But it doesn't mean that people could not have a glass of wine and enjoy themselves—not to be drunk every night... When I look at my photographs from the '70s, in every single photo I have a cigarette in my hand. I didn't inhale them and I didn't buy them, but it was so cool to have the cigarette. So I always asked my friends, "Will you take a photograph and I will hold the cigarette?" It's hilarious, but I really look at them and think, God, the kind of posing idea of a cool artist in the '70s.

When you do these exercises, you have to have clarity of mind, without being influenced by anything. One of the things that I exercise in my life, instead of taking drugs, is not eating. When you don't eat for a long period of time, you have incredible effects on perception, the almost existential perception, seeing reality as it is, feeling luminosity, feeling all of these things that you can actually feel under drugs: expanding consciousness, whatever we do, ayahuasca or whatever the new things are on the market. But the next day, your mind is polluted by the idea that this was influenced by the mushrooms, or by this or by that. If you don't eat, the next day your energy is higher and the next day it's higher. It's my trip, basically.

Of course you should not push it. The longest I didn't eat any kind of food was 16 days. I would not suggest anybody do 16 days. But one week, I suggest to everybody. One week is perfectly fine. How old are you, by the way?

**I'm 30.**

Oh, my God. That is so complicated. Thirty is not easy because you just finished your 20s and now you're getting an all new set of problems.

**What's your suggestion to get through my 30s?**

My suggestion is don't control anything. Just take things as they are. Follow your intuition. Listen to your body, because our mind really fucks us up so much, because our mind is manipulative. Our mind is always imagining things that don't exist.

**Have you ever struggled with the criticism you've received throughout your life?**

Listen, if I read the criticism of the '70s, when I made my major performances, I would not even leave the house. Everybody was against me. My family was criticized in Communist Party meetings because they thought I was ready for the mental hospital. My professors at the art academy thought it was absolutely disgusting, what I was doing. Everybody was against it. Those pieces are now in every book of the performance art as very important pieces. For me, the only thing that matters is that when I do something, that I do not 100, but 150 percent. That 50 percent extra is everything. If I give my 150 percent, any critic in the world can do whatever they want, I don't care. Because I've done my best. And the more revolutionary, the more different you are, the more criticism you have. Now, I'm criticized that I am a trendsetter, that I sold myself to fashion, that I'm involved in conspiracy theories. I mean, you name it. Who cares?

My own country, which is now Serbia, they say, “How can she sit on the chair, do nothing and have all this attention? This is not art. This is ridiculous. This is bullshit.” But you can't rule your life by what other people are thinking, ever. I don't care. I really don't. Otherwise I would be nowhere. You have to do things that change you. And to change, you have to go to the territories that you don't know. You have to take risks. You have to not be afraid—and also to not be afraid of failure, because if you go to places you've never been, you can fail. But failure is a part of it. You fail and you stand up and you go home and then you fail again.

If you don't fail, that means you are repeating yourself, and repeating yourself, it's terrible. You have to always surprise yourself. This is a lesson. A lesson of Dr. Abramović.

### **What are you excited for next?**

I'm touring my opera, the *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, in different countries in Europe, and hoping to come to the Armory here in New York around 2024. I am having the biggest show of my life at the Royal Academy in London in 2023. It has been postponed for three years because of COVID. It's called *Afterlife*. What is interesting about that show is that I am the first woman in 250 years to show in that space. It's only been the big muscle guys. We are talking **Ai Weiwei**, **Anish Kapoor**, **Antony Gormley**. It's a huge responsibility. Huge. And I wanted to make an impact. I have projects right now to 2027, and I'm thinking, “Okay, when do artists go to pension?” Never. I work till I die, I'm sure.

L I S S O N   G A L L E R Y

*The Guardian*  
12 February 2022

# The Guardian



## Marina Abramović: 'I don't want to have my life in control'

■ 'If a performer doesn't have the public, the performance is non-existent': Marina Abramović.  
Photograph: Camila Falquez/The Guardian

The performance artist is known for putting herself in challenging situations. Now, she says, it's your turn, with a set of instruction cards aiming to 'reboot your life'

by Kadish Morris

**G**o into a park, find a tree you like, hold the tree and complain to the tree. This was Marina Abramović's technique for staying focused during the pandemic. In 2020, she and a group of volunteers tried out this tree-hugging exercise during a five-hour programme on Sky Arts that sought to educate watchers on the history of performance art. Though at times it felt like watching a mockumentary, it was a transformative experience for the participants, according to Abramović. "It was amazing how people got emotional. How much they kept inside, and how talking to the tree [was] a kind of release."

It's 11am in New York, where Abramović is based, and she has just finished a morning yoga session. She stretches out her arms, showing me her black fitness top before turning the web camera round to reveal a snowy landscape. "I like to do physical exercise. Walk in the snow. I don't want to have my life in control. I hate [the] studio. I never go to the studio," says the 75-year-old artist. "I like to put myself in very uncommon situations."

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Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

Internationally known for her performance art pieces that experiment with time, metaphysics and the human body, Abramović is teaching her fans the art of endurance, concentration, self-control and willpower through a new series of instructions intended to "reboot your life". The Marina Abramović Method is a set of 30 cards, each featuring a different DIY task. Some instructions are overtly unconventional, such as "Walk backwards with a mirror", which she advises you to do outdoors. Others are secretly tricky, like "Open and close a door", which seems simple until you read the small print telling you to do this continuously for one to three hours. Many are tethered to Abramović's previous works. One card reads "Count each grain of rice and lentil", which takes inspiration from her 2014 work *Counting the Rice* in which participants laboriously tallied up a pile of grains, one by one.



Abramović, who was born in Belgrade in 1946, has been teaching the art of endurance since the 1980s and exploring it in her own artworks for far longer. She passes on her wisdom via her Cleaning the House five-day workshops, in which she takes a group of students to places that are too hot, or too cold, and never comfortable. “Nobody would eat anything apart from water and herbal tea. Without any talking and doing very hard physical and mental exercises, they will then make a work of art out of this.”



📷 One of the cards from The Marina Abramović Method: Instruction Cards to Reboot Your Life. Photograph: Laurence King Publishing

Still, for all the stoicism, the Marina Abramović Method is not to be taken too seriously. There is an element of fun that she is leaning into thanks to the Dalai Lama, whom she first met in the early 80s. “I always remember what [he] said to me. You have to always start with playfulness. With a joke. Make people laugh to open their heart, and then you tell them terrible truths after, because they’re ready,” she says. “These cards are playful, but at the same time, if you really do [them] properly, you actually get a very deep experience. You enter two different states of consciousness. It’s all about how much we invest in time.”

Why has she decided to distil her art-making practice for the general public now? There have been many pioneering figures - such as Carolee Schneemann, Ana Mendieta and Chris Burden - at the helm of performance art, but Abramović is undoubtably the face of the form. Her endurance art, despite its intensity, often veers into trendy themes such as mindfulness, and this has ensured her work's absorption into pop culture. (Shia LaBeouf and Jay-Z both did their own versions) Such success hasn't come without criticism: her work has been called kitsch, and "celebrity art at its most empty". Are these cards just an exercise in self-branding; an artist making merchandise in order to capitalise on their fame?

"I don't think I will be rich by selling these cards," she laughs. "I am such an interesting example of the art market. I have so many viewers and such a very large young audience, and still, my prices are much below the middle-career artists who make paintings," she claims. Her only goal, she adds, is to engage people, especially young people.

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📷 Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010. Photograph: Andrew H Walker/Getty Images



These methods for getting the most out of work and life aren't your typical self-help tips, but they are in line with an artist whose oeuvre consists of pushing herself to the limit. One of her earliest works was her six-hour performance at Galleria Studio Morra in Naples, where Abramović allowed the public to interact with her body in any way they chose, using a range of 72 objects (scissors, bread, a gun) that were laid out on a table.

"I was a painter before, but the first time [I performed] in front of an audience, I felt the electricity that I never felt in my studio. At my age right now, I am not able to do any more of that kind of long durational performance. I did *The Artist Is Present* [in which she sat at a table for eight hours a day, allowing visitors to sit silently opposite her] when I was 65. This was hell on earth to do! Now I'm 75, I'm thinking about how I can express those thoughts [in] different mediums. I just made the opera," she says, referring to *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, a piece about the tragic myths surrounding the Greek-American soprano.

Age aside, works such as *The Artist Is Present*, and *512 Hours*, where she and gallery visitors walked around in silence, require audience participation and close contact, and that seems inconceivable in these times. The pandemic has irrevocably changed the boundaries that artists can push. "Contact with the public is absolutely essential. Because if a performer doesn't have the public, the performance is nonexistent."





📷 Marina Abramovic. Photograph: Camila Falquez/The Guardian

Abramović doesn't hate technology - her 2018 work Rising uses VR technology to explore rising sea levels, and she collaborated with tech company WeTransfer in 2021 to create an immersive digital experience titled Traces - but she thinks our approach to it is all wrong. "Everything became Zoom. I absolutely don't like working with Zoom. First, the sound is bad. Images are terrible. I always think, just have patience and wait, because this isn't going to last for ever. We are talking about two years. It's nothing."

Abramović's first UK retrospective, delayed by the pandemic, is due to be held at the Royal Academy in 2023. Spanning her 50-year career, the show will recreate her live performance pieces, adapted to reflect a change in her physicality, and feature new works. "They decided to postpone it for three years. This is kind of big," she says. "I'm 75. Time goes. I really need to do this show earlier rather than later. But at the same time, I understood that it would be a disaster if I had it in 2020, because I depend on the public."





Abramović may not be ready to sell her soul, but she has other ways of exploring immortality. She has created the world's first mixed-reality performance artwork, titled *The Life*, which uses 36 video cameras to create a simulation of her body. "This is the closest to immortality that I can get. This piece doesn't have as much value now because I'm alive, but the moment I'm not there ... I can appear in your living room, I can walk in your garden. That is something that is mind-blowing."

Abramović is clearly intent on injecting herself into the future, but how will the future feel about her? Considering how people long dead are now being held accountable for their past behaviour, what about those comments she made in her 1979 diary about Indigenous Australians? In remarks initially republished in her 2016 memoir *Walk Through Walls* (but later taken out), she had said that they looked "terrible", "like dinosaurs" and are really "strange and different". As the passage became shared and criticised, Abramović released a statement saying that she had "the greatest respect for Aborigine people" and that her earlier description "does not represent the understanding and appreciation of Aborigines that I subsequently acquired through immersion in their world and carry in my heart today".

Abramović has spent time with Indigenous people in Australia and the Siberian desert, and has taken part in retreats with Tibetan monks. Her tree-hugging exercise was inspired by time spent with Amazonian tribes, where they would, according to her, dance with the sequoia tree. “This dance with the tree was so incredibly moving and emotional, so I said: ‘Wow, why don’t I create exercise that really works for me?’”

Given that her performance artworks and career have long drawn on the sacred practices picked up on her visits to Indigenous communities, I inquire about the methods she has undertaken to battle racism personally in recent years, with more attention on Black lives and indigenous people.



Instead, Abramović responds by taking issue with how her words were reported in the first place. “People take out the quote and they don’t actually see the context,” she says. “I said that Aboriginal [people are] the oldest race on the planet. They are *like* dinosaurs. Next to that sentence. I also say they have to be treated like living treasures. They only saw my quote about dinosaurs.” She appears to have forgotten her own words – there’s a semantic difference between “they look like dinosaurs” and “they are like dinosaurs” – though either way, likening people to animals feels like textbook dehumanisation.

“This is so sad,” says Abramović, before somewhat arbitrarily bringing up her longstanding collaborations with transgender people (“much longer than [people have been] talking about”), as well as her work about the Yugoslav wars, and mentioning the Dalai Lama once more. “The only way to stop violence is to learn to forgive and we are not able to forgive as human beings. We are repeating this over and over. This is not new. This is a centuries[-old] story.”

Abramović believes the online criticism directed at her is due to the press manipulating people and that sexism, ultimately, is at fault: “The press is so much tougher on women than on men.” She told me earlier in the conversation that she has never used Instagram and doesn’t go online except for emails and meetings. “There’s so many people who think that what I’m doing is not art at all. If I read this, I will never even leave home.”

She might not read everything, but she reads some things. She asks me who will write the headline for this interview after being outraged with the Times for an article it published last year. “The title, to me, was incredibly vulgar. I was so angry. It was ‘Marina Abramović, young lover, dirty jokes, and magic crystals’. They will not do this to male artists,” she says. “They used a photograph of me for the interview that I did not approve. I don’t know where they found it. Why don’t you put in pictures of the work?!”

One of The Method’s instruction cards reads “Notice a moment of anger, then stop it”. It advises you to hold your breath until you reach your physical limit and repeat as needed, until the anger subsides. It comes to mind as Abramović discusses her treatment by the media.

“I need to go, my dear,” she says abruptly. She does appear calmer for having said her piece. “It was lovely talking to you.”

*The Marina Abramović Method: Instruction Cards to Reboot Your Life is published by Laurence King (£16.99) on 17 February.*



LISSON GALLERY

Wallpaper magazine  
25 January 2022

# Wallpaper\*

ART | 25 JAN 2022 | BY HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH

## Can the Marina Abramović Method change your life?

Lady Gaga and Jay-Z are among those who have followed the Abramović Method to reach higher creative consciousness. Now, the artist's iconic approach has been translated into a series of instruction cards for all. If you don't try, you'll never know



All images from *The Marina Abramović Method, Instruction Cards to Re-boot Your Life*, by Marina Abramović and Katya Tylevich, published by Laurence King

The path to creative transcendence has never been a clear one, but no one has come quite as close to forging it as Marina Abramović. The Serbian artist and titan of performance art has spent the last half-century stretching the human body to breaking point, offering herself as an object of experimentation for audiences, and eroding the seal between body and soul.

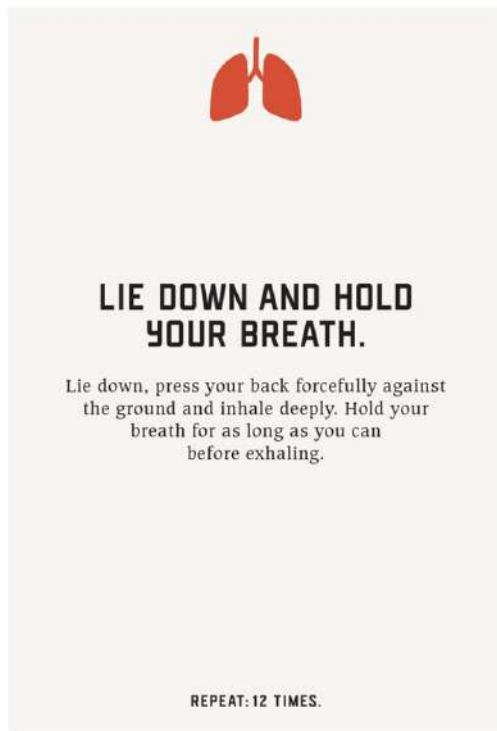
Through staggering performances, she's subjected her body and mind to distressing symbolic rituals, reconfiguring the thresholds of pain, endurance and suffering.

Among these, *The House With The Ocean View* (2002) at Sean Kelly Gallery, for which Abramović lived, entirely exposed, on three raised platforms for 12 days with no food and only water. And lest we forget *The Artist Is Present* (2010), in which she sat motionless for at eight hours per day over three months, engaged in silent eye contact with hundreds of strangers, and some friends, one by one. More recently, the artist dominated London with a multifaceted homage to soprano Maria Callas.



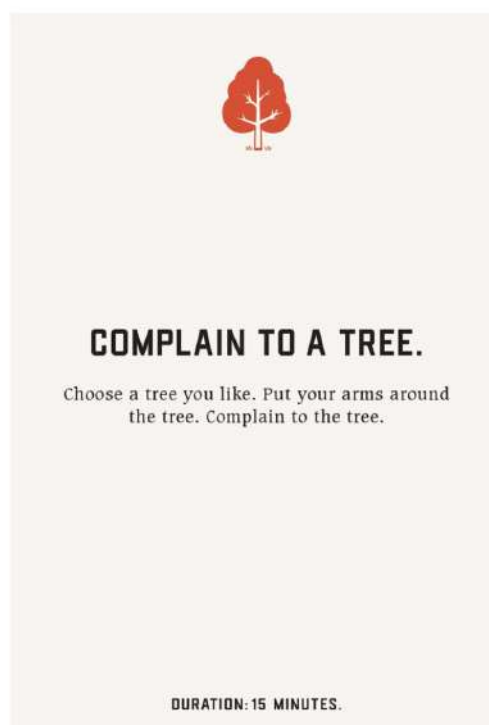
Her interest in participation is cemented in the so-called Abramović Method, an approach conceived by the artist to engage the public with participatory exercises to conjure 'inner strength, concentration and endurance' to confront life's challenges. The method blends radical contemporary art with self-help, making the otherworldly connotations of transcendence feel jarringly down to earth. Last year, as part of a year-long collaboration with file sharing platform WeTransfer, the artist unveiled a digital manifestation of The Abramović Method available 24/7 to the platform's 80 million-strong global community.

Now, this famed method is being made available as a set of physical instruction cards published by Laurence King. Created by Abramović and arts and fiction writer Katya Tylevich, the 30-card set makes some ambitious and alluring promises: to 'purge your mind of all unnecessary distractions and anxieties' and 'unleash your creativity'.



So what's on the cards? For starters, you might try 'complaining to a tree', in which you 'Choose a tree you like. Put your arms around the tree. Complain to the tree', for 15 minutes. If tree-hugging isn't your jam, perhaps you could try 'holding a mutual gaze' with a willing partner? Or 'releasing static electricity through a strand of your hair?' (there's a first time for everything).

In 2023 Marina Abramovic will present a solo exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, and become the first female artist in the institution's 250-year history to occupy the entire gallery space with her work. ★



#### INFORMATION

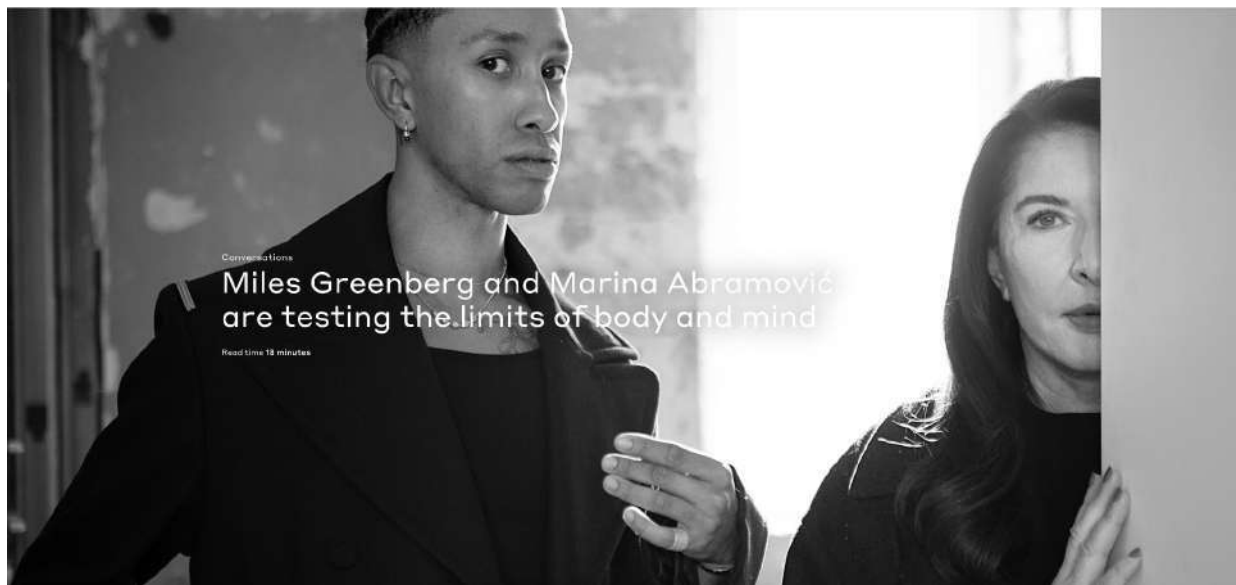
*The Marina Abramović Method, Instruction Cards to Re-boot Your Life*, by Marina Abramović and Katya Tylevich, will be released on 10 February 2022, £16.99 [laurenceking.com](http://laurenceking.com)

# LISSON GALLERY

*Document Journal*

20 January 2022

## DOCUMENT



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Posted

**January 20, 2022**

For Document's Winter 2021/Resort 2022 issue, two generations of performance artists unite to discuss abandoning time, learning from one another, and the inspirations behind their death-defying craft

"Whatever you're experiencing, you have to dedicate yourself to it completely," says performance artist Miles Greenberg. "It needs to feel like it's going to be the rest of your life, because that's the only way that you can abandon time."



For Greenberg, this devotion has taken radical forms. In his 2020 performance *OYSTERKNIFE*, he walked on a conveyor belt uninterrupted for a full 24 hours; in *LEPIDOPTEROPHOBIA* (2020), he faced his fears head-on, trapping himself in an acrylic box as live insects crawled over him; in *Admiration Is The Furthest Thing From Understanding* (2021), he lay blinded as sugar syrup dripped down from above, crystallizing over time to impair his movement; in *HAEMOTHERAPY (I)* (2019), he invited the audience to contemplate his body as a living sculpture, balancing nude atop an altar of raw meat and spices for as long as his body could tolerate. By challenging his own physical and mental limits, Greenberg arrives at a sense of internal clarity that can be found in no moment but the present: a space of heightened consciousness, where the monotony of the everyday falls away in the face of what he terms a profound “inner silence.”

Marina Abramović is no stranger to this sensation. Widely considered the mother of performance art, she has utilized her body as both object and subject throughout her five-decade career, often leveraging acts of extreme danger, pain, and endurance to complicate the relationship between artist and audience. She’s been stabbed with knives, set herself on fire, and flung herself against cement pillars; in one early performance, *Rhythm 0* (1974), she entrusted museum visitors with her life, inviting them to do whatever they desired to her body as she lay prone on a table for six hours surrounded by 72 instruments of her choosing—including matches, lipstick, saws, nails, and a loaded gun, which at one point was held to her head. In her renowned retrospective at MoMA, Abramović staged a performance called *The Artist Is Present* (2010) where, seated across from an empty chair for eight hours a day, she locked eyes with thousands of strangers in an act of silent communication—one that moved many participants to tears and, unbeknownst to her, served as Greenberg’s introduction to the world of performance art when he visited the exhibition at the age of 12.

“[The show] was partially what gave me permission to think about what I can do with what I have already—my body,” Greenberg recalls. It’s a concept they have since explored together, having struck up a friendship after Greenberg attended Abramović’s *Cleaning the House* workshop, a method of teaching she developed to hone the physical and mental fortitude required for long-duration performance. “It really works on your transformation as a human being,” Abramović states. “Time stops existing, there is no past and future—whether the performance is one hour, two hours, even a week, you have to surrender to the extending of this moment now into forever.” Greenberg agrees: “There is something so romantic about this total devotion to an idea,” he muses. “It’s a bit like love—the romantic nature of dying for art over and over, a little bit more every time.”

**Marina Abramović:** Let me ask you a question that I ask myself often, but have never actually asked anyone else. Why is it that younger people have such a strong response to my work [compared to my own generation]? You are from a younger generation, so perhaps you can answer.

**Miles Greenberg:** I grew up immersed in technology, so any work that's interfacing directly with real life and in such a strong way is almost foreign to me, and it impacts me harder. I think it's why a lot of people in my generation are attracted to things like sculpture. My reflex is to go into the real, into the flesh and the blood.

At the end of your show in MoMA, there was this piece: a bed of stone, with something like a pillow. I remember lying down on this for what I thought would be maybe 30 seconds, and I closed my eyes for the first time after seeing all of this work. When I opened my eyes again, it had actually been about 25 minutes, and there was a very long line of people in front of me waiting to do the same thing!

Lying there, I lost all sense of time and processed information in a way that I had never processed information before. It was very interesting to have this moment of rest and repose, as someone who had never had this silence.

“People think that performance artists are very severe, and we're not. I think if we are, then we're not good at what we do.”

**Marina:** During *The Artist Is Present*, I asked people to totally block off the sound around them with headphones and go to the platform and stand there in silence, for as long as they wanted. And I saw this little boy who was coming after school every single day for months.

When he first arrived, he put the headphones on and he said, ‘The headphones don't work.’ I said, ‘What do you mean “don't work”?’ He said, ‘There's silence: nothing coming out.’ I say, ‘Exactly, this is what silence means.’ And then I never talked to the kid again—he would come with his parents, his parents would leave, and he would just stand there in silence with the headphones on. I noticed there were more and more kids coming to my performance, coming and putting on headphones and not listening to anything. They said, ‘We never heard the silence before.’

**Camille Sojit Pejcha:** You both utilize temporality in long-durational works. What do you share in your experience of time during a performance, and where do you diverge?

**Marina:** When you start a long-durational performance, you can't think of time—if you think of time, your concentration is zero, you're completely lost. Because then you're obsessed. How long do I still have to perform? How much time has passed? When does it end? You have to totally abandon the feeling of time.

Time stops existing, there is no past and future—whether the performance is one hour, two hours, even a week, you have to surrender to the extending of this moment now into forever. It needs to become life itself. It really works on your own inner transformation as a human being.



Marina wears dress her own. Miles wears trousers  
by Dior Men. Jewelry (worn throughout) his own.  
Photographed in New York City.

**Miles:** I could not have said it better myself. It changes the structure of your brain to even approach time in the way that you have to in a long-duration performance situation. That's why I'm also really fascinated by this onboarding and off-boarding process: how you transition between everyday reality and the parallel reality of performance.

People ask me if I meditate constantly. I actually don't, because, for me, it's better to go in cold and experience the sort of transcendental turbulence, like taking off in an airplane, of getting into that space and having that be legible [to the audience]. I think that's something that people really connect to, seeing the human beings sort of transformed through this process. Whatever you're experiencing, you have to dedicate yourself to it completely. It needs to feel like it's going to be the rest of your life, because that's the only way that you can abandon time.

There is something so romantic about this total devotion to an idea. It's a bit like love—the romantic nature of dying for art over and over, a little bit more every time. Pushing against death in this way gives it a sort of form, a sense of beauty and poetry.

**Marina:** What do you think about how the public merges around you in support of your work—to become like a living body?

**Miles:** It's interesting to look at the audience like a living body. I work a lot with contact lenses, so I actually don't see them most of the time. I can feel them though, and I can see these shadows that sort of converge around me. I notice when people stay for five hours. I'll be spinning on this stone at two rotations per minute for seven hours, and then I'll come back and realize, *Oh, that's the same shadow that's been standing there.* I like that people can kind of get obsessed, and [their presence] sustains the shape of it. My relationship to long-durational performance actually started because I wanted to make something that was not theater—something people could feel free to interact with like a sculpture, to walk in and out of whenever they want.

When you give people that freedom, I think they get even more intrigued, because they're like, 'Why am I not sitting down to see this from the beginning to end—what is going to happen? Why should I be allowed to come in and go into this reality whenever I want?'

**Marina:** To me, it's so important to give the audience freedom. In the early '70s, it was a different structure: People go there and sit and look at a piece, and become bored after some time, and then you feel incredible pressure and shame to leave because somebody will see you leaving. They will stay if they don't even like the work, and they hate you for it.

I remember when you were doing your 24-hour performance *OYSTERKNIFE*, and I would come there in the morning, first thing, before I even brushed my teeth. I had to see what you were doing. And at one point, you fell down—you lost consciousness. Your mother was calling me, asking what we should do—*Should we get a doctor?* I said, 'You're forbidden to do anything. Everything that happens is part of the piece. Let it go.' And she did.

I was very proud. In entering the performance space, there are different rules and different limits. So anything that happens is a part of the piece. It is something we can't predict.

**Miles:** I'm so grateful you stopped my mother or anybody at the museum from dumping water on my head, because I think I would have been miserable. It was only 22 minutes of unconsciousness. So, you know.



“Time stops existing, there is no past and future—whether the performance is one hour, two hours, even a week, you have to surrender to the extending of this moment now into forever. It needs to become life itself.”

**Camille:** Performance art demands this sort of presence from the audience, by merit of the performer being so present in their body—something young people are prepared to embrace, as Miles said, having been accustomed to existing in ephemeral spaces like the internet. I’m curious what you think about the role of emerging technology in performance.

**Marina:** Recently, I got an email from somebody asking if I can make an NFT of my soul and sell it on auction. I get the most strange, strange, strange emails. Once, I got a contract from [an artist’s] lawyers. She [would] like that I agree with the lawyer that after my death, before the funeral, she would massage my body—my dead body—for one hour. Another time, there was a collector who told me that he liked my work so much that he wanted to give me [the entirety of his] possessions when he died.

I’m really open-minded. I’m not one of these old artists who hates everything which is new. Just the opposite. But I don’t see any NFTs I’m really moved by, and I don’t have any great ideas yet myself. If I have one, I will do it.



Right: Dress and coat Marina’s own.

**Miles:** Having grown up surrounded by technology, there are so many options at my disposal. Personally, I feel like the only good art that I've ever seen necessitates its medium. That is doubly true for technology. It's very important that the work you're making relies entirely on how you're making it. It's very important that they correspond: the idea, and the means, and the process. If I'm looking at a VR piece, and I say to myself, *This could have been a video*, or *This could have been an animation or a projection...* Well, there's no reason for it to have been [VR] then, you know?

There's one crypto story I've heard that I actually quite liked. This man in Quebec was mining bitcoin. That process uses a lot of energy, which is usually wasted. All of the servers used to process this data create an enormous amount of heat, and because it gets so cold here, he made a deal with a small church, and basically used their basement as a server room in exchange for providing free heating for the church in the winter. I found it very interesting to look at it in this way—of, like, using every part of the technological process, making something from the waste.

**Marina:** A perfect recycling.

Honestly, what I think is so discouraging, is every time people call me and ask me to [make an NFT], they always give the example of how an NFT sold for \$69 million. But money was never the reason to do art in the first place, you know? I am tired of artists becoming commodities.

I always mention the wonderful book, *Just Kids*, by Patti Smith. They're talking about New York in the '70s, and how it was so incredibly difficult to live day-to-day. There was no money anywhere, and they were still making art, because they believed in it. Art was never [the route] to becoming rich, or famous. To have commodities, or millions in investments. I don't know, maybe call me old-fashioned, but to me, art is the oxygen of our society. Its benefit can't be measured in money, commodities, or investment. These are the wrong reasons [to make art].

**Miles:** I think money has made this whole conversation around NFTs really boring. I think there's great art to be made with these mediums—but it hasn't happened yet.

**Marina:** It's very important to look in the past sometimes, to learn about the present. When the video camera was invented, everybody was first like, *This is ridiculous, this is not art*. A lot of bad artwork was made with this video camera. [They were] trying all kinds of stuff.

Then came Nam June Paik, who created incredible artwork, [with his television sets]. He brought the entire idea of using video [in art] to a totally different level. Video became art. We need time for NFTs. Sometimes, we just need time to pass. That's all.

**Camille:** What have you learned from witnessing each other's work take shape across various mediums?

**Miles:** I've learned so much. We did the *Cleaning the House* workshop—the Abramović method in Greece. Five days of no eating, no speaking, and doing these exercises.

It was really fascinating, because it was the first time that I was able to truly create a perfect environment for the direction of my thinking, when it comes to space and rituals. Marina has—through her work, and through direct teachings—given me an enormous amount of context around the impulses that I think a lot of my work comes from, and [taught me] how to put that into physical space with very little more than what we're born with. And that's really exciting to me. It has given me permission to basically have a career and have a practice with what I have. I think that the most important thing that Marina has taught me is that I have everything that I need. 'Of less and less,' that was my favorite line.

“It doesn't matter if it comes from fashion, from cinema, from astronauts, from science, from art. There are people who are inventing, who invented a different vision of the world, and the ones who follow.”

**Marina:** I've had a long career—it's been 50 years now—and only in the last parts of my life have I really understood the importance of long-duration work. So it was such an incredible surprise that Miles, who is so young, understood this immediately, from the start of his career.

He came to the idea of long-duration performance [on his own terms]—allowing him to actually create his own system of work, which is truly original and independent. When I'm looking at his work, there's no similarity between his work and my work. This is something that people want to say, but his sources come from his own background and his own mind—a young mind, creating for a different generation. So I learned from him. I can give him experience, but he actually gave me the possibility to be in touch with the time we live in now. That's a connection that I think is so important, so it's a very fair exchange. He takes the advice, but he always makes it his own. He created his own style and his own way, and it is really truly respectable. This is why I am having this conversation today. Miles is just in the beginning of his career and the things he has done are mind-blowing—there's never a moment that he doesn't surprise me.

Our friendship comes from the grounds of mutual understanding. We just went recently to see this very, very old Iranian movie together. It was strange. It was boring. It was interesting. It was curious. It was mysterious. It was everything. And we both went with an open mind—he has a young open mind, and I have an old open mind. But we both have an open mind. This is our connection.



Miles wears tank top his own. Coat and trousers by Dior Men. Marina wears dress and coat her own.

**Miles:** I like that we were able to laugh at all of the moments where people got shot, and then stayed alive for a little bit too long.

**Marina:** Sense of humor is very important.

**Miles:** People think that performance artists are very severe, and we're not. I think if we are, then we're not good at what we do.

**Marina:** Absolutely. If you put a group of creative people together, we don't talk about work, we have fun. It's a different story. Life is short, and we have to enjoy every minute!

In one week I will be 75, and I just went to TJ Maxx [for the first time] and bought what I am wearing for this interview, on sale for \$11.94. It comes with matching pajama bottoms. I mean, this is ridiculous, but I love it.

I have learned to never stop learning. It's very important at my age to be curious, to have a mind like a child, to see everything for the first time. This is what I do: I open my eyes.



**Camille:** How do other creative mediums intertwine with and inform your practice as artists?

**Miles:** I wanted to be a fashion designer before I wanted to be an artist. I started out really wanting to be a couturier. The worlds and the universes that Alexander McQueen created were everything to me—not just the theater of it, but the autonomy that the models and the visuals had. Eventually I realized that performance was more of a concise avenue, because I’m terrible with a sewing machine. [Laughs]

**Marina:** When the designer Riccardo Tisci and I met, we became good friends. We started thinking about things, how fashion is inspired by art [and vice versa]. I said to him, ‘Fashion feeds from art—and if I’m art, you’re fashion: Suck my tit.’ So we made a piece together titled *The Contract*: an image of me holding him [in my arms] while he sucked my tit. It was a really wonderful collaboration and [an important] friendship.

I felt like in the ’70s, there was an idea that if you care [about your appearance] you’re a bad artist because you try so hard. I got so fed up with this attitude! I remember after walking the Great Wall of China, I woke up one morning and said, ‘I don’t need to prove anything to myself. I’ve done my work,’ and I went out and bought my first [Yohji] Yamamoto suit with the money I got. I remember coming out of the shop with the Yamamoto suit, feeling great, and realizing it’s not the fashion that wears me, I wear the fashion.

I think of Yamamoto in the ’70s—at the time he was so popular, and everybody was asking ‘Why are these pieces so large?’ He said something like, ‘Oh, because I like that between the body and the fabric the spirits have space to live.’ I thought, *Shit, this guy really thinks about spiritual stuff!* I divide the entire world into two sections: the originals, and the ones who follow. It doesn’t matter if it comes from fashion, from cinema, from astronauts, from science, from art. There are people who are inventing, who invented a different vision of the world, and the ones who follow.

Hair **Erol Karadag**. Make-up **Rommy Najor** using **Furtuna Skin**. Production Director **Madeleine Kiersztan** at **Ms4 Production**.



## One Good Thing: The celebrity art couple who turned love into performance

Ulay and Marina Abramović's legacy is often overshadowed by an elaborate breakup, but their body of work is a valuable lesson on love and creativity.

By Terry Nguyen | Feb 11, 2022, 8:00am EST



Ulay and Marina Abramović's unexpected 2010 reunion at Abramović's solo exhibit "The Artist is Present." The two artists supposedly didn't speak to each other for over 20 years since their split. | Will Ragozzino/Getty Images

### ONE GOOD THING

*Recommendations from the world of culture we think you should check out.*

Modern celebrity couples can be exhausting to keep up with. Their appearances and antics invite considerable attention and scrutiny, so much so that romance often becomes an afterthought to the spectacle.

What matters to the public is that the couple is seen together, which confers some aspect of togetherness.

If you, like me, are tired of hearing about how horny Megan Fox is for Machine Gun Kelly or how Ye likes to dress up Julia Fox (no relation to Megan), consider turning your attention to a pairing no longer in the public eye, one that has already parted ways. The best lessons on love and romance, after all, are often understood in retrospect.

One such couple is Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen) and Marina Abramović, two performance artists whose 12-year collaborative partnership from 1976 to 1988 elevated them to micro-celebrity status in the art world. Ulay **died of cancer** in 2020 at age 76, while Abramović, 75, is still performing and exhibiting work. What piqued my initial interest was the relationship's elaborate end — how the two artists decided to split, rather than the why — although as a romantic, I later found myself drawn to their earlier works, produced while they were still madly in love and living nomadically in a van.

But first, the breakup. It was grounds for their final, arduous performance together, titled “The Lovers.” In 1988, Ulay and Abramović began at opposite ends of the Great Wall of China, and trekked on foot for three months to meet somewhere at its center. It took **eight years** to secure permission from the Chinese government to embark on the journey. The original plan was to culminate the walk with a wedding — a celebration of love. Instead, the nearly 6,000-kilometer pilgrimage became one of the most elaborate uncouplings documented in modern history.

The two artists supposedly didn't speak to each other again for over 20 years — not until Ulay unexpectedly showed up at one of Abramović's 2010 performances at the Museum of Modern Art. If you were on the internet in 2010, chances are you've encountered **viral footage of their reunion**: Two former lovers, silently gazing across a table; Ulay shaking his head in disbelief and Abramović blinking away tears before reaching for his hands. The gesture is incredibly moving to witness but, as with most viral snippets of life, the video reduced the artists' intense, dramatic, and convoluted relationship to a feel-good blip on the internet.





**Ulay went on to sue Abramović** in 2015 and won, receiving €250,000 worth of royalties that she owed for violating their contract over joint works. Abramović also published a 2016 memoir that included **details of Ulay's infidelity** in the relationship's final years, and revealed that he impregnated his translator during the Great Wall walk. In spite of this, the two eventually reconciled as friends in 2017, and offered commentary on their work and romance for **a short documentary**. "For her, it was very difficult to go on alone," Ulay said of their split. "For me, it was actually unthinkable to go on alone."

A **1983 Artforum piece** described the couple as "Tantric collaborators" and "karmic acquaintances," who recognized each other as spiritual counterparts in separate bodies. They shared a birthday on November 30 (although Ulay was three years older), resembled one another in personal style and physiognomy, and perhaps most importantly, were single-mindedly devoted to their craft.

"We really worked with the idea that ego is not important, that we have to create something that we called third energy," Abramović said in the 2017 documentary. They operated as an artistic unit, and refused to attribute ideas to a single individual. And while the couple chose to not have children (Abramović's **disinterest in conceiving** was a turning point in the relationship), art was the thread that tied them together. The posterity of their performances briefly seemed as rewarding as raising a child.

"We were a couple, male and female, and the urgency for us had an ideological basis," Ulay **said in a 2014 interview** with Brooklyn Rail. "The idea was unification between male and female, symbolically becoming a hermaphrodite ... We used to feel as if we were three: one woman and one man together generating something we called the third."

It's a shame that Ulay and Abramović's collaborative legacy is often overshadowed by the enormity of their final act (and the messiness thereafter), which feels at odds with their earlier body of work. I am most fascinated by their previous collaborations, particularly the series "Relation Works" (1976-1979), which examines the duality and dependence inherent in romantic relationships — in relation to gender, identity, and the natural world. There was an earnest synergy to the series, a mutual devotion toward their newfound togetherness. They were learning to love, while discovering how to make art in unity.

The most memorable "Relation Works" performances often manifested in crude, physical violence (self-inflicted or toward the other), but some were contemplative, even repetitive. Ulay and Abramović have stated that these violent outbursts were **not reflective of their domestic life**. Instead, it was "the opposite of how [they] understood, lived, and loved each other," according to Ulay.

Their first performance, "**Relation in Space**," consisted of the two artists running and hitting each other with their naked bodies for an hour. In "Light / Dark," the couple sit facing each other, trading slaps on their partner's right cheek. They start slow and accelerate the pace of their slaps for six minutes. In "**AAA-AAA**," they yell, faces within a few inches of each other, for





nearly 10 minutes. What was perhaps their riskiest performance, **"Rest Energy,"** was deceptively sculptural and serene: Abramović holds a bow, while Ulay nocks an arrow aimed at her heart. They lean back and sustain the pose for four minutes, as microphones broadcast the sound of their heartbeats.

However, it was **"Relation in Time,"** a 17-hour performance in which the couple sat back-to-back with their hair tied together, that foreshadowed the meditative pivot their work later took. These tableaux vivants required great mental and physical stamina, done with the intention of melding their separate selves into a complete work of art. It was much harder to be still for hours at a time, Ulay said, than running against a wall naked for an hour.



In “**Nightsea Crossing**,” a series of 22 performances between 1981 and 1987, the couple sat for seven hours over the course of four days, staring at each other in various settings. Preparing for this “required abstinence and distance in our off hours,” Abramović wrote in her memoir. It also marked the beginning of the relationship’s three-year death spiral. Ulay was uncomfortable with their burgeoning fame as artists, and could no longer physically endure the lengthy performances. Meanwhile, Abramović was insistent on continuing the work they were doing, and refused to settle down to start a family. They both had affairs, and began to talk less and less. **In Abramović’s mind**, they failed for “the stupidest, pettiest reason — the failure of our domestic life.” Private life, she said, was also part of the artistic work.

It’s a revealing sentiment, because for those of us who aren’t world-famous performance artists, domestic life is all the work there is. Relationships fail for all sorts of stupid and petty reasons. Abramović and Ulay may have left behind an iconic canon of collaborative work, but there is solemn condolence in recognizing that any union — even if it’s creatively charged or uniquely karmic — can unravel under very mundane circumstances: lack of communication, waning trust, and differing visions of life. Love, like art, is a lot of work.

*A **short 2017 documentary** on Ulay and Marina Abramović’s relationship is available for viewing on the Louisiana Channel website. For more recommendations from the world of culture, check out the **One Good Thing** archives.*



## January Book Bag: from Marina Abramović's instructions for rebooting your life to Paul Nash's little-known design work

Our roundup of the latest art publications

**Gareth Harris**

11 January 2022



Paul Nash's design for Heaven High, Hell Deep (1935) by Norman Archibald



**Paul Nash, Designer and Illustrator, James King, Lund Humphries, 216pp, £35 (hb)**

Paul Nash's achievements as a painter have been recognised but his work in design and illustration has never received its due. This survey of the life and work of the early 20th-century UK artist fills the gap, offering "a fresh interpretation of Paul Nash's career through the lens of his design and illustration work", according to the publishers. Inspired by Giorgio de Chirico, he experimented with Surrealist techniques in the 1920s. But Nash's design output was prolific, encompassing posters, set design pieces, pattern papers, fabrics, glass, and ceramics. Chapters cover topics such as "Fine and Applied Arts", "Vast Primitive Things" and "The Artist Outside the Theatre".

**Faith Ringgold: American People, edited by Massimiliano Gioni and Gary Carrion-Murayari, Phaidon and the New Museum, 240pp, £59.95, February (hb)**

This extensive survey accompanies a Faith Ringgold exhibition at the New Museum, New York (17 February-5 June), spanning six decades of the US artist and activist's prolific career, featuring works created in response to the civil rights and the second-wave feminist movements along with autobiographical pieces that tell stories of the Harlem Renaissance. Ringgold, aged 91, is known for her piecework quilts and paintings that recount Black histories and examine racial and gender hierarchies in the arts. The book features 11 essays by art historians, curators, and artists, who offer insight into Ringgold's influence, including by former Tate curator Mark Godfrey and the artist Diedrick Brackens.

**The Marina Abramović Method: Instruction Cards to Reboot Your Life, Katya Tylevich and Marina Abramovic, Laurence King, 30 cards, £16.99, February**

Improve your life, the Marina Abramović way. The Belgrade-born godmother of performance art reveals her tips "for reaching a higher consciousness and confronting life's challenges" on a series of 30 instruction cards, which include directions such as "complain to a tree", "walk backwards with a mirror" and "drink a glass of water as slowly as you can". Key works by Abramović include *Rhythm 5* (1974), where she lay in the centre of a burning five-point star and *The Artist Is Present* (2010) when she sat and locked eyes with hundreds of visitors to the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

**A Pound of Pictures, Alec Soth, Mack, 156pp, €70 (hb)**

The US photographer Alec Soth presents a new body of work made between 2018 and 2021 during one of his many meanderings across the United States, capturing the odder aspects of life across both Biden's and Trump's America. Soth's documentary images depict a wide range of subjects from Buddhist statues and birdwatchers to sun-seekers and busts of Abe Lincoln. Soth says that the pictures are "about going into the ecstatically specific world and creating a connection between the ephemeral (light, time) and the physical (eyeballs, film)". An accompanying exhibition runs at Sean Kelly Gallery, New York (14 January-26 February).

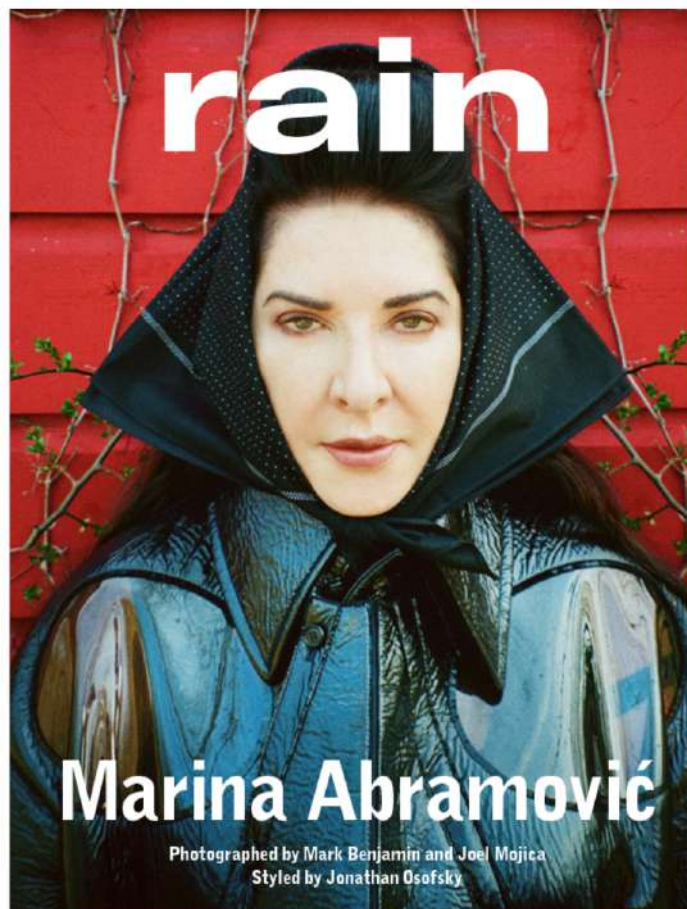


*Rain Magazine*  
9th May 2022

# rain

art

how icon marina abramovic is transforming fashion into  
consciousness



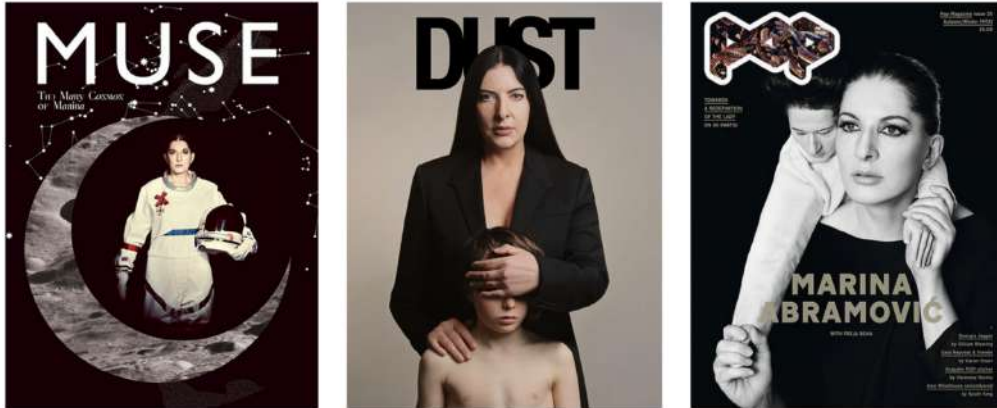
Coat by **WALTER VAN BEIRENDONCK**, scarf, stylist's own

Performance artist **Marina Abramovic** is known for her works of endurance on the mind, body, and spirit. She once said of her performance pieces, "it's so easy to put the human spirit down but so difficult to lift the human spirit up. If I can do it, my audience can, too."

A testament to her thesis, Abramovic has [walked two thousand miles of the Great Wall of China](#) and [sat for an audience at the MoMA](#) for 750 hours (31 days) straight. Recently, she created an opera, "7 Deaths," and a film with actor Willem Dafoe, "[7 Deaths of Maria Callas](#)." In the jaw dropping and surreal film, she reperforms six death scenes and the actual tragic death of one of opera's greatest singers of all time, Maria Callas.

## Marina's take on fashion

Now, Marina Abramovic reinvents her relationship to fashion. In her earliest pieces, fashion was an important part of her work. She would often dress in utilitarian clothing, a style that was commonplace in communist Yugoslavia. Abramovic has since become a symbol within the lexicon of fashion having graced sixty-two magazine covers, including this one. She has appeared on the cover of *Dust*, *Pop* (with an effigy of herself), *MUSE* (as an astronaut), and Harper's *BAZAAR* multiple times.



In 2011, Marina Abramovic and close friend, Burberry designer, [Ricardo Tisci](#), collaborated on "The Contract," a story told through a photograph which blurs the lines between fashion and art. In it, the artist and designer pose as Madonna and child, bringing forth questions about the spiritual relationship between fashion and art.



"There's no category for fashion, art, and music, for me," she explains. "There are only two categories: the originals and the ones who follow. Every century there are two or three of these geniuses, not more. They can be in science, fashion, cinema, literature, philosophy, whatever. And then, you have the rest of us following. But good art never dies. It has multiple lives."

“If an artist had anything to do with fashion, they were absolutely considered bad artists. Fashion and art could not live together.

## Unusual beginnings

The story of Marina Abramovic is one of remarkable and unusual beginnings. Born in war torn Yugoslavia, both her parents held leadership roles in the war, and were considered heroes. They met under peculiar circumstances, in that her father, Vojin, was a communist leader, who had found her mother, Danica, an art historian bleeding to death. He saved her once it was discovered that they shared the same blood type. Later, her father, also bleeding to death, was saved by her mother. Although they realized they didn't have much in common, they conceived Marina. Thus, an artist was born.



Marina wears headscarf by **BURBERRY**, coat by **WALTER VAN BEIRENDONCK**



Abramovic's calling is one of immeasurable responsibility: to lift the human spirit through art. For Marina Abramovic, art should be three things: it should predict the future, it should be disturbing, and it should ask questions. Specifically, for Abramovic, it should involve an audience as a propelling force. Her work shows the audience what is possible to achieve because of their participation. She is, in a sense, a conduit for collective consciousness. The exchange between audience and artist is the ultimate gesture of her work, and for Marina, this is the focus which assists in unlocking higher forms of consciousness.

## Art must be true

"Art must be beautiful. Artist must be beautiful," she chanted in [her 1975 work](#) of the same name. It is a resistance to notions of art as upholding a certain quality of exceptional beauty or aesthetic. The beauty of art is not important for Abramovic. For her, art must be true.



Marina wears coat by **WALTER VAN BEIRENDONCK**



At the time, this radical notion placed her at the forefront of the first wave of feminist critique. She went on to become a political voice and leader for generations of women finding themselves in a quickly shifting nation. Today, many of the same values feminism promoted pervade culture. Inclusivity, respect, and the celebration of ourselves has become woven into the fabric of modern societies.

“Fuck what the people think! I want to be free. Freedom is intoxicating and it's great.

Though fashion and identity have a long and troubled history, image conscious publications and brands have recently taken note of the changing tide. [Aaron Rose Philip](#) (the first black, transgender, and physically disabled model), [Precious Lee](#) (the first black curve model to appear in *American Vogue*), and [Ellie Goldstein](#) (the first model with down syndrome) have proven that modeling involves more than the body; it involves the soul. Representation, whether in art or modeling, is about the celebration of our differences and the human spirit.

## Healing

Through her art, Marina Abramovic helps others recognize their own pain by providing an entry way to healing. Less than a year ago, her work, “Crystal Wall of Crying,” was erected in the Babyn Yar ravine of Kiev, Ukraine, to commemorate the Babyn Yar massacre. It was one of the biggest massacres of the Holocaust during World War Two when Nazi troops gunned down nearly 34,000 Jewish men, women and children at the wooded ravine of Babyn Yar on Sept. 29-30, 1941.

For her, this pain experienced from the war is all too real. Not only because her story began during a war, but also because she has [actively fought](#) to heal those affected by its traumas through her work. The war in Ukraine has also been a devastating and painful reminder to those who know war all too well. Designer Demna Gvasalia of Balenciaga recently dedicated his Fall/Winter 2022 runway show to the war in Ukraine. “The war in Ukraine has triggered the pain of a past trauma I have carried in me since 1993, when the same thing happened in my home country and I became a forever refugee,” he recounted in an open letter.



Marina Abramović  
**Crystal Wall of Crying**  
Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center,  
Kyiv, Ukraine  
2021

The work and memorial, a large wall of dark stones with protruding quartz crystals, was destroyed only months ago by Russian bombs at the start of the war in Ukraine. Five people were killed and five more injured. The wall itself was meant to help people by giving them an entry point for reflection and healing. Now with the work destroyed, the forces of war that it had sought to address have reappeared.

## From fear to love

“A miracle is a shift in perception from fear to love,” Marianne Williamson once said. For many that have participated in her works, it is more than art because the healing is real. Abramovic does not seek worship nor admiration but rather asks for an open mind. A chance to listen to a message about overcoming our own fears and transforming them into love.

Transforming fear into love has been a difficult journey even for one of art's greatest minds. Marina recounted how as a young child she never felt pretty, “My hair was always cut short with a pin, I had to wear a blouse and orthopedic shoes. I had a big nose on my small child face. I felt so ugly and so unwanted and so terrible. For my birthday, I got flannel pajamas that were always three sizes too big. My mom told me they would shrink when they washed. They never did.”



Marina wears sweater vest by **COMME DES GARÇONS HOMME PLUS**, dress, stylist's own



It wasn't until she stood in front of an audience to perform for the first time that Marina felt "energy, electricity" through her body. "I was no longer this poor little shitty Marina. I was a superhero and didn't care if I felt fat or skinny. After all, I was presenting an idea to communicate my art," she recalled.

However, between her private life and public performance there was a schism. Existing in the public sphere in Yugoslavia was a challenge for Abramovic because of the public's strictly imposed limits on self-expression. "Luxury didn't exist in communism. Luxury was something vain. If a woman had red lips or red nail polish, they would be shunned as a whore, a prostitute," she explained.

It wasn't only society but also the art world that had impositions on fashion. Marina explained, "In the early 70s, performance art was expected to be done with the naked body or in dirty black and white attire. If an artist had anything to do with fashion, they were absolutely considered bad artists. Fashion and art could not live together."

## Yohji Yamamoto

In 1988, Marina and her cherished collaborator Ulay had planned to meet and marry in the middle of the Great Wall of China as part of a performance piece. After canceling their engagement the two decided to complete the project, each walking two-thousand miles from opposite ends. Afterwards, devastated and heartbroken, Marina went to Paris where she put on a show at the Centre Pompidou. The show was a success and allowed her to purchase her first designer clothes from the collection of an emerging designer named Yohji Yamamoto.



"I still have the clothes. I bought trousers, I bought an asymmetrical jacket, and a white shirt with a one-of-a-kind triangle sticking out. Everything is symmetrical. I went out and felt this incredible pleasure. Paris was smiling at me and everything was wonderful," she recalled.

## Ricardo Tisci

Years later, Marina met designer Ricardo Tisci, the creative director of Givenchy at the time, who inspired her to embrace herself with clothing. They were introduced by Marina's then husband, Paolo Canevari. Ricardo told her how, as a student, he had come across her art while attending Central Saint Martins. The two quickly hit it off. She now jokes that she became his ninth sister (he has eight).

"Ricardo dramatically changed my belief in myself. That I could wear things. That I could look good and feel good. It helped establish my self-confidence. I was always secure as an artist, but not as a woman. There was a division between the two worlds."



Marina Abramovic wears jacket by **WALTER VAN BEIRENDONCK**, shoes and pants, stylist's own

As an artist, it has always been important for Marina to expose things that people would never expose. Yet for years, she struggled with ridding herself of self-doubt. "When you are ashamed of something and you show it and share it with the world, you become vulnerable. That vulnerability in the public brings you real feelings, because we all have those same feelings, but we hide it. It's your body. You can do whatever you want and project different things."

## Sharing everything

The influence of social media and the ubiquitous image of perfection can be hard to shake. "When you look at the big jetsetters and stars, they're always presenting the best parts of it. Then you find out their vulnerabilities, or their trash. I don't want to have any insecurities and I don't want to have any secrets. I make it my work to share everything," she explains.

For Marina, it goes beyond the mirror and into how we live our lives full of fear. "For many, I think jealousy comes from envy. There's also the fear that you're scared to change your life. People are unhappy with their current lives, but you can create your own life as you like. Nobody else can create it for you. Say you have been with the wrong person for years. You don't even talk to him in your marriage. Whatever problems you have, you can really look at them and change. I did."





Marina Abramovic wears jacket by **WALTER VAN BEIRENDONCK**, shoes and pants, stylist's own

This sense of freedom in her daily life is the ultimate sense of luxury. "I want to be a mirror for people to show them freedom, to show my change. I went through so much shit in my life and now I'm really happy. My boyfriend is twenty-one years younger than me who is kind of crazy about me. He calls me ten times a day and sends me flowers, all from Japan. I love him very much."

The vulnerability that comes with freedom means going all the way, even into the bedroom. "People stop fucking when they're fifty," she says. "This whole idea about life stopping after menopause is not true because actually you won't care about getting pregnant. You have so much more fun plus you know your body better. All of this is taboo to talk about with women. When I see women get upset by this you can see they don't have a sex life. It's sad. It's terrible. What keeps you alive is to be alive!"



Marina wears coat by **COMME DES GARÇONS HOMME PLUS**

# Fuck negativity

For years, societal norms deprived Marina of joy and shamed her. She has been accused of being a satanist, the subject of countless death threats, conspiracies, and has been assaulted with her own portrait. Today, she sits across from me wearing black sandals; one says “fuck” and the other one says “negativity.”

“I have no shame in having joy now. I used to think, ‘Oh my God, what will people think if I wear this?’ Fuck what the people think! I want to be free. Freedom is intoxicating and it’s great.” She also finds inspiration in the values of younger generations that are more fearless with their style. “My generation [Baby Boomers] is judgmental. They would never dream to wear things that may look ridiculous. But why not look ridiculous? What’s wrong with that? Fashion gives you the possibility to dream. To go to an unknown world, to be somewhere else, to explore and discover sides of yourself that you didn’t even know exist.”

**Instagram:** [@abramovicinstitute](#)  
[mai.art](#)

Text by [Mark Benjamin](#) and [Louis Augustine Herrera](#)

## **Marina Abramovic**

Photography by [Mark Benjamin](#) and [Joel Mojica](#)

Styling by [Jonathan Osofsky](#) / [KASURI](#)

Hair by [Takuya Yamaguchi](#) with The Wall Group using Oribe

Makeup by [Paco Blancas](#) with L’atelier NYC using NARS cosmetics

Art direction by [Michaela Nilsson](#)

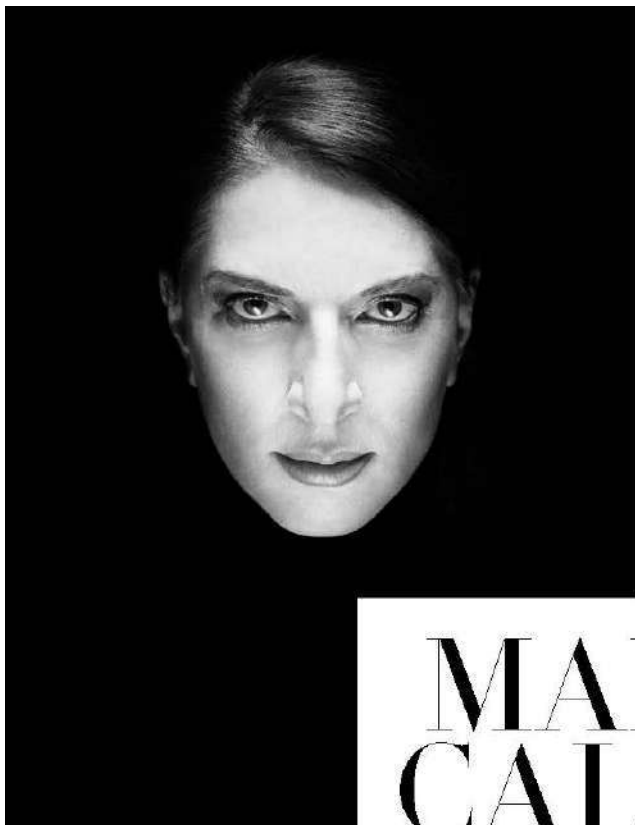
Post creative direction by [Chris Correa](#)

Special thanks to [Siying Qu](#), [Donna Clairfield](#), [Billy Zhao](#), and [Matthew Moorman](#)



Harper's Bazaar  
October 2021

# Harper's BAZAAR



PERSPECTIVES

scene because my art has always dealt with the very same things that she faced: pain, suffering and mortality.

This project has taken many years to put together. I originally wanted it to be a film, with different major directors for each death, but I then was approached by the Bayerische Staatsoper [the Bavarian State Opera] in Munich, and thought how powerful this would be on stage. It is, of course, not an ordinary opera. It is much shorter – just an hour and a half – and very different. We have electronic music by Marko Nikodijevic and video installations by Marco Brambilla, who has made the beautiful cloud images that introduce you to the emotion of the next scene. There are also excerpts of film, directed by Nabil Elderkin, in which Willem Dafoe plays an assassin. This is meant to show how Aristotle Onassis, Callas' lover, kills her, over and over again. In New York, I live in the same building as Willem, and we have been great friends for many years now.

I thought, who better to kill me than him?

Another friend, Riccardo Tisci, with whom I have collaborated before, has made all the costumes, and he is as enthusiastic as I am about this. I gave him free rein and he made so many surprising choices. He dressed all the singers as Callas' beloved maid Bruna, and you do not understand why, until you see the finale. He created wonderful costumes for me too. I never felt secure in myself as a woman, but in his clothes, I feel so confident.

Obviously, the project has been affected by the pandemic. We are only now getting the bigger audiences.

When I first played to a small

crowd, I was so nervous that I could not enjoy anything. But the last time we were on stage, there were 2,300 people. Wow! I really felt her spirit with me then. I now know I want to play this until I am 80. Through this work, I have come to understand that Callas never really died. Continuing the story of that voice I first heard so many years ago means she lives for ever.

*Marina Abramovic: Seven Deaths* is at Lisson Gallery ([www.lissongallery.com](http://www.lissongallery.com)) until 30 October. *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* will tour nationwide in 2022 ([mat.art/7deaths](http://mat.art/7deaths)).

Right and below:  
scenes *7 Deaths  
of Maria Callas*  
(2019)



## MARIA CALLAS & ME

Marina Abramovic reveals the profound  
effect the diva has had on her life – and how  
it has inspired her new performance

I was 14, and in my grandmother's kitchen, when this female voice came through the Bakelite radio. I didn't know it was Maria Callas. All I knew was how it made me feel, that voice. I stood up, closed my eyes, and started to cry. I never met her, I never saw her perform live, but from that moment on, I was obsessed.

We are connected, she and I. We have a surprising vulnerability and an enormous strength, which we combine to make art. We are women who can love so much that we could die from a broken heart. I have felt this love, but my work saved me when it did not save her. She died heartbroken and alone.

A part of me is angry with Callas, for letting this love overpower her, for even thinking of giving up her remarkable talent for the man she loved. I believe women should take their power. I always have. If I could, I would have told her to embrace her life, I would have tried to shake her from this strange dream of sorrow. Yet there is still something heroic about her ending.

In *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, a performance-piece-cum-opera, we look at all the famous operatic endings she enacted and each female character, played by a different singer, is portrayed as a heroine. They live their passion to the end, and that's something so powerful. If we can love that much, it is almost like we can live for ever. But we also have an eighth death, Callas' own, which I play myself in a recreation of her apartment, right down to the smallest detail, like the bottle of pills by her telephone. I feel so united with her in this



# Contributors



## RUSSELL TOVEY

Since 2018, the British actor, famed for his roles in *The History Boys* and *Sherlock*, has co-hosted the podcast *Talk Art* with his friend, the gallerist Robert Diament. An avid collector, he shares a work that has inspired him in 'Eye of the beholder'.

**The power of art is...** 'the fastest and most authentic way to show us what humanity is across the world.'

**The greatest misconception about art is...** 'it's superfluous to what's important in life. Art is life. It is what makes us human.'

**An emerging artist we should all know about is...** 'Louis Fratino: his proudly queer, autobiographical renderings are rapidly changing the face of the contemporary art world.'

## KATE BRYAN

An art historian, curator and broadcaster, Bryan began her career at the British Museum and has since worked across the world as a gallery director and commercial art dealer. Since 2016, she has been the global head of collections at Soho House. On page 12, she highlights female artists who died young and have been written out of history.

**The power of art is...** 'endless. It can take you somewhere else in an instant.'

**The greatest misconception about art is...** 'that you need to study it to qualify your opinion.'

**An emerging artist we should all know about is...** 'Miranda Forrester. She is reconfiguring the tradition of life drawing into something dynamic and urgent.'



## MARINA ABRAMOVIC

At the forefront of conceptual art since the early 1970s, the award-winning performance artist has created some of the most talked-about works of the past 50 years. She discusses her latest project – an opera about the death of the iconic diva – in 'Maria Callas and me'.

**The power of art is...** 'to elevate your spirits.'

**The greatest misconception about art is...** 'that it is a commodity.'

**An emerging artist we should all know about is...** 'Regina José Galindo... she makes radical political work with such strength and power.'

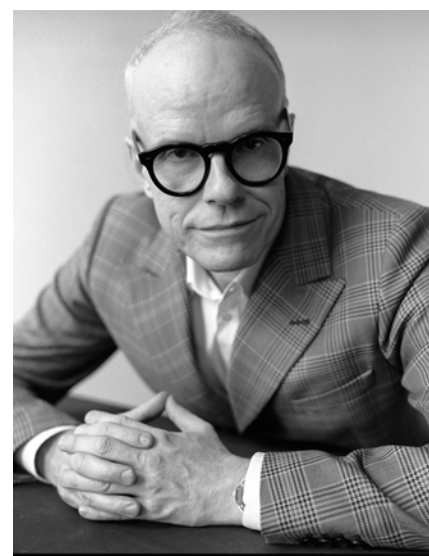
## HANS ULRICH OBRIST

The Swiss-born artistic director of the Serpentine Galleries is also a curator, critic and historian, whose many shows include the revolutionary 'Take Me (I'm Yours)', which allowed visitors to touch and even bring home exhibits. In 'Eye of the beholder', he talks about the artwork that has most fascinated him.

**The power of art is...** 'as Gerhard Richter keeps telling me, "Art is the highest form of hope".'

**The greatest misconception about art is...** 'expecting art to change what we expect from it.'

**An emerging artist we should all know about is...** 'Precious Okoyomon.'



*Haaretz*  
21 October 2021



## Marina Abramovic Has Healed From Her Own Art, Now She's Healing Visitors to Babi Yar

The performance artist who once let the audience abuse her talks to Haaretz about feminism, political correctness and the monument she put up at the site of a Holocaust massacre in Ukraine



Liza Rozovsky

Follow

Oct. 21, 2021

Kyiv is jammed. Three presidents – of Israel, Ukraine, and Germany – are making their way to Babi Yar for the main ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the two-day massacre where the Nazis killed around 33,000 Jews. The evening's program is extraordinarily rich and equally long.

In the mayhem, a tall woman in black with long black hair runs around the compound. She is tense, intent, excited and has been hard at work since the early morning. It's hard to believe she'll be 75 in a month.

She is Marina Abramovic, the famed performance artist. She is set to unveil the installation she was commissioned to put up at [Babi Yar](#) – the Wall of Tears.



A visitor to the wall. Credit: Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial Center

Abramovic likes to tell about the military discipline she grew up with in communist Belgrade. When you see the woman who's sometimes called the diva of the art world in action, it's easy to imagine her sleeping on hotel beds without pulling back the covers, as she attests to doing.



And here, fashionably late, the VIPs arrive. They stride toward the Wall of Tears, which is 40 meters long and 3 meters high, made of coal mined in Ukraine with chunks of quartz crystals mined in Brazil. Water spouts from the top of the wall, making the coal seem to shed tears. At night, the crystals are illuminated from within.

Abramovic positions presidents Isaac Herzog, Volodymyr Zelensky and Frank-Walter Steinmeier in front of the wall. The crystals are set in columns of three so they're at the head, heart and stomach of the observer.

Before noon Abramovic marked the spot where her microphone should be, but in the moment of truth, the presidents are a bit flummoxed. Herzog hesitantly reaches out to touch the coal, and the presidents continue on walking.

Two days earlier we spoke on Zoom; Abramovic sat in her hotel room and surprised me: Instead of a slow delivery, a deep, portentous voice, she fired out her words rapidly and softly.

"When I was invited, it was incredible for me that I would actually be able to do this kind of installation. This is the biggest installation I've built in my life. I was thinking how to approach this problem. How can I approach something that means so much more than just a monument?" she says.

"I was inspired by the Western Wall in Jerusalem, where people stand and pray. I thought: What if I transport this wall mentally, virtually, to [Babi Yar](#) and create a wall of healing and crying – so that there's something really to experience. I don't like monuments that you look at, big things you just stand in front of and observe. I'm a performance artist, I want to make something the public can interact with, can feel, can have a personal experience with their own kind of energy."



Abramovic and Ulay in 'The Artist is present.'

This is precisely the challenge Abramovic faced as she arrived at [Babi Yar](#), known as Babyn Yar in Ukrainian, early the week before: How to get the installation to be interactive. She has become famous for the uncompromising presence in her art, and often, for being the piece itself.

An installation that has come to symbolize her drew hundreds of thousands of people to New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2010. It was only Abramovic, sitting at a desk for three straight months eight hours a day, so that anyone who wanted could sit across from her and look her in the eyes for as long as they liked. That installation was simply called "The Artist Is Present."

In the 1970s she created a unique series of installations called "Rhythm." In one, "Rhythm 10," she stabbed knives rapidly into a table between her splayed fingers, occasionally missing and hurting herself. In another display, she lay down in the middle of a burning pentagram, passing out from oxygen deprivation.

In "Rhythm 0," the most extreme of the series, she handed the audience 72 objects, including a gun with a bullet, a whip, a knife, a scalpel, lipstick, flowers, perfume and herself – for six hours. The

audience members could do as they pleased with the objects; they began with cautious touches and ended up ripping the artist's clothes off, abusing her, injuring her and pointing the gun at her temple.



Israeli President Isaac Herzog at the wall. Credit: Haim Zach/GPO

### **Encouraging the human spirit**

It seems that in the eighth decade of her life Abramovic is taking a step back – or maybe actually leaving her comfort zone. She is still part of her work, but it seems not as totally as before.

A few months ago an opera she directed and stars in, “7 Deaths of Maria Callas,” premiered in Munich and went on to Paris and Athens. The opera combines videos where Abramovic and actor Willem Dafoe dramatize the Greek-American soprano's iconic arias. Callas has excited Abramovic from an early age; she identifies with her.

They have the same nose, they both had horrible mothers, and they're both Sagittarians, she told The Art Newspaper, which is based in London and New York. As Abramovic and Dafoe cavort, leading opera singers perform the arias onstage.

Abramovic's role on the stage is to portray (or perhaps reenact) Callas. But most of the attention goes to the video art, which is also



being shown as an independent piece at the Lisson Gallery in London.

The Wall of Tears has been no less challenging for Abramovic. First, after the monument's unveiling she won't be there to explain what Brazilian quartz has to do with the Nazis massacring Jews in Ukraine. Second, she and her creation ran into a hornet's nest of Russian and Ukrainian journalists, who accused it of shallowness and populism, a kind of "Holo-Disney."



Abramovic in '7 Deaths of Maria Callas.'

*What do you say to critics who wonder why Marina Abramovic, the performance artist famous for her radical, provocative installations, is showing a "New Age" piece at Babi Yar?*

"I just can say that when I did 'The Artist Is Present' at MoMA, I had nothing – I had a chair, I sat on it and people came to look at me. Nobody could explain why 850,000 people came – never had so many people come to look at a living artist. Why people slept in line. What they found there.

"I think my work in general – maybe not my earlier works, which were maybe more provocative, but my later work – is about lifting human spirit in the best possible way. And to me this installation is

about lifting human spirit – it's about meditation, it's about healing, it's about really being with yourself and starting to think about all the problems that have always existed in the world. Because viruses, murder and killing have always been part of humanity. And that's my contribution. If people think that's not right – I can't do anything about that.

“But when I saw yesterday the people participating, crying and really having an emotional effect, I said: I'm fine. I'm on that path. That means it was worth it. Only time will tell, but it's very easy to judge, it's very easy to dismiss this from outside. That's why I'm asking all the journalists: Before you write about it, come and stand there. And if you dismiss it – I can't do anything about it.”

As she puts it, “I've never made a Holocaust monument. This is the first one. And the first time you never know what will happen. If someone had told me 10 years ago that I would do an opera as a radical performance artist, it would have been crazy. But I did an opera. And I was so afraid, but now it's a huge success, standing ovations in Paris, because I deconstructed opera and created something new, a new formula.

“And that's what I like to do – to make things new, in a different way. There are so many ways to see the Holocaust. But I would like people to see this wall, through my eyes, as a wall of healing. And how can you go wrong with that? You can't go wrong with healing.”



Abramovic explaining her creation to the media. Credit: Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial Center

## The final act

Two days later I meet with Abramovic in Kyiv, on the morning of the installation's official unveiling. "You've made an effort to come just for me," she says, wrapping me in warmth and caring. She takes my hand in her warm one and leads me from place to place.

"This woman, she came and spent so much time by the wall," she says, showing me a selfie of her with an older, blue-eyed woman. "She came crying. Her whole family was murdered. And she said that to her, my project is so important because she can just come and think about her past, because there was never a spot where she could do that in Babi Yar because, you know, it's just a park."

In fact, several memorials scattered throughout Babi Yar have been put up in recent years, from the monument for murdered Soviet citizens, which does not include any mention of Jews, to one of a menorah.



Abramovic again the subject of one of her art pieces, "The Artist Is Present," 2010. Credit: Andrew H. Walker / Getty Images



When we pass the security barrier and reach the wall, Abramovic dives into preparations for the evening. Here comes the moment to finally experience the wall. It's very pretty in the cool sunshine of early October. The large, unprocessed crystals glimmer. Even the coal, with water drops peeking from it, is shining.

Together we choose a column of crystals suited to my modest height; I stand in front of the wall and Abramovic leaves me alone. I stand there for about five minutes, trying to concentrate, then I let my thoughts flow freely. But all I feel is the edge of the top crystal stabbing my forehead and the water drops splashing on me. The soft coal dirties my hands a bit.

Now that it's behind us, we can talk about other things as well. We sit on a sunlit bench behind the wall, fall leaves fluttering about, but the trees are still green. True, this is Babi Yar, and a few dozen meters away an event took place that no installation can describe, but right now it's pretty, sunny and peaceful here, and Abramovic has a few free moments.

*One inspiring thing about you is that you're a late bloomer – you reached your peak in the second half of your life.*

"The last part. This is the final act. I am a very late bloomer. I left home when I was 29. I lived under the military control of my mother and had to come home by 10 o'clock." Even after marrying her first husband, they lived apart because her mother objected to the relationship.

"Then I escaped and went to Amsterdam. My mother went to the police saying 'My daughter escaped. You have to look for her.' So the policeman asked her: 'How old is your daughter?' She said '29,' and he answered, 'Comrade Abramovic, we have better things to do.'

“The most difficult part for me was when my mother died. I went to clear her house and I found her diaries. Wow, if I had read a single page of it during her lifetime, my relationship with her would have been very different. She suffered so much – the very violent relationship with my father, the divorce.

“There was an incredible amount of emotion hiding under complete coldness. She never kissed me, never touched me, and then there was a totally different person writing these diaries. I understood that she wanted to make me a warrior, make me strong. She’s done a good job, but I never understood it. I thought she never loved me, [but then it turned out] she kept every newspaper clip of every exhibition I did – I found them in the diaries. She was secretly proud. Never showed it. Ever. And I never wanted to have children because I didn’t want to be like my mother.”

*Many are inspired by your choice not to have children and to devote yourself to art. It’s a feminist act. But now you say you didn’t want to turn into your mother. Now, at nearly 75, do you regret it?*

“No, I don’t. I’ve dedicated over 30 years to teach performance. I have so many students. I’m a such a tough teacher. Some of my students are very successful. So I feel that even though I didn’t physically have children, I have them all. They call, send me invitations, I see them. They perform at my institute. So I have a very large young community.”



Visitors to the Wall of Tears. Credit: Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial Center

## Back home to Mama

Born in 1946 in Belgrade, Abramovic manages to be a groundbreaking artist even in the third decade of the 21st century. She has long been a feminist icon and is scheduled to soon break through another glass ceiling.

In 2023 an exhibit of hers, combining a retrospective and new works, will open at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, making her the first woman to have a major solo exhibit at that prestigious bastion in its nearly 250 years. She's a woman of the here and now, but also misses the '70s. When I ask her if she shares the skepticism of many who were born in the communist bloc toward the #MeToo movement and political correctness, she laughs.

"What we did in the '70s we couldn't do now because of political correctness. PC ruins creativity in art. It restricts it. It makes new rules, and artists must be free. They must be able to express what they want to express. So these are difficult times. All the crazy performances we used to do before wouldn't be possible today. I'm so happy I've already done them."

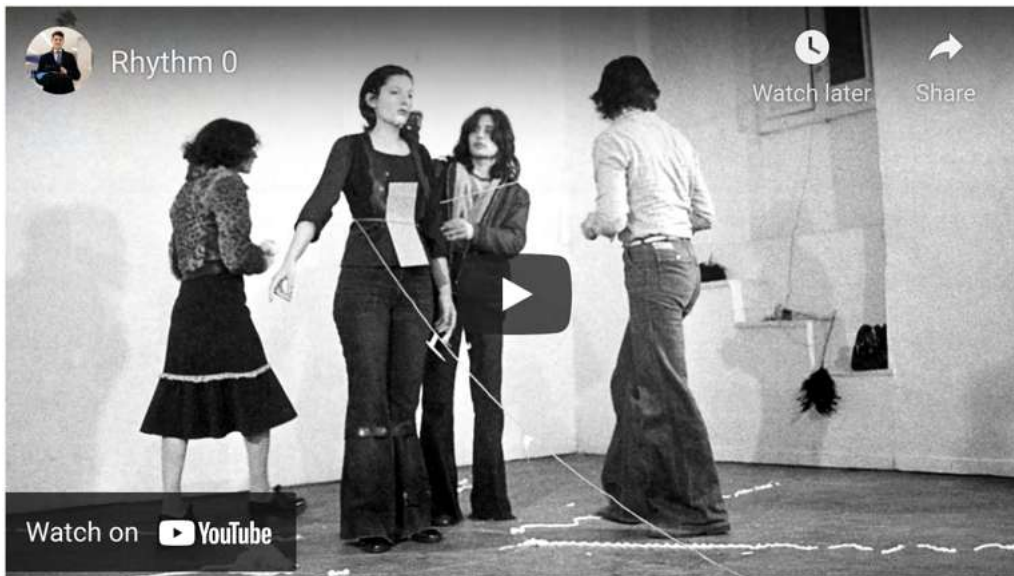
*Give me an example of a piece you made in the '70s that would be criticized today.*

"Let's say the very simple piece called 'Rhythm 0,' where there was a pistol, a bullet and me. I started dressed, and then the people cut off my clothes and stripped me naked – they could have killed me, a pistol, a bullet and me. I started dressed, and then the people cut off my clothes and stripped me naked – they could have killed me, raped me, wow. This installation was stopped exactly six hours later," as planned.

"And what's important is that I never felt like a victim, because it was my decision to be an object for six hours. The moment the



guards came at 2 in the morning and said, 'It's over,' I was myself again, and the audience all ran away from me. But that's the thing. It's very hard when you're being abused against your will, but it was my will. I wanted to see how far the audience could go. Could it really kill you? I was 23, by the way. It's crazy."



Abramovic talking about 'Rhythm 0.'

*And still living with your mother! That's the craziest part.*

"I know! I had to do installations by 5 in the afternoon to get home in time." [Laughs.] "But I've never felt abused in my life, sexually. Ever. If anything would have happened, I would have kicked somebody's balls. Maybe I created such energy that people never dared, but they really never did."

*So you think the women coming out now ...*

"You have to check the circumstances in each case. It depends. It's very difficult to judge. But when it's a student who waited 30 years to say something ... act immediately. Do something about it. This is why I hate women as victims, because we are warriors and we're so strong – the fact that we can create life in our bellies.

"I didn't, but the fact is we can. I just did a residency program at Oxford and went to the Pitt Rivers Museum, which is an

archeological museum displaying ancient cultures, from the Aztecs to the Siberian shamans. There was a matriarchy there. Women had all the power. We willingly gave up the power just to play this fragile shitty role, to please men.

“But we had the power. Where is that power today? I want to be a kind of example. If I managed to do it, coming from the fifth world that was the former Yugoslavia, and did it on my own – I didn’t marry a rich guy, I didn’t get my residency permit through marriage – I want to be an inspiration. We have the power in ourselves. We just need confidence – not just to play the victim, but also to change our lives. You’re unhappy in marriage? Leave the fucking husband. You’re not happy with your job? Change the job. Find who you are.”



A visitor to Maria Abramovic's Wall of Tears in Babi Yar, Ukraine. Credit: Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial Center

*So you place the responsibility with women. You're not saying,  
"Men, stop being assholes."*

“No. If we don’t change ourselves, nothing will change. Look what we did in Italian society. Italian women have raised sons that are complete parasites. Look at the art world – 90 percent of gallery owners are women. But what are they showing? Only male artists.

It's so easy to blame somebody else, but we have to change."

*Throughout your career you've been completely exposed and vulnerable. This wall, and the opera you directed, give the impression that you're taking a step back.*

"No, I'm not. But I no longer have to prove to anyone that I can do those long, crazy installations. I've done that, experienced it. There's also an age limitation. When I did 'The Artist Is Present' I was 65. I couldn't have done it at a younger age – I didn't have the willpower, the experience. It was crazy. Every day could have been the last. The pain was intolerable – from sitting.

"I'm interested in so many things – starting with opera, which is the purview of dinosaurs. Who likes opera? Nobody. The Sky Arts channel allotted me five broadcast hours and gave me carte blanche to do what I wanted with them – so I brought in 61 performance artists from over 30 countries to show their art to people.

channel allotted me five broadcast hours and gave me carte blanche to do what I wanted with them – so I brought in 61 performance artists from over 30 countries to show their art to people.

"I have my institute, where I teach young people. I have so many ways to transmit what I'm doing. I don't need to keep cutting myself or being naked. I'm planning something performative at the Royal Academy, but usually a performance takes me two to three years to plan."

*So you don't know what you'll do yet?*

"I know, but it would be a jinx if I tell you."



## IL GIORNALE DELL'ARTE

### Marina Abramovic tra sangue, amore e strategia

Lea Vergine la definì un'artista di seconda mano, un'epigona dell'«arte agita» più genuina. Di sicuro la star montenegrina ha saputo perpetuare il suo mito tramutandosi da martire a guaritrice, ma ha tradito il principio stesso della Performance art



*Marina Abramovic e Ulay, «Nightsea Crossing, sitting au Mac Lyon», 1986*

FRANCO FANELLI | 20 ottobre 2021

PERSONE ARTE CONTEMPORANEA

*«In passato mi sarei arrabbiata per un fatto del genere, oggi invece provo compassione. La cosa più difficile è perdonare ma bisogna riuscire a farlo, come dice il Dalai Lama»:* così Marina Abramovic, nel 2018, commentò a caldo un'aggressione subita a Firenze, davanti a Palazzo Strozzi, dov'era in corso una sua retrospettiva. Anche Silvio Berlusconi, nove anni prima, aveva perdonato Massimo Tartaglia, che a Milano, al termine di un comizio dell'allora premier, lo aveva colpito al viso con una riproduzione in miniatura del Duomo.

La differenza tra i due fatti è che Berlusconi spedì comunque in tribunale il suo aggressore; Marina Abramovic non commise l'errore di denunciare il sedicente artista ceco protagonista

dell'estemporaneo happening, giacché un prosaico atto giudiziario avrebbe intaccato l'aura sciamanica di santa panteista e guaritrice alla quale ha da tempo affidato la sua immagine e la sua tarda maturità artistica. Tuttavia non bastarono il sangue versato e il viso gonfio di Berlusconi per scoraggiare i sospetti di una messa in scena a uso delle telecamere.

Chi invece ha una sia pur minima conoscenza del modus operandi dell'artista montenegrina oggi settantacinquenne non ha mai avuto dubbi sull'autenticità dell'aggressione di Firenze. Nonostante sia lecito supporre che il senso del ridicolo di cui è dotata la sacerdotessa buddhista dei Balcani sia quasi inesistente, la modalità dell'attentato fiorentino, il suo non più ieratico volto per pochi secondi incorniciato nella tela dipinta sfondatale sulla testa (roba da rissa in un film con Bud Spencer) era quanto di più indesiderabile (proprio perché irresistibilmente comico) potesse accaderle.

E sì, deve esserle costato un bello sforzo non reagire in maniera scomposta a quella situazione, nella quale da performer veniva trasformata in performata. Non vi è, in effetti, traccia di ironia (figuriamoci di comicità) nella cospicua produzione di colei che si è attribuita il titolo di «nonna della Performance art». C'è invece una feroce determinazione, unita a un buon livello di sopportazione del dolore, oltre a un'intatta, quella sì, resistenza fisica, su cui ha basato tanti suoi lavori.

### **Arte slava, roulette russa**

I tempi eroici delle foto sfocate e dei video mossi che documentavano l'epoca d'oro della performance sono da tempo tramontati. E remoti, sepolti nella Belgrado di Tito, sono gli esordi negli spazi underground dell'allora capitale iugoslava e oggi serba, quando Marina alternava la pittura all'arte agita, una pratica che, in virtù del suo potenziale eversivo e clandestino, ha una sua estesa fioritura nei Paesi dell'Est sotto i regimi comunisti.

La bella e poco agiografica biografia di James Westcott (pubblicata in Italia da Johan & Levi nel 2011), riporta Marina nella sua famiglia, tra genitori copertisi di gloria durante la seconda guerra mondiale contro le armate di Hitler, e ampiamente beneficiati dal nuovo regime. Ci racconta degli studi all'Accademia di Belle Arti, di un padre che le regala, adolescente, la prima pistola e di una madre tirannica con manie igieniste. È in un ambiente comunque protetto (anche dalla relativa tolleranza del regime di Tito rispetto ai «diversamente allineati») che all'alba degli anni Settanta lo Studentski Kulturni Centar di Belgrado (Skc) accoglie i turbamenti dei giovani artisti iugoslavi.

Quando Marina propone alla Dom Omladine (Centro giovani) di Belgrado la sua prima performance potenzialmente (se non letalmente) autolesionista, è il 1970: vestita con gli abiti convenzionali impostigli dalla madre, si sarebbe puntata una pistola alla testa secondo le ben note modalità della roulette russa. L'organizzazione respinse il progetto e l'aspirante performer optò per una meno rischiosa mostra di pittura. Il fatto è che in quel periodo le performance erano diventate una specie di gara a chi si procurasse più dolore o mettesse maggiormente a rischio la propria incolumità fisica.

L'allora ventiquattrenne Abramovic non poteva sapere che, qualunque fosse stato l'esito della roulette russa, avrebbe potuto anticipare di un anno l'azione che rese celebre il suo collega e coetaneo statunitense Chris Burden, che il 19 novembre del 1971 alle 19 e 45, in una sala della galleria F-Space di Santa Ana in California, si fece sparare addosso con un fucile. L'imperizia (o la paura) dello sparatore gli procurò solo una ferita al braccio sinistro.

### **Il pubblico? È colpevole**

Ma prima del gruppo di giovani performer di Belgrado tra i quali si muoveva la Abramovic, prima di Burden, negli anni Sessanta i più cruenti esponenti dell'Azionismo viennese avevano alzato l'asticella del dolore, del masochismo, dell'umiliazione dei propri e altrui corpi. Sangue, bende, lamette da barba, corde, liquidi organici e varie deiezioni, chiodi, erano già diventati materiali artistici per spaventose esibizioni.

La Body art diventa il codice più estremo per perpetuare nel '900 una figura affacciata nell'arte, nel teatro e nella letteratura della seconda metà dell'Ottocento: l'artista come portatore del disagio, dell'alienazione, della crisi dell'individuo, dei turbamenti interiori, dell'emarginazione, delle discriminazioni di genere, dei mostruosi effetti collaterali della rivoluzione industriale e poi delle guerre, della repressione, del capitalismo ecc.

Alla componente romantica delle pratiche performative nell'arte del XX secolo non sfuggiranno neanche le serate futuriste e Dada; e quell'ingrediente permarrà anche nel secondo dopoguerra, passando dall'Action painting all'arte «agita». L'elemento nuovo, se vogliamo, sarà il coinvolgimento del pubblico, giacché il ruolo di spettatore di fronte a una Gina Pane che si fa del male, di Shigeko Kubota che dipinge con un pennello inserito nella vagina o di Vito Acconci che si masturba alla Sonnabend Gallery di New York si complica assai.

Lo spettatore può essere un voyeur, un non sempre incolpevole testimone, un partecipante all'azione, il complice di un'azione proibita. La provocazione del senso di colpa nell'animo dello spettatore-testimone sarà in effetti uno degli obiettivi dei body artisti.

### **(Gina) Pane et circenses**

E la giovane Marina Abramovic ci dà dentro. Anche se, a ripensarci oggi, specialmente dopo che il cinema balcanico ci ha fatto conoscere anche un lato meno retorico di un'epoca e di un territorio complicato, dopo che, negli anni Novanta, i «Bulgari» interpretati da Aldo, Giovanni e Giacomo hanno fatto la loro apparizione a «Mai dire gol», dopo i fasti della Kocani Orkestar che ritma «La contrada chiavicone» ai concerti di Vinicio Capossela, è un po' difficile non inquadrare certe ormai leggendarie imprese di Marina Abramovic in un'atmosfera vagamente circense.

Signore e signori, la giovane donna si esibirà davanti a voi in una tipica sfida slava, conficcando ripetutamente e sempre più velocemente dieci affilatissimi coltelli negli spazi tra le dita della sua mano aperta poggiata su un tavolo! («Rythm 10», 1973, l'opera con la quale partecipò a «Contemporanea», la mostra curata da Achille Bonito Oliva nei garage sotterranei di Villa Borghese).

Amici del brivido, non mancate la nuova sfida di Marina Abramovic, la stella del Balcani, che nuda, inginocchiata a terra, si posizionerà davanti a un gigantesco ventilatore industriale con lo scopo di incamerare più aria possibile nei polmoni, fino al collasso! (da Luciano Inga Pin, a Milano, nel 1974).

Ed ecco a voi un nuovo, pericolosissimo numero di Marina Abramovic, la regina di Belgrado: si taglierà capelli e unghie di mani e piedi e li getterà nelle alte fiamme che formano a terra il perimetro di una grande stella e poi, saltando le lingue di fuoco, si sdraierà all'interno dell'astro, simbolo della rivoluzione nel nostro amato Paese! («Rythm 5», 1974, Studentski Kulturni Centar, Belgrado; solo l'intervento di alcuni fra i presenti salvò l'artista dall'asfissia per mancanza di ossigeno).

Il ridicolo postumo è uno dei rischi di un mestiere del genere. Postumo perché all'epoca l'arte contemporanea e le sue pratiche restavano una nicchia frequentata da pochi adepti. Il regista Paolo Sorrentino, con la parodia della performer che (con un trucco da avanspettacolo) si



scaglia, nuda e in corsa, contro le scabre arcate romane nella Valle degli Acquedotti, sarebbe arrivato nelle sale cinematografiche solo quando la sovraesposizione avrebbe reso Marina Abramovic (per chi non la ama) appena meno insopportabile dell'enfasi con la quale i media decantano l'aura e le vibrazioni che emanano la sua presenza e i suoi oggetti.

### **Ulay, amore e guai**

Ci sono due date importanti nel percorso della Abramovic. La prima è il 1975. A quell'epoca, dopo l'incontro con il gallerista scozzese Richard De Marco, aveva cominciato la sua lunga carriera internazionale partecipando al Festival di Edimburgo (dove conobbe Joseph Beuys) e poi spostandosi, con alterne fortune, a Londra e a Colonia, incontrandovi, tra gli altri, Rebecca Horn, con la quale avrebbe intrecciato una profonda amicizia.

All'inizio del 1975 è a Napoli, ospite di Peppe Morra, nella cui galleria presenta «Rhytm 0». Per sei ore mise a disposizione del pubblico settantadue oggetti sparsi su un tavolo: tra gli altri, un ago, un flauto, del miele (Beuys aveva lasciato il segno), una sega, una spazzola, un martello, una macchina fotografica Polaroid, una rosa e una pistola con un proiettile. I presenti erano invitati a utilizzare su di lei, che non avrebbe reagito, uno qualsiasi degli oggetti. Dopo tre ore qualcuno prese l'iniziativa; seguirono vari atti, non esclusa qualche timida molestia sessuale, e un tizio particolarmente intraprendente le puntò la pistola al collo.

Solo nella tarda maturità, però, l'interazione con il pubblico sarebbe diventata parte fondamentale delle sue opere: sarà allora il momento in cui il suo non sarà più l'«artist body» ma il «public body». Ma un'altra data chiave, e una lunga vicenda in cui s'intrecciarono arte, amore e inevitabili stracci volati alla fine della storia, separa quel 1975 e il culmine della fase «public body», quello che coincide con l'azione «The Artist is Present», svoltasi al MoMA di New York nel 2010. Qui, per 736 ore durante le quali l'artista, seduta a un tavolino, avrebbe incontrato in silenzio, fissandole negli occhi, circa 1.700 persone sedute dall'altro lato del tavolo, con il divieto assoluto di toccare la performer.

Tra le persone che si sedettero davanti a lei apparve un uomo non più giovane, incerto se sorridere o se restare impassibile per non rovinare tutto. Quella scena ha fatto il giro del web, perché l'uomo era Uwe Laysiepen, in arte Ulay. Su youtube si vedono Marina prima sorpresa, poi commossa fino alle lacrime di rito, lui un po' più controllato ma ben felice di poter stringere le mani che gli porge la sua antica compagna.

È il 1976 quando i due s'incontrano ad Amsterdam; il fatto che entrambi fossero nati il 30 novembre (Ulay nel 1943) fu una delle coincidenze che alimentarono il coup de foudre; determinante fu altresì l'attrazione per quell'artista tedesco un po' cazzaro, che però si presentava come un androgino, il volto e i capelli metà rasati e metà no.

La storia è nota, come i reciproci tradimenti che nel 1988 posero fine a un sodalizio nel quale a Ulay era inevitabilmente toccata la parte di comprimario, non foss'altro perché in performance impennate sulla resistenza fisica lui era in genere quello che cedeva per primo. Il furgone sul quale i due vissero come nomadi per anni, il viaggio iniziatico in Australia a nutrirsi di larve d'insetto con gli aborigeni, la gravidanza interrotta perché lei non voleva nulla e nessuno che potesse contrastare la sua consacrazione totale all'arte, sono fra le tappe di uno dei più celebri rapporti di coppia della storia dell'arte.

A Palazzo Strozzi, nella menzionata retrospettiva del 2018-19 (180mila visitatori) è stata riproposta, affidandola a due giovani performer, la loro più popolare azione, «Imponderabilia» del 1977, quella in cui i due, alla Galleria comunale d'Arte moderna di Bologna, in occasione della Settimana Internazionale della Performance, si posero nudi, uno di fronte all'altro, nello stretto accesso al museo: chi, dotato di una corporatura appena normale, vi entrava, doveva

sfiurare o strusciare sui corpi, libero però di scegliere a chi dei due dare le spalle. A vederne la replica fiorentina, priva della patina di quarant'anni di storia, si è capito quanto avrebbe fatto bene Marina Abramovic a mantenersi fedele al suo proposito di non ripetere o far ripetere le performance.

Di «The Lovers: the Great Wall Walk», titolo piuttosto inadatto vista l'ormai avvenuta rottura del rapporto sentimentale, restano invece qualche immagine e un film della Bbc. Era il 1988 quando Marina e Ulay partirono a piedi dalle due estremità della Grande Muraglia cinese per incontrarsi dopo tre mesi e dirsi addio. Land art, arte relazionale (numerosi gli incontri durante il viaggio), walking art, religione, politica e ancora molta, molta resistenza furono gli ingredienti di quel percorso un po' à la Christo, dopo il quale iniziò la terza parte della vita artistica e sentimentale di Marina Abramovic.

### **Ayurveda e Givenchy**

Mentre tra i due cominciavano a divampare le prime liti sulla gestione e sulla proprietà dell'archivio (una vicenda poi conclusasi con un risarcimento di 250mila dollari versati da lei a lui), la non più giovanissima artista assisteva alla fine dell'epoca delle neoavanguardie e alla stagione dei ritorni: alla pittura, alla scultura, al piacere, alla ricchezza e all'alba del mondo dell'arte come star system, sull'onda di un mercato e di un pubblico in crescita sotto la spinta della globalizzazione.

Arrivò comunque con un certo ritardo al suo personale «ritorno all'ordine». Quando si recò in Brasile per reperire i cristalli e i minerali «energetici», o magici che dir si voglia, utili per le sue sculture-oggetto, forte di un accordo con il gallerista parigino Enrico Navarra, registrò infatti il sostanziale insuccesso di quelli che lei definiva un po' ipocritamente «oggetti transitori». Vent'anni prima inveiva contro l'arte come produzione di opere stabili, ma evidentemente per arrivare al momento in cui sculture, dipinti e installazioni sarebbero scomparsi occorreva quella tappa intermedia, transitoria appunto.

Più redditizia del mercato tradizionale si sarebbe rivelata un'altra clamorosa smentita ai nobili principi che nelle sue intenzioni dovrebbero guidare la vita di un artista: «*Un artista non dovrebbe fare di sé stesso un idolo*», dichiara nel suo *Manifesto*. Concetto ribadito in un'intervista con Hans Ulrich Obrist nel 1998: «*L'ego è diventato quasi un oggetto per il pubblico [...]. Si va a una mostra e si cercano i nomi. L'opera è ciò che dovrebbe sorprenderti, darti energia. Il nome viene dopo. Il nome [...] è diventato l'ennesimo ostacolo, è diventato un altro oggetto [...]. Bisogna che l'ego sparisca dall'opera, altrimenti questa non comunica*».

Certo che è difficile mantenersi coerenti con questi propositi quando il fiato creativo comincia a farsi corto e ciò che ti consente di vivere in una confortevole residenza newyorkese è la tua leggenda, la tua immagine di Frida Kahlo al contrario ma egualmente mitizzata, il magnetismo e l'«energia» che la tua presenza irradia per gli adepti della tua religione fatta di medicina ayurvedica e Givenchy.

Angela Vettese e altri storici dell'arte hanno notato che solo negli ultimi vent'anni l'artista montenegrina è diventata una presenza fissa e importante nella manualistica e nella saggistica. Guarda caso, diciamo noi, in coincidenza con la prepotente emersione della popolarità mediatica dell'arte contemporanea e, in parte, con la riscoperta della performance, in momenti di crisi come quelli che recentemente ha attraversato il mercato dell'arte. Ora che la storiografia artistica non la snobba più, lei ha dato precise disposizioni per il suo funerale, che culminerà con l'autodivinizzazione tramite la consumazione della teofagia attraverso la distribuzione ai convenuti di frammenti di una torta di marzapane che riprodurrà il corpo della dea temporaneamente defunta.

In attesa della morte e della resurrezione, ha anche attraversato, negli ultimi dieci anni, una fase da curatrice: non nel senso espositivo del termine, ma in quello pseudoterapeutico, quando nel 2010 al Pac di Milano ha sottoposto al «The Abramovic Method» i visitatori-pazienti invitati a fruire dei benefici derivanti dal contatto fisico con quarzi e magneti. È vero, per una volta almeno, lei (che ha all'attivo anche qualche imbarazzante esperienza teatrale) non è stata al centro della scena, lasciando agire i suoi assistenti. A noi scettici e filistei quell'esperienza, per una di quelle imprevedibili associazioni di pensiero, ha ricordato Alberto Sordi che da medico della mutua finisce la sua carriera come venerato e assenteista direttore di una costosissima clinica privata.

### **La donna è mobile, l'icona no**

Ma al di là dei peccati veniali e venali, resta il paradosso di una donna autocertificatasi come grande interprete dell'arte transitoria per antonomasia rivelatasi, alla fine della fiera, un'abilissima produttrice di immagini ad alta definizione mediatica, in maniera che la transitorietà dell'atto performativo trovasse un suo commercialmente e mediaticamente indispensabile momento di stasi.

Già in passato, soprattutto durante la coproduzione con Ulay (scomparso nel 2020) l'immobilità fisica, portata ai limiti della resistenza, era il fulcro di opere spesso articolate sul tema della specularità; ecco il bacio soffocante di «Breathing In/Breathing Out» (1977); i capelli dei due, entrambi seduti e di spalle, intrecciati sulle rispettive nuche in «Relation in Time» (1977); la tensione della corda di un arco con freccia incoccata e puntata al cuore di lei in «Rest Energy» (1980); o il tango in souplesse di «Similar Illusion» (1981).

Ma dopo la separazione da Ulay le performance della Abramovic come solista sembrano chiaramente congegnate in modo da pervenire, a un dato punto, a ciò che contraddice il significato stesso dell'*hic et nunc* su cui si è sempre tradizionalmente basato il radicalismo di un'arte che di sé non lascia se non il residuo raffreddato della documentazione.

Per ottenere il suo obiettivo, sostanzialmente antiperformativo, la Abramovic ha anche contraddetto sé stessa, replicando alcune sue celebri azioni. Nel 2005, quindi trent'anni dopo la prima esecuzione, ha mostrato al mondo e ai fotografi gli eccellenti e duraturi esiti di un intervento di chirurgia estetica mammaria riproponendo al MoMA di New York la celebre «Thomas Lips», culminante nell'autoincisione sul ventre, mediante rasoio, di un pentacolo.

Ma già il video «The Hero», in cui appare come una Giovanna d'Arco balcanica in sella a un cavallo bianco, brandendo un'eloquente bandiera bianca (nel 2001, l'anno di morte di suo padre), sembra fatto apposta per la copertina di un'eventuale monografia. Ancora del 2005 è il magrittiano autoritratto, con i lunghi capelli che le coprono interamente il volto, che la mostra a petto nudo mentre regge tra le mani un teschio di plastica. L'opera fa parte di «Balkan Erotic Epic», una megaproduzione presentata nel 2006 all'Hangar Bicocca di Milano, una spettacolare messa in scena di un ciclo ispirato ai riti di fertilità praticati dalle antiche popolazioni slave per propiziarsi le divinità ctonie dei raccolti (il risultato complessivo stava a metà strada tra Vanessa Beecroft, Pipilotti Rist e Matthew Barney).

E che dire dei cinque pitoni che in «Dragon Heart» (1992), strisciandole intorno al capo, la tramutano in un'imperturbabile e pietrificata Gorgone? La danza macabra con lo scheletro umano ossessivamente strigliato nel tentativo di un'impossibile pulizia (retaggio materno, s'è visto), l'iterata scarnificazione di una montagna di ossa bovine nei tre giorni di inaugurazione della Biennale di Venezia del 1997, quando ottenne il Leone d'oro, e prima ancora il *tableau vivant* molto alla Bill Viola in cui inscena, nel 1983, la Pietà michelangiolesca tenendo sulle ginocchia l'esanime Ulay, sono soltanto alcuni esempi di quello che, a ben vedere, è uno certo talento pittorico. Di sicuro è un clamoroso tradimento: nulla più della fissità dell'icona è



talento pittorico. Di sicuro è un clamoroso tradimento: nulla più della fissità dell'icona è antitetico rispetto all'azione.

### **Marina Callas**

Il salto nelle nuove tecnologie e il flirt con le forme più aggiornate di Web art non sono che l'ultimo (per ora) tradimento dell'azione a favore dell'immagine: dopo l'autoritratto in ologramma presentato alle Sperentine Galleries, il suo nuovo progetto è stato realizzato sfruttando WePresent, una delle piattaforme di WeTransfer, attraverso la quale propaga il pop up «Traces», mostra ambientata in cinque sale nell'Old Truman Brewery a Shoreditch, un quartiere di Londra.

È, nella sostanza, un'autocelebrazione sintetizzata in cinque oggetti che lei reputa importanti per la sua vita privata e professionale degli ultimi cinquant'anni: un disinvolto passaggio dalla vitalità dell'azione alla natura morta. A proposito di morte, in «Seven Deaths», «esperienza cinematografica immersiva» offerta sino al 30 ottobre alla Lisson Gallery, la Abramovic si reincarna in Maria Callas. E chissà che cosa ci riserverà per il 2023, quando la capitale britannica ospiterà, alla Royal Academy, una sua nuova retrospettiva.

A Lea Vergine, che pure ha studiato e sostenuto con passione l'arte delle donne, qualcosa di Marina Abramovic non quadrava. Non era tanto il suo opportunismo a lasciarla perplessa (lei che si ricorda di essere balcanica solo quando la sua terra sconvolta dalla guerra etnica è in prima pagina nei tg, e allora produce la terrificante scarnificazione di «Balcan Baroque» per la Biennale; lei che si getta, tra le prime, nell'abbraccio arte-moda; lei che cavalca l'onda della New Age nei tempi più opportuni).

C'era dell'altro: «Un'artista di seconda mano», giunse a definirla Lea Vergine. Un'artista che avrebbe sfruttato il tramonto e la scomparsa dei pionieri della performance per affermare sé stessa. Un'epigona? Un sequel? O qualcosa di diverso ancora, per cui le ultime «azioni» di Marina Abramovic stanno alla genuinità della Performance art come l'hollywoodiano e barocco «Dracula» di Francis Ford Coppola sta al «Nosferatu» di Murnau?

Sia come sia, Marina Abramovic ha sì sfruttato, ma ha anche retto al tramonto della performance dura e pura e ha saputo attendere il momento in cui il pubblico e il mercato, un mondo pervaso da misticismo e spiritualità sovente d'accatto, hanno avuto assoluta necessità di un'artista martire, redentrice e guaritrice. E che ora, con l'ineffabile opportunismo di sempre, naviga in rete esaltando le potenzialità del digitale non come formidabile veicolo di diffusione della propria produzione, ma in quanto medium capace di conferire l'agognata immaterialità all'opera d'arte.

Ci sono voluti cinquant'anni e allora occorrerà pure riconoscerlo: come nelle sue più estreme performance, anche nella gestione di sé stessa e delle sue contraddizioni Marina Abramovic, stella dei salti mortali nel circo dell'arte, ha rivelato una prodigiosa resistenza.

I «Primattori» già pubblicati sono [Joseph Beuys](#), [Achille Bonito Oliva](#), [Maurizio Cattelan](#), [Piero Manzoni](#) e [Gino De Dominicis](#).



Photo: Martin van Nieuwenhuizen, Amsterdam, all rights reserved

Marina Abramovic, «Balcan Baroque», 1997-03 © Cortesia di Marina Abramovic Archives / Adagp, Paris, 2021



Marina Abramovic e Ulay, «Imponderabilia», 1977-1999 © Cortesia di Marina Abramovic Archives / Adagp, Paris, 2021





Marina Abramovic e Ulay, «Relation in Time», 1977-1999 © Cortesia di Marina Abramovic Archives / Adagp, Paris, 2021



Marina Abramovic e Ulay, «The Great Wall walk», 1988 © Cortesia di Marina Abramovic Archives / Adagp, Paris, 2021

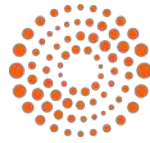




*La performance «Thomas Lips» riproposta al Guggenheim Museum di New York nel 2005 in occasione della mostra «Seven Easy Pieces». Foto Steven P. Harris*

Reuters

7 October 2021



## REUTERS

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Europe

### Artist Marina Abramovic's 'Crystal Wall of Crying' commemorates Jews killed in Babyn Yar massacre

2 minute read

By Margaryta Chornokondratenko

KYIV, Oct 6 (Reuters) - A group of people walks slowly in silence past a stand-alone thick wall made of coal with large quartz crystals sticking out of it. People pause to touch the crystals and stand close to the 40-meter-long structure, some with eyes closed.

"The Crystal Wall of Crying", an interactive installation by world-renowned performance artist Marina Abramovic, was erected in Ukraine's capital to commemorate Jews killed in one of the biggest massacres of the Holocaust during World War Two.

It will be officially unveiled on Wednesday evening as part of a series of events to mark the 80th anniversary since Nazi troops gunned down nearly 34,000 Jewish men, women and children at the wooded ravine of Babyn Yar on Sept. 29-30, 1941.

A symbolic extension of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the artwork is a "wall for healing," Abramovic told Reuters in an interview ahead of the ceremony.

"You come here and you look that this is a park. There are so many trees, so much nature, it is so much life. You know, people come here to sit in the sun, little children are playing, but all of this, you know, is one part of reality," said the 74-year-old Serbian artist, speaking in English.



Artist Marina Abramovic performs next to her artwork "Crystal Wall of Crying" at Babyn Yar, the site of one of the biggest massacres of the Holocaust during World War Two, in Kyiv, Ukraine October 4, 2021. Picture taken October 4, 2021. REUTERS/Gleb Garanich

"But another part of reality - you know that something terrible, terrible happened at the same time. And that kind of memory can't leave you. So you have this mix of feeling beauty and heaviness and past which is there all the time."

The wall is one of several new installations in a memorial project for Babyn Yar. A synagogue built of wood and designed to unfold like a pop-up book opened in May. [read more](#)

Abramovic, known for her work with crystals, chose anthracite from Ukrainian mines and rock quartz crystals from Brazil.



"I want to create the image that is transcendental about any war at any time at any place," she said.

"Whatever we are doing, there is always violence, there is always a war somewhere, there is always something that we should not do as people. And I love to create images that teach us: 'stop that'".

SWI swissinfo.ch  
6 October 2021



## Artist Marina Abramovic's 'Crystal Wall of Crying' commemorates Jews killed in Babyn Yar massacre



▲ Artist Marina Abramovic performs next to her artwork "Crystal Wall of Crying" at Babyn Yar, the site of one of the biggest massacres of the Holocaust during World War Two, in Kyiv, Ukraine October 4, 2021. Picture taken October 4, 2021. REUTERS/Gleb Garanich reuters\_tickers

October 6, 2021 - 15:36

By Margaryta Chornokondratenko

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(Editing by Matthias Williams and Gareth Jones)



Art and Piece  
30 September 2021

# 美紙

ART AND PIECE

ENERGY

135 | TEXT Cusson Cheng PHOTO Courtesy of the artist, the Marina Abramović Archives, Sean Kelly, New York, and Lisson Gallery

## MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

### 在恐懼中超越生死苦樂

於1974年的意大利拿坡里的一個晚上，一位出生於南斯拉夫的首都貝爾格勒的女性行為藝術家表演了長達六小時的作品。她在桌子上擺放了七十二件物件，當中包括玫瑰、羽毛、香水、蜜糖、麵包、葡萄、酒、剪刀、解剖刀、釘子、鐵棒和一把上了膛的手槍。她在桌上亦寫上簡單的規則：

「規則。

桌上有七十二件物件，任何人都可以隨意在我身上運用它們。

表演。

我是那個物件。

在這個期間我將會負上全部責任。

長度：六小時（晚上八時到凌晨兩時）。」

這一晚，這位藝術家直視了暴力、血腥和人性

的醜陋。她，便是那時年僅二十八歲的Marina Abramović（瑪莉娜·阿布拉莫維奇）。筆者有幸以視像形式訪問被稱為「行為藝術之祖母」的Marina Abramović。她的作品結合了身體、擁有同理心的忍耐、接近失控邊緣的共謀、滲透著危險的被動性等不同概念；細緻地運用時間、寂靜、能量、痛苦以及因長時間的表演而產生的高度意識，挑戰觀眾的接受能力和不停推進她自身的極限。是次獨家專訪，筆者不只帶你回到Marina的孩提時代，更會回顧其七十年代至近代的標誌性作品，揭開Marina這位傳奇人物的神秘面紗。



Ulay/Marina Abramović  
REST ENERGY, 1980  
Black and white photograph  
137.8 x 113.66 cm (unframed)  
54.3 x 44.7 in (unframed)  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Marina Abramović  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of  
the Marina Abramović Archives  
Photo: Dusan Reljin (2018)







### 高壓下，身體成為靈感繆思

在二戰後出世的Marina，除了深受動盪的東歐局勢影響，從出世到成年她都在母親的強權控制下長大。「我的父母是游擊隊員和民族英雄，他們非常強悍，也忙於自己的事業，以致我直至六歲也是與祖母住在一起。那時候，我甚至不知道父母是誰，只記得每逢星期六會有兩個陌生人帶著禮物探訪。可是，當父母開始親自照顧我時便是惡夢的開始。家裡只有控制、規訓和暴力，所有事都是極端。母親從來沒有親我，她對細菌有莫名的恐懼症，所以她不允許我和其他小朋友一起玩耍，以防我感染疾病。甚至在我離開貝爾格勒前往阿姆斯特丹，母親報警聲稱我失蹤了，警察問她我究竟幾多歲，當他們得悉我已經是二十九歲時便叫我母親回家。」可見，在極端直升機父母的家庭以及不安的東歐政治氛圍長天下，成長之路充滿創傷。

同時，也是因為高壓的環境，藝術成為Marina的避難所和表達情緒的唯一渠道。在一個講座中，Marina曾說過：「沒有一件藝術品是因為快樂而創作出來的；一個藝術家的童年愈糟糕，他的造詣便愈精湛。」對Marina來說，為甚麼她會毅然選擇以身體作主要媒介，專注創作行為藝術？「首先，藝術家愈能夠找到屬於自己的創作媒材愈好。我知道很多藝術家都用上畢生時間找尋適合自己的媒介，雖然我一開始是進行繪畫創作，但隨即意會身體是我理想的媒介。我透過身體表演時感受到在繪畫過程無法擁有的獨特能量，行為藝術是一種有活力的、與觀眾互動的藝術形式，也是一種基於真實時間性的藝術。高質素的行為藝術作品能夠打動人心，勾起藝術家自身和觀眾的情感。」

行為藝術對Marina來說是將創傷和傷痛由內化轉化為表達。「在作品中，我不斷測試身體的極限，我想在觀眾面前上演自身的恐懼，讓他們透過同理心經歷我的痛苦。觀眾的參與猶如將他們的能量注入我的現場作品中，隨後結合了我的能量便是雙重聚合。我就好像一塊活鏡子——我能夠摒棄恐懼，觀眾也一樣可以。」

### 2021年的我們依舊死性不改

「藝術是一場生命和死亡的探索，聽起來可能很浪漫派，但這是事實——我的行為藝術一定要做到徹底，過程中我必須運用所有能量和將自身的恐懼拋開；即使我與死亡擦身而過也必須付出所有。」Marina說。她這種想法無疑在她第一個長時間的行為藝術作品中完全地反映出來。在《節奏0》（Rhythm 0）中，事先麻醉自己的她在六小時內任由觀眾在她身上使用桌上的七十二件物件。演出開始時觀眾頗為溫順。有人把她轉過來；有人將她的手臂伸向空中；有人稍為親密地撫摸著她。可是，表演踏入第三個小時，她所有的衣服都被刀片從她身上剪掉了。踏入第四個小時，刀片開始在她的皮膚表面來回。她的喉嚨被割破，以便有人可以吸她的血。有人開始對她的身體進行了各種輕微的性侵犯。當一把上膛的槍被指向她的頭部，而她自己的手指被扣住在扳機時，觀眾之間爆發了一場爭鬥。六小時過後，Marina帶著身上的鮮血和眼淚步向群眾時，他們紛紛狼狽地逃跑。Marina在這個作品中學到的是，如果我們將自己的命運交給一個集體，他們可能會把我們殺掉。在七十年代演出的《節奏0》主要闡述藝術家與觀眾的關係，透過自虐的方式探究兩者的象徵界線。可是，近來的全球政治動盪使Marina對作品有另一體會：「如果政治家允許暴力，我們將會接受多大程度的殺戮？我們的道德界線將會被推到哪個位置？當有人詢問我會給政治家甚麼樣的建議，我都會叫他們閱讀關於甘地和曼德拉的書籍；學習如何怎樣在沒有流一滴血的情況下革新社會，以及可以怎樣培養憐憫和覺知從而改變我們的思維模式。《節奏0》是一個觀察關係的微型，於1974年首次演出作品時所看到的血腥和暴力，2021年的我們依舊在人性中見證同樣的醜陋；我們需要不斷認清自身的思想，反思邪惡的本質。」

Marina Abramović  
*Balkan Baroque II*, 1997  
C-Print  
104 x 134 cm  
41 x 52 3/4 in  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of Lisson Gallery



Installation view of 'The House with the Ocean View' at Sean Kelly, New York, 2002  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York  
Photo: Attilio Maranzano



Installation view of 'The House with the Ocean View' at Sean Kelly, New York, 2002  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York  
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Photo: Attilio Maranzano



Installation view of 'The House with the Ocean View' at Sean Kelly, New York, 2002  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York  
Photo: Attilio Maranzano





### 我們曾是在長城上攀山涉水的戀人

二十九歲的Marina受到荷蘭的電視節目邀請表演，也是這次的因緣，讓她遇見了改變一生的男人。「當我到達阿姆斯特丹機場，一位名為Ulay的藝術家迎接我。我們發現大家都是同月同日生，也有更多相似之處。我們很快便墮入愛河。我隨後回到貝爾格勒，但因為相思我們決定在阿姆斯特丹和貝爾格勒的中間點布拉格相聚。最後，我們決定一同於荷蘭居住和工作。」Marina和Ulay一同創作的作品固然引起迴響，但他們其中一個行為藝術則成為國際焦點。二人足足用了八年時間跟中國政府爭取在萬里長城上演出作品《戀人》（The Lovers）。他們計畫每人在長城的各端往對方的方向走，路途上相遇的一刻便結婚。

《戀人》雖然是他們事業上的一個高峰，但兩位藝術家之間的關係卻急轉直下。「當中國政府答應之時，我們的關係已經緣盡。儘管如此，我不想放棄這個大好機會，便決定按照原定計劃在長城演出作品，只是最後一刻我們沒有結婚，而是分手。這是一個非常痛苦的經歷。更淒慘的是，Ulay那時候使他的中國嚮導懷孕了。」可是，即使被傷痛佔據身心，Marina同時在演出作品的時候發現了當年建造長城的真正原因。「我們都以為長城是用來抵擋外敵入侵，但這是一個迷思。城牆不單延伸到高山裡，更是以之字形的方式建造。其實，在黃海那端的長城映出銀河的蒼龍之首；而在戈壁沙漠另一端的長城則有如龍尾。換言之，萬里長城是一個映照著銀河的神話建築。當我和Ulay在長城走了五千多公里，我們彷彿在蒼龍上沿著地球的能量線步行。」

### 面對無常，你要放鬆

Marina走了萬里路，經歷了愛情中的切膚之痛，決定繼續以「龍」為題創作更多作品。在1990年，藝術家創作了名為《龍頭》（Dragon Heads）的系列；在表演中，Marina靜止地坐下並任由蛇攀在身上，危險的氣息瀰漫著整個空間。作品除了與美杜莎（Medusa）和萬里長城的神話象徵有著明顯的聯繫之外，Marina的作品都一直引用蛇為創作主題。「只有西方基督教文化將蛇描繪為邪惡的象徵。在澳洲土著文化中，世界的創始源自居住在水中的彩虹蛇；在古代中國文化中，蛇咬了自身的尾巴後便形成了宇宙；在科學領域中，蛇會沿著地球的能量經緯滑行。可見，西方宗教看蛇的眼光是多麼的狹窄和充滿限制。」也是因為蛇與能量的深層關係的緣故，Marina在演出《龍頭》時決定將四至五條蟒蛇放到頭上的帽子，讓牠們跟隨她頭顱和身體的溫度和能量移動。為了不讓蛇爬到觀眾裡，Marina亦

將寒冷刺骨的冰塊圍繞著自己，減低蛇因觀眾所散發的熱能而爬往別處的風險。

可是，有一次Marina在演出的時候死亡之神與她擦身而過。她娓娓道來：「在準備表演之前，其中一條蟒蛇突然從帽子掉到我脖子上，牠不但開始周圍滑動更纏繞著我的頸項。這條蛇固然是以為我的脖子是樹上的枝桠，為了抓緊支撐點牠逐漸束緊肌肉扼制了我的呼吸。我開始驚慌，但我的心跳愈來愈快的時候，蛇便愈束愈緊。我頓然領悟到我需要在此刻放鬆：我開始調節心跳和身體的緊張度，蛇也跟隨地鬆弛肌肉，我也隨即可以將牠放回帽子上。這是一個很好的練習，我學會了如何在驚恐中放鬆身心。」Marina的行為藝術教導我們的便是人生沒有排練這回事，最真實震撼的從來都是自身經歷，我們一日不踏出第一步，人生將不會有任何改變。

### 要懂得愛，便需要智慧

「愛是人類最重要、最基本的特質。我們一生會學會不同種類的愛，不同表達愛的方式，但我們需要智慧才能真正懂得愛。過去十年間，我發現要愛一個人很容易，但需要修行的卻是如何以慈悲和大愛包容朋友和敵人。達賴喇嘛曾說過：『當我們能夠寬恕暴力和殺戮，便能敞開心扉。』原諒敵人需要無比的勇氣和能量，過程必須經歷療傷和學懂無條件的愛。」Marina告訴筆者，她年輕的時候並不懂得愛，直到在2010年於紐約現代藝術博物館（MoMA）演出作品《藝術家在場》（The Artist is Present）後才經歷了徹底改變人生的蛻變。

在預備這個行為藝術的時候，藝術家深信將表演的時間延長至超越大眾預期能夠改變我們對時間的感知，以及促進更深刻的經歷。也因如此，Marina以長達接近三個月，每天八小時的創作模式，無間斷地、沉默地坐在椅子上，等待觀眾坐在對面的椅子互相凝望，透過雙目打動無數人。「我還記得展覽開幕之前，策展人好心地提醒我必須有心理準備沒有人會坐在對面的椅子上，因為紐約市不會有人那麼耐心地、純粹地與人互動。結果當然出乎所有人意料，大批觀眾為了能夠有坐在椅子上的機會便在博物館外排隊。在這個表演當中我凝視著不同種族、來自不同背景的陌生人；這是一個非常悲慟的經歷，我看到人們是多麼的疏離和寂寞，反之，我們也是多麼需要真實的人際接觸。很多與我凝望的觀眾都流下眼淚，他們不只被我看進眼眸裡，更是被圍觀的觀眾和攝影機觀察著，那一刻，他們只可以往心坎裡走與自己重新連繫，勾出藏在深處的情感。與其說我在表演，不如說我成為觀眾的舞台和鏡子。」



Marina Abramović  
*7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, 2019  
 © Marina Abramović, courtesy of the  
 Marina Abramović Archives  
 Photo: Marco Anelli



Marina Abramović  
*7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, 2019  
 © Marina Abramović, courtesy of the  
 Marina Abramović Archives  
 Photo: Marco Anelli





Marina Abramović  
*The Artist is Present*, 2010  
Performance  
3 months  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives / Bild-Kunst, Bonn – SACK, Seoul, 2021  
Photo: Marco Anelli





Installation view of 'Marina Abramović : Early Works' at Sean Kelly, New York, 2018  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York  
Photo: Jason Wyche New York



Installation view of 'Marina Abramović : White Space' at Lisson Gallery, London, 14 November 2014 – 17 January 2015  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of Lisson Gallery  
Photo: Dave Morgan

也是此刻，在二十多年後，Marina在桌子對面再次遇見Ulay。當Marina打開眼睛看見他，她先驚訝，羞答地笑後，卻開始眼泛淚光；他搖著頭提醒她要放鬆，並一起完成只屬於他們的能量交流。那一分鐘，無聲勝有聲。透過雙眸，他們回顧了二十年前的轟烈愛情，他們的過去，彷彿灑漏到現在與未來。最後，Marina罕有地伸出雙手，Ulay自然地緊握著對方，往前傾並細訴著悄悄話。觀眾看到兩位傳奇行為藝術家的重聚也不禁感動起來，展覽廳頓時掌聲如雷。一分鐘過後，Ulay站起來離開椅子，而Marina則重新調節情緒準備迎接下一位坐在對面椅子的觀眾。每個人都在人生的旅途中人來人往，我們會遇到過客，也成為別人的過客；歲月匆匆，回眸一笑便是很多曾經的回憶。

#### 要純粹，便從飲水開始

Marina離開MoMA那張椅子後擁有不一樣的心境，她意會是時候創辦一個名為Marina Abramović Institute (MAI)、旨在教導自療（self-healing）的機構。藝術家透過機構教授私下創立的Abramović Method，引導參與者訓練專注呼吸、動作、靜態和集中力，探索如何在當前的片刻自處。Marina幾年前曾在一些講座中，提及我們需要有意識地喝水並且道出將日常生活儀式化的重要性。她教導聽眾先用手拿起裝了水的杯子，閉上眼，並感受著杯子的冷度和濕度。之後，以緩慢的節奏呼吸和專注想著喝水的動作；將嘴唇放在杯上小口地喝水，容許自己感受水如何從口腔流到身體裡和注入細胞內。整個喝水的過程需時大概三十分鐘。讀者們聽起來可能覺得不可思議，喝水怎麼可以怎麼慢？其實，Marina在Abramović Method中教授的是清理，這裡指的並不只是打掃家居而是打掃身體。「科技佔據了我們生活的每一分秒，科技本質沒有錯，錯是在我們運用科技的方式；我們人類的沉溺傾向實在太嚴重了，這使我們都沒有剩留時間給自己。喝水的練習能夠使我們重回純粹，過程中必須專注自身姿態和意識。科技發展的程度即將超越人腦不可跟隨的速度，若果我們現在不開始重拾簡單的生活，科技將會吞噬我們的心神。」

疫情肆虐了接近兩年，Marina居住的紐約市的疫情明顯地沒有緩和的跡象。在這個被病毒打亂所有故態和習性的時代，Marina提出了《跟大樹投訴》（Complaining to the Tree）的構想，講述我們可以到社區的公園擁抱樹木，與我們的植物眾生重新

連結，療癒自己。「大自然是一切，我們必須停止將大自然看作為敵人，她是值得我們尊重的朋友。我曾在巴西與薩滿相處，也曾與西藏僧侶交流，他們都視樹木為有情眾生，皆因植物之間都會透過獨特的溝通系統互相扶持。在疫情仍然蔓延之時，我們或許不可以擁抱身邊人，但樹木就在我們眼前，我們可以選一棵合眼緣的，與它相擁訴說壓抑的心事。即使你在樹下休息片刻，它們的能量會為你帶來療癒的力量，這便是一種遠古的智慧。」

#### 前世今生後有來世嗎？

Marina本來這個月份在倫敦皇家藝術研究院（Royal Academy of Arts）舉行機構有史以來第一位女性藝術家的個人展覽，可惜因為疫情緣故被逼延遲至2023年。Marina因為對死亡議題為之著迷而命名展覽為「來世」（Afterlife）。她說：「我們都對生命和死亡的哲學問題非常好奇，但我更想了解死亡之後的境界究竟何樣。雖然『來世』是一個非常重要的大型展覽，但它並不是回顧展，它將會敘述我五十多年來的職業生涯的創作實踐，亦會展出一些我十四歲時所繪畫的作品；同時，不同年輕的表演者將會重新演繹我過去的一些行為藝術作品。我也會在展覽中演出一個對自己非常苛求嚴格的現場作品。另外，為了鑽研今生來世的議題，我六年前便聯絡科學家Adam Lowe，共同研發一種能夠同時持有生命和衰壞、必死性和不滅性的嶄新媒材。我也創作了一個名為『正門』（portal）的裝置，它將會放置在展覽的出口處。簡單來說，它是一個綻放著光芒的大門，我認為死亡就是在光芒中消滅，所以希望觀眾們離開展覽都仿如經歷轉世，跟隨白光而去。」與Marina的對談與其說是專訪，倒不如說是讓身在香港的我們上了關於人生觀的寶貴一課。珍貴的四十五分鐘視像訪問即將結束，今年七十五歲的她在鏡頭面前風采依然，淡定地、風趣地回答著筆者的問題。也許超越生死、看破痛苦、看清愛情，便能像Marina般笑看人生。✂



Marina Abramović  
*Complaining to the Tree*, 2020  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy of the  
Marina Abramović Archives

LISSON GALLERY

*FT Weekend Magazine*  
25-26 September 2021

# FT Weekend





# YOU

# ARE THE

# AUDIENCE

*Yes, they're both women who live for their art. Surely that's where the similarities end? At FT Weekend Magazine's request, the Serbian performance artist **Marina Abramović** exchanged letters with the reclusive Italian author **Elena Ferrante** to find out. Portraits by **Juno Calypso***





## ELENA TO MARINA

*In general, in a discussion, I tend to emphasise differences. In our case the most obvious difference is this: for more than 30 years I've decided to appear only in writing; you, for 50 years, have put yourself with your whole body, your whole person, courageously at the centre of the stage. And yet, since I began reflecting on your extraordinary performance "The Artist Is Present", it has seemed to me that the concurrence between body and work that you create is not so far from my cutting myself off from the published book.*

*But I want to explain in what sense. In "The Artist Is Present", even more forcefully than elsewhere, you make of Marina Abramović – the artist – the work itself. And you offer that work to the public to contemplate no differently, in my view, from the way a carefully wrought text is offered to readers. I mean that the body, too, with its many experiences, is raw material, just as much as stone, wood, paper, ink. What's important is how that material is worked poetically, how we invent it, how we become its author. The rest is the industry of greatness, marketing, success, celebrity, biographical and autobiographical detail: things that are not at all irrelevant, and which we can enjoy or – with a self-control that I can assure you isn't easy – relinquish.*

## MARINA TO ELENA

And one difference between us is that, in a discussion and my work in general, I actually like to find elements that unite people and make them relate to each other. When I wrote my memoir, *Walk Through Walls*, I saw similarities between writing and long-duration performance. Both practices entail an openness to editing as long as we are willing to look at things with both curiosity and an open heart.

During "The Artist Is Present", for example, I realised that the table that was separating me and the person sitting across from me was actually obstructing the flow of energy exchange between me and that person. That energy is so important to me when establishing non-verbal communication, which is why, at some point during the three-month-long performance, I decided to get rid of the table in favour of a more essential setting.

The title itself, "The Artist Is Present", outlines one of the main

aspects of performance art: something that happens here and now, in the presence of the artist. On the other hand, after my performance at MoMA, I realised more and more that the public had a much bigger role than just being a mere spectator.

The subsequent efforts in my practice have been addressed toward public participation and, while I cannot cut myself off completely from the performance, I have definitely found a way to blend in so that the audience can make their own journey.

But you are right, nonetheless, it is always me in the centre of my work. I have to start with myself because myself is what I know best. My body is my universe and it's the beginning of everything.

Performance art can be radical if you open yourself to bold choices, like you did with your writing and the decision not to appear in public. Can I ask you why?

## ELENA TO MARINA

*As a girl I felt like a tangled knot, unpresentable. And I was ashamed of everything, especially of wanting to write. Writing seemed to me an act of pride, as if I were claiming to contain the world in myself. But my passion was strong, and I trained myself to lead my life as a timid person, separating it radically from the times when the body would let loose in writing. The sharper this separation, the freer I felt. Success complicated things not a little. People close to me said: 'Enjoy it; if you don't enjoy it, why do you write?' I had to work further on myself. I was curious, and the spectacle of celebrity tempted me, but in the end the conviction solidified that my true body, capable of going outside the margins with the necessary energy, is writing. My self that writes is there, the rest seems meaningful only in my private life. If I*

*were to expose myself, I would become a character, a public fiction that would also condition the fiction of the writing.*

*I'd like to ask you, do you know this separation? Is there a part of yourself that you haven't*

*exposed and that at times seems to you more alive, more joyful than the part you've given meaning to with your performances? I have a lot of questions for you. Women's art doesn't have a strong tradition of its own. You tried to weld the feminine to the masculine – I'm talking about your collaborative works with Ulay – to give life to a third element, and had to declare failure. Is there an inevitable violence in the encounter-clash between male and female as they are still historically determined? Can our creativity erupt only with absolute commitment – no children, for example – and in solitude? And doesn't devoting oneself totally to one's art, pouring one's entire life into the work, produce a sort of anguish of waste and impermanence?*

## MARINA TO ELENA

You know, once I was asked to illustrate a children's book of my choice, and without even thinking about it twice, I picked *The Ugly Duckling*. As a young child and growing adolescent, I felt a complete identification with the story. I, too, was the ugly duckling. Since I was very young I always felt like a misfit. Therefore my teenage years were desperately awkward and unhappy. I had skinny legs, orthopaedic shoes and ugly glasses. My mother cut my hair way above the ear and fixed it with a pin, and put me in heavy wool dresses. And I had a baby face with an impossibly big nose. In my mind, I was the ugliest kid in my school.

When I found the medium of performance to express myself through everything changed. The moment I stepped in front of the public in my first performance, I experienced my transformation immediately, like I was hatching out of an egg. I left behind my doubts and low self-esteem and discovered my higher self. When I perform, I feel beautiful, radiant and powerful. Everything is possible, and the world around me becomes luminous.

This is also the reason why, in my case, separation between public and private life always had blurred lines. As a performance artist, I need the attention and the energy from the public, and a way for me to achieve that is to stage my own fears, vulnerabilities and pains so that the

audience can relate to them. I don't think there's a part of myself that I haven't exposed, although there are definitely things that many people don't know about me. One of them is that I can be hilarious. I love spending time with my friends, we tell each other politically incorrect jokes. Sometimes people have an image of myself that is mirrored to my austere performances. That's definitely not the case.

On the other hand, that doesn't mean that I haven't sacrificed a lot for my work. As you mentioned, maternity was not an option for me because I chose to give performance my undivided attention. In many cases, my professional choices also created a distance between me and the men in my life, including Ulay. The intensity of the energy intertwining in our performances could be as strong as the differences in our private life, where our egos prevailed the most.

I think the violence you mention as a result of two clashing worlds, the masculine and the feminine, had more to do with our nature as human beings than as artists. Overall, I've experienced loneliness very often in my life and, correct me if I'm wrong, I think you have too. However, how do you really feel about solitude? You say you trained to lead your life as a timid person. Does that entail making loneliness a part of your life? ►



Marina Abramović with Ulay, "Rest Energy", 1980

## MARINA TO ELENA

I have to say, I am very fascinated by our differences and I feel that if we had the chance to meet, we could learn many things from each other.

In most cases, I do not believe that the work of an artist is sufficient to itself. An artwork can carry so many layers of meaning, and, when we can, artists should always try to bridge the gap between the work and the way the public perceives it. I know it might sound like a strong statement, but I've always felt that an artist is a servant of society. If you have the gift of creativity, you have to share it because it doesn't belong to you only. And creativity should be removed from male and female specificity. To me, there are only two kinds of art: good art and bad art.

The male-dominated world is a structure that we all contribute to. Last month, I was doing an artist residency with Modern Art Oxford, in collaboration with the Pitt Rivers Museum. During this time, I had the chance to access a large amount of the most diverse artifacts where

it was clear that there was a dominance of matriarchal cultures. There were rituals and ceremonies where women had all the power, based on the unquestionable fact that they created life in their bodies.

Maybe not everybody knows that during the world wars, women from Montenegro and Albania, after losing their husbands to war, would step up their game to the point of becoming men themselves, wearing men's clothes, using weapons, stopping their period and growing a beard. All I want to say is that it's also our fault if we ended up giving so much power to men.

I'm never tired of mentioning the example of Louise Bourgeois, one of the most prominent female artists of our time. She only started to fully focus on her art and career after the death of her husband. Without even realising it, we create so many superstructures for ourselves and our society. We are the only ones who can change them. We can all be warriors in our own unique way.

## ELENA TO MARINA

*I was very much alone; later on I had a busy life, but today not many people still need me, and I spend my time writing. Besides, writing is work that you do in absolute, dangerous solitude, even if your head is packed with too many people, too many voices, too many objects. Also, the public always enters in when things are done, and since I've chosen not to encounter readers, not to have literary engagements or to be part of the literary world, in the more and more openly polemical conviction that the books should be sufficient in themselves, here I am, in a solitude that I would call absolute.*

*So I've always been interested in your creativity, which is, conversely, invented and takes place in public and with the public. I'm especially struck, I have to say, by the pride with which you declare that you're an artist. I would never use the term "writer" with the same pride, it would seem to me excessive. And yet, when the creative process goes well it's equally absorbing, implies the same courageous total immersion, the same risk of losing yourself, the same effort to find yourself again. Why do you consider the artist a special human being, one who knows no limits, one who for art can expose herself even to the point of death?*

*I'm also fascinated by the fact that you remove the artist from male or female specificity. We still live in a male-dominated world, where it's men who define the aesthetic canons, asking us to subordinate ourselves in every manifestation of our lives, on pain of exclusion or relegation to a female market. You don't think that, artists or not, we are still very far from the possibility of expressing ourselves autonomously, escaping, that is, the cage of the powerful, extraordinary male tradition?*

## ELENA TO MARINA

*I, too, hope that we'll have an occasion to talk with each other. And I like your warrior spirit. But we have to fight so that no woman ever again has to wait for her husband to die in order to express her own genius. Nor am I convinced that we need to seize any opportunity to replace men and act like them. Rather, we have to fight so that the greatest, longest, stupidest waste ever seen on this planet will end: the waste of female intelligence and creativity. Then we'll see about the quality of the works. Yours are extraordinarily inventive: they make me want to write. For several decades – just to offer an example – I've been trying to work on a novel that has at its centre the performance you gave in Naples in 1974, at Studio Morra. I don't want to bore you here with the drafts I've accumulated up to now without ever getting to a resolution: there was always something that frightened and blocked me. I'll tell you only that it was supposed to be the story of a young Neapolitan woman who is dragged by an older man into that gallery, into your audience. And I'm telling you about it here to underline the fact that your performances, more than others, seem to me thought out so that, within a controlled space, there comes a push, a shove, then the question: and now what happens? Do you invent with a total awareness of potentially narrative situations? ►*



Marina Abramović, "Rhythm 4", 1974



Marina Abramović was photographed at the Bishop Edward King Chapel in Oxford, in August



## ELENA TO MARINA

*I don't know. Putting creative processes in order, reliably reconstructing how a story originates, develops and comes to an end is an arduous, perhaps impossible undertaking. I have to say, in fact, that I don't really trust those who discuss in detail the conception of their own works. In my experience it's a matter of flashes, collisions, fragmentary, fleeting apparitions in the theatre of the brain. Most of*

we would normally consider a disruptive moment.

Then you mention the young girl taken to the gallery by an older man in your novel draft based on "Rhythm 0", and you triggered a memory that I completely removed and that I never shared with anyone until now. I remember vividly that during the performance at Studio Morra, there was a small old man who was always around me during those six hours. At some point he even got very close, although he never touched me or participated actively in the work. However, I could hear his breathing and feel his breath on my skin. Believe it or not, he was the only person in that room I was afraid of.

On the other hand, in "Rhythm 0" I never felt I was a victim. It was my decision, and my decision only, to be an object among the other 72 items that I chose, which included a pistol and a bullet. I decided that the public could do anything they wanted, including killing me, although only during the time frame I provided. After six hours, that right was taken away from them.

Finally, you brought up another important aspect of the creative curve: like you, I have works that I had in mind but never got to perform. Why do you think this happens?

*that some of the works we don't achieve are crouching in our brain and waiting with us for the right moment. They're there, we draft fragments of them, but our strength and courage are not sufficient. It's not serious. They've briefly appeared, and someone else will complete them in our place. We aren't indispensable.*

*This exchange, and looking for points of contact, has been a real pleasure, Marina, thank you.* **FT**

## MARINA TO ELENA

You are bringing up such an important aspect of performance art, and the very personal process through which I create my work. Performance is the medium that gave me the opportunity to set very few, precise rules that I can only follow as an artist, in both a given space and time frame. As a human being, normally I would not have that same stamina and courage that I have when I'm performing.

To quote a line from one of Almódovar's early movies: "I am only human and I'm very imperfect." What I am relying on is the energy of the public that for me represents the extra help I need to carry out my performances.

When I have an idea about a new performative work, I don't think of any potential narrative situations. I have a set of instructions and a defined time for them to unfold. Everything happening in between becomes part of the work and, therefore, its narrative. None of it is planned, which brings up another important aspect about my practice: I do not rehearse my performances. I let life and energy go through it, and by that I mean that an earthquake can happen, someone in the audience faints, or the public interrupts the work. There is not a predetermined flow, and I accept everything that comes out of what

*those fragments leave pallid marks. Others instead pull everything along with them, the story cascades to the end. Still others continuously change direction, you chase them, you get lost, sometimes they come at you suddenly from an unexpected angle and hurt you. I favour these last, I always have, and the result is that I abandon many works.*

*Usually it's because I consider them beyond my capacities (the writer, as I was saying, can count only on herself, the public arrives later). But in some cases I insist, I wait, I start again. For the book that was most resistant to my writing I had to wait a decade: it's called "The Lost Daughter". And writing it scared me, I was sure I wouldn't succeed. So, yes, I think*

*Marina Abramović's exhibition "Seven Deaths" is at Lisson Gallery, London until October 30; [lissongallery.com](http://lissongallery.com)*

*Elena Ferrante's emails have been translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein*

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ. COURTESY LISSON GALLERY

# AD



*The Guardian*  
25 September 2021

## The Guardian

Interview

### Marina Abramović: 'I think about dying every day'

Joanna Moorhead



▲ 'You have to think about what you're going to leave society: as an artist you have that obligation': Marina Abramović. Photograph: Peter Rigaud/Camera Press

**I'll be 75 in November.** My grandmother, who lived to be 103, told me that 70 is when life starts to be really interesting. You're free to do whatever you want, you have all the wisdom to do that. What sucks is if you're sick; but if you're healthy then life at this stage is incredibly enjoyable.

**I think about dying** every single day. It's only when you think about dying that you fully enjoy your life. It means you can't bullshit; everything that's not important falls away, and you know death can happen any minute, any time - you are in the last act. You have to think about what you're going to leave society: as an artist you have that obligation. Because if you have a gift, you have to handle it carefully. The gift isn't given to you personally, it's given to you to give to society. You have to think carefully about how you're going to leave meaningful work behind.

**Legacy is very important.** If I die this minute, what will I have left behind? One thing I've been responsible for is putting performance art into the mainstream, because there was nobody in this territory before. Performance art was ridiculed, it wasn't considered art at all. It's taken all my life, 50 years of my career, but now it's part of museum life, part of culture, part of the collections.

**For a lot of art** you have to intellectually understand it - you have to read lots of texts, that's the key to it. But it's not like that with my art. Mine is purely emotional: it hits you in the gut. That kind of art belongs to everybody; you don't need any knowledge from before.

**I was with Ulay** [fellow performance artist [Frank Uwe Laysiepen](#)] for 12 years. He was the love of my life. And then he sued me. It was terrible - I lost on every point. I was incredibly angry. But then one day I opened my eyes and said, "OK, I lost. What's next?" And what was next was forgiveness. He passed away in 2020 and we had this wonderful last year of his life when we actually became friends. It was an incredibly rewarding feeling, because anger is poisonous, not only to the other person, but also to yourself. Now I remember Ulay with tenderness.

**I never wanted children.** You have one energy in your body and the moment your energy is divided between being an artist and being a mother, one or the other suffers. All my friends got me to be godmother to their children, and that's been wonderful - and also, all my students are my children. And I'm really proud of all of them.

**Sex is very important** to me. It always has been. Many people think after the menopause women give up the idea of sex. For me sex since then has been better, because you don't need to worry about pregnancy. Right now I have a boyfriend who is 21 years younger. It's great! I've no problem with being very sexually active. It makes me happy. I see sex as a necessary balance along with good food, humour, joy for life.

**I lived with my** grandmother until I was six, and she was the centre of my world. My parents were communists, but my grandmother hated communists. She was highly spiritual - in the morning she would light a candle and pray. There was a feeling of peace and tranquillity and that stayed with me for a long time. But from my mother and father I got everything to do with willpower and courage and the idea that your life isn't important, what matters is the cause your life is there for, its purpose. That combination of spirituality and communism is what made me.

*Humble Works: Artists and friends Marina Abramović, Nico Vascellari and Fyodor Pavlov-Andreevich in conversation with Masterworks from Ancient to Modern is at [Colnaghi](#), London, until to 22 November*



*The Art Newspaper*  
18 September 2021

  
**THE ART NEWSPAPER**

## Marina Abramovic takes London by storm with a trio of shows

Louisa Buck

18 September 2021



Still from Marina Abramovic's *Seven Deaths* (2021)  
Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery

Her Royal Academy of Arts exhibition may have been postponed until 2023, but that hasn't stopped Marina Abramovic from taking London by storm.

For just three days last weekend (between 10-12 September)—in collaboration with We Present, the digital arts arm of WeTransfer—performance art's best known figure marked her arrival by taking over the Old Truman Brewery in Whitechapel. There she immersed audiences in *Traces*, a five room extravaganza of video works, soundscapes, light pieces and sculpture which focused on some of her most significant objects and ideas. These included a giant quartz crystal, the writings of her late friend Susan Sontag, a stone from Mars and the miraculously resilient desert plant Rose of Jericho—all things she believes “we have to preserve for the future”.

More long lasting are her two shows at Lisson Gallery which also opened this week and run through into October. One is in the gallery's main galleries in Lisson Street, and one in their temporary pop up space in Cork Street. Both revolve around her enduring passion for the Greek American soprano Maria Callas, whose voice the teenage Abramovic first heard on the airwaves in her grandmother's Belgrade kitchen. "I started crying, I don't know why—the voice was so emotional for me." she remembers.



Still from Marina Abramovic's *Seven Deaths* (2021)

It might seem incongruous for the queen of radical performance to be drawn to the great diva of bel-canto, but Abramovic strongly identified with what she describes as Callas's "mixture of stress and vulnerability: she was so strong on stage but so unhappy in her life. Also she really died for love," she says adding that "once I was also so much in love in my life: I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't even think. And then my work saved me." While strongly empathising with Callas, Abramovic also admits that, "I also kind of blame her—when you have the talent she had, you are not allowed to give up, because this talent doesn't just belong to you, it belongs to all of us."

These anomalies and complications run through her stunning high octane *Seven Deaths*, a new film work in which Abramovic acts out the tragic and sometimes grisly deaths of seven operatic heroines, each one performed to the soundtrack of Callas singing the original solo or aria. In each case Abramovic, working with the actor Willem Dafoe, complicates the notion of the tragic heroine often dying at the hands of a man by adding a new twist or interpretation.



Instead of being strangled at the hands of Othello, as in Verdi's opera, in Abramovic's version Desdemona is throttled by two boa constrictors that, with grim tenderness, Dafoe drapes around her neck; while the jealous murder of Carmen in Bizet's opera is recreated with Dafoe and Abramovic—the latter in full matador rig—messing with the traditional power dynamic by staging their own torero involving Dafoe being reeled in at the end of a rope and Abramovic brandishing the knife that ultimately brings about her demise. Rather than leaping off castle battlements, Abramovic's Tosca launches herself from a Manhattan skyscraper; while the ritual suicide of Madame Butterfly is replaced by the artist ripping off a Hazmat suit and exposing herself to radiation poisoning.



Still from Marina Abramovic's *Seven Deaths* (2021)

The climax of the film is Bellini's *Norma*, sung by Callas more often than any other opera. Here the interchangeable personae of Maria/Marina is rendered even more complex with the spectacle of Willem Dafoe dressed in a full length gold sequinned gown and walking hand in hand into the fire with Abramovic, who wears a tuxedo and assumes the male role of the Roman Pollione. "When Norma decides to walk into the fire to sacrifice herself, the Roman General understands how stupid he is...he still loves her and how incredibly brave this woman is and so he comes to hold her hand in the fire together" says Abramovic. "So he's in woman's clothes and she's the warrior."



"Opera is boring...dying is much shorter" Abramovic told us at the opening of her Lisson shows. To this end she sees both the film *Seven Deaths* and also the accompanying ambitious live action opera-cum-performance *The Seven Deaths of Maria Callas* which debuted at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich and has just completed its Paris run with more dates this year and next in Athens, Berlin, and Naples (and which Abramovic fervently hopes will also make an appearance Covent Garden) as "the deconstruction of real opera." "My public is very young and I am very happy about that" she says, declaring that "I wanted opera, this very ancient art form, to be changed into something else that the public can see."



Marina Abramovic, *Seven Deaths: The Snake* (2020/2021)  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy Lisson Gallery and Factum Arté. Photography by Oak Taylor-Smith

In Lisson Gallery's Cork Street space, these seven dramatic denouements of her operatic alter egos assume a new form, captured in seven back lit portrait sculptures, each one taken from a still from *Seven Deaths*. These images of Marina-Maria, whether stabbed, strangled by a snake, or consumed by madness from Lucia di Lammermoor, are each carved from single blocks of alabaster, the result of seven years of research with Adam Lowe of Factum Arte.

This new-found monumentality is another unexpected departure for someone whose life work has been devoted to the ephemeral. "I said to Adam, performance is an immaterial form of art, making marble pieces will be a total contradiction for me," says Abramovic, who declares herself very happy with the result. "I wanted to do something which has material and immaterial elements inside: life and death at the same time, and alabaster has that kind of transparency and fragility." Certainly the effect is uncanny: what appears to be an illuminated photo-realist likeness at close quarters disintegrates into abstract peaks and cavities of stone.



Marina Abramović, Fyodor Pavlov-andreevich And Nico Vascellari In The Sant Agnese In Agone, Rome, 2021  
Courtesy of Colnaghi

Although Abramović told us that, “I’m definitely finished with dying,” there is a decidedly deathly feel to her third London exhibition at Colnaghi. The title of the show is *Humble Works* and she is showing alongside two younger artists, the Italian artist and musician Nico Vascellari and Fyodor Pavlov-Andreevich, who lives and works between Moscow, London and Sao Paulo. All three met in 2009 when Abramović filled Manchester’s Whitworth Gallery with performance art and at Colnaghi, one the world’s oldest commercial art galleries, each have made work in response to artworks and artefacts created across different cultures and eras.



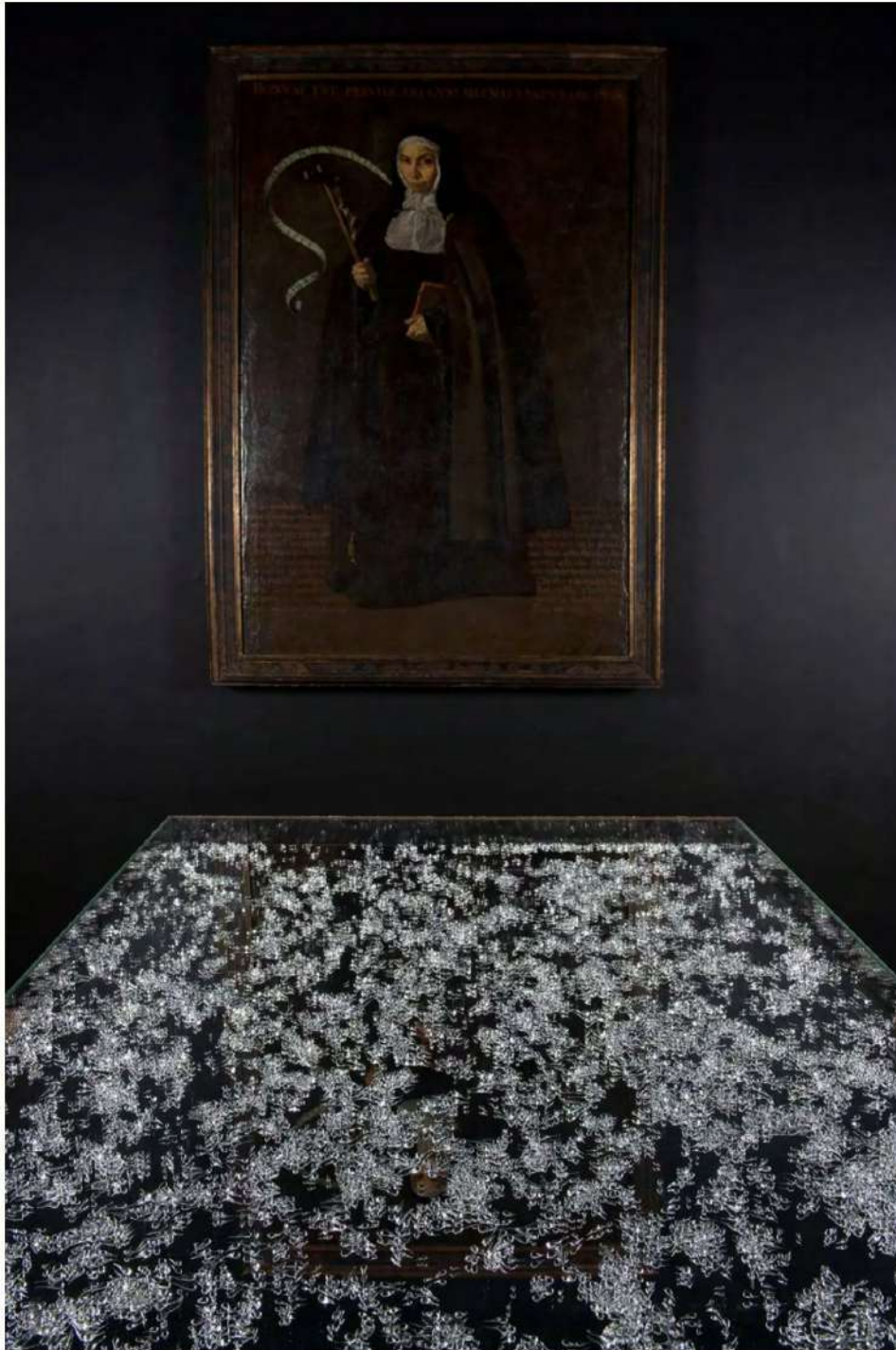
The exhibition opens with Pavlov-Andreevich responding to a 6th-century BCE Etruscan burial urn with his own memento mori sculpture, fashioned from dust gathered from beneath the beds of his lovers; while Vascellari's film of his prone, unconscious body suspended from a helicopter hovering perilously over forests and mountains is accompanied by a horned Corinthian helmet; with the combination of the two, intending to channel ideas of being engulfed in wild nature and the sublime.



Marina Abramovic's *The Kitchen (IV)* (2009)  
Courtesy of the artist



Abramovic praises this “very strong nun” and pays her own homage to a historic Spanish nun with *The Kitchen*, her photograph taken from a 2009 series devoted to St Teresa of Avila, who coincidentally met Mother Jeronima in her lifetime and encouraged her to take the veil. Also filling Abramovic’s small, sombre, dimly-lit chapel-like chamber is a pair of dramatic backlit self-portraits, in which Abramovic holds a laughing skull. Like the alabaster works at Lisson, they appear to be photographic images but are in fact carvings in both negative and positive, this time made from corian, a material usually reserved for worktops.



(Top) Madre Jerónima De La Fuente By Diego Velázquez, 1620; (Bottom) Table Of 10,000 Tears By Marina Abramović, (2021)  
Courtesy Of Colnaghi

*Wallpaper*

15 September 2021

# Wallpaper\*

ART | 15 SEP 2021 | BY JESSICA KLINGELFUSS

## Marina Abramović in London: death, Maria Callas and breaking the rules of Opera

Ahead of her dramatic operatic takeover in London, we spoke to Marina Abramović about 'Seven Deaths', her multifaceted homage to soprano Maria Callas



Marina Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, 2019. Photography: Marco Anelli, Courtesy of the Marina Abramovic Archives

**I** am an international gypsy with two suitcases running from place to place!' enthuses Marina Abramović only moments into our conversation. Halfway through a four-month trip that includes 19 stops, the indefatigable artist is back to her nomadic ways after an unplanned sabbatical – prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic – of reading books, growing vegetables, and planting trees in the countryside.



For now, the Serbian performance artist is in London to open a duet of solo exhibitions across Lisson Gallery's spaces on Cork Street and Lisson Street, the culmination of her lifelong preoccupation with Greek American opera singer Maria Callas. An immersive film installation, *Seven Deaths*, captures a series of heart-rending demises that Abramović undergoes on-screen, to the soundtrack of seven Callas solos.

The artist's fascination with the ill-fated diva began in her grandmother's kitchen in Belgrade, when she was 14 years old. From the radio, an unfamiliar voice – Callas' voice – pierced the space. 'I remember standing up in the middle of the kitchen and starting to cry. It was immediately emotional. And I have no idea why,' she says. Now 74, Abramović has spent much of her life endeavouring to make a work in tribute to the woman who inspired her.



Marina Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, 2019. Photography: Marco Anelli, Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives.

Ideas for the project percolated in various guises over the decades, from film to a theatre play. Abramović settled on an opera – an unlikely medium for the radical performance artist – with *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, which debuted in Munich last year. 'I am secure in my skin as a performance artist, so I was interested in doing something new, to go into a world that I had never been to before,' says Abramović of her first foray into the traditional art form. 'The opera world has such strict rules – so it's a good thing to break them.'



And break them she does. Joined by long-term collaborator, actor Willem Dafoe, the artist adds a new twist to the macabre fates she meets in the course of an hour and 50 seconds in her film homage at Lisson: from consumption (set to *La Traviata*); to jumping (*Tosca*); strangulation (*Otello*); harakiri (*Madama Butterfly*); knifing (*Carmen*); madness (*Lucia di Lammermoor*) and self-immolation (*Norma*). Here, Abramović commits to her different characters – herself, Callas, or the jilted bride, among others – with abandon.



Top and above: Marina Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, 2019. Photography: Marco Anelli, Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives

In the opening act, Dafoe tends to Abramović, who lies bedridden and wan in a faithful recreation of Callas' bedroom, down to the Madonna in front of her bed and the sleeping pills next to her telephone. The roles are reversed in the second scene, when Dafoe appears lifeless in the artist's arms before she takes a fatal leap from a skyscraper (the only vignette which required more than one take, she notes). In her reimagining of *Otello*, Abramović is suffocated by a snake, while the ritual suicide of *Madama Butterfly* is replaced with the artist ripping off a hazmat suit and exposing herself to radiation.

The work reaches its climax as the pair – dressed throughout in custom Burberry looks designed by Riccardo Tisci – walk in tandem at a glacial pace into a raging fire. 'Willem taught me so much about what acting means, because it is completely contrary to performance art,' explains Abramović. 'He showed me that you can get into the role so deeply that you become that role, and that was a new teaching for me.'



Installation view of 'Marina Abramović: Seven Deaths' at Lisson Gallery, Cork Street, London, until 17 October 2021 © Marina Abramović, courtesy Lisson Gallery

The Lisson exhibition continues at Cork Street, where Abramović is exhibiting an ethereal series of photorealistic alabaster sculptures relating to her dramatic killings. The works mark a departure from her 'normally immaterial' practice: 'We tried many different things and finally ended up using alabaster because it has rigidity, but also transparency – it both keeps the light within and can be illuminated by light.'

Abramović's kinship with Callas reaches deeper than their shared classical facial features, painful relationships with their mothers, tumultuous love lives, magnetic personalities, and a shared star sign (the two Sagittariuses were born almost exactly 23 years apart). 'What I admire about Callas is her incredible courage, strength and fragility, which exist at the same time,' says the artist. 'She was so strong on the stage and yet so lonely and unhappy in her life.'



Marina Abramovic, *Seven Deaths: The Snake*, 2020/2021, Alabaster, custom light. © Marina Abramović, courtesy Lisson Gallery and Factum Arté. Photography by Oak Taylor-Smith

Callas' death, while not as overtly dramatic as Abramović's cinematic representations, was just as tragic. The soprano died suddenly and alone in her Paris home in 1977 from a heart attack, aged 53. A recluse in her final years, the gifted Callas led an extraordinary life mired with personal tragedies: among them, blackmail by her mother, theft by her husband Giovanni Battista Meneghini, and physical and sexual abuse by her paramour Aristotle Onassis. 'The fact is, she simply lost the will to live,' reflects Abramović. 'In my case, I was also deeply in love once in my life. We both almost died from a broken heart – but my work saved me.'

Like Callas, Abramović's personal life has been punctuated with turmoil – much of it public and part of her art. In spite of this grief, both on screen and off, is Abramović a romantic? 'The Slavic soul is so romantic. We always suffer – if we don't suffer in our private life, we suffer for eternity, for the universe,' she says. 'I always believed that nobody makes any good artwork from happiness because happiness is a state that you don't like to change. But the suffering is where you really become creative.'





Marina Abramović, *Portrait with Laughing Skull* (top: positive; above: negative), 2019 Corian, LED panel, aluminium frame, diptych. Part of the exhibition, 'Humble Works' at Colnaghi gallery for which the artist has created work in response to a series of masterworks including a Velázquez portrait.

Her solo exhibitions at Lisson Gallery coincide with a recent pop-up experience presented in collaboration with WeTransfer's digital arts platform, WePresent, at Shoreditch's Old Truman Brewery. A virtual time capsule of sorts, *Traces* comprises five objects that the artist wants to carry into the future, such as an essay by Susan Sontag, a Martian rock and the resurrection plant Rose of Jericho. (The physical iteration of the project is now closed but can be experienced online.)

Elsewhere in London, Abramović will debut new and recent works in 'Humble Works' at Colnaghi gallery alongside friends and frequent collaborators Fyodor Pavlov-Andreevich and Nico Vascellari, created in response to and presented in dialogue with a series of masterworks including a Velázquez portrait and an Etruscan burial urn.

Abramović's London moment this autumn offers a tantalising prelude to a career-spanning survey of her work opening in 2023 at the Royal Academy, where she will be the first female artist to have a solo show across the entire Main Galleries. The retrospective's title, 'Afterlife', suggests the always forward-thinking Abramović is looking beyond our mortal coil: 'I'm done with dying,' she quips. ✱



Marina Abramovic, *Seven Deaths: The Fire*, 2020/2021 Alabaster, custom light. © Marina Abramović, courtesy Lisson Gallery and Factum Arté. Photography by Oak Taylor-Smith



Marina Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, 2019. Photography: Marco Anelli, Courtesy of the Marina Abramovic Archives

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## **‘Opera is boring’: Marina Abramovic’s cinematic ode to soprano Maria Callas opens in London**

Belgrade-born performance artist discusses recasting opera for a younger generation, how the diva label is “dubious” and why sex is better post-menopause

**Anny Shaw**

14 September 2021



Marina Abramović and Willem Dafoe in *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* (2019)  
Photo: Marco Anelli. Courtesy of the Marina Abramovic Archives

“Opera is boring,” the Belgrade-born performance artist Marina Abramovic tells a room full of journalists at the opening of a display of her alabaster sculptures at Lisson Gallery in London. “It’s always four or five hours, it’s too long...dying is much shorter.”



It is an astonishing statement from someone who has spent the past 30 years realising *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*—part opera, part performance in which Abramovic invokes her heroine and lifelong obsession, the Greek-American soprano Maria Callas. It is also surprising for someone who has spent a great deal of her career making long-duration performances: three months of sitting in silence opposite thousands of visitors at the Museum of Modern Art or 512 hours of intense mindfulness at the Serpentine Galleries, to name a just a couple.

But Abramovic is recasting opera for a younger generation, making arias cool again. *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* is just one hour and 36 minutes long; the cinematic version, titled *Seven Deaths* and now on show at Lisson's Bell Street gallery, is one hour and 50 seconds.



Installation view of 'Marina Abramović: Seven Deaths' at Lisson Gallery, Lisson Street, London  
© Marina Abramović, courtesy Lisson Gallery

In the film, Abramovic enacts the deaths of seven protagonists in famous operas—usually at the hands of a man, played in Abramovic's work by the Hollywood actor Willem Dafoe. Each vignette is performed to an aria sung by Callas. In one scene, meant to evoke the ritual suicide of *Madame Butterfly*, Abramovic rips off her hazmat suit and exposes herself to radiation poisoning. In another, instead of being strangled by the hands of Othello, Dafoe throttles the artist with two snakes. Abramovic's *Tosca*, meanwhile, leaps from the roof of a skyscraper instead of from the parapets of a castle—a scene she took more than 70 takes to perfect. "You really have to hit the ground to get that impact," Abramovic says.

One of the most climactic moments comes when Abramovic and Dafoe (as the high priestess Norma and the Roman proconsul Pollione) stride together, holding hands, into a fire. In a contemporary twist, Dafoe is cast as the diva, wearing a gold sequinned dress designed by Riccardo Tisci, Burberry's chief creative officer who is behind all of the costume designs in Abramovic's magnum opus.

The show of seven alabasters, on Cork Street, each relate to a death scene and are a way, Abramovic says, of combining the material with the immaterial, of life with death. The prices of the wall sculptures range from €250,000 to €400,000, depending on size, and are available in an edition of two, though each piece is individually carved into a different block of alabaster. *Seven Deaths* (edition of five) starts at €250,000.

Fire, snakes, knives, gravity are all materials and elements Abramovic has used in her own work and to this end, *Seven Deaths* is as much about Abramovic as it is Callas. The artist notes how the two share many traits: "We both have the same noses, we both had terrible mothers and we are both Sagittarius." Abramovic also identifies the personal pain both women have endured. "She was so strong on stage but she was also very lonely and unhappy in life," the artist says. "Callas just lost the will to live. In my case, I was also so in love. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, but then my work saved me."

Now 74, Abramovic shrugs off press articles that call her a diva or headlines that hone in on her boyfriend, Todd Eckert, who is 21 years her junior. That is not to say she shies away from talking about sex. "I'm very sexual," she tells *The Art Newspaper*. "With women there's this whole idea that after the menopause everything is gone. But for me, everything got started. I didn't need to worry about getting pregnant anymore. It felt great. Sex is so important. Good sex is part of a good healthy life."





Marina Abramovic's *Seven Deaths: The Breath* (2020/2021), alabaster

© Marina Abramović, courtesy Lisson Gallery and Factum Arté. Photography by Oak Taylor-Smith

She also questions the diva label. “The whole thing is so dubious,” she says. “I read this sentence by Gandhi recently which really puts it so well: ‘First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win’”.

For now, Abramovic is focusing on a healthy lifestyle, rising at seven o’clock every morning to practice yoga. The artist has never drank, smoked or taken drugs—though she wants there to be plenty of mind-altering substances at her funeral, as well a final performance work, live music and a colourful dress code. “The worst thing is to be old and sick,” she confides. “Another fear is how much time I have left to still make things, because I have so much stuff to do here. I’m not ready to go.”

There is indeed still much to come. Alongside her Lisson gallery shows, the artist opens a collaborative exhibition at Colnaghi in London this week. In 2023, Abramovic will become the first woman to have a solo show at the Royal Academy in London (the exhibition was postponed in 2020 due to the pandemic), but her sights are now squarely on the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden where she wants *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* to be performed. The piece had its debut in Munich, sold out in Paris and is currently en route to Athens before performances in Berlin, Naples and Amsterdam.

“Covent Garden is my obsession,” Abramovic reveals. The artist says she was in discussion with the Royal Opera House when she started producing the work, but “they asked for so much money for just one matinee and one evening in August”. So Abramovic declined. “We now hope Covent Garden will be more generous once they see the response to my shows. I won’t give up.”



ARTS

## Marina Abramovic: My key to happiness: a young lover, dirty jokes and magic crystals

The performance artist Marina Abramovic, 74, talks to Rachel Campbell-Johnston about ageing, laughter and why she wants a one-way ticket into space



**Y**ou might think that performance artists would be the last to relaunch themselves into our nervy post-lockdown society. But that's not the case when it comes to Marina Abramovic, the 74-year-old Belgrade-born doyenne of the genre.

Abramovic threw herself on to a sceptical art world in the early Seventies with a nerve-racking — not to mention blood-splattering — piece that involved stabbing sharp knives between her splayed fingers. “Once you enter into the performance state you can push your body to do things you absolutely could never normally do,” she said.

She went on to more than prove it. A career that has spanned close to 50 years has involved, among other things, carving a pentagram into her stomach, almost killing herself when she leapt into flames, ingesting medications that sent her muscles into spasms, spending four days scrubbing blood from a heap of cow bones, placing a loaded gun on a table, and inviting people to shoot her and walking half the length of the Great Wall of China with the sole purpose of breaking up with her lover in the middle.



An alabaster sculpture by Marina Abramovic  
TODD-WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY

It's hardly surprising then to discover that a mere pandemic has done little to abate her practice. When I catch up with her by telephone in Paris (she is working there, although her home is New York), she immediately asks me which of her several new projects I would like to talk about.

Is it her operatic piece, the *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*? She is, as we speak, getting ready for its French premiere. Or is it the pair of related projects — a cinematic presentation and a display of alabaster sculptures — that will open at Lisson Gallery in London next week? Or might I be interested in *Humble Works*, also opening next week in London? She and a pair of fellow performance artists with whom she frequently collaborates — Fyodor Pavlov-Andreevich and Nico Vascellari — will be presenting a new group of pieces that set up conversations with old masterworks. If the past is anything to go by, prepare for something zaniily extreme.



Actually, it is a show called *Traces* that I want to focus on. It's a free immersive experience marking the culmination of her hugely popular year-long collaboration with the file-sharing platform WePresent (the "content platform" of WeTransfer) that will be at the Truman Brewery in the East End of London over the course of this weekend.

As the first guest curator for WePresent, Abramovic looked at ways in which performance art could improve daily life. She propagated her home-grown philosophy — the Abramovic Method — which, as she explains it, encourages us to become "present in both time and space" by participating in meditative tasks that focus "on breath, motion, stillness and concentration". More than 80 million people logged on to join in over this past pandemic year.



The Cleaner, part of a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in Belgrade in 2019  
ANDREJ ISAKOVIC/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Now, for *Traces* she invites you on a contemplative journey that, rooted in her personal story, projects you onwards and outwards through time and space. The conceit is simple: which five most treasured items would Abramovic choose to put in a time capsule? What would she like the next century to unlock?

Evidently the future could do with a pot plant. One of her picks is a rose of Jericho, a desert shrub that curls up like a hedgehog when it is not watered, but which, when re-irrigated, takes less than an hour to unfurl and again turn green. The rose of Jericho is one of her favourite plants, Abramovic explains, because she travels so much. It shrivels in her absence. When she gets home it looks dead, but then 45 minutes later it has resurrected. I suppose that makes it easier to keep than a cat. "But I like this plant particularly because it's not temporal," Abramovic says. "I like it because in a strange way it is immortal. I am always thinking about immortality."

She has certainly grown more peaceable in her old age. When she was young, she explains, she saw herself as a warrior. She was battling to establish performance in the face of fierce criticism. "It was hell. I was fighting everybody and everything." But a clear path has now been bulldozed. "Performance is an established art form and I can enjoy it," she says.

No longer feeling the need to be painfully extreme, she laughs off rumours, published in several newspapers, that in a forthcoming 2023 Royal Academy show (she will be the first female artist to take over the grandest galleries of this august institution) she will charge herself with one million volts of electricity. "That is totally wrong," she says. "I will do a performance, but I can't tell what it is because I am superstitious."

Her aim now, she says, is to stay strong and healthy. Her grandmother, the only source of love and affection in a family in which her parents ("national heroes" with positions in the postwar Yugoslavian government) exerted a military-style control over her, lived to the age of 103. "When you hit 70, it's just the beginning," her grandmother told her. "I would love to reach the same age, or more," Abramovic says. "But only with my health. The worst thing is to become old, but with a sick body."

That explains her fierce discipline. She gets up early every day to do yoga, goes on regular ayurvedic retreats in India and she has never drunk, taken drugs or smoked. Twice a year she reboots her system by spending five days without eating, talking or reading. She describes it as "cleaning the house". It's a measure she propagates in her Abramovic Method.

And then there's her boyfriend, Todd Eckert. He's 21 years younger than her and they had been doing their morning yoga together, she tells me, when I called. "I had been alone for seven years before we met. I was thinking there will never be any love coming to me. But then it happened. And I want to tell women that this is wonderful. It is like good food. It makes me happy."

The key to longevity, Abramovic believes, is to have the curiosity of a child, to always surprise yourself and, most importantly, to have a good sense of humour. "Laughter is one of the great things about getting old. When I was young everything was so dramatic, so serious. I cried so much back then. But I am over that. Now I love laughter and jokes — dirty jokes. Depression is a luxury I can't afford." She gives a long, throaty laugh as if to prove her theory.



"I am an optimist," she says, citing the case of an old woman in France (her conversation is littered with references to stories she has heard, books she has read, facts she has stumbled across). "This woman lived to 120," she tells me. "She remembered Napoleon. Her husband had died. All her children had died. The doctors examined her. There was nothing physically special. She had lived so long because she never remembered all the bad events of her life, only the positive ones."

Abramovic still enjoys her good looks. She is far from unaware of their power: of the magnetic pull of that pale face, lit by dark flashing eyes, which has put her on dozens of fashion magazine front covers; of that signature rope of dark hair. But it is her mental strength that she most values now.



Marina Abramovic and her then partner Ulay perform Rest Energy in 1980  
ALAMY

"The mind is our biggest enemy," she says. "It has taken me all my life to learn this." Her landmark performance, *The Artist Is Present*, staged at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010, was a silent, static piece more than 700 hours long. Over the course of almost three months, for eight hours a day, she sat immobile in the museum's atrium while a long queue of visitors took their turn to sit opposite her, locking on to her gaze. "I could never have done something like that when I was 23. I could do it only when I was 63."

It's the wisdom that comes with age that she treasures, that wisdom that we in the west too easily overlook. "In the west, and especially in America, being old is like being dirty. That's totally wrong. We should learn from the old," she says. With her own age she has learnt humility, she tells me. "We are only little specks of dust in the universe." She takes herself far less seriously. She has discovered the importance of simplicity. And she has finally learnt forgiveness, she says.



IN YOUR INBOX

## Arts newsletter

The best film, music and theatre reviews, features and interviews from the most trusted critics and writers in the business

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Ulay (the German performance artist Frank Uwe Laysiepen) her erstwhile lover and collaborator, died of lymphatic cancer just one day into lockdown in March last year. The pair, after several tumultuous years, their unhappinesses caused all too frequently by his infidelity, had finally parted company in a 1988 performance that involved them walking the Great Wall of China from opposite ends to meet in the middle and say the single word "goodbye". Ulay subsequently sued her over royalties for their shared works.

"You know, it's very easy to say you can forgive, but when you really do it [and it took her at least 20 years, she admits with a long laugh] it's an incredible release of negativity. Three years before he died, we really became friends again. It was really important to me."

Another of the five objects that Abramovic will invite visitors to the Truman Brewery to contemplate is a crystal. "Crystals are the computers of the planet," she explains. "Every kind of information — light, electrical information — are captured inside them. Now we have crystal chips as small as a finger tip and we can put an entire planet's information inside them. That seems amazing to me. If you really tune into a crystal for a long period of time, you can tap into the planet's secrets. Don't look into the television, look into the crystal," she says with a laugh.

It is this sort of technology that she believes might be able to capture her vital energy for future generations. She has turned herself into a hologram. "If you have 36 video cameras that record every atom and molecule of your body, you can be really projected into space," she says. "I can appear in your living room. What you will see will be far more real than a video that plays across a surface. A hologram captures the energy of the body. And energy is immortal."





Marina Abramovic in *The Artist Is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.  
ANDREW H. WALKER/GETTY IMAGES

Abramovic is adamant that she doesn't want to live for ever. Death doesn't frighten her, she insists. All that is important is to face death the right way, to die consciously, without fear and without anger, she says. "I believe that when you die you don't go to darkness, you go to light. Your physical body dies, but not your energy. People when they die are 21g lighter because that is the energy that leaves the body. And energy is indestructible. It can be transformed into so many things."

Abramovic hopes that this continuing energy will be her legacy. She says she recently met [Richard Branson](#) and asked him if he would give her a one-way ticket into space. Would she have been happy there, all alone, I wonder? She gives another of her long, throaty laughs. "Oh yes. I'm 74. I could die any minute. But to have that chance of understanding for a moment, of seeing the bigger picture. I would love to do that. I would be very, very happy indeed."

*Traces* will be at the Truman Brewery, London E1 ([trumanbrewery.com](http://trumanbrewery.com)), Sept 10-12; free tickets from [dice.fm](http://dice.fm). *Humble Works* will be at the Colnaghi Gallery, London SW1 ([colnaghi.com](http://colnaghi.com)), Sept 17 to Nov 22. *Marina Abramovic: Seven Deaths* will be at the Lisson Gallery in Cork Street, W1, and Lisson Street, London NW1 ([lissongallery.com](http://lissongallery.com)), Sept 14 to Oct 17

*Harper's Bazaar*  
10 August 2021

## BAZAAR<sup>Harper's</sup>

### La prossima mostra di Marina Abramovic sarà uno sguardo intimo sulla sua vita

Cinque stanze, ognuna delle quali caratterizzata da un oggetto che ha avuto significato per la performer.

**B** DI VIVIEN BOVARD / 10/08/2021



**M**arina Abramović, imperatrice dell'arte performativa, è ormai uno status, una condizione archetipica; più che un'artista, la performer serba sembra essere regina di un Olimpo vittima della *disneyficazione*. Il suo profilo è quello delle grandi star: un pop residuo, con scintille d'avanguardia. Il suo nome infuria sui social, senza lasciare trasparire le profonde radici culturali che la sua opera mantiene salde ad una tradizione immemorabile. Seguendo questo paradigma – e con un certo timore che le cose più taciute vadano perdute - arriva direttamente da lei l'idea di tracciare una chiara linea lungo tutto il suo percorso.

Si chiamerà Traces il progetto ibrido che allineerà gli astri della parabola di Abramović. Un labirinto d'installazioni darà il via a un'esperienza multimediale totale, che si terrà all'Old Truman Brewery di Londra dal 10 al 12 settembre prossimi. Traces è un tragitto esperienziale, attraverso il quale si troveranno riassunti tutti quei maestri più o meno invisibili, presenti nel lavoro della performer. Chi sono le sue ispirazioni? Van Gogh, con la sua notte stellata, e Susan Sontag, con la sua poetica, sono solo due nomi delle numerose presenze che hanno costellato la vita artistica di Marina. Non si tratta solo di persone, ma anche di oggetti significativi per l'artista che hanno mutato la loro natura in simboli. Ogni stanza dell'esposizione, infatti, evocherà un concetto o un'immagine in grado di sintetizzare i vari tasselli che hanno composto il mosaico del suo immaginario negli ultimi cinquant'anni. Nell'atmosfera densa di storia, gli ambienti della sede londinese saranno tramati da interventi video, narrazioni di luce e di suoni. Lo spettatore sarà guidato attraverso lo scrigno sotterraneo che contiene il riflesso speculare di tutto quello che abbiamo visto e conosciuto di Marina Abramović. L'eredità nascosta ce la consegna lei stessa, dalle sue stesse mani.

Un atto archivistico che sembra essere sostenuto dall'ansia, quella dell'artista, di perdersi: cosa rimarranno degli effimeri – pur profondi – atti impalpabili? Delle performance? Forse l'intero substrato mai esplicitato, ripescato a posteriori, ed oggi diventato parte di una mostra curata da lei stessa. Nel mezzo dell'installazione totale, saranno presenti anche due lavori di Marina – Crystal Cinema (1991) e 10,000 stars (2015), nonché un'intervista ad hoc pensata per la mostra. È forse questo il monito che ci indica, ancora di più, la necessità di Abramović di dare vita a una memoria parallela, in grado di tessere il fil rouge della sua opera. Si potrebbe parlare di antologia o di monografica, ma quel che si cela dietro, in realtà, è l'atto performativo di ricostruire una memoria. Attraverso tesori, mai naufragati, e oggi riportati in salvo dagli abissi, la performer ci invita nel territorio di un'autoanalisi. Ci troveremo dentro il ritmo di affinità elettive che potrebbero appartenere a chiunque: cammineremo lungo oggetti magnetici, nomi d'artisti, storie passati. Non ne usciremo intatti. È infatti la curatela della mostra stessa il nucleo di questa performance d'archivio; nel suo ricostruire un percorso, suo, noi possiamo ipotizzare di ricostruire il nostro, personale.

Sarà possibile fruire dell'opera anche attraverso la piattaforma di WePresent – strumento già utilizzato nello scorso anno da Marina e che ha coinvolto più di 80 milioni di persone in tutto il mondo, alle prese con il metodo Abramović versione digital.



*The New York Times*  
28 July 2021

# The New York Times

## Review: Marina Abramovic Summons Maria Callas in ‘7 Deaths’

Part mixtape and part séance, this opera project by the famed performance artist attempts to unite two divas across time.



Marina Abramovic's "7 Deaths of Maria Callas," in Munich, includes opera excerpts and short films such as this one, inspired by "Otello." (Leah Hawkins is onstage at left, with Abramovic in bed.) Wilfried Hösl



By **Joshua Barone**

July 28, 2021

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### 7 Deaths of Maria Callas

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MUNICH — In Leos Carax's new film, "Annette," the husband and wife played by Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard are described in

inverse terms. As a comedian, he kills every night; as an opera star, she dies.

That's of course a reductive view of opera. But the alignment of the art form and demise persists in the popular imagination, and guides "[7 Deaths of Maria Callas](#)." A dramaturgically misguided séance of a project by the performance artist Marina Abramovic, it played to its largest in-person audience yet on Tuesday at the Bavarian State Opera here, after a heavily restricted run and livestream last year. It is bound for [Paris](#) and [Athens](#) in September, then [Berlin](#) and [Naples](#) — and who knows where else, with Abramovic's celebrity behind it.

"7 Deaths" is a meeting of divas in which Callas is invoked through a series of the arias for which she was notable. She is then inhabited onstage and in short films — the summoning of a spirit who, Abramovic argues, is still very much with us.



In the work, Abramovic inhabits Maria Callas, miming to a recording of "Casta Diva."  
Wilfried Hösl

She's right. Callas [died in 1977](#), yet lives on in a still-robust stream of albums, art books and, yes, [hologram concerts](#). She was known even to a public beyond opera as tabloid fodder, especially because

of her affair with Aristotle Onassis — a love triangle involving Jacqueline Kennedy, his eventual wife. But her pop celebrity emerged from her being an indelible artist, who contributed to the 20th-century resurrection of bel canto repertoire with a transfixing stage presence. Even when silent, she emoted with the entirety of her face, arrestingly expressive with just a small hand gesture. Her voice failed her too early, but she embodied the “Tosca” aria [“Vissi d’arte”](#): “I lived for art.”



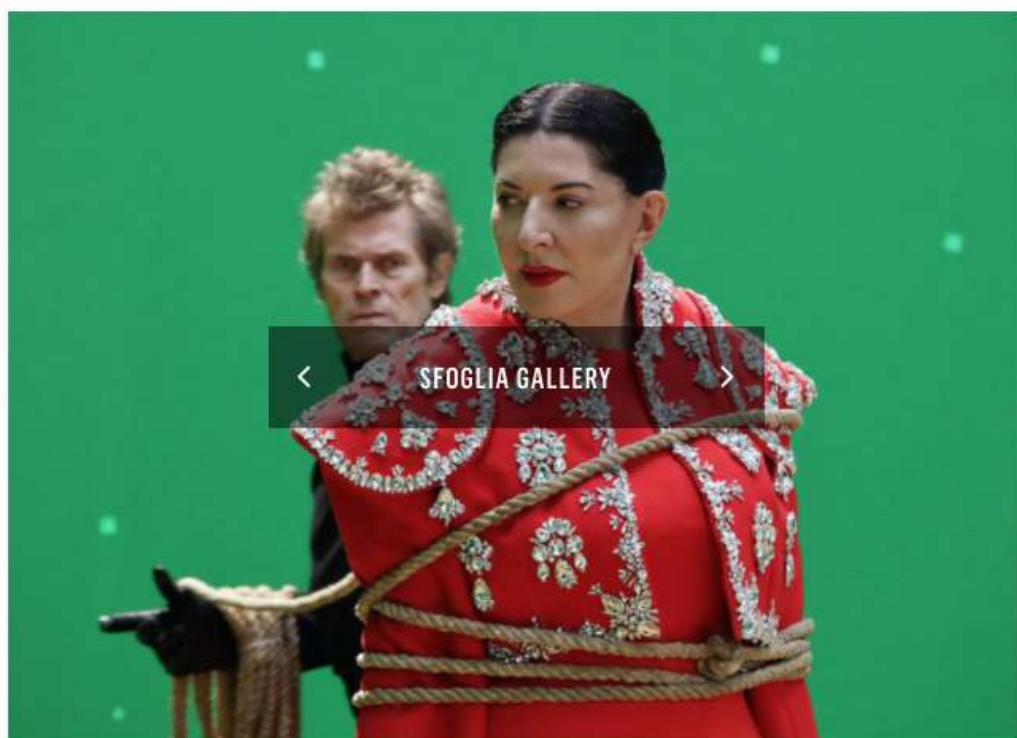
*Vanity Fair, Italy*  
24 July 2021

## VANITY FAIR

VF

**Marina Abramović: «Dimmi di no»**

di FRANCESCA AMEY



Da sempre Marina Abramovic fa dell'arte una missione. Provate a fermarla: ogni «stop» per lei sarà l'inizio di una nuova battaglia. Specie se si tratta di «abbattere muri» e aprire le porte di una società più equa

*Questo articolo è pubblicato sul numero 30-31 di Vanity Fair in edicola fino al 3 agosto 2021*

Marina Abramović è in attesa che l'ospite avvii la riunione». Appena planata a

Madrid da New York, dove vive abitualmente, **Nostra Signora della Performance** compare grazie a un clic su Zoom in primo piano con gli occhiali dalla montatura scura, i capelli sciolti di lato, poco trucco e molta luce attorno. Non manca molto al suo arrivo in carne e ossa a Roma per partecipare a un incontro pubblico (subito sold out) **organizzato lo scorso 16 luglio al MAXXI, il Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo, con il direttore Hou Hanru.**

«Il mio primo viaggio dopo tanto. Non sopporto più Zoom: l'arte ha bisogno di presenza», **dice l'artista che cinquant'anni fa ha inventato le performance**, la più nota delle quali s'intitola – non a caso – ***The Artist is Present***. Risale al 2010: per tre mesi accolse quotidianamente, per 8 ore di fila e in religioso silenzio, i visitatori del MoMA di New York che, uno alla volta, potevano sedersi davanti a lei per alcuni minuti.

Da qui all'autunno l'artista sarà di nuovo presente in una dozzina di città di vari Paesi: «Si ricomincia, ma del periodo pandemico conservo il beneficio di aver smesso di prendere un aereo ogni tre giorni: sono stata in campagna, ho curato l'orto, piantato alberi, letto libri». Marina Abramović una di noi, o quasi: anziché curare il lievito madre, ha lavorato indefessa e, tra le altre cose, lo scorso settembre ha presentato alla Bayerische Staatsoper di Monaco di Baviera la prima di ***7 Deaths of Maria Callas***, opera-performance con cui ora è di nuovo in tournée come regista e interprete. **Sul palco l'accompagna Willem Dafoe, le musiche sono di Marko Nikodijević, i costumi di Riccardo Tisci.**

«Da trent'anni volevo creare un'opera contemporanea sulla Callas, adatta anche ai giovani, per raccontarne la fine. Avverto molte affinità con lei: entrambe siamo del Sagittario, forti e carismatiche, vulnerabili ed emotive. **Maria è morta per amore di Onassis, io quasi morta per amore di Ulay: mi ha salvata il lavoro**».

Ulay, all'anagrafe **Frank Uwe Laysiepen**, è l'artista e fotografo tedesco con cui Abramović ha stretto uno dei sodalizi più intensi della storia dell'arte. Chiusero la liaison nell'88 con una passeggiata-performance sulla Muraglia Cinese che sarebbe dovuta culminare nel matrimonio ma, a causa dei tradimenti di lui, sancì la separazione emotiva e artistica fino al romantico epilogo: **l'incontro al MoMA durante la performance in presenza di cui si diceva**. Di nuovo uno davanti all'altra, con le lacrime agli occhi: vedere su YouTube per credere.

**Dal marzo dello scorso anno Ulay non c'è più: si sente sola?**

«Ci siamo molto amati e molto odiati, abbiamo litigato e creato performance storiche. Tre anni prima che morisse, ci siamo perdonati tutto. Vivrà sempre in me».

**A proposito di performance storiche, in mostra al MAXXI rivediamo *Rhythm 0*, realizzata a Napoli nel '74 allo Studio Morra quando aveva solo 28 anni e considerata la sua più pericolosa. Queste le sue istruzioni per il pubblico: «Ci sono 72 oggetti sul tavolo che possono essere usati su di me nel modo in cui desiderate, io sono l'oggetto, mi assumo la responsabilità di quello che faccio, durata sei ore». Che cosa ricorda di quell'evento?**

«Ricordo tutto. Nessuno mi prendeva sul serio e intendevo dimostrare chi ero offrendo al pubblico la libertà di fare del mio corpo ciò che voleva. A Napoli, negli anni '70: follia».

**Sul tavolo c'erano delle lamette e persino una pistola che qualcuno le puntò contro.**

«All'inizio era tutto tranquillo, ma in sei ore ogni situazione può degenerare: mi tagliarono i vestiti e lembi di pelle, alla fine ero un pupazzo coperto di sangue. Allo scadere, cominciai a muovermi per la sala: scapparono tutti, incapaci di tollerare la mia presenza, emblema di ciò che erano stati in grado di fare. Se concedi a qualcuno pieno potere su di te, può ucciderti senza rendersene conto».

**La rifarebbe?**

«Avrei voluto, ma non è più possibile portare lamette e pistola in un museo».

**Alcuni definiscono eroiche le sue performance, altri eccessive.**

«Sono figlia di due eroi nazionali della Jugoslavia di Tito, cresciuta a Belgrado da una nonna religiosa e anticomunista. Sono il risultato di questo strano mix e sebbene da giovane mi sia ribellata a tutto ciò, mai avrei potuto realizzare le mie performance senza questa eredità. Fatico ancora a dire che sono serba: mi sento una creatura di quella Jugoslavia, un'incredibile unione di sei diverse repubbliche, culture e lingue dove il singolo era al servizio della società, dove si lottava per i propri ideali».

**Qual è la sua battaglia?**

«Il mio motto è: "Se mi dici no, questo è solo l'inizio". Nasco per rompere i muri, per essere la prima a fare qualcosa affinché altri possano fare altrettanto».



**Nel 2023, la Royal Academy di Londra le dedicherà una personale, prima artista donna in 250 anni di storia dell'istituzione.**

«Un altro muro abbattuto e una grande responsabilità».

**Le disuguaglianze di genere esistono anche nel mondo dell'arte?**

«Non amo le etichette, non mi piace esser definita “artista donna” o “femminista”: un artista è un artista, qualsiasi sia il suo genere. Può fare cose belle o brutte, essere bravo o no. Tuttavia, non sono ingenua: so delle difficoltà e disparità che ancora oggi molte devono sopportare sul lavoro. A loro dico di non lasciarsi impaurire, di seguire intuito e cuore e non cedere a compromessi».

**Da sacerdotessa della performance a guru online. Da qualche tempo mentre usiamo WeTransfer possiamo apprendere il suo metodo di meditazione: la conta dei chicchi di riso durante gli interminabili minuti di caricamento dei file è geniale.**

«Abbiamo avuto 36 milioni di visualizzazioni nella prima settimana di questo mio nuovo progetto digitale che durerà tutto l'anno. Mi ha reso felice, ma conscia di quanto la tecnologia ci tenga sotto scacco. Semplici esercizi come contare i chicchi di riso su un tavolo o bere un bicchiere d'acqua in slow motion rafforzano il corpo e la mente. Ho condiviso i trucchi che uso da anni per realizzare le mie performance: il “Metodo Abramović” è universale».

**FOTO: Marco Anelli**

*La Nacion*  
14 July 2021

## LA NACION

### Marina Abramovic enseña su método en el tiempo que tardan en cargar los archivos al WeTransfer

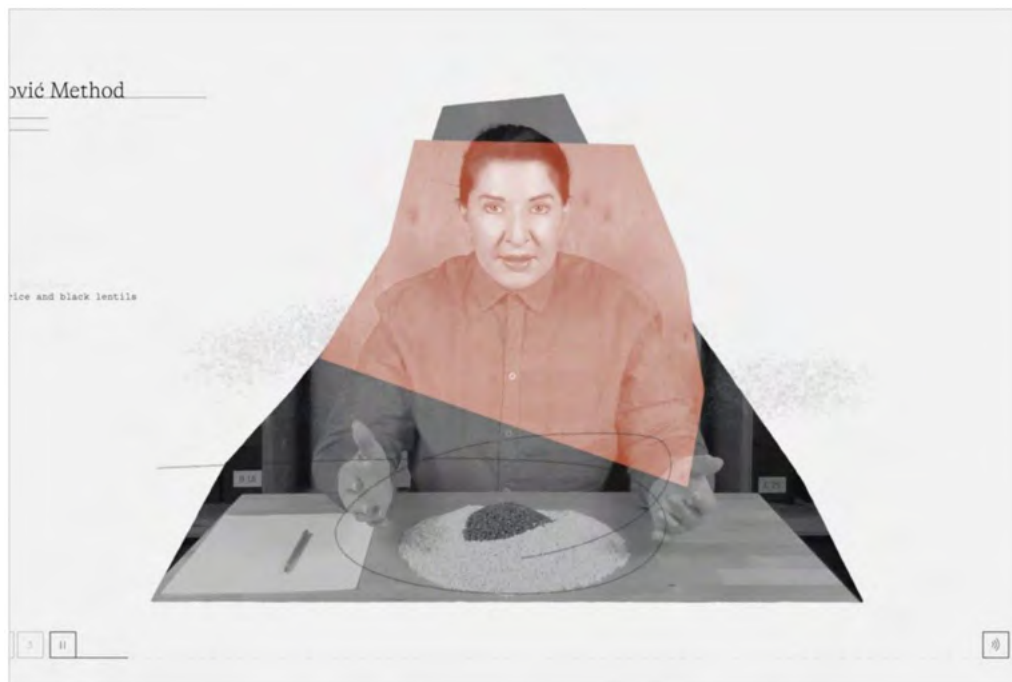
Una conexión a Internet, un vaso con agua, un puñado de arroz y algunos minutos libres parecen suficientes para realizar los ejercicios de meditación que enseña "la abuela de la performance"

14 de julio de 2021 • 15:08



**María Paula Zacharías**

PARA LA NACION



Marina Abramovic se asoció con la plataforma WeTransfer, donde enseña sus célebres ejercicios  
Prensa Wetransfer

**A**hora mismo es posible sentarse con **Marina Abramovic, la artista más reconocida de la performance a nivel mundial y reciente ganadora del premio Princesa de Asturias**, y realizar con su guía, en la propia casa, ejercicios de su célebre método: meditaciones para sentirse más presentes, despejar la mente o inspirarse. Eso sí: hará falta además de un vaso de agua, un puñado de arroz y quince minutos una buena conexión a Internet.

Este encuentro virtual con la bien llamada “[abuela de la performance](#)” llega en virtud de un acuerdo con WeTransfer, una de las más usadas aplicaciones para transferir archivos pesados a través del correo electrónico, que en el tiempo que dura la espera ofrecerá a su comunidad de 80 millones de personas ejercitarse con el Método Abramovic. Los videos están pensados para ser vistos mientras se cargan los bites, a partir del 24 de este mes, pero a la vez están ya disponibles [en el sitio de la artista para disfrutar cuándo y cómo se quiera](#).

Poner arte en sitios de Internet donde la gente entra para hacer otras cosas es tendencia. Son remansos visuales en la marea digital. Algo parecido hacen los bancos. En el país, el Galicia se asoció con el Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires para curar una galería virtual en su aplicación de *home banking*: los interesados pueden mandar sus imágenes por correo para ser vistas por 400.000 personas por día.

Pero volviendo a ***Marina Abramovic te enseña a estar presente***, la nueva iniciativa es un guiño a la taquillera exposición de la artista que se vio en el MoMA de Nueva York en 2010 con el título *La artista está presente*, cuando pasó 716 inmóvil en una silla de cara a quien quisiera sentarse enfrente.

Esta vez, propone **ejercicios conscientes** que enseñan a estar presente tanto en el tiempo como en el espacio, que algunos ya practicaron con ella en Buenos Aires durante la primera edición de la [Bienal de Performance](#), [en 2015](#), cuando visitó el país y dio un workshop en el Centro de Arte Experimental de la UNSAM. No se trata de nada extremo como ella acostumbra: dejarse apuntar por el público con un arma cargada, cortarse los dedos con un cuchillo cada vez que erra una melodía o sentarse sobre 2,5 toneladas de huesos de vaca para limpiar cada uno.

Desde la web propone, en cambio, caminos para una profunda introspección que apuntan a “limpiar la casa”, que son para ella la mente y el cuerpo. ¿Qué puede aportar el arte de la performance a la vida cotidiana? Mucho. En los videos, Abramovic da la bienvenida, explica cada práctica con claridad y deja instrucciones por escrito. No es necesario ser avezado para realizarlas. Son maneras muy especiales de tomar agua, contar granos de arroz, caminar en cámara lenta y mirarse mutuamente. Con consciencia e intención, se logra serenidad.





La artista desarrolló diferentes ejercicios para ganar fuerza de voluntad y concentración, que llama 'El Método Abramovic'. "Después de un año durante el cual volver a conectarnos con nosotros mismos nunca ha sido más importante, estoy encantada de compartirlos", dice ahora  
Prensa WeTransfer

“Ser una artista de performance es una tarea muy difícil –declaró la artista al presentar esta iniciativa–. Necesita mucha preparación para que el rendimiento de larga duración funcione. Entonces, desarrollé diferentes ejercicios para ayudarme a generar fuerza de voluntad y concentración, traspasando límites físicos y mentales. Más tarde, comprendí que estos ejercicios pueden servir no solo a mí, sino a cualquier profesión en el mundo, por lo que los convertí en algo que llamo El Método Abramovic. Después de un año durante el cual volver a conectarnos con nosotros mismos nunca ha sido más importante, estoy encantada de compartirlos con el mundo en WeTransfer”.

La artista nacida en Belgrado en 1946 recibió recientemente el premio Princesa de Asturias de las Artes, concedido por España, por explorar en su trabajo “los límites del cuerpo y la mente a través de performances arriesgadas y complejas en una constante búsqueda de libertad individual”, según el fallo del jurado.

Esta iniciativa es una más de las muchas que lleva adelante la app relacionada con el arte. En [su sitio](#) hay cientos de artículos dedicados a artistas de todas las disciplinas y latitudes, con información, obras y videos de cada uno. Una invitación a conocer a alguno de ellos sale habitualmente al azar mientras se cargan archivos. A comienzos de año, Abramovic ya había trabajado con la plataforma como curadora, seleccionando a cinco artistas de performance en ascenso.

Por [María Paula Zacharias](#)

LISSON GALLERY

*Trebuchet Magazine*  
July 2021





CONTENTS

12  
PORCELAIN  
EDMUND DE WAAL



20  
WOOD  
GERALD CHUKWUMA &  
MICHAEL ARMITAGE

28  
CELEBRITY  
WARHOL, STELLA VINE,  
SAM MCKINNISS

36  
CONCRETE  
NEUNAU

44  
RENEWED VOICES  
EMERGING ARTISTS

66  
SPRAY PAINT  
SICKBOY

74  
BODY  
MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ



82  
FABRIC  
CRYSTAL FISCHETTI



90  
CANON  
SCOTT DORWARD

98  
WORDS  
ED RUSCHA

108  
NEON  
CERITH WYN EVANS

116  
TELEVISION  
DARA BIRNBAUM

124  
NAIL VARNISH  
SYRETT

REGULARS

04  
Contact & Credits

08  
Editor's Note

10  
As Seen Online

49  
In Focus

106  
Eat It Here: The  
Social Arc of Art

132  
Subscriber Print

136  
Collector Profile:  
Mark Hinchliffe

139  
In Focus: Credits

140  
Subscriptions

141  
Art Fairs

142  
Art Market: Value  
in Context





# BODY

**DECODING THE BODY AS  
LANGUAGE: MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**

**WORDS: MILLIE WALTON**

## Timeline

1909 - Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti presents the first Futurist evening of performance art that rages “against the cult of tradition and commercialisation of art” (Goldberg, 1988).

Late 1950s - Dada cabarets and performances explore the relationship between the artist and the viewer.

1960s - Happenings take place across New York City. The term, coined by artist and lecturer Allan Kaprow, is used to describe performances that combine elements of dance, poetry, music, theatre and visual art, and often involve the participation of the audience.

2012 - Pussy Riot stage *A Punk Prayer* in a Orthodox cathedral in Moscow, and are arrested.

2019 - Christie's auctions Marina Abramović's mixed reality artwork *The Life* (2020) for £287,500.

2020 - Russian performance artist Petr Davydtchenko films himself eating a live bat as a protest against the actions of big pharmaceutical companies during the coronavirus pandemic.

2023 - Abramović's first major exhibition in the UK to be held at the Royal Academy of Arts

## Key Works

Hermann Nitsch, *Das Orgien Mysterien Theatre*, 1957-ongoing.

Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1964.

Joseph Beuys, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, 1965.

VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants: Genital Panic*, 1969.

Chris Burden, *Shoot*, 1971.

Jeremy Deller, *The Battle of Orgreave*, 2001.



**Our bodies are so integral to the way we communicate and understand the world that many of our bodily actions occur automatically. On an unconscious level we operate through ritualistic, theatrical and artistic physical practices to emphasise and achieve specific aims. Before we learn to speak, actions and gestures are our first language and touch the most primal form of interpersonal connection—a language ripe for appraisal.**

In the early 1900s, artists linked to the Futurist and Dadaist movements began harnessing the power of live performance as a form of resistance to tradition and the commercialisation of art, the idea being that the body was beyond commodification (a boundary that has been dissolved by digitisation) as opposed to, say, a painting or a sculpture. Performance was employed as a means of political intervention, and in the post-war years—largely led by the 1960s Vienna-based collective Wiener Aktionismus—it became increasingly violent, utilising self-mutilation and bloody, quasi-religious ceremonies as shock tactics. Because of its association with violence, as well as its immediacy, ephemerality and inextricable connection with ‘real’, lived experience, performance art stood outside the conventional structures of the art world until the new millennium.

Marina Abramović grew up in Belgrade, Serbia (then Yugoslavia) under the communist dictatorship of Marshal Tito. In 1968, she took part in a series of anti-Soviet student demonstrations. While the demonstrations achieved very little, disappointing the artist who was “literally prepared to die for the cause” (Abramović 2017), it brought about an awareness of her body as a tool for mediating political and social beliefs. At the time, Abramović was studying painting but by 1969, inspired by the works of happening artists such as Joseph Beuys and Nam June Paik, she had envisioned and proposed her own performance entitled *Come Wash With Me* to the Belgrade Youth Centre. Although the piece was rejected, it foreshadowed her ongoing fascination with not only ritual cleansing, but also the potential of an embodied and, specifically, shared experience to transform and even transcend the confines of everyday existence.

“The performer and audience create the work together, they depend on each other,” says the artist (Abramović 2021). In other words, a connection has to be built, which is facilitated (often entirely in Abramović’s work) by the body. As such, the body simultaneously becomes the mediator

(between two or more subjectivities), a mirror (a reflection of self) and a symbol (of the other). Take, for example, *The Artist is Present* (2010), in which Abramović sat in a chair in the Museum of Modern Art in New York for eight hours a day, every day for three months, without speaking or moving, with no food, drink or bathroom breaks, while members of the public queued up to gaze into her eyes. “What I found, immediately, was that the people sitting across from me became very moved. From the beginning, people were in tears—and so was I,” she recalls (Abramović 2017).

It’s impossible to record all the immediate or lasting effects of the performance and the extent to which it was transformative because it was, deliberately, an internalised experience. It’s also worth noting that by this stage in her career, Abramović was already something of a household name, so there would have been, for at least some members of the public, the allure of celebrity. Nevertheless, the piece is significant not for its disparate outcomes, but for the questions it posed: can non-verbal communication heighten our awareness? Can it allow us to access a new level of sensitivity by which we may not only better understand ourselves but also others?

In a critique of the 2010 performance, Amelia Jones argues that: “The live act marks the body, understood as an expression of self, as representational” (2011). While Jones’ argument evades the central point of the work, which is to propose, not dictate, a form of collaboration or exchange where what the audience experiences or gains from the encounter is dependent on their willingness to actively engage, it points to the dialectic of objectification and embodiment. That is to say, Abramović’s body becomes both subject and object, both intimate and public. While this dialectic might create a certain distance, or rupture the relationship between artist and audience, it can also be used as a tool of empowerment and connection. Indeed, *The Artist is Present* seems to play on the circularity of this idea by structuring a very specific bodily experience for the artist that was then witnessed, and altered by individual members of the public, who as a result of their own bodily participation were simultaneously transformed by the experience. All of this was also witnessed by a wider audience and recorded by film cameras which enacted a diluted repetition of the central performance. But what was achieved? Somewhere within the carefully contained loop of creation and transformation, there arose *potential*

Photograph by Marco Anelli, Courtesy of the Marina Abramovic Archives and Lisson Gallery

Marina Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, 2019.







**THE PIECE IS SIGNIFICANT NOT  
FOR ITS DISPARATE OUTCOMES,  
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POSED: CAN NON-VERBAL  
COMMUNICATION HEIGHTEN  
OUR AWARENESS?**

for a sense of, if not wholeness, then at least momentary unity within the self and with the other.

Thirty-six years before *The Artist is Present*, Abramović performed a more extreme version of a similar concept. In *Rhythm 0* (1974), she stood in a gallery room and invited the audience to use a selection of objects—including a hammer, rose, needles, knife, lipstick and pistol—on her for six hours. “Someone stuck pins into me. Someone else slowly poured a glass of water over my head. Someone cut my neck with the knife and sucked my blood,” she recalls (Abramović 2017). At the time, Abramović, as well as other artists including the likes of Hermann Nitsch and Otto Muehl, were criticised as masochists, and in some ways the performance was a form of protest but also an exploration of power (similarities can be drawn with the 1971 Stanford prison experiment) and the limits of the human body.

“In the simultaneous denial or abuse of ego, selfhood and the body, such artists also create a climate of positive selfhood; not only because of the strength to be gained by surviving such actions but because of the special, unique nature inherited from passing accepted limits; the status of shaman,” says Mark Dawes (Dawes 1995). However, the concept of pain as a gateway to freedom from the body’s limitations is, naturally, controversial and arguably a less powerful performance technique in the sense that it engenders a more volatile relationship between artist and audience. This is because the experiences of artist and audience are often in opposition and are, therefore, unrelatable. In *Rhythm 0*, only Abramović experienced pain while the audience experienced what it was like to inflict violence, or control over another being.

That’s not to say, however, that the gesture or symbolism of violence is ineffective. Abramović was awarded the Golden Lion for Best Artist at the 1997 Venice Biennale for the video installation and live performance *Balkan Baroque* in which she sat in a basement room scrubbing a huge mound of bloody bones, reflecting the brutality and shame of war. This notion of cleansing runs throughout the artist’s practice, drawing a connection between ritualistic practices and self-realisation. In a trilogy of video works entitled *Cleaning the Mirror* (1995), for example, Abramović sat with a skeleton in her lap, vigorously scrubbing it for three hours, lay naked beneath a skeleton breathing gently, and finally sat in a darkened room while she was brought ancient artefacts from the Pitt Rivers collection in Oxford,



above which she held her hands to feel their energy. All three pieces explore the idea of mortality, drawing on classical and gothic tropes as “a disturbing reminder that the human body is merely matter” (Dawes, 1995), but at the same time, they gesture towards the possibility of transcendence, a life beyond the physical—an idea that sits outside the Western way of thinking (it’s no coincidence that Abramović has spent significant periods of time immersing herself in Eastern cultures). It’s also interesting to note that the *Cleaning the Mirror* series was made specifically for video, “kind of a time capsule” (Abramović 2017), which flattens or even destroys physicality whilst simultaneously overcoming the body’s inability to exist beyond the present moment.

Lately, Abramović has evolved her explorations of transcendence by introducing the possibility of a kind of rebirth facilitated by art. In *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005), she selected five performance pieces from the past, alongside two of her own, to re-perform with slight alterations, in homage to the original artists (she paid for the rights to do so). Afterwards, she opened up her archive to give subsequent artists the opportunity to re-perform her works. This is a development of what we saw happening in *The Artist is Present* on a much wider scale, but unlike a singular, time-based performance, the circular process of creation and transformation is continuous and the potential for overcoming the limitations of the body never ending. “My life is continuing without me,” she says. “There’s a feeling of responsibility, but also release” (Abramović 2021).

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Original photos Pg74; Sasha Maslova, Pg78; Engin Akyurt, Pg81; Skylar Kang. Remixed by Trebuchet, Courtesy of Pixels.



**IN RHYTHM 0, ONLY THE ARTIST  
EXPERIENCED PAIN WHILE THE AUDIENCE  
EXPERIENCED WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO  
INFLICT VIOLENCE, OR CONTROL  
OVER ANOTHER BEING**

# APOLLO

THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE

## The path to self-improvement, according to Marina Abramovic

Gabrielle Schwarz

18 JUNE 2021



Star gazing; still from the Abramović Method by Marina Abramović, designed by WeTransfer

I am probably not the first to wonder, while absentmindedly staring at my screen and waiting for WeTransfer to send a batch of files I've uploaded, about the artworks that sometimes appear on the website of the file-sharing service. Why, instead of a full-screen ad for Amazon or Nike or some other corporation, am I now looking at (to take the most recent example) a soft-focus photograph of underwater foliage, bathed in a hazy green light? Well, apparently WeTransfer has always really cared about artists. In 2017 the company's then editor-in-chief Rob Alderson explained that the 'founders of WeTransfer are both creative blokes and so it felt natural to them to use the platform to showcase and promote great creative work'. From its launch 12 years ago WeTransfer has given away a third of its background images to artists – and now it even has a dedicated editorial website, named WePresent, which commissions and exhibits creative projects.



Allow me to be a little sceptical about the altruism of WeTransfer's latest commission, a 'never-before-seen digital manifestation' of Marina Abramovic's tried-and-tested method of preparation for the gruelling feats of endurance for which she is famous. Booking an appearance by the performance artist, who has made an art of celebrity as much as anything else, cannot have come cheap. Although this isn't new material; the series of exercises that make up the 'Abramovic Method' have been, per the [Marina Abramovic Institute](#)'s website, 'developed over decades of research', and the artist has been sharing them in exhibitions and lectures for a number of years.

Now, though, you can participate from the comfort of your own home. But don't get too comfortable. Abramovic states in the introductory video on the website: 'To be a performance artist, it's a very difficult task.' And so 'I developed different exercises to help myself – generating big willpower, concentration, crossing physical and mental limits and so on. Later on I understood that these exercises can serve not just me but anybody else, with any profession, in the world.' The artist intones her words slowly and deliberately, her gaze directly meeting the camera. She is sitting at a table, her hands clasped and resting on its wooden surface – a tableau that is closely framed by the custom video-player which WeTransfer has designed for the occasion, a jaunty polygon with a wide base and a narrow peak. The video plays in black and white (with some red-filter accents), adding to the seriousness of the occasion.



Still from the Abramovic Method by Marina Abramovic, designed by WeTransfer

In the videos that follow, the artist talks us through the four exercises selected for this presentation: drinking water; counting rice; slow-motion walking; and mutual gazing. I'm relatively game – at first. If all I need to do to achieve Abramovic's astronomic level of success are these four simple tasks, then why not give them a go? The first exercise starts off straightforwardly: we are instructed to sip a glass of water (not too full, not too empty) as slowly as possible, taking note of the sensations that occur throughout: the coolness of the glass against our hands and lips, the water passing down our throats. This is fairly standard mindfulness stuff. Then comes the kicker: you must repeat this exercise every day for a minimum of 15 minutes, and a maximum of one hour. I'm not sure I've cleared enough time in my schedule.



In her introduction to the second exercise – after noting that risotto rice mixed with black lentils is best, because the grains are big and clear and don't break – Abramovic makes a crucial point. 'Now, when we have mixed the rice and lentils, we have to make the most important decision: what we're going to do, and how much of this amount of rice and lentils we're going to count.' She explains that the pile on the table in front of her, in her experience, would take between six and eight hours to count. There will be boredom, there will be anger, and eventually, if you break through the wall, there will be acceptance of the situation you find yourself in. But quitting is not an option. 'If you decide to do everything, then you do everything. This is like literally the question of life and death. If you count and give up in the middle of the way, that's the same with life. If you can't count the rice and lentils you decide to [count], then your decisions in life – you have the same approach. Just not good enough.'



Still from the Abramovic Method by Marina Abramovic, designed by WeTransfer

I have often thought about what motivates artists such as Abramovic in their undertakings – to, for example, spend 12 days in a gallery without eating or speaking (*The House with the Ocean View*; 2002) or trek for 90 days across the Great Wall of China in order to meet up with an ex (*The Great Wall Walk*; 1988). Surely this is about more than just the fulfilment of a set of parameters? Abramovic is right that all kinds of people take on all kinds of challenging tasks, often voluntarily: just witness the trend for ultramarathons, races covering distances greater than 26.2 miles. But there must always, I imagine, be a reason, however unrelatable to others – however rooted in obsession or ambition or perhaps simply desire. I just can't muster up any reason to sit at a table for several hours and count a pile of grains and pulses – or, for that matter, to walk as slowly as I possibly can for an hour straight, or to look at a zoomed-in video of Abramovic's eyes indefinitely. However, maybe when I'm next waiting for a really big file to send on WeTransfer this could be a good way to pass the time?

The Abramovic Method by Marina Abramovic is [online](#).

LISSON GALLERY

*Galleries Now*  
23 May 2021

VOGUE

INTERVIEW

“I See Myself As A  
Warrior”: Marina  
Abramović On Art,  
Feminism, And Her  
History-Making Royal  
Academy  
Retrospective

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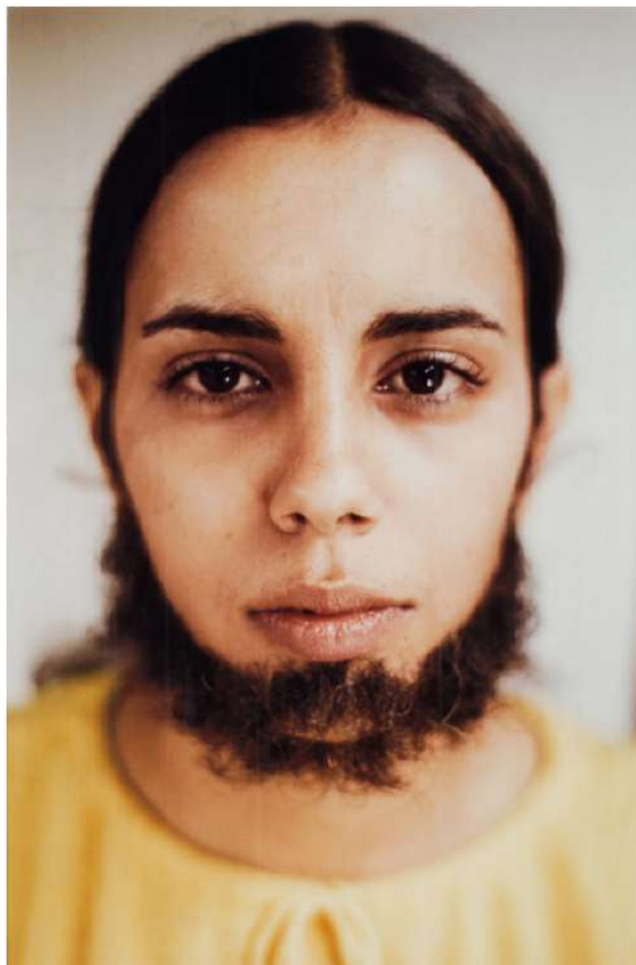
BY ZOE WHITFIELD

23 MAY 2021



“I was just looking on [Netflix](#) yesterday, at the new series about [Halston](#),” says Marina Abramović, relaying her current culture fix and heaping praise on Ryan Murphy’s latest work for the platform. “Oh my God, the ’80s was unbelievable, it was just drugs and sex. Such an incredible, strange time in New York – I was in ex-Yugoslavia then – so it was interesting to see. And the actor is fantastic.”

Currently in New York, where she’s lived for two decades, Abramović has joined *Vogue* over Zoom to discuss a new Sotheby’s auction. Titled [\(Women\) Artists](#), the house describes the sale (also accompanied by an exhibition, open now through 27 May), as celebrating the contributions by women to art history over the last 400 years. It’s simultaneously an embrace and a critical unpacking of how artists (namely cis women) have been grouped throughout history, their work segregated based on gender.



A work from the series “Facial Hair Transplants” by Ana Mendieta.

The Serbian artist’s involvement – she has a self-portrait in the auction – is a curious and potentially provocative choice: while it’s easy to examine her work, which deals most prominently in forms of endurance, through a gender-based lens, she has long been explicit in her rejection of such categorisation, similarly removing herself from any feminist discourse. At a MoMA event in 2007, [The Feminist Future](#), she announced, “I am not a feminist artist. I am woman, but I am not the woman artist, I am just an artist.” She



is not naïve about gender politics – at the same event, she remarked, “Did you notice that all the equipment is done by men?” – but it’s not the framework she wishes to centre her work within.

“Normally I hate these kind of titles,” she laughs, on being introduced to the auction’s moniker. “I generally don’t like titles which divide male and female. You know, my position of art is that we don’t have male, female, trans, gay, lesbians, homosexuals – whatever the categories are – the art can be good art or bad art, that’s it, that’s the only category I respect. I really think that when we put in boxes, male art, female art, we are creating differences and divisions which actually art should not have.” It’s a fair assessment, and ultimately what the auction house will probe with the sale.

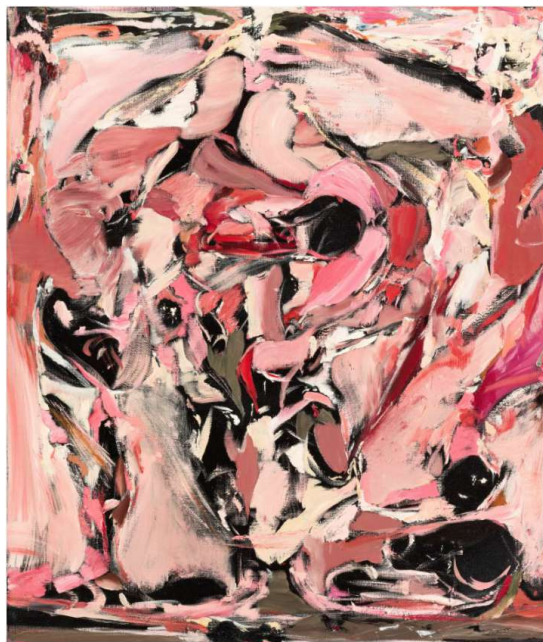
Abramović was born in Belgrade to Yugoslav Partisans in 1946, and associates her lack of feminist tendencies (professionally, at least) with her mother. “I grew up in ex-Yugoslavia where my mother was a national hero, and major of the army – an incredibly powerful person,” she explains, alluding to the difficult relationship she describes in her 2016 autobiography, *Walk Through Walls*. “All my life I have to fight against her, you know, it didn’t go well with her – she proposed military discipline that was such a restriction to my creation and to my upbringing as an artist, it was very difficult.”



“Self Portrait with Quartz Crystal” by Marina Abramović.

“I think it’s damaging for artists when they have feminist exhibitions,” she continues, lamenting the rise of group shows championing women who are artists under the umbrella of feminism, largely proposed as the course for redressing the industry’s imbalance. “In my experience, when you talk about feminist exhibitions, you always have two, three really good artists – many of them are Sunday painters and not good, and the whole thing becomes not good. Let’s put them [male and female artists] together, then let’s talk about the subject and content, because it’s not just about male/female numbers, it’s about content, what art represents, the ideas behind it, how strong these ideas are; that’s what really makes art powerful.”

Perhaps best known for 2010’s *The Artist is Present*, a three-month undertaking at the Museum of Modern Art, for which more than 1,000 people joined her to sit in silence on a pair of wooden chairs (850,000 watched on), Abramović has been using her body to create powerful art for 50 years. In “Rhythm 0” (1974), she invited audience members to use any one of the 72 objects placed on a table beside her naked body – amongst them a gun, a bullet and a rose – to inflict pain or pleasure on her as they saw fit. “I see myself as a warrior,” she remarks today. “I fight for my position. It took me 50 years to get there and it was not easy, because I work with art which is not normal – performance art – I’ve never been part of any mainstream, they’ve been always out of the context. But I succeeded, with my show in MoMA and Guggenheim, where performance was accepted. Now, one thing I really realise, female artists are less paid than male artists; they have much less visibility than male artists, and this has been there for centuries, and worse. Now the situation’s better, so we have to be more enthusiastic, but we could be better and we should be better.”



“Twice Told Tales” by Cecily Brown.

When Abramović's postponed retrospective opens at the Royal Academy of Arts in 2023, it will make her the first woman artist to have a solo show across the academy's main galleries in its 252-year history. Speaking to [The Guardian](#) last year, she noted that "as the first woman, I have to deliver something which is even better than a man". Elaborating on the pressure that accompanies people – usually women and people of colour – who occupy this unique "first" territory, she describes a huge responsibility. "I have to make work that's so good, that it opens the road for all the young and incredibly talented female artists coming after me. If my show is not good then it'll reflect badly on everybody else, so I have to be incredible."

Originally titled *After Life*, she admits to taking a new approach for 2023 post-pandemic. "After [Covid](#), it's become negative and I felt, actually, very superstitious about this title, so it's going to be *360 Degrees*. 360 degrees is 360 degrees, from your beginning to your end, at the same time it's a kind of cycle, and it's more positive and happy. But this is a working title, there's still two years." On a personal level, she has mostly enjoyed the last 15 months. "For an artist it's kind of a dream come true, you're in isolation, you're connected to nature, have time for solitude, time to think," and subsequently she's put out numerous projects, including a takeover with Sky Arts (*512 Hours*). She does miss hugging though, she confirms, while in the realm of performance art she's unbothered by what's come out of the pandemic so far. "I really did not agree to Zoom, Zoom is ugly, it's terrible looking, the sound is horrible; nothing that came out of Zoom is good, that I saw. Performance art needs direct contact, live audience. So we have to wait, why make compromise? What's the problem waiting two years? I don't have this problem. This is a learning period."

*Sotheby's '(Women) Artists' auction is open for bidding until May 27 via [sothebys.com](https://sothebys.com)*



# LISSON GALLERY

*Associated Press*  
12 May 2021



## Performance artist Marina Abramovic wins Spanish arts prize

May 12, 2021



FILE - In this Sept. 21, 2019 file photo, performance artist Marina Abramovic speaks during a press conference in Belgrade, Serbia. A Spanish foundation, the Princess of Asturias awarded Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic one of the European nation's most prestigious awards for the fine arts on Wednesday May 12, 2021. (AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic, File)

MADRID (AP) — A Spanish foundation awarded Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic one of the European nation's most prestigious awards for the fine arts on Wednesday.

The jury that decides the Princess of Asturias Awards said that the work of the 74-year-old Abramovic revealed "a sensorial and spiritual component hitherto unknown."

The 50,000-euro (\$56,700) award is one of eight prizes, ranging from the arts, social sciences and sports, handed out annually by a foundation named for Spanish Crown Princess Leonor.

Born in Belgrade in 1946, Abramovic studied fine arts in her hometown and Zagreb before she moved to Amsterdam in 1976. Her performances include the 1988 "The Great Wall Walk," in which she and German artist Ulay walked from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China before meeting in an embrace.

At the 2010 retrospective of her work held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Abramovic performed her "The Artist is Present," in which she spent 716 hours sitting still while thousands of museumgoers took turns sitting in front of her and sharing one another's gaze.

The jury said that "Abramovic's courage in her dedication to an absolute art and her adhesion to the vanguard produce moving experiences that demand an intense connection with the spectator and make her one of the most inspiring artists of her time."

She heads the Marina Abramovic Institute, an arts center in Hudson, New York.

LISSON GALLERY

*The Last Bohemians*

8 March 2021

# THE LAST BOHEMIANS

The award-winning podcast + portrait series profiling fearless women and maverick outsiders in arts and culture.

Like what you hear? Buy us a coffee! [ko-fi.com/thelastbohemians](https://ko-fi.com/thelastbohemians).



*Taken on Zoom, January 2021*

***Marina Abramović***

*"I feel free all the time. I make my life the way I really want to, with no compromises. I don't have children, I don't have dogs, I don't have lazy husband at home. I wake up in the morning and I do what I want. That feels really good"*

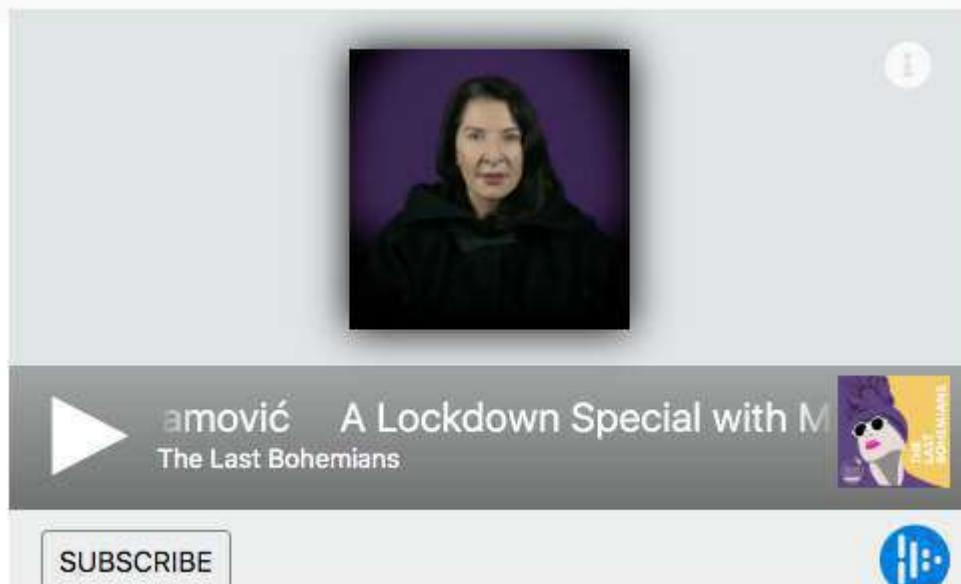


**LISTEN ON:**  
**ITUNES**  
**SPOTIFY**

For International Women's Day 2021, we return with a special episode, in partnership with [KLORIS](#), with Marina Abramović, the groundbreaking – and divisive – Serbian artist who changed the way we view performance art and who has spent the past half a century confronting the mental and physical limits of the body. Her early work in the 1970s is famed for its extremity, with pieces where she would cut the communist star into her stomach or invite an audience to use weapons on her, a thread she continued when she teamed up with her creative collaborator and lover Ulay, who passed away just before the pandemic struck in 2020. Their final piece together in 1988, where they walked from one end of The Great Wall of China and met in the middle, is one of the most elaborate break-ups of all time.

Since then, Abramović has become known for intertwining performance art with spirituality, shamanism and pop culture: she trained Lady Gaga in her 'Marina Abramović Method', starred in a Jay-Z video, became a Tibetan buddhist and turned her attentions to durational works. These include her infamous piece The Artist is Present at the MoMa in New York in 2010, where she spent 700 hours sitting silently across a table from spectators – over 1,500 people came to sit opposite her, many of them moved to tears.

In this interview, conducted via Zoom at the start of this year, Abramović delivers some life lessons about creative fearlessness, the importance of failure and taking risks, how she survives criticism, why she put her career in front of having children, how she never compromises, why she enjoys being in her seventies and what she has in common with the opera singer Maria Callas, on whom she has based her own mixed-media performance, which will return to the stage in September, following its pre-pandemic premiere last year. A retrospective of her life's work – [her first major exhibition in the UK](#) – will now be showing in 2023.



The Last Bohemians: Marina Abramović episode is a proud partnership with [KLORIS](#), a superior CBD oil company whose mission is to use the power of nature to help and heal. Their exceptional and range of 100% natural, premium quality and highly effective CBD products spans 5% and 10% oil drops, 800mg luxury balm, superboost face oil, bath blocks and hand sanitiser, and is a favourite with VOGUE, Glamour, GQ, Elle and Grazia. Like The Last Bohemians, it's an awards winner: it won the Hip & Healthy CBD Awards 2020, was shortlisted at the Natural Health Beauty Awards 2020, was an Editor's Choice at the Beauty Shortlist Awards 2020 and was named a Best Buy for the Independent's Indy/Best 2020.

The KLORIS journey started as many good things do – and just like The Last Bohemians did! – with friends sharing a meal and talking. The team had all discovered CBD for different health reasons, tackling challenges from anxiety and insomnia through to menstrual cramps and back ache, and they were frustrated at the lack of ethical, reliable, science-backed products available. So they decided to do something about it. They spent months searching the globe for the purest CBD, cultivated and extracted in the most respectful and sustainable way, then blended it with organic ingredients to deliver products that are truly a joy to use, with efficacy the core purpose.

KLORIS is all about harnessing the healing power of nature, combined with good science, ethical business and respect for the environment. For more information and to see their range, visit [www.kloricbd.com](http://www.kloricbd.com).  
The Last Bohemians listeners can use the code LAST20 to get 20% off at checkout.

This episode was produced by Holly Fisher.

With thanks to KLORIS, everyone at the Marina Abramović Institute, Lisson Gallery, Irma Crusat, Laura Martin at Real Life PR, Ali Gardiner, Johan Karlberg, Miles Cumpstey ([www.speedwagon.me](http://www.speedwagon.me)) and Toni and Andy Shaw.

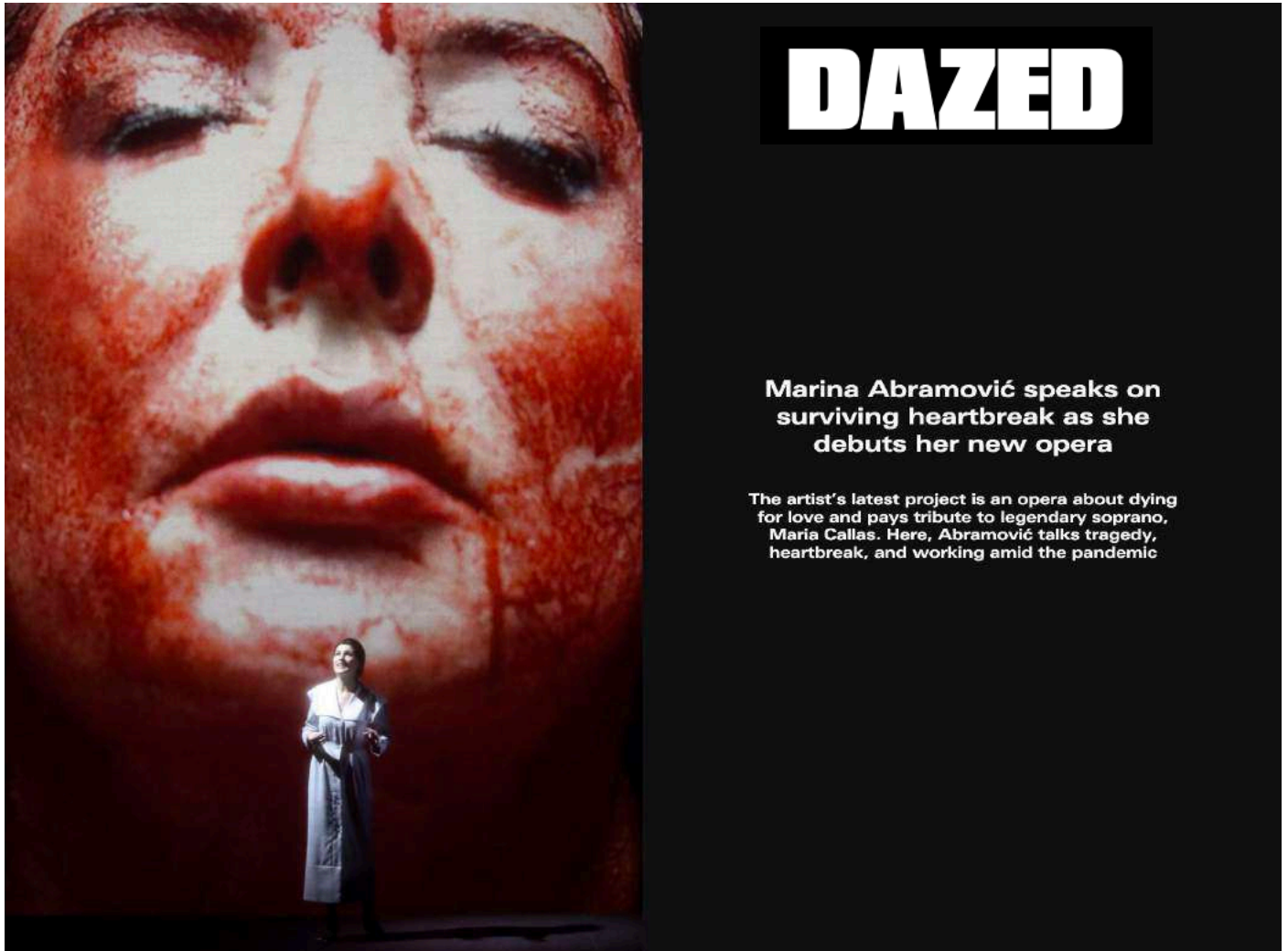
Music used in this episode (all via [freemusicarchive.org](http://freemusicarchive.org)):

Daniel Birch - Indigo Moon  
Daniel Birch - Indigo Shore  
Chad Crouch - Algorithms  
Lobo Loco - Deepest Breath  
Salakapakka Sound System - Kapina Tiibetissa  
Siddhartha Corsus - Victory of Buddha  
Sputnic - Spiritual Dreams  
Tortue Super Sonic - Klezmer Uno



DAZED

3 September 2020



Marina Abramović was 14-years-old when she first heard the devastatingly beautiful voice of Maria Callas, and it's haunted her ever since. In conversation with Nikolaus Bachler, the director of the Bayerische Staatsoper, she recalled, "I don't know what I was doing, but I was in the kitchen with my grandmother, and I remember that I froze. Literally, time stopped, nothing was moving. I put the radio on maximum and this voice was just filling the space... there was electricity in the air."

For anyone unfamiliar with Maria Callas, she is widely regarded as one of the most influential opera singers of all time. Her reputation as the original diva ("La Divina"), her so-called temperamental behaviour, and the romantic scandals that so publicly dogged her private life, have become almost as much a part of Callas' enduring mythology as her celebrated voice. The fated love affair with Greek shipping magnate, Aristotle Onassis (which destroyed her marriage, and, according to speculation, continued to dominate her heart even when Onassis married John F. Kennedy's widow Jackie Kennedy) was one of the great sources of sadness of Callas' relatively short life.

Based on an idea she first had more than 30 years ago, Abramović's latest work is an opera that pays tribute to Callas' life and her transcendent talent. Munich's Bayerische Staatsoper (the Bavarian State Opera) is hosting 7 Deaths of Maria Callas, an opera featuring seven vocalists each embodying a different on-stage incarnation of the legendary soprano.



*7 Deaths of Maria Callas* moves through the dramatic climax of seven arias, focusing on the moments of her on-stage death. Abramović concludes the show herself by enacting the real death of Callas (who died alone of a heart attack in 1977, in the grand Paris apartment where she'd spent her last years living in exile and isolation). As a hugely multi-media production, it includes elements of new music, performance, and video, includes costumes by Burberry's chief creative officer, [Riccardo Tisci](#), and films featuring [Willem Dafoe](#) as Abramović's recurring assassin (a figure who represents Aristotle Onassis – the man who Abramović conceptualises as the personification of her heartbreak).

Below, I talk to Abramović about surviving heartbreak, death, and her lifelong affinity with Maria Callas.



**This particular project, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, has really captured my imagination. You've carried this idea with you for 30 years. Why is it such an enduring idea to you? And, why now, after all these years, is it the right time to make this work?**

**Marina Abramović:** I had the idea for a long, long time because I was very much touched by Maria Callas. I had a very similar experience of a broken heart as she did. She died but I didn't die, and my work really saved me after that. I've always wanted to address this problem, and dying for love is something that is always there. As long as human beings exist, we all die. We all have at least one experience of loving so much that we want to die – or, we don't die, but we have broken hearts.

It happened by chance that when we started rehearsal in March for the premiere in April we were struck with Coronavirus. It was a pandemic, everything was closed, and everything stopped. But I didn't want to stop this project because it has nothing to do with viruses and we didn't make the project to be in the same time as the Coronavirus moment.

In my life, I don't give up easily. Once I want to do something, I have to do it – even if it takes 30 years. To [walk the Great Wall of China](#), it took me eight years to get Chinese permission. *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim took me 12 years. Time doesn't mean anything, but this was the time to do (this opera).

**Has working in the conditions of Coronavirus – the element of risk created by the pandemic – infused the project with an extra kind of energy or urgency?**

**Marina Abramović:** It's very important not to give up to the virus; not to get depressed and not to have a fear of uncertainty. Everybody is so afraid that they can't plan anything; everybody is so afraid of nothing to do; to be with themselves. I really think [we have to have more humour](#) in this whole situation and continue working.

We succeeded with opera rehearsals with social distancing. I've been tested during the rehearsals eight times. The entire opera – 600 people – have been tested every week in this place. Every single person who enters is still wearing a mask, still social distancing, and we're all tested. The Germans took this to another level. In America, you get the test and the results take five to seven days, and it's already old. So we have really great conditions here to actually work with the virus and keep it in perspective.

**Apart from the logistical implications of COVID-19, it's bound to change people's feelings about proximity and intimacy. Obviously a lot of your work involves interactions with an audience. How do you think this may impact your work?**

**Marina Abramović:** This kind of distancing and how differently people relate to each other, it already started long before the virus with technology. All the texting, tweets, Instagrams... young people don't talk to each other. All the dating is online, through computers. It already alienated human beings. When I created The Abramović Method I was especially thinking how important human contact is. Human touch. I think that the virus is finally going to end, like every virus in the history of humanity. If this is going away, are we going to have to go through the same problems and mistakes again? Or will the virus change our perception? I really hope it will change, and we will understand how nature and human contact is important. Also, to go back to simplicity. Everything is too much. We're looking to fashion and art too much. How many artists (are there) whose art has become a commodity? Everything is over the top. We need to get back to simplicity, otherwise we are really lost.

**I'm so interested in the notion of heartbreak and what you've said about how it's such a unifying experience for humans, and that the idea of dying of heartbreak is very close to your heart. Do you think that this is the ultimate fantasy for anyone with a romantic temperament?**

**Marina Abramović:** It's very romantic but, at the same time, it needs to be cured. When you make something about your broken heart and you go through these heavy emotions, you come out the other side healed. Healing is very important to me. One of the effects of this work should be that humans can always project their own feelings into this project and they can heal. The broken heart takes time, but you can come to heal on the other side.

I chose seven operas which Maria Callas sings, seven operas where she dies at the end. And this is dying of tuberculosis in *La traviata*, dying of strangulation in *Othello*, jumping to her death in *Tosca*, a knifing in *Carmen*, burning alive in *Norma*, dying from madness in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and in *Madame Butterfly* she didn't make her killing, she dies in my case from radiation, so I introduce new elements. They all died from different deaths, and then there is the death of Maria Callas herself, which I'm playing the part of. In the end, she disappears and all you have left is the voice. So, the body can die but the voice can actually never die. Once you have such talent and you share it with the people, the people make you live forever. So this was really a work of hope in so many ways.

And I just want to say that, for this production, I have an incredible crew to work with. They've done as much work as me to complete the struggle. We had a really great group of people (see below for full credits). Because this production is a mix between the live performance, live stream, Bavarian State Orchestra, and the video works, so it's mixed media. And, you know, the normal opera is more than three, four, or five hours long but, because dying is so short, this is only one and a half hours.





7 Deaths of Maria Callas at the Bavarian State Opera Photography Wilfried Hösl. Courtesy the Bavarian State Opera

**You describe Maria Callas' voice as being eternal, and you once described the moment you first heard her voice on the radio when you were 14, and how it affected you so profoundly. What was the nature of that affinity you felt?**

**Marina Abramović:** Emotions. An incredible rush of pain that made me cry even though I didn't understand arias – I didn't understand anything. But voice is vibration and that vibration really went into my heart. It was so full of emotions of sadness.

**I find it fascinating your idea that, for Maria Callas, the man who killed her on the opera stage was always, in her heart, Aristotle Onassis, her lover.**

**Marina Abramović:** In my mind, yes, he's the one who's killing her. This is why I chose Willem Dafoe, who is actually killing me over and over again in all those different arias. But, another thing, Riccardo Tisci dresses every singer in a French maid's costume because Maria Callas' maid, Bruna, was very important to her and when she died, she left everything to her. She was the only one who was with her through all this, who witnessed all the pain, and so every singer who sings each different opera is dressed like Bruna. There is one moment when seven Brunas are coming in to clean the room and close it, and that's the end.

**What do you think it is about the moment of death that's so compelling for us as an audience?**

**Marina Abramović:** There are really two different types of death in the public perception. If you look at television news and you see a real death – somebody cut the head off somebody else, or the torture in the wars everywhere around the world, from Syria to Afghanistan. That, we don't like to see. We immediately change the channel because you don't want to have this image in your head. But if you see the stage death in film or in opera, and it's a very beautiful death, then you cry, and you identify with this kind of death. So there are two types of death: really brutal, real death, and death on the stage. It's interesting how humans never want to see reality.





7 Deaths of Maria Callas at the Bavarian State Opera Photography Wilfried Hösl. Courtesy the Bavarian State Opera

**You say in your autobiography, 'Could art, or should art be isolated from life? I began to feel more and more strongly that art must be life.' And I wondered if you had any advice on how we can all bring more art into our own lives every day?**

**Marina Abramović:** I don't have any advice. I think you have to wish it yourself. Nobody can actually pester you that you need more art. It doesn't even mean you need more art or you don't need more art. It's much more important for every human being to live in the present. When you live in the present, you see things differently: you perceive nature differently, you see shadows on the wall differently, and you can see art with absolutely more clear eyes. We always live in the past and future, but we forget the present, but the present is the only reality we have. So when you're really in the present, art offers to you, but you can't do this if you're not in the present or if you just take it intellectually. You have to take art by heart.

**What what do you think we learn from these grand romantic narratives, like the story of Maria Callas?**

**Marina Abramović:** If you have a talent as she had, she didn't have the right to stop, she didn't have the right to destroy her life. That's a strong statement.

*NB. Towards the end of our conversation, Abramović's very personable PR, Lena, joined the call to let us know it was time to round up because Abramović had to leave for her next appointment. We all exchanged thank yous and farewells and, as I hung up, I heard Abramović say, "You must \_\_\_\_" before the line went dead. I'll never know what the end of that sentence was. I'll never know whether she was addressing me or Lena; whether it was something to do with her upcoming meeting or a piece of urgent advice she wanted to impart, but I'll never stop wondering. And one day I may make a piece of performance art called 7 Unfinished Sentences of Marina Abramović, in which I explore seven of the endless speculative configurations of possible conclusions to that tantalising half-finished remark by one of the world's greatest living artists.*

7 Deaths of Maria Callas is running at [Bayerische Staatsoper](#) until September 6 2020

LISSON GALLERY

*Artforum*  
1 May 2020

# ARTFORUM

PASSAGES

## ULAY

Marina Abramović on Ulay



Marina Abramović and Ulay, Amsterdam, 1981.

**ULAY, MY FORMER PARTNER IN LOVE AND ART**, died this year, and I lost a dear friend. He was an exceptional artist and human being who will be sorely missed by all who knew him and his work. We embarked on our private and professional journey together in Amsterdam in 1975. When we first met, on November 30, the date of birth we shared, in many ways we each felt as though we had found our other half. Our meeting was male and female energy coming together to create a third unified element we called "That Self." The nickname we used for each other was Glue, which speaks to the way we viewed our relationship.

We spent many years living in an old Citroën van with our dog, Alba, driving across Europe from one performance to the next. When recalling those years, I think of the total freedom we had. They were some of the happiest years of my life. We made a manifesto representing our values for this period of time, which we called ART VITAL.

#### ART VITAL

No fixed living place  
Permanent movement  
Direct contact  
Local relation  
Self-selection  
Passing limitations  
Taking risks  
Mobil energy

No rehearsal  
No predicted end  
No repetition

Extended vulnerability  
Exposure to chance  
Primary reactions

As wildly compatible as we were, our relationship could also be extremely combusive. Yet, somehow, we managed to harness that energy and use it in our lives and work—work that I'll remain proud of for as long as I live.

We reached the end of our path together on the Great Wall of China in 1988. We each began on one end and spent three months walking toward the other. We met in the middle to say goodbye, concluding our personal and professional journey.

Over the years that followed, we reappeared in each other's lives frequently, and we remained friends until the end.

Ulay was a genuine artist. He never compromised and never shied away from the truth, however uncomfortable it might be. This was an ideology we had in common, and it brought us together in the first place.

He was as dedicated to his art as he was to the people close to him. We have had our share of clashes through the years, but all that remains today is love and gratitude.

Marina Abramović is an artist based in New York.



*The Guardian*  
25 April 2020



China  
holidays

David Bramwell

Sat 25 Apr 2020  
07.00 BST



790

## The bittersweet story of Marina Abramović's epic walk on the Great Wall of China



▲ Divide and rule .... the Great Wall of China, the setting in 1988 of an extraordinary performance art piece.  
Photograph: Getty Images

In 1988 Abramović and Ulay trekked from opposite ends of the wall to meet in the middle, but this act of love and performance art was doomed from the start

From the moment in 1976 that Serbian and German performance artists [Marina Abramović](#) and Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen, who [died last month](#) aged 76) clapped eyes on each other they were inseparable. Ulay found Abramović witchy and otherworldly; she found him wild and exciting. Even their initial encounter was propitious: they met in Amsterdam on their shared birthday of 30 November.

The pair began to perform together, describing themselves as a “two-headed body”. For years they lived a nomadic lifestyle, travelling across Europe in a corrugated iron van and performing in villages and towns. Their artistic collaborations matched their personalities: they focused on performances that put them in precarious and physically demanding situations, to see how they and their audience would respond. In one, called *Relation in Time*, they remained tied together by their hair for 17 hours. They explored conflict, taking their ideas to extremes: running full pelt into each other, naked, and slapping each other’s faces until they could take no more.

One of their pieces, *Rest Energy*, performed in Dublin in 1980, saw them balance each other on opposite sides of a drawn bow and arrow, with the arrow pointed at Abramović’s heart; one slip from Ulay and he could have killed her. Uncomfortable viewing, this was relationship therapy played out as art - and, perhaps, vice versa.



▲ Marina and Ulay perform *Rest Energy* in 1980. Photograph: Gryf/Alamy



In 1983, Abramović and Ulay announced their ultimate collaboration: *The Lovers*. They proposed to be the first people to walk the Great Wall of China. Setting off alone from opposite ends, they planned to meet in the middle, where they would marry. Exhilarated by the emotional and physical scale of *The Lovers*, the pair imagined themselves walking alone across great expanses of the Chinese landscape, camping under the stars and concluding the journey with the ultimate commitment. They saw *The Lovers* as an odyssey and a performance in which they alone would be both players and audience.



Eager to prepare, and ever-practical, Ulay laid in a year's supply of dried tofu and seaweed, together with tents and camping stoves. What the pair were less prepared for, however, was Chinese bureaucracy. The Beijing authorities struggled to comprehend the pair's motives for the journey. No one camped or walked the Great Wall as an "art project". And who in their right minds would want to get married on it? Paper trails were endless. Permissions and visas were granted then denied. The pair were told that it would be too dangerous to do the walk alone and they would be required to have an accompanying crew. As phone calls, letters and documents were fired back and forth between China and the artists, years rolled by.



In 1986, they went to China to visit parts of the Great Wall, to familiarise themselves with it and meet some of the villagers they would be staying with. Permission was finally granted for the walk to take place the following year. Then, inexplicably, the authorities postponed it again. A frustrated Ulay confessed: "I have been living with the wall in my thoughts for five years. Already I feel I have walked it 10 times. Already it is worn, it is polished."

Finally, having also agreed to participate in a film of their "study" of The Great Wall for Chinese Central Television, they were granted permission.

Abramović and Ulay began their walks on 30 March 1988, from either end of the Great Wall, known to the Chinese as The Sleeping Dragon. Abramović, set off westwards from the dragon's head at the Bohai Sea, an extension of the Yellow Sea between China and the Korean peninsula. Dressed in baggy red clothes, she was given the nickname Pa Ma Ta Je - big fat sister mother.

Much of her trek proved arduous. Abramović was walking through the mountainous regions of eastern China. On such difficult and inaccessible terrain, she had to watch every step. On her fourth day, after slipping on rocks as slippery as polished ice, Abramović and her guide found themselves hanging by their fingertips over an abyss. She found homes and stables built into sections of the winding wall, and other parts that had been dismantled by locals who, under Mao's encouragement to "kill the dragon", had removed the clay and stones to build with. Once, Abramović claimed to have walked through a kilometre of human bones. Her accommodation in villages and hostels each night was often a two-hour trek from the wall.





▲ Marina Abramović found much of the walk arduous. Photograph: publicdelivery.org



At every village she stayed in, Abramović asked to meet its oldest resident and for them to share a local legend. Inevitably these were dragon stories, often related to the wall itself. While built more than a 1,000 years as a defence against invaders from the north and west, the serpentine spine of the Great Wall had been carefully mapped out by geomancers for its “dragon energy”. Abramović would occasionally find copper pots placed along the wall, as energy spots: acupuncture points to control the forces that rippled up and down the creature’s back.

Five thousand kilometres west of Abramović, Ulay had started his walk at the dragon’s tail in the Gobi Desert. Moustachioed and lean, with long hair and matching bright-blue drawstring trousers and cape, Ulay would have looked to a westerner every bit the bohemian traveller. Most of his journey would be spent trekking through China’s deserts. Rickshaws and donkeys were familiar sights, as were camels pulling ploughs. Ulay crossed the great Yellow River on a raft covered with sheepskins and, like Abramović, saw families living in caves within the wall itself. He managed to sleep under the stars some nights, while his bemused crew watched over him from their jeeps. Most of the time, however, Ulay also had to sleep in nearby villages. While the simplicity of the trek stirred Ulay’s soul, its fragmentation by bureaucracy and restrictions meant it was not the romantic sojourn the pair had dreamed of.





To the Chinese who encountered the artists, they were of great curiosity. Having originally believed themselves to be the sole players and audience for their walk, they found everything they did was witnessed as if a performance. In towns and villages, silent crowds followed them wherever they went. In one settlement, villagers gathered to watch Abramović sleep. When she awoke, a different group were present, silently observing her.

More by happenstance than planning, Ulay and Abramović met at the centre of a stone bridge in Shenmu in Shaanxi province, among a series of temples built in the Ming dynasty. They had averaged 20km a day, walked 90 days and covered roughly 2,000km each. As they embraced affectionately, Ulay shared with Abramović his desire to continue the walk “forever”. Abramović was unequivocal in her desire to get home. Ulay made a comment about her shoes that seemed to annoy her; to his irritation she began to cry.

While musicians, the Chinese press and even a fireworks display had been laid on for the pair, there would be no wedding ceremony. After a press conference in Beijing, they returned separately to Amsterdam and didn’t speak or see one another for 22 years. What had gone wrong?





▲ Ulay and Marina approach each other at the end of their trek. Photograph: publicdelivery.org



In the five years that Ulay and Abramović had been waiting for permission for the walk, their lives had changed irrevocably. Their work had become internationally renowned. Abramović was fed up with being the archetypal poor artist, so she welcomed the success, but Ulay had no interest in celebrity. An anarchist who enjoyed solitude, he rebelled against what he saw as a growing commercialisation of their work. In short, they had grown apart. Both had had affairs; communication and trust had broken down.

Ulay and Abramović were not, however, the kind of couple to be easily defeated. They decided to go ahead with the walk, not in order to marry but to spilt up. The Lovers transformed from wedding to divorce. “Why didn’t you just make a phone call and break up like normal people?” one friend allegedly quipped. Because that simply wasn’t their style.



▲ Marina and Ulay finally meet on the wall. Photograph: publicdelivery.org



To the Chinese, the dragon is an auspicious symbol, representing strength, good fortune and the elemental forces of nature. **Walking** the dragon's spine had, for Ulay and Abramović, been intended as a great motif for transcending the barriers that divide us - it was to be a totem of love and reconnection. Instead, the wall came to represent a division in myriad forms, not just physical but also the political barriers they then perceived between east and west, as well as the emotional barriers that had grown between the pair. Since planning to walk the wall, their differences had become more apparent and more difficult to reconcile. Abramović embraced the growing success of their work; Ulay withdrew from it.

Unlike in China, the dragon in western mythology is perceived as a symbol of malevolence, a destructive creature to be hunted down and destroyed. Abramović claimed that the idea for *The Lovers* came to her in a dream, a vision in which the pair would wake a sleeping dragon through their epic walk. They had, it seemed, woken the wrong dragon.

Over the next two decades, Abramović's work continued to reach larger and larger audiences; her celebrity grew. Her work inspired Lady Gaga and Jay-Z, she made adverts for Adidas and she came to be known as "the grandmother of performance art".



▲ Ulay and Marina sit opposite each other in 2010's *The Artist is Present*. Photograph: Patrick McMullan/Getty Images



In 2010, at a New York Museum of Modern Art retrospective of her work entitled [The Artist Is Present](#), Abramović sat for eight hours a day - 750 hours in total - in silence, at a table. Members of the public were invited to come, sit and hold her gaze. They were kept two metres apart at opposite ends of a table. Contact was not permitted. The show was spiritual and cathartic for some, pretentious and self-indulgent to others. Many queued for hours for the opportunity to sit opposite Abramović for a few minutes or, in a few cases - and to the irritation of those in the queue - the whole day.

One moment, however, was to capture the world's attention and amass close to 20 million views on YouTube. On the opening night of the show, [Ulay made a surprise appearance, stepping from the audience to sit and face his former lover](#). He nervously stretches his legs, adjusts his jacket and, as Abramović opens her eyes to see him, the pair smile. It is the first time in 22 years that they have seen each other. Tears fill their eyes.

Finally Abramović, in a flowing blood-red dress, leans across the two-metre division and - breaking her own rule of non-contact - takes Ulay's hands. Onlookers begin to applaud. It is impossible to watch this moment without also being moved to tears. After their arduous journey and a long time apart, they are finally reunited. A new dragon is awakened. Intimacy is rekindled.

While their separation was a choice, ours - for now - remains a necessity. In time, physical intimacy will return to us all. And with it, perhaps, the opportunity for us all to awaken a new dragon.



*Financial Times*  
21 November 2019

## FINANCIAL TIMES

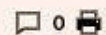
### Christie's to auction Marina Abramovic Mixed Reality artwork

Hologram will be first of its kind at auction; Los Angeles fair eyes the competition; China's art in Abu Dhabi



Watching Marina Abramovic's 'The Life' (2019) at the Serpentine © Harry Richards Photography

Melanie Gerlis YESTERDAY



A sophisticated hologram by the performance artist [Marina Abramovic](#) which was originally unveiled at London's Serpentine Galleries in February will be auctioned at Christie's for about £600,000 next year. Abramovic's "The Life" (2019) recreates the artist in Mixed Reality, meaning that she is viewable through specialist eyewear, but — unlike in Virtual Reality — the outside world remains visible.

The 19-minute work involves Abramovic, dressed in red, appear to pace around her viewers. It was variously described in the press as "a pointless perversion" (The Guardian) and "radical . . . strangely riveting" (Evening Standard) when it landed in London in February.



“The Life” took 32 cameras to create and is the first work of its kind to appear at auction. Its sellers are the artist (through Abramovic LLC) with Tin Drum, a Mixed Reality production studio founded by Todd Eckert, who directed the film. There are three editions of the work, plus one Artist’s Proof (which Abramovic will keep).

It is unusual for an auction house to sell a work straight from the artist; that primary market is traditionally the preserve of their representing galleries. Christie’s specialist Stefano Amoretti acknowledges the auction house’s redefined role but believes that “you have to push boundaries in the contemporary market”. “The Life” will be a highlight of Christie’s Frieze Week sales in London next October and will coincide with a retrospective of Abramovic’s work that opens next September at the Royal Academy.

*Evening Standard*  
21 February 2019

**EveningStandard.**

Lifestyle › ES Magazine

## Marina Abramović: The Life is the world's first mixed-reality art experience

Currently showing at the Serpentine Gallery

**JULIANA PISKORZ** | Thursday 21 February 2019 16:17 |  0 comments



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ES Magazine



*Images courtesy of Marina Abramović and Tin Drum*

**Marina Abramović's** new exhibition is weird. Radical performance art is what Abramović is known for and her latest work is no exception.

Showing at the **Serpentine Gallery** until February 24, *Marina Abramović: The Life* is billed as the world's first mixed reality art experience. More on what the hell that means later...

On arrival visitors are guided into a room by an assistant dressed in a white lab coat and relieved of all their possessions. No phones. No bags. Nothing.

More white coat-clad assistants will then fit you with a VR headset and guide you by the hand to the main exhibition. The whole effect is quite disconcerting. You're then steered towards a round antechamber filled with other visitors seemingly engrossed in nothing. Black squares calibrate the headset and in the centre of the room flashes the life sized figure of Abramović. Dressed in vermillion red, her dark hair tumbling down her back, the virtual apparition is momentarily startling against the expanse of white background.

**Mixed reality** combines Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality so you're able to see a virtual image within a real physical space. "This experiment is just the beginning," said Abramović in a press release. "I hope that many other artists will follow me and continue to pioneer Mixed Reality as an art form."



Since the beginning of her career in Belgrade in the 1970s, Abramović has continually pushed the boundaries of performance art, exploring her own physical and mental limits. During her 1974 'Rhythm 5' performance she lost consciousness after leaping into a blazing fire, the observing audience only realised she was in danger as the flames began licking her inert body.

'The Life' is distinctly less dramatic. The 19-minute performance consists of Abramović pacing a circle, gazing down at her arms and making ethereal gestures before disappearing in a cloud of sparkly blue dots. Despite its slow pace, there is something unsettling about the lifelike click-clacking of her shoes on the stone floor in contrast with the blurry holographic outline. I had an eerie feeling as if I were being watched by a ghost.

Nothing much happens in the 19 minutes, but this uncanny absence is strangely riveting. I leave feeling meditative, with a sense that I've gazed at nothing and everything at the same time.





Of course, this is the point. The exhibition examines Abramović's long-standing fascination with the notion of material absence. "The fact that the project can be repeated anywhere in the world while I am not there is mind-blowing. I can be present in any spot on the planet," says Abramović.

There are no flames or knives or bits of flying toe nail in Abramović's latest instalment; 'The Life' is an altogether quieter, more cerebral experience.

*Marina Abramović: The Life at the Serpentine Gallery. February, 19 - February, 24. Entrance is free but visitors will have to pre-book online.* ■

More about: [Marina Abramovich](#) | [Art](#) | [Virtual Reality](#) | [Serpentine Gallery](#) | [Girl Interrupted](#) | [The Life](#) | [The Matrix](#)



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*i News UK*

18 February 2019



by  
**Hettie Judah**

2 weeks

Monday February 18th 2019

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## Marina Abramovic - The Life, Serpentine Gallery: 'a slow, minimal, intimate encounter with a virtual Abramovic'

The performance artist has created her first work using augmented reality



Marina Abramovic. Image courtesy of Marina Abramović and Tin Drum

**Marina Abramovic - The Life**  
**Serpentine Gallery, London**

★★★★

**Marina Abramović** has long referred to herself as “the grandmother of performance art.” It’s matriarchal, but also a reminder she got here first. Performance art is her territory: be careful where you tread.

The Belgrade-born artist started performing internationally in the 1970s with works that were dramatic, emotional and often caused her harm from weapons, drugs or toxic fumes. For the memorial performance *Balkan Baroque*, staged at the Venice Biennale in 1997, Abramović sat on a pile of stinking cow bones, singing as she attempted to scrub each of them clean.

Read more: **[Marina Abramovic, interview - 'I want to live to 103, at least'](#)**

More recently, her work has focused on higher spiritual notions: mindfulness, presence and energy. For ***The Artist Is Present*** (2010) Abramović sat face to face with visitors at MoMA in New York for three months. In ***512 Hours*** (2014) at Serpentine Gallery, visitors shed their baggage at the door and shared the performance space with her, wearing noise-cancelling headphones, counting grains of rice, and clearing their minds. It was a sensation, attracting almost 130,000 visitors.

Now aged 72, Abramović has been pondering the question of legacy. Performance art doesn’t give much durable, saleable product. Over the years, she has photographed and filmed works and has even trained younger artists to deliver performances for her, but there are limits. Even the seated work at MoMA was a feat of endurance you could not demand of another.

It’s not hard to see, then, the attraction of new technologies that offer presence made immortal. Debuting on Monday at the Serpentine – and playing for one week only – ***The Life*** is the artist’s first work in mixed (aka augmented) reality. A squadron of specialised assistants, out of a futuristic laboratory, fit you with a headset and walk you into the gallery’s central rotunda space.





Everything looks normal – you can see fellow visitors, your body, the quality of light in the room – the only difference is that Abramović is standing in the centre wearing a red dress. Much of the time she is still, or moving through a series of slow ritual gestures. You can walk around the circle to stand in front of her and gaze into her eyes. Toward the end of the 19-minute work, she steps in and out of the central circle, dissolving each time into a shower of light, leaving nothing of herself but a shadow floating on the floor.

*The Life* is not conceived as a game or entertainment: it is slow, minimal and intimate. If you yearn to have been part of *512 Hours* or *The Artist is Present* this is for you. Virtual Abramović is pieced together out of footage from 36 cameras: she's not an animated avatar. We see her actual body going through a 19-minute performance and get to share it with her in real time.

Read more: [\*\*The best exhibitions in 2019, from Van Gogh to Bridget Riley\*\*](#)

Abramović has said that she feels like the first woman on the moon with this technology. This is very much the beginning of something, rather than the ultimate expression of it. And it's true – there are limitations. The artist's image only appears in a central rectangular portion of the goggles' screen. There's still a shimmering, glitchy, feel to the rendering of her.

Unlike a work of theatre, performance art is not conceived and rehearsed with the aim of repeat performances: it's usually a one-shot deal. The repercussions of this technology are thus significant: you can give yourself, blood, sweat and tears, and make the real time experience available in perpetuity.

**Marina Abramovic – The Life** is at Serpentine Galleries, London to 24 February

*Financial Times Magazine*  
20 March 2019

Opinion **FT Magazine**

## Can Magic Leap's 'mixed reality' find the human touch?

The idea that we could be captured for posterity, or teleported for a holographic call, is tantalisingly close

**TIM BRADSHAW**

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© PÂTÉ

Tim Bradshaw MARCH 20, 2019

2

Like many artists, [Marina Abramovic](#) craves immortality. But the very nature of her work poses a unique challenge to achieving this.

Abramovic, a pioneer of performance art since the 1970s, focuses on her own body as both "subject and medium". During 2010's *The Artist is Present*, she sat opposite visitors to New York's Museum of Modern Art, staring into their eyes in total silence, every day for three months. For 2014's *512 Hours*, she led visitors by the hand around London's Serpentine Gallery in a strange hybrid of group meditation and interactive theatre.

Other artists can leave behind a canvas or a sculpture but Abramovic's experience is more intimate. Once her performances end, they are impossible to relive. "I am mortal," the 72-year-old told me when we met at the Serpentine last month. "That's a really big deal."

This was the first time I had met Abramovic, but it did not quite feel like it. Just a few minutes earlier, I was one of two-dozen people standing in the gallery watching her pace methodically around a small circular podium. Then, without any warning or dramatic special effects, her body dissolved into thin air.

This may not have been the "real" Abramovic, but her virtual twin appeared solid, tangible and in all three dimensions. I could walk around the podium until I stood eye to eye with her. I could hear her footsteps as her ghostly shadow passed me, before she reappeared again on the other side of the room.



Yana Peel, CEO of the Serpentine Galleries, at the premier of 'The Life' © Harry Richards

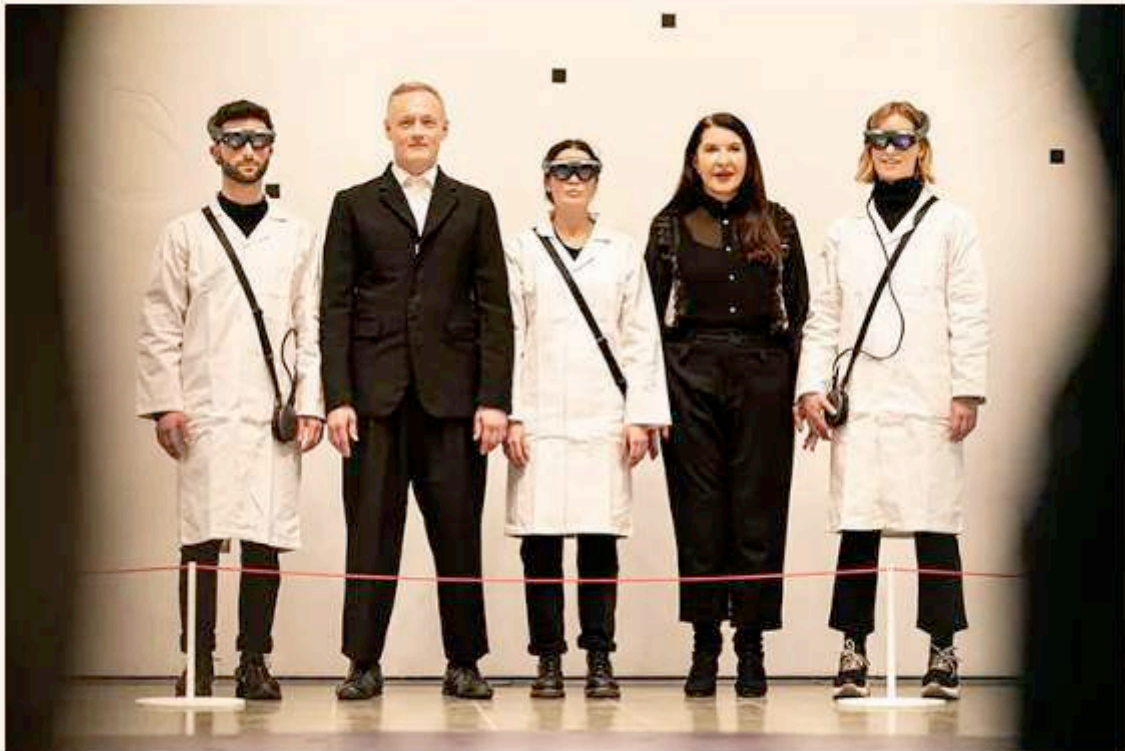


Along with the rest of the audience, I was wearing a [Magic Leap](#) “mixed reality” headset. I have been following this Florida-based start-up, which raised a staggering \$2bn before it released its first product, for several years. But the Abramovic installation was the first time I had tested the company’s technology for myself.

Early teaser videos posted by Magic Leap on YouTube showed a whale breaching in a school gymnasium and a shootout with killer robots invading an office. Initially, *Marina Abramovic: The Life* seemed a rather sedate, even anticlimactic affair — a woman in a red dress doing not very much. Gradually, though, the minimalist, meditative performance won me over. That I was one of several real people experiencing the same collective hallucination only made it feel more vivid.

If mixed-reality technology is going to succeed — and most of Silicon Valley is betting that it will — it needs to work on a level that is human, as well as spectacular. As Abramovic explained, “Our world is full of scary stuff. We need the quietness, the tranquillity and ordinariness of everyday life.”

According to Todd Eckert, whose production studio [Tin Drum](#) worked on the installation, creating this kind of piece is far more challenging than letting off digital fireworks. “If you volumetrically capture sword fighting, it’s just motion, so you don’t have the time to contemplate the reality of the form,” he says. “To have a slow, authentic connection between artist and audience is probably the hardest thing we could have come up with. We had to invent all sorts of tools to make it work.”



Marina Abramovic, Todd Eckert (both in black) with three of the specially trained attendants from her "The Life" exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery (© Harry Richards)

Even networking together more than 20 Magic Leap headsets to view the same digital object was a first. Months earlier, Abramovic had spent three days surrounded by video cameras that could volumetrically capture her in 360 degrees. Each minute of recording took 10 hours to render into a three-dimensional image. Her matte make-up and the fabric of her dress had to be chosen carefully to ensure there were no reflections that could break the illusion.

Tools and techniques for such realistic 3D imagery are unlikely to be available to most of us anytime soon. Magic Leap's headset alone costs \$2,295. Still, the idea that any of us could be captured for posterity, or even teleported for a sort of holographic FaceTime call, is tantalisingly close. "The first time I saw it, it was a very intense experience," Abramovic said. "You are seeing me — and what is going to be left of me."

Immortality is going to take some getting used to.

Forbes  
30 June 2018

# Forbes

JUN 30, 2018 @ 06:55 PM 319

The Little Black Book of Billionaire Secrets

## Marina Abramovic On Why She's 'Under Pressure To Open Roads For Every Great Female Artist'



**Ann Binlot**, CONTRIBUTOR

*I bring creativity and culture from around the globe to you.* [FULL BIO](#) ✓

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Ann Binlot  
*Five Stages of Maya Dance by Marina Abramovic at Masterpiece London*

Visitors to [Masterpiece](#), the “unmissable art fair,” which runs through July 4 at the grounds of the historic Royal Hospital Chelsea, will be greeted by the artist Marina Abramovic through a presentation by Factum Arte in collaboration with Lisson Gallery at the fair’s entrance that’s a sneak peek of what’s to come for her 2020 exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. A film of the legendary performance artist is currently being projected over a curtain of smoke that visitors will walk through. Inside, a series of five alabaster portraits titled “Five Stages of Maya Dance”. When visitors walk around each work, they’ll see it diminish into merely pieces projecting from a flat surface. I spoke to Abramovic about the work, and why she needs it to help fund her Royal Academy show.



### ***On the Genesis of Five Stages of Maya Dance:***

You know I work with Factum Arte, which is a really interesting place. You give them the idea and they find the solution how to do it, so I want to do something material, but also something immaterial, but a very old material, like alabaster. And then we come up with this idea where you can see the image, but the image disappears, so it has some kind of filmic quality when you're moving in and out. Then we had an idea that we present this first work in Masterpiece, because we have to raise the funds for my show in the Royal Academy, and this is this also building, and we need somebody to produce, so hopefully we sell this masterpiece to invest in the new show, so that's the reason why I'm here, and they give me centerpiece, which I'm very proud and happy, and then we decided to make something immaterial that just goes through my face, so people understand that they don't pass because they are afraid. My body belongs to everybody, because I'm doing work that's performance, and it's immaterial, and to present immateriality, the best way is like this...We all will actually will end in the dust at the end of our lives, so why not experience now?

### ***On the Reports That She Will Shock Herself For The 2020 Royal Academy Exhibition:***

This is fake news.

### ***What Her Royal Academy Exhibition Means for Female Artists:***

What I wanted to do with my show — I don't want a retrospective — right now I have the same retrospective, in different museums. I want really to show — his will be 50 years of my career, and I am first artist, woman to have all this space, which has never happened, so I have so much responsibility, and I'm also under pressure to open roads for every great female artist after me, because this has to change.

### ***On the Plans for Her Royal Academy Exhibition:***

I don't want it to be chronological, I want to have that conversation between different works in my life and I want to present 40 percent new works, so this is one of the new works that I'm going to be doing, and there's going to be much more — and I can't tell you, because the show is 2020, and I can't open all the secrets.

*The Art Newspaper*  
7 March 2018



## THE ART NEWSPAPER

### **Marina Abramovic turns Seven Deaths project into an opera to debut in Munich in 2020**

Artist will direct the production, which was originally conceived as a cinematic tribute to her lifelong hero Maria Callas

ANNY SHAW

7th March 2018 10:56 GMT



MORE



Almost 30 years after she first conceived the idea, Marina Abramovic is to finally realise her Seven Deaths project. The Belgrade-born artist has turned the work into an opera, which she will direct herself. The production is due to debut at the Munich Opera House in 2020, with plans for it to tour to Covent Garden in London.

The project will see Abramovic play her lifelong hero Maria Callas dying in seven operas including including *Madame Butterfly*, who stabbed herself, and *Tosca*, who jumped to her death from a parapet. Abramovic's performances will be filmed and screened as part of the new production. "I have been thinking about this romantic idea of dying for love for a long time," she says, adding that Callas "died of a broken heart".

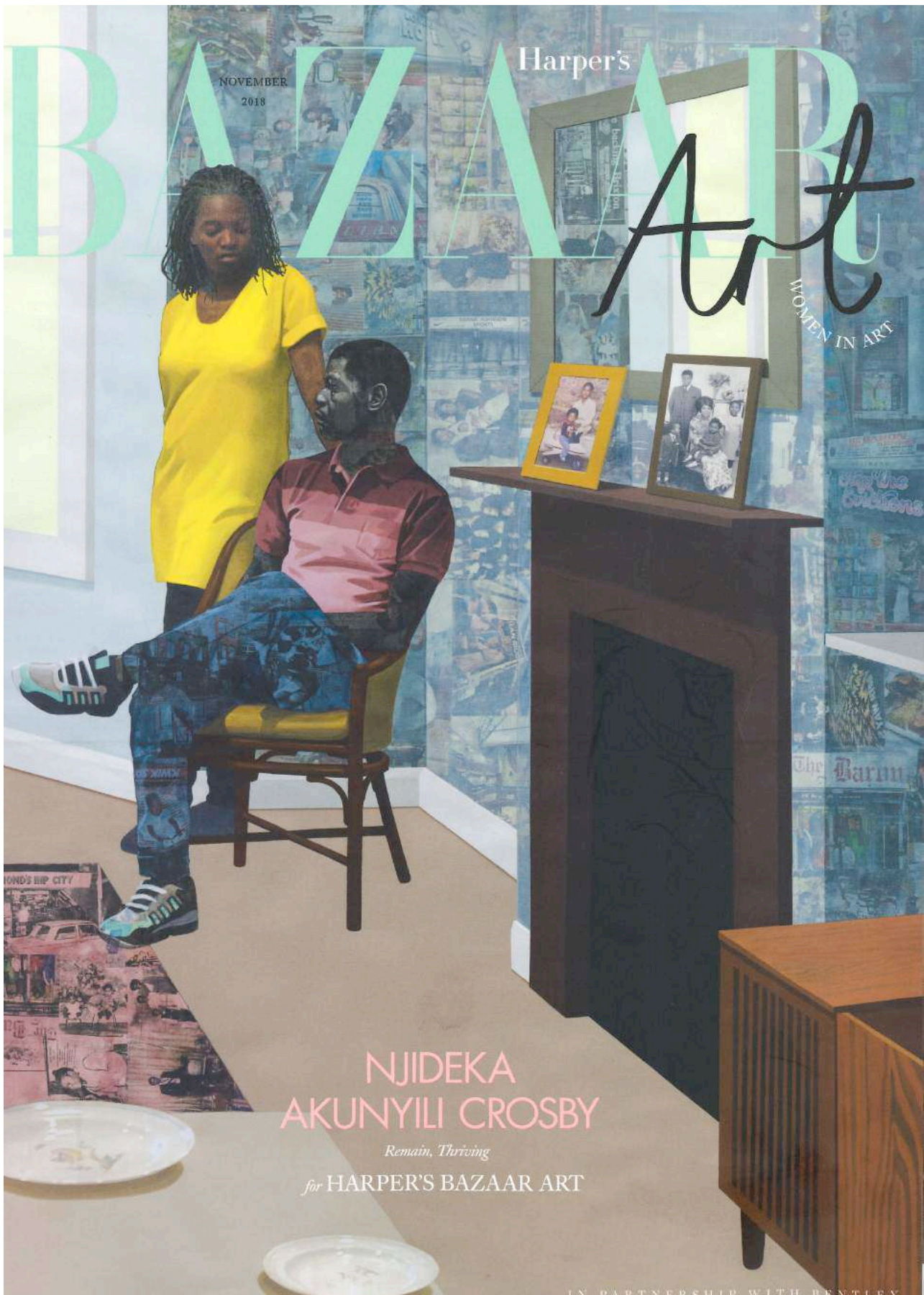
The original plan had been to employ seven of the biggest film directors in the world to each direct one death scene and create a series of ten-minute videos. By the end of 2014, Roman Polanski, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Marco Brambilla, Giada Colagrande and Yorgos Lanthimos had all agreed, but Polanski and Iñárritu were later reported to be no longer working on the project. The Norwegian writer Petter Skavlan has written the script, which is now being adapted for opera.

Abramovic is no stranger to death, tackling the subject in her theatrical work, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic*, which premiered at the Manchester International Festival in 2011. Now aged 71, Abramovic says she is constantly thinking about her mortality. "I am so conscious that this is the last part of my life. How much time do you really have, and how do you translate what you have done in your life for future generations. This concerns me a lot," she says.



# LISSON GALLERY

*Harpers Bazaar*  
October 2018





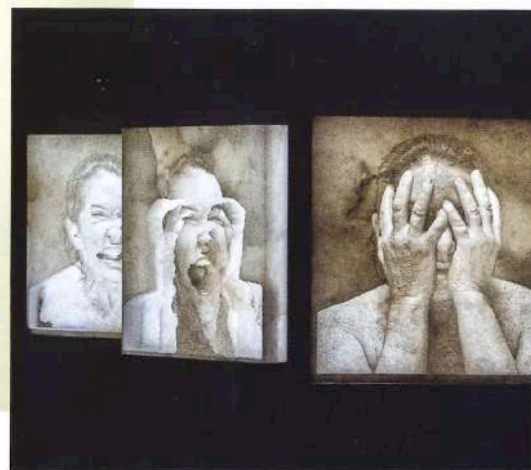
ARTIST  
INTERVIEW

# Playing with fire

After more than four decades setting alight the world of performance art, the legendary Marina Abramovic remains fearless in her groundbreaking work, and is now preparing to become the first ever woman to take over the Royal Academy's Main Galleries

BY HELENA LEE

*'Artist Portrait With a Candle' from the Places of Power series (2013). Right and above right: 'Five Stages of Maya Dance' (2018)*



*'The Kitchen Table: A Marriage' (2009)*

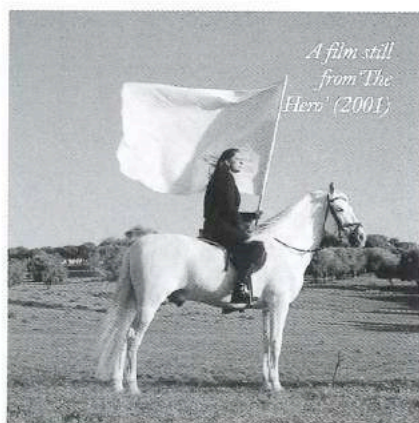
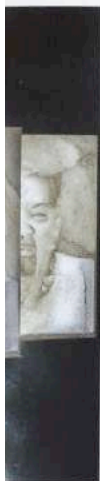
On a brutally hot morning in June, the Serbian artist Marina Abramovic is sitting in the cool of her suite at the Dorchester hotel eating porridge. Next to a glass of water are 13 pills and, on the table, a collection of invitations fanned out before her: Elton John's Argento ball, the opening party at Masterpiece art fair... An assistant busies himself, advising on the timings of the day. She is in London on a flying visit from New York, as she is being honoured by the British Friends of the Art Museums of Israel and the auction house Dorotheum at their prestigious annual gala lunch. Later, when we leave the hotel together, the celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck asks for a selfie, and as we cross the road, there are gasps, nudges and surreptitious pictures from her fans and admirers. Abramovic commands attention beyond that of an artist; it feels as if I am in the presence of a rock star.

Her rise has been exponential, and she is still on the ascent. When she began her career nearly five decades ago in Tito's Yugoslavia hoping to become a painter, success seemed improbable. Then, she began exploring immaterial performance art, which, by its very nature comparatively few would see, but many would hear about. This was the woman who, in 1973, cut a five-pointed star (the symbol of communism) in her stomach, whipped herself and lay on a cross made from a block of ice. A year later, she stood in a Naples gallery in front of 72 objects and invited the public to use them on her. The objects ranged from a rose and lipstick to razor blades and a loaded gun.

And this is how Abramovic has always done things; she makes her own rules, defies expectation. Her career has been characterised by



dogged commitment, pushing the physical and mental limits of human capability. Eight years ago, her show at MoMA, 'The Artist Is Present', was a sensation, attracting 850,000 visitors, including Björk, Lady Gaga and Isabella Rossellini, many of whom queued for hours for a chance to sit opposite her and look into her eyes. In preparation, she spent a year training herself to avoid eating, drinking and moving during the day and conditioning herself for the three-month stretch. 'Performance is the most difficult form of art,' she tells me, her voice rich and assured like black coffee and her hazel-brown eyes drawing me in. 'It's time-based, it's immaterial, you have to be with your body and your mind in the present. Your relationship and energy with the public is very important. Your mind can't be far off somewhere, so you have to train yourself to be there for them, no matter what. It's a transformative experience because it's direct, it's physical, it's emotional.'



'Black Clouds Coming' (1970)

The emotions concern Abramovic, because this is what makes her work worth doing, what makes it count. 'Technology took us away from these emotions; kids are sitting at the table texting each other messages. All performance is direct contact with a human being as a human being. I like strong emotions; if you suffer, go all the way – suffer, cry, scream, but then if you love, love all the way. Life is to feel, you know?'

Abramovic will be 72 at the end of November, but appears 20 years younger; her long dark hair is swept up into a high ponytail, making a virtue of her pale, luminous and unlined face. She wears her wisdom lightly, offering self-deprecating quips on her outfit, as if slightly unnerved by veering away from her customary black. She is clad in a whimsical pale Marni silk shirt and matching trousers, patterned with gold ribbon, elephants and gummy bears ('They look like Chinese pyjamas,' she says with a touch of woe). It's clear that she looks after herself: she visits southern India once a year for a 21-day retreat, has a personal trainer, pops herbal pills and is about to go to the draconian Lanserhof in Austria ('A hospital spa where they give you a piece of dry bread you have to chew 130 times, and starve you to death'). With such absorption in looking after her mind and body, I wonder whether she would still be prepared to die for her art as she was 45 years ago in Naples? 'The public can genuinely kill you,' she says. 'If you give them the wrong

tools, they behave differently. I've learnt so much in the process – I've got wisdom that I didn't have when I was young. And now I understand that lifting the spirit is the best thing to do.'

'Do you think that's the purpose of your work now?' I ask.

'Yes I do. I've been studying Matisse, and during World War II, when everyone was painting the horror – an exact reflection of what was happening – Matisse was painting flowers. That's lifting the spirit, my dear. You have to think differently.'

Her preoccupation with life and death has evolved but not abated. Is death something she thinks about a lot as she grows older? 'Very much,' she says. 'I think dying is not a disappearance in darkness, but a disappearance in light.' 'Luminosity and lightness on the other side' will form a large part of her

show in 2020 at the RA, where she will take over the institution's Main Galleries – the first woman to do so in its long history. She is conscious that the event will present another milestone in her career; she will be there in person for four months. 'It will be exactly 10 years after "The Artist is Present", and one of the biggest shows in my life,' she says. 'Women have been in the smaller spaces, but few artists get the large ones. And being a woman – it's really about time.'

While she is proud to have that accolade, Abramovic does not call herself a feminist. She has abstained from having children, and has said that art has no gender: 'There are only two categories to me – good art and bad art.' She's conscious of the responsibility of forging a path for women in a male-dominated world, but to her, this means sacrifice. 'It's our fault,' she says emphatically. 'Women have many more strengths than men, but we just don't take our power. I never care, I just take my power. I'm showing females they can do anything they want, it's only that we make our own limits. We don't have limits, we are powerful.'

By 'limits', she means family and children. At the gala afterwards, she'll go on to say: 'We are not ready to sacrifice as much as men, because we want family, we want children, we want love, we want art, we want everything, and guess what? It's not possible.' It's not a fashionable view, but she is adamant that success comes from being single-minded in vision. 'Human beings are divided into originals and the ones who follow. I'm only interested in originals, the ones who create something that a generation will follow, something different, breaking regulations, breaking limits.'

As we walk to lunch, she wants to talk about fashion. She is excited about the Burberry S/S 19 show in September; her close friend and collaborator Riccardo Tisci, who was at Givenchy, recently became the British brand's chief creative officer. Her loyalty to Tisci is absolute. She watched Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's wedding, and admits she was not keen on the dress, which was designed by Givenchy's artistic director Clare Waight Keller. 'It was too simple,' she says. 'Give people the dream!' With that, she is whisked away, leaving us with a sentiment that could be her imperative for life. □

*Marina Abramovic. The Cleaner' runs at Palazzo Strozzi ([www.palazzostrozzi.org](http://www.palazzostrozzi.org)), until 20 January 2019. For more information on BFAMI, visit [www.bfami.org](http://www.bfami.org).*



# LISSON GALLERY

*The Art Newspaper*  
17 February 2017

## THE ART NEWSPAPER





NEWS

### Major retrospective for Marina Abramovic at Moderna Museet

The show will include re-enactments of performances as well as paintings, soundscapes and diaries



Marina Abramović, Stromboli III Volcano (2002) (Image: courtesy of Marina Abramović Archives and Lia Rumma Gallery, Milan. Photo: Paolo Canevari © Marina Abramović)

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MORE 

The first major retrospective of Marina Abramovic's work in Europe opens this weekend at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, celebrating a decades-long career in performance art (18 February-21 May). At a press conference on 16 February, Daniel Birnbaum, the museum's director, said: "Twenty-seven years ago, before her international breakthrough at the Venice Biennale, we had the honour of featuring Marina Abramovic in an exhibition at Moderna Museet."

Called *The Cleaner*, the exhibition contains more than 120 items from the 1960s to the present, including re-enactments of three of the artist's performance pieces. Live performances are presented alongside films, video art, photography and scenography.

Lesser-known aspects of Abramovic's output, such as paintings from the 1960s and soundscapes from the 1970s, are also on display, together with family memorabilia and her childhood diaries. At the press conference Abramovic humorously described the process of revisiting her life and career as "almost depressing".

Born in 1946 in Belgrade, in what was then Yugoslavia, and brought up by politically-engaged parents and her Orthodox grandmother. Abramovic's experience of dogmatic beliefs and strict discipline had a profound impact on her later work. In *Rhythm 5* (1974/2011), however, she sets fire to a five-pointed star—a symbol used in both Communism and Christianity. "I don't care anymore about my bad childhood, I've got good raw material," she said.

For seven days, between 27 February and 5 March, the nearby Eric Ericson Hall will host a new work created in collaboration with the choreographer Lynsey Peisinger, in which Abramovic will perform with 30 performers, 15 singers and 40 different choirs.

The exhibition was organised with Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, and the Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, where the show will travel respectively.

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# APOLLO

THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE

Inside the  
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## BOOKS

### Written in blood

Marina Abramović's memoir offers an intensely personal insight into her life and art, says **Imelda Barnard**

#### Walk Through Walls: A Memoir

Marina Abramović  
Fig Tree, £20  
ISBN 9781101905043

At an Austrian gallery in 1975, Marina Abramović staged the performance *Thomas Lips*, in which she cut a five-pointed star into her stomach using a razor blade. According to Abramović: 'The pain was like a wall I had walked through and come out the other side.' The artist's capacity to overcome limits, be they physical or psychological, is at the heart of her intimate and aptly titled memoir *Walk Through Walls*. Yet it's hard to imagine becoming more intimate with an artist whose work across five decades has so persistently engaged with the personal and in which her body has been both subject and medium. In recent years, Abramović has also become a well-known public figure, thanks to major exhibitions at MoMA and the Serpentine, not to mention her collaborations with Lady Gaga and Jay-Z.

*Thomas Lips* serves as a reminder of Abramović's extreme early work, and a time when she 'yearned to make my own art more visceral'. In *Rhythm 10*, which she performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1973, the artist used 10 knives to stab at the gaps between her spread-out fingers, nicking her skin in the process. The work was a turning point, marking the 'way past painting' that Abramović sought: 'I had experienced absolute freedom - I had felt that my body was without boundaries, limitless... That was the moment that I knew that I had my medium.' *Rhythm 0* (1974), in which Abramović laid out 72 items (including a pistol) and challenged onlookers to do what they wanted to her, signalled the beginning of a lifelong collaboration with her audience.

The freedom Abramović craved was not only from two-dimensional art, but also from Belgrade (where she went to art school) and from her controlling mother. The artist was raised in Yugoslavia under Tito's Communist dictatorship. Her parents were tough war heroes whose 'marriage was like a war';

1. A Marina Abramović performance during 'Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present' at MoMA, New York in 2010



despite material privileges, she was raised in a household with a 'complete lack of love'. Abramović's skill for endurance seems tied to her mother's own self-discipline and ability to withstand pain - 'nobody has, and nobody ever will hear me scream', she told her daughter. Although she married at 24, Abramović ended up back at her mother's house with a strict 10pm curfew.

Abramović met her collaborator and lover Ulay in 1975, and his presence is one of the book's guiding forces. The pair worked together for 12 years, living simply and travelling around Europe in an old Citroën police van - a far cry from Abramović's gilded later life in New York. Their joint works saw them slap each other (*Light/Dark*; 1977), smack their bodies together (*Relation in Space*; 1976) and stand still while Ulay pointed an arrow at Abramović's heart (*Rest Energy*; 1980). She writes touchingly about Ulay, but not without

a degree of theatricality: 'I think we both felt from the outset that there was something historical about our relationship.' The separation that followed their walk across the Great Wall of China follows this dramatic arc.

These early chapters are moving, with Abramović actively using the memoir form to reveal the persona 'I try to keep hidden'. That's not to say there isn't a certain amount of personal mythologising: she is deeply aware of how the book functions as another performance. There are three Marinas, we are told: 'There is the warrior one. The spiritual one. And there is the bullshit one,' and all three are present here. The last persona, 'who thinks everything she does is wrong', is vulnerable and seems at odds with the self-controlled figure that drew 750,000 people through MoMA's doors in 2010. When detailing her love affairs with Ulay and, later, the Italian artist Paolo Canevari who became her husband, Abramović appears emotionally fragile. Her split from Canevari prompts public weeping and breakdowns with friends. Her heartbreak takes her to a forest in Curitiba where a shaman encourages her to scream it out.

Along with shamans, the book features a lot of monks, Sufi masters, meditative retreats, fasting, and lines like 'I love to live in the spaces in between'. The spiritual Marina isn't always easy to digest. Later chapters detailing her post-Venice commercial success (she won the Golden Lion for *Balkan Baroque* in 1997) also chart the excesses of her rising celebrity, such as a private 60th birthday party at the Guggenheim featuring cocktails made with her teardrops. But for all this, there is little ego in Abramović's writing, just as the artist's performances are as much about the audience as herself.

In performance art, Abramović writes, the blood is real, whereas in theatre the blood is ketchup. For an artist whose work and biography are so intertwined, this book succeeds in breaking down the wall between art and life. There's real blood spilt in this memoir.

**Imelda Barnard** is assistant editor of *Apollo*.



Willeke Driemore



Artnet News

7 November 2016

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/right-wing-mistakes-marina-abramovic-dinner-party-for-satanic-ritual-736247>

**artnet**news

## Politics

# Right-Wing Media Mistakes Marina Abramović Dinner Party for Satanic Ritual

'Spirit Cooking' actually just involved learning to make soup.

Alyssa Buffenstein, November 7, 2016



Marina Abramovic in Sao Paulo, Brazil on April 8, 2015. Courtesy of NELSON ALMEIDA/AFP/Getty Images.

A dinner party at Marina Abramović's TriBeCa apartment caused a satanic panic over the weekend, after a leaked email forwarded from the artist to Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta made the rounds on a number of conservative news sites.

Last June, the artist sent [an email invitation](#) to John's brother Tony Podesta, a lobbyist and long-time collector of Abramović's work, to a gathering in honor of significant donors to a kickstarter campaign.



Those who pledged over \$10,000 in support of the Marina Abramović Institute were invited to “Spirit Cooking with Marina Abramović,” an event whose description advertised “A dinner night with Marina during which she will teach you and other backers at this level how to cook a series of traditional soups, which you will all enjoy together. The night will end with the making of a golden ball, a recipe given to Marina in a Tibetan monastery.”

“Spirit Cooking,” Abramović told [Artnews](#) on Friday, was just a “funny name” for a “normal dinner” with about 10 guests, including Tony Podesta. His Clinton-affiliated brother, however, did not make an appearance—and neither did blood, semen, nor breast milk as suggested by alt-right conspiracy theorists.

The title, which right-wing media has read as a “[sex cult](#)” or a “[bizarre occult ritual](#),” refers to a series of performances from the 1990s, in which Abramović used pig’s blood to write phrases like “Fresh morning urine sprinkle over nightmare dreams,” or “with a sharp knife cut deeply into the middle finger of your left hand eat the pain,” on the walls of museums. In 1996, she also created an “[aphrodisiac cookbook](#)” of the same name.



A YouTube video of the performance taking place at the Zerynthia Associazione per L'arte Contemporanea in Paliano, Italy was hit with a slew of confused commenters over the weekend. Conspiracy theorist and “media analyst” Mark Dice wrote, “illuminati psychos. Podesta and Hillary, what else do you expect?”

Defending herself, Abramović maintains the truth about her work, which deals more with an aesthetically-provocative spirituality than with satan-worshipping cults, can be found in her memoirs.

“I’m outraged, because this is taken completely out of my context,” she said. “Anybody who wants can read my memoirs and find out that [my work] is far away from Satanism.”



THE SUNDAY TIMES

# Suffering for her art

Being Marina Abramovic is a painful business

## MEMOIR

**Michael Prodger**

**WALK THROUGH WALLS** A Memoir  
by **MARINA ABRAMOVIC**

*Fig Tree £20 pp370*

If ever proof were needed that artists are usually the last people qualified to talk about their own work, this memoir provides it. Marina Abramovic is the world's most celebrated performance artist, not a hotly contested position it is true, and a woman who embodies a perfectly contemporary type of celebrity: she might be fêted for her displays of painful endurance, but she has also taught Lady Gaga, performed with Jay Z, been referenced in *Sex and the City*, designed shows, modelled for Givenchy and won a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale.

Her 2010 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in which she sat stock still all day, every day, without food or drink, for three months (736 hours in all), staring in silence at the audience in front of her, was visited by 850,000 people. Her work can have a visceral effect: this piece saw people enter meditative states and frequently burst into tears. Whether this is what she intended remains a mystery; she never goes much beyond stating that "the audience and the performer make the piece together". Considering how much reflection her work induces and how much time she has to think while performing, she is remarkably unreflective.

Abramovic, it seems, was always going to be an artist. The daughter of Serbian partisans who fought with Tito in the war, she grew up in Belgrade adored by her

father and disliked by her mother. Within the first few pages many of the elements that would come to define her work are in

place: she was frequently slapped as a child, "one of my greatest fears has always been of blood — my own blood"; she would counter migraines by training herself to lie still for long


periods of time; and she tried to break her nose to look more like Brigitte Bardot. Gawky, self-ashamed, wearing "socialistic glasses" and orthopaedic footwear: "What happened? Art happened."

The work she developed, first by herself and then with her lover, the German artist Ulay, was unsurprisingly focused on pain. This is a book that will induce queasiness in even the strongest stomachs: she variously cuts a pentagram into her midriff, lies on ice to the point of passing out, stabs her fingers repeatedly with a knife, runs full tilt into walls, lies inside a flaming wooden star, invites an audience to use any of 72 objects (ranging from a feather to a loaded pistol) on her, and sits on a pile of 2,000 maggoty cow bones and scrubs them clean.

Her rationale for these mutilations and degradations is that they allow her to feel that her body is "without boundaries, limitless", that she becomes "a receiver and transmitter" of huge bursts of energy and that "pain was something like a sacred door to another state of consciousness". What she does with that limitlessness, energy and consciousness, and why they are worth suffering so much for, she never explains.

Indifference to her own pain makes her indifferent to that of others. At one point she plans a video piece filming the stage deaths of Tosca, Carmen and other operatic heroines and the real deaths of miners in

the Dante-esque Brazilian goldmine of Serra Pelada, all set to Maria Callas singing. Such is her impenetrable bubble that the fact that using actual deaths for her work might be morally questionable, to say the least, doesn't even occur to her or indeed to the gallerists and curators she pitches it to.

Everything about being Marina Abramovic, not least her love affairs, which invariably come to messy ends, is a serious business. The performer and the persona are intertwined and her endurance and mortifications of the flesh are indeed remarkable, which makes for an intense and unremitting book. She does tell one good joke though: "How many performance artists does it take to change a light bulb?" Answer: "I don't know — I was only there six hours." 



**Silent witness**  
Abramovic performs  
at Moma, 2010



## International New York Times

### By the Book

Marina Abramovic

*The performance artist and author of "Walk Through Walls" doesn't have a severe temperament: "I have a dark sense of humor which is very much from the Balkans — I love dirty jokes."*

**Q. What books are currently on your night stand?**

**A.** "Tesla: Man Out of Time," by Margaret Cheney. Nikola Tesla had such intuition about the future, and his ideas are more relevant today than ever before — it's inspiring to read about his life.

"The Secret Oral Teachings in Tibetan Buddhist Sects," by Alexandra David-Neel and Lama Yongden, is always on my night stand. I return to it again and again in different stages of my life.

**Q. What's the last great book you read?**

**A.** "On Creativity," by David Bohm. Reading about the creative process from a scientific perspective, I found more similarities to my work than I thought I would.

**Q. Do you have an all-time favorite author?**

**A.** I like Haruki Murakami. I enjoy the realism he mixes with the surreal Japanese mysticism in his narratives.

**Q. Who are your favorite poets? And do you have a favorite poem?**

**A.** I like many poets, but these three simple lines by Arakida Moritake (1473-1549) always stay with me as a reminder of the temporality of our existence:

*An orphaned blossom  
returning to its bough, somehow?  
No, a solitary butterfly.*

**Q. What moves you most in a work of literature?**

**A.** I know that I am reading a powerful book when everything around me disappears and I am unable to put it down until I finish it. A good book can bring you to another state of consciousness and transport you into different times and spaces. I am always searching for that experience of having the reality of the book overpower the reality of my own life.

**Q. What's the last book that made you laugh?**

**A.** "Zizek's Jokes," by philosopher and



ILLUSTRATION BY JILLIAN TAMAKI

cultural critic Slavoj Zizek. I have a dark sense of humor which is very much from the Balkans — I love dirty jokes. Most people who are familiar with my performance work expect me to have the same severity that my long durational performances require and are surprised to discover my sense of humor when they meet me. But we all need to laugh, especially about ourselves.

**Q. How do you like to read? Paper or electronic? One book at a time or simultaneously? Morning or night?**

**A.** I prefer to read at night. When I'm traveling I pack as light as possible and read on my iPad. But at home I like to sit and turn the pages by hand and have a physical relationship to the book as an object. It's more old-school.

**Q. How do you organize your books?**

**A.** I organize my books by subject. My favorite subjects are anthropology, history, biography, artist books, joke books, spirituality, nonfiction, science fiction and dictionaries — I like to collect all kinds of dictionaries.

**Q. What book might people be surprised to find on your shelves?**

**A.** Marcel Proust's box set of "In Search of Lost Time," next to the collected works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

**Q. What's the best book you've ever received as a gift?**

**A.** The best book I've ever received as a gift was actually the best gift I ever received from my mother, too. When I was young, she gave me "Letters: Summer 1926," about the three-way correspondence between Rainer Maria Rilke, Marina Tsvetayeva and Boris Pasternak. Three brilliant minds that had never met, all writing sonnets and passionate letters to each other for four years, eventually falling in love with each other through this correspondence. Seeing this love triangle unfold through actual letters was very exciting for me as a young girl. Later in life, I met Susan Sontag, and she told me she wanted to give me a new edition of a book for which she had written the foreword. You can understand my surprise when I discovered it was this very same book. She was always giving me books over the course of our friendship, but this one is the most precious to me, especially since she is no longer with us.

**Q. Which writers — novelists, playwrights, critics, journalists, poets — working today do you admire most?**

**A.** The historian and biographer Tom Reiss. His writing captivates me, and I look forward to reading his next book.

**Q. In writing "Walk Through Walls," were there any specific memoirs or writers that you looked to for inspiration?**

**A.** Patti Smith's "Just Kids" was a huge inspiration for me. While reading it, I was so nostalgic about the simplicity and innocence of the art scene in the '70s, which I think she portrayed really well.

**Q. You're organizing a literary dinner party. Which three writers, dead or alive, do you invite?**

**A.** Kafka, Hemingway and Beckett. It would either be a great success or complete disaster, but definitely an eventful evening.

**Q. If you could befriend any author, dead or alive, who would it be?**

**A.** I have always wanted to meet Paul Auster. I also think I could learn a lot about consciousness from George Gurdjieff.

MANAGING YOURSELF

# Life's Work: An Interview with Marina Abramović

by **Alison Beard**

FROM THE NOVEMBER 2016 ISSUE



PAOLA + MURRAY

**M**arina Abramović has for decades pushed the boundaries of performance art—hurling herself against walls, cutting herself with razor blades, sitting motionless for 750 hours. Though she started with fringe shows, she eventually worked her way up to premier venues, such as the Venice Biennale and New York's Museum of Modern Art. Her memoir, *Walk Through Walls*, is out now.

**HBR: Tell me how your creative process works.**

**Abramović:** I've never really had a studio. A studio makes you lazy and comfortable, and you repeat yourself. I don't go on holidays. I go on research trips to places that don't have Coca-Cola or electricity, away from civilization. I'm interested in nature and people from different cultures who push their bodies and their minds in a way we don't understand. I expose myself to life, and from that, ideas come as a surprise. I totally dismiss the ones that are pleasant and easy. I'm only interested in the ones that really disturb me and that I get obsessed about. They're what bring me to new territory. When I say, "Oh my God, shall I do that?" I know I have to. I love what John Cage said: "Every time I'm accepted by my audience, I move to the place where I'm not."

**Why did you choose such a difficult, poorly understood medium?**

In the beginning, I was a painter, but the moment I stood in front of the public and expressed my ideas using my body as the object and subject of the work, immediately it was clear that this is my best medium. I struggled with acceptance; my early career was hell. But it took me all these years to create a foundation so that performance would become accepted in the same way as photography and video. You have to believe that you're right, even if everybody believes you are wrong.



**As a young artist, you faced a lot of rejection. How did you handle it?**

I didn't take no for an answer. I've always been like that. If I think in my gut that I'm right, I do it. You have to have this kind of conviction.

Otherwise, I would have given up many years ago. After the 1970s, all the performance artists started doing paintings and sculptures or architecture; performing was far too hard. I'm so happy I didn't give up.

**You've talked about the importance of not just making work but ensuring that it's seen in the right place by the right people at the right time. How did you develop those marketing skills?**

Early on, I had to perform wherever I had the possibility. My audience was anything from 10 to 40 people. Then I started getting invited to the festivals, finding curators interested in presenting new forms of art, and going to important exhibitions. So many artists don't have that kind of stamina. They need collectors to buy the work or galleries to take care of them. I didn't have a gallery for at least 30 years. I had to do everything myself. But now I really do only projects that interest me. I get lots of invitations, and from these I choose the thing that will really bring my work to a new level.

**How did you develop that stamina?**

Both my parents were war heroes in Serbia, and my entire childhood I was taught that I had to sacrifice my private life and everything else for the cause. Why are you here on this planet? What is your function? What is your responsibility? That's how I was brought up, and that's what I've been doing.

**You set such ambitious goals for yourself, artistically and physically. How do you get yourself to a point where you can achieve them?**

You have to train the entire body: training physically, thinking about nutrition, not taking drugs, not ever drinking. And I learn from Tibetan monks, Aborigines in Central Australia, shamans in Brazil. To be able to sit on the chair in *The Artist Is Present*, I trained my body for an entire year. I didn't have lunch, so my body wasn't producing acids to make me sick. I drank water only by night so I wouldn't have to pee.

**You talk in the book about times when you've hit your limit in a performance, yet you kept going. How do you do that?**

Everybody can. The mind is a huge enemy because, every time you try to do something out of your comfort zone, it will make you not do it. But we all have this extra energy in our body. We might use it when we're in extreme situations, trapped or in a plane crash or a fire, and we're able to run out. But we don't need to wait for this drama.

**Ulay was both an artistic and a romantic partner. How have you balanced the personal and professional over the course of your career?**

I tried to have the marriage life, but it didn't really work. I always felt guilty that I worked and traveled too much. Now I'm getting to 70, and I've never felt better. I don't need to tell anybody if I'm coming home or not. I can do whatever the hell I want. I didn't want children because I didn't want them to suffer. I had a dog, which suffered enough. I don't even want a goldfish or a turtle. I have a desert plant in my house that needs a glass of water maybe once a year, which I can deliver. If you're in a relationship, your energy is divided. If you have children, it's even more divided. When I'm alone, there's nothing else, so then I put in not just 100% but 20% more than 100%, and that 20% really makes it.

**How have you handled going from starving artist to famous?**

People who love you start to hate you when you become that rock star. Everybody is scrutinizing. They want you to be poor, to suffer, to struggle. I could not pay my electricity bill until I was 50, and now I can. I think this is something I should not be criticized for. That is the negative part. What's more important is the platform—on CNN, TED, Bloomberg—to talk about performance art. I've always been working with artists, always been teaching. The memoir is coming out so that the general public can understand my life. It's the same with the film *The Artist Is Present*. I was taped with a microphone for one year, and the crew could come anytime.



**What lessons do you try to pass on to artists at the start of their careers?**

We investigate first what is their motivation, then which is the right work, how to develop the idea, how to start and finish the performance, how to prepare and condition, how to breathe. I also teach them how not to be exploited by galleries. In one of my first shows, all my photographs sold, but I never got a penny. I don't want that to happen to young artists. I also go to their home and studio. I make them write down every single thing they have, and they are completely alarmed by how much shit they collect. Then we clean the whole place and have a fresh start.

**In the book, you describe an interesting classroom exercise.**

Yes, it's very simple. For a few months, they sit for two hours a day at a table with 1,000 pieces of blank white paper and write down their ideas. All the good ones they put on one side of the table; all the bad ones go in the trash can. But in the end, I only look in the trash. It turns out to be a treasure of everything they're afraid of and really should do.

**When people criticize or make fun of your work, how do you react?**

I'm only angry at myself if I know that I didn't give my 120%. But if I give everything, you can criticize, you can ridicule, you can do anything, and it doesn't touch me. If I was not strong enough to push my idea completely through, then I know I failed, and that's worse than anybody else telling me.

**You've said there are three Marinas: the warrior, the spiritual one, and the bullshit one who doesn't believe in herself. How do you keep that third Marina at bay?**

I don't. I just expose all of them. It's very important to be vulnerable and to show the things you're afraid and ashamed of to everybody—not just to people you love but also to the public. That way, we have a connection. We create trust. My work is emotional, and I never hide anything. But it took me a long time to get to that point.

**When you do fail, how do you learn from the experience?**

I was talking to some painter friends of mine. They make one painting, and the more they work on it, the worse it becomes. Then they take the next canvas, and in two minutes they made a masterpiece. The more you fail, the more you understand what caused the failure, and you can make the next piece great. You're not consistent because you're taking risks, exploring different territories.

# LISSON GALLERY

*The Art Newspaper*

14 March 2016

<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/news/how-to-be-a-performance-artist-like-marina-abramovic/>



## NEWS

# How to be a performance artist like Marina Abramovic

Athens project trains Greek artists and the public in the “Abramovic Method”

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by HANNAH MCGIVERN | 14 March 2016

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Marina Abramovic in the Method space. Photo: Panos Kokkinias



Marina Abramovic is stepping out of the limelight for her latest performance art project. Her 716-hour stint sitting motionless and silent in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art in New York was the main attraction of her 2010 retrospective at the museum, *The Artist Is Present*, which drew more than 550,000 visitors. At the Benaki Museum in Athens, the Marina Abramovic Institute has partnered with NEON, the non-profit organisation founded by the Greek collector and entrepreneur Dimitris Daskalopoulos, to stage *As One*, a seven-week programme featuring 29 emerging Greek and international performance artists (until 24 April). “I’m not here to show you my own work or to perform, I’m here to be a delegate of my institute and legacy,” Abramovic said at the launch event on 10 March.

The programme is dedicated to the Belgrade-born artist’s preferred medium, long-duration performance. Six Greek artists are performing for the full run, eight hours a day (ten on Fridays), six days a week. Twenty-three others (18 Greek and five international) are presenting shorter interventions of one to six days. They were selected by Abramovic, the institute’s director Serge Le Borgne and the artist Paula Garcia from among 320 artists born or based in Greece who responded to NEON’s open call last year. The organisation is funding the project, which is described as its “biggest and most ambitious” to date, filling the three floors of the Benaki Museum’s 8,200 sq. m Pireos Street venue.



As One, Abramovic Method, Photo: Panos Kokkinias



As One, Abramovic Method, Photo: Panos Kokkinias



As One, Abramovic Method, Photo: Panos Kokkinias



Despina Zaharopoulou, Corner Time, Photo: Panos Kokkinias



Lambros Pigounis, Micropolitics of Noise, Photo: Natalia Tsoukala



The collaboration introduces both Greek artists and the public to the “Abramovic Method”. In January, the six artists commissioned to perform long-duration works spent ten days in the Corinthian mountains with the choreographer Lynsey Peisinger to complete “Cleaning the House”, Abramovic’s crash course in sensory deprivation and physical control. Peisinger has also trained a small army of facilitators to lead visitors through a less intensive set of activities at the Benaki Museum.

The Method is less an interactive work of art than a primer for appreciating performance. Participants must first deposit their personal belongings, including phones and watches, in lockers. They pass through three rooms of warm-up exercises (breathing, stretching) before putting on noise-cancelling headphones and taking the hand of a facilitator. In silence, people walk in slow motion, lie on barracks-style beds and stand with their eyes closed on low plinths. They sit studying coloured squares, sorting and counting piles of rice and lentils and, in pairs, sustaining the “mutual gaze” that moved some to tears during *The Artist Is Present*.

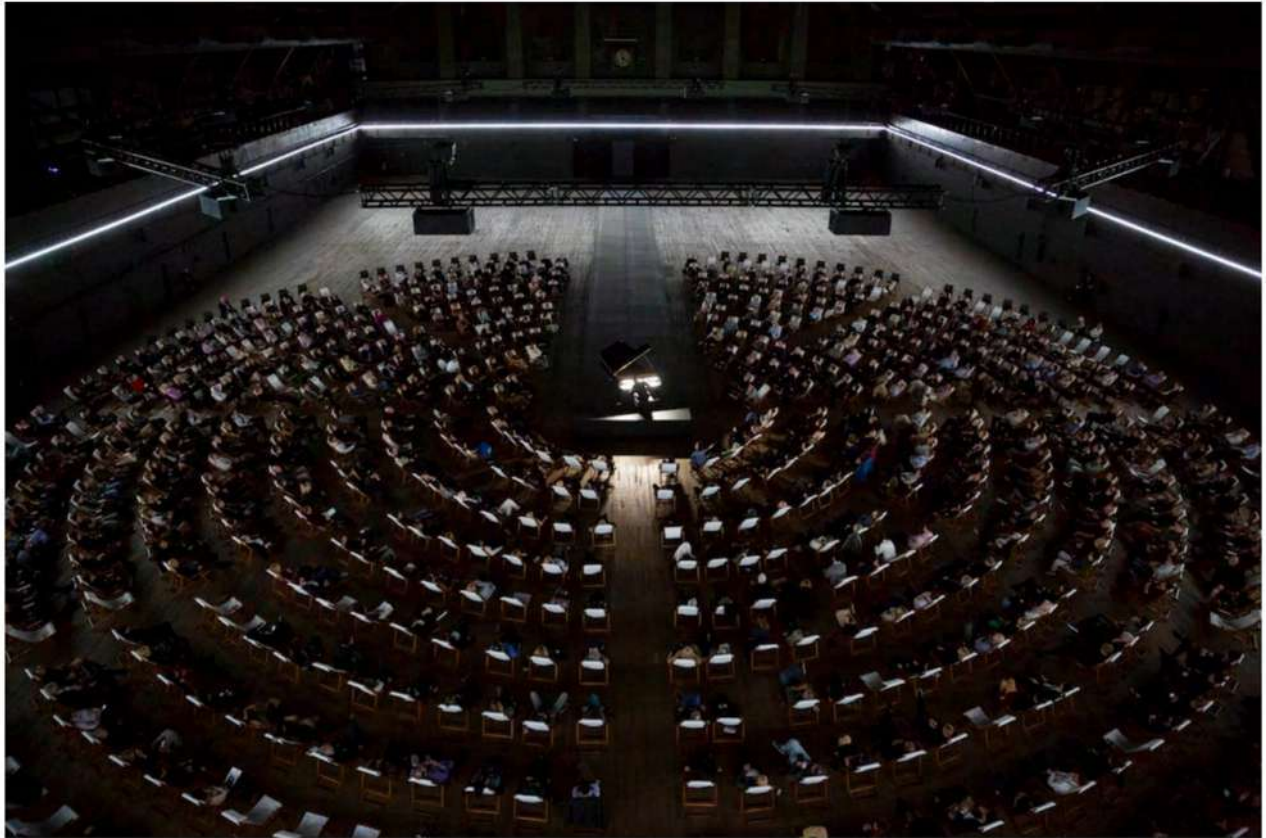
“You have to teach the public to look at something where nothing much is happening,” says Abramovic. “How can you have them coming straight from the streets, with phones, selfies, a million things to do and see something like a girl just counting time, a turtle moving?” The Method is strategically placed at the entrance to the museum, before visitors encounter Thodoris Trampas demolishing a giant rock, Lambros Pigounis enduring subsonic vibrations and Virginia Mastrogiannaki, the “human clock”, among others. “The only thing that you have to do is be in the present,” Abramovic says.

As One, which includes re-performances of two of Abramovic’s past works and a series of lectures and workshops, continues the Marina Abramovic Institute’s travelling educational mission. The planned \$31m centre for time-based art in Hudson, New York, is still a long way from completion (a Kickstarter campaign raised more than \$650,000 to pay the architect Rem Koolhaas and his firm OMA for the design). But the institute’s residencies in Sao Paulo and Sydney last year attracted more than 130,000 people. “The building will one day be the headquarters but it’s not about coming to the building,” Abramovic says. “I came to Greece and my dream is to go to Ukraine. I want to go to difficult places where we can be needed.”

In a country grappling with the double crisis of economic recession and migration, performance art now seems increasingly relevant, says NEON’s director Elina Kountouri. “At this particular time in Athens, there’s a lot of activism and anxiety, stress and release. Performance evokes these kinds of reactions from the audience. I thought it was the time to show this medium.” The Benaki Museum will be open free of charge over extended hours to encourage visitors to return throughout the changing programme. “It couldn’t work any other way for this kind of show, for Athens in crisis,” Kountouri says.

# Aesthetica

Interview with Marina Abramovic, Goldberg, Park Avenue Armory, New York



The art of Marina Abramovic, notorious for her radical and physically enduring performances, is in the process of constant transformation. In her latest and largest project in New York since her retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, Abramovic decided to work with classical music for the first time. “Music goes through your body, through molecules of your skin. There is no object in between. Music is on top of the pyramid of immaterial art,” she proposes during our interview in between the performances. With this passion cutting a tough and (dangerously) thorny path across the decades, she has forged a new method to sound and what its performance could be.

*Goldberg* (Bach's piano variations) was created in collaboration with Russian-German pianist Igor Levit and, for the first time in living memory, performed here in its entirety. For this performance, at Manhattan's Park Avenue Armory, the pleasure of our attendance is immediately challenged as Abramovic characteristically imposes sets of rules: we leave our cell phones, watches, and other electronic devices, as well as handbags of any kind in specially installed locker rooms. Next, we put on noise-cancelling headphones and sit in silence for approximately 30 minutes in exclusively designed chairs, before the performance begins. It isn't disclosed for how long the silence will last. It feels slightly uncomfortable, until one loses count of time and gives up completely to the master plan of Marina. "For any kind of experience you need discipline. Any master in Buddhism, or any mystic, or a ceremony in any culture deals with very difficult conditions. You don't get the experience if you don't put in the effort," she laughs.

Time stands still at an Abramovic durational performance: there you still are, deprived of a smartphone to check absent-mindedly, so you look around and back to follow the spotlight installation flow: one usher appears as a doll that was forgotten there, another, as a ballerina poised to plié. "The initial 10 minutes of that silent eternity is hell," explains Marina, "See, I don't even give them a program to read, I don't give them anything! They just have to be with themselves and they don't know how to do that, but eventually they have to figure out, okay, now it is just me." It is alien, the way Levit makes his entrance into the space (there is no stage per se, or if there is, then you're right there with a hundred other parts of its installation: the audience), floating furtively along with the piano towards the centre. Then you realise that this pianist is a mere attachment to the piano, and also that his journey, as well as the very gradual clockwise rotation of the whole installation, is not a product of your imagination. Nor is Marina Abramovic herself, standing amongst the audience and applauding smilingly at the end. It all makes us equal in a way: the auxiliary to his instrument, Igor, the crowd in scarves and coats, the mysterious Abramovic, all music devotees.

"First of all it took me two or three years to make a new piece. I will never stop performing, but now I can see more and more that what interests me is when the public itself becomes my work, and when I have a duty of transmitting the knowledge to the younger generation of artists". The Abramovic Method, which now is being applied to listening to the music, was created with the contemporary audience in mind: it involves different exercises to heighten consciousness and being present in the moment. Abramovic has a method for how to drink a glass of water. How to count rice. How to stand still. "We've become very restless human beings. We don't have time for anything," Abramovic argues. "I realised that if you want to get deeper into anything you have to find a centre within yourself, and this is my problem too! I couldn't concentrate for the performance just within five minutes, I needed much longer time. And I realised that the public would require even longer than myself."

The Method proves to be in high demand at the Marina Abramovic Institute, founded by her in New York State, and home to long durational works which at last has opened its doors, after raising \$660,000 on Kickstarter. Here, guests will have to sign an agreement with Marina that they are willing to stay in the museum for at least six hours, which reflects the emotional connection she has established with followers, but also speaks to her audience's appetite for structure and discipline.



Whereas *Goldberg* relates to her recent practice of durational performances, her early work in the mid 1970s when she first gained prominence was more conceptual, and radical in many ways, dealing with more physical risks and symbolism. Even her approach to sound, which was her way into performance art - was conceptual back then: "I put the speakers at the edifice with the sound of a building crashing down," - she tells us, "and you are standing right there. Visually the house is intact but your aural perception tells you that it is in a process of collapsing, which creates a truly interesting split in your consciousness, I was very into that." In other performances she has laid in a large star set on fire until she lost consciousness, cut her stomach with a razor blade, and stood still for hours while her then-collaborator and partner Ulay aimed an arrow at her heart.

While retrograde fans might still expect radical things, or mindshifting one-to-one meditative experiences like they saw at MoMa, Marina has absconded to a new experiential plateau, as if defying even her own public to catch up with her. "My ideas come out of nowhere. But I have to be completely quiet when this happens. This is why I am going to India now to get away from all the distraction. I am going to this place where they give you three pajamas. You stay there for a month and you don't do anything. Doing nothing for me is the base of everything."

She educates us during the interview about virtual reality: it constitutes the future of art. Perhaps over time, technology will transform her once more, but for now, *Goldberg* is a shockingly simple analogue, a refined piece that encourages the observer to adjust their expectations, all accomplished with beauty, vision, and the Abramovic Method turning the equation back on the audience. "It is interesting how people would still like to see me splashing blood and me cutting myself. I am bored with this. I have done it. I am not interested in repeating myself. I am more interested in showing the public themselves. When I performed people cried, now they can cry even without me."

Olga Zavarzina and Masha Froliak

*Goldberg* showed at Park Avenue Armory, New York, from 7-19 December 2015.

Learn more at [www.armoryonpark.org](http://www.armoryonpark.org).

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#### Credits

1. Marina Abramovic and Igor Levit, *Goldberg*, 2015. Courtesy of Park Avenue Armory and James Ewing.

Posted on 20 January 2016

The Guardian

20 January 2016

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jan/20/monuments-should-not-be-trusted-yugoslav-art-fascinates-country-gone>

theguardian

Art

Adrian Searle encounters

## An ashtray for President Tito: after the fall, the staying power of Yugoslav art

From semi-rebellious 'Black Wave' films to a flag made of razor blades, the UK's largest-ever show of art from communist Yugoslavia has plenty to say about the purpose and political usefulness of culture today



Excerpt of Projekt 6 by the Slovene group OHO/Naško Križnar, 1969. Photograph: Naško Križnar

Adrian Searle

@SearleAdrian

Wednesday 20 January 2016  
08.00 GMT



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"An artist must be good-looking," says Marina Abramović, staring into the camera and furiously brushing her hair. "Art," she says, "must be beautiful." Beauty is in short supply in [Monuments Should Not Be Trusted](#), the largest exhibition in the UK to focus on the art of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It is a country that no longer exists, yet the art it produced continues to resonate.

The exhibition takes us from the 60s to the late 80s, before the dissolution of the communist state, the wars and years of chaos. Abramović is one of several artists appearing in [German film-maker Lutz Becker's](#) 1975 *Film Notes*, a record of performance and statements about art and socialist society, in the wake of the 1968 student protests and subsequent loosening of state control.

On a wall nearby, a photograph shows Abramović lying inside a five-pointed star, made from a wooden trough filled with burning wood shavings and petrol. During the 1974 performance in Belgrade, she passed out from lack of oxygen and had to be rescued as the flames reached her legs. The revolution, her work proclaims, devours its children.



The art and film, the clips from TV pop music programmes, the photographs and records of performances in *Monuments Should Not be Trusted* are by turns innocent, angry, sarcastic, ludicrous and critical. Some of it – matchboxes painted with pictures of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones – seems very slight.



📺 Karpo Godina's film featuring the Pupilija Ferkeverk collective.

Karpo Godina's film, in which members of the poetry and dance collective Pupilija Ferkeverk [lark about in a shallow lagoon](#), while a topless woman rides a swing over the water, accompanied by a blues-rock number by Rory Gallagher and Taste, ends with people ostentatiously taking LSD. Banned for a number of years owing to its drug reference, the film has also lost what subversive edge it once might have had, but retains a period charm.

Hippy rebellion, sexual liberation and nudity begin to be used as signal to a greater cultural openness and transparency, an idea rejected by bands like *Borghesia* in the 80s. [Borghesia's video On \(Him\)](#) combines synth-heavy new romanticism with BDSM scenes in which sex is displayed as a performance of control and subjugation.

All this is in stark contrast to the most monumental objects in the exhibition, which aren't so much untrustworthy as objects of jaw-dropping witlessness: a brass hammer and sickle table-lamp, a matchbox holder in the form of a partisan resting on a rock, ashtrays, a model of a mountaineer's hiking boot, and numerous other unsolicited gifts for "President for Life" Josip Broz Tito to keep on his desk. An object of inadvertent surrealism – a pair of gleaming dentures fixed to a polished wooden base (a gift from the Alliance of Dentists of Yugoslavia) – grins at nothing at all.

“

The most monumental objects in the show are objects of jaw-dropping witlessness

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Tito's popularity might be measured in the amount of junk that factories and unions, associations and individuals kept sending him as gifts, much of it now enshrined in Belgrade's Museum of Yugoslav History. Appearing in the final section of the exhibition, these weighty gewgaws represent a kind of artistic nadir, signal to a narrow and mediocre official culture.

A school student also sent the president a flag made out of the same number of matchsticks as there were words in one of his speeches. Weirdly, this isn't so dissimilar from Sven Stilinović's wretched little 1984-85 flag of grubby cotton wool, and another made from razor blades, both materials chosen for their associations with pain and injury. [In her 1982 video Personal Cuts](#), Sanja Iveković cuts holes in the stocking that obscure her face, each cut interspersed with archival footage of the history of Yugoslavia.





Sanja Iveković, *Personal Cuts*, 1982. Photograph: Espaivisor Gallery/Sanja Iveković



Iveković returns throughout the show, with her sly and subversive reworkings of commercial imagery depicting women. The complications and contradictions of the Yugoslav state, with its relative freedoms and “utopian consumerism”, its non-aligned status between the cold war superpowers of east and west, are documented here through art that, as often as it is critical of the status quo, had its own kinds of socialist and revolutionary fervour. It was also very much a product of its times.

People garbed in white are doing daft things with white geese, white sheep and white mice squirming in flour. Two men suck at the same length of spaghetti, till their mouths come together and they kiss. Another pair get wrapped in aluminium cooking foil and bounce about. Amid the nakedness and soap-suds, the message of *White People*, a 1970 film by Slovene group OHO, is all to do with oneness and merging, and its protagonists eventually head off into the sea and snow, just as many members of the group headed into nature to live in a commune.

Wonderfully daft, *White People* has a beguiling innocence. You can also relate it to Italian *arte povera* of the same period. Another film has the OHO group manoeuvring a large truck tyre from one place to another, in a performance of stupendous effort, scrabbling against the inertia of a dumb object – that familiar comedic trope of the little man and the big machine.



📷 Bogdanka Poznanovic, Action Heart, 1970. Photograph: Marinko Sudac Collection/Bogdanka Poznanovic



In Karpo Godina's 1971 film, [Litany of Happy People](#), the inhabitants of the ethnically diverse autonomous province of Vojvodina pose for the camera in front of their rural dwellings. Priests in their vestments proclaim how healthy the state is. Beautifully shot, you might at first assume this was a tourist film for the region, with picturesque peasants smiling, jocular families, young and old proclaiming their love for the Hungarians, the Slovaks, the Croats, Gypsies, the Romanians and the Russians – and how much they are loved in return. One group not mentioned in this imaginary bucolic love-fest is the Serbs.

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Musicians jauntily sing: 'Let the Eastern Bloc as a whole, be buried deep in a hole'

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On the jaunty soundtrack musicians sing “Let the Eastern Bloc as a whole, be buried deep in a hole.” This terrific film, and the great freewheeling film experiments of [Želimir Žilnik](#), are worth the visit alone. In one, he invites six homeless men to share his family home, and questions people on the street about what he should do for them. Another focuses on young workers singing bawdy songs and playing ferocious drinking games. Žilnik's films, like Godina's, were part of Yugoslavia's “[Black Wave](#)” of film production. Far from being underground or countercultural works, they had a degree of official sponsorship, even though the results sometimes got their makers into trouble.



Showing The Life of Village Youth by Želimir Žilnik

Film is the strongest medium in the show. It is a great pity Lazar Stojanović's 73-minute 1973 feature *Plastic Jesus* can only be viewed on a monitor, and with nowhere to sit. This encourages no one to watch. Mixing scenes of the everyday life of a disaffected non-conformist with sometimes horrifying footage from Nazi propaganda and documentary films, *Plastic Jesus* led to the artist, a member of the communist party, being imprisoned for three years and the film itself being suppressed until 1990.



There is much here that is useful to see for the first time. Raša Todosijević's long 1995 [Edinburgh Statement](#), pinned to the wall, asks who profits from art and who gains from it: the factories who produce materials, the art dealers, clerks, bankers, politicians, "critics, theoreticians and other quacks" and just about anyone else caught up in the web of social, political and economic relations the production and consumption of art creates.

More than a conceptual art statement, Todosijević's statement makes salutary reading today. Debates about the purpose and usefulness of art, and of museums, continue. Rather than being a historical snapshot, *Monuments Should Not Be Trusted* feels more like a continuing debate. It has no end.

● *Monuments Should Not Be Trusted* is at [Nottingham Contemporary](#) until 4 March

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## IN THE FRAME

# Marina Abramović and Igor Levit mediate on silence

by THE ART NEWSPAPER | 14 December 2015



Photo: James Ewing

Artist Marina Abramović has collaborated with the Russian-German pianist Igor Levit for performance piece that emphasises being “present”. In *Goldberg* (at the Park Avenue Armory until 19 December), Abramović aims to show how a meditative state of silence can increase mental awareness and enrich any experience, such as listening to music. “Everyone has a movie reeling in their mind, and the only time you stop thinking is when you sneeze or have an orgasm,” the artist explained during a panel discussion held after the performance on Sunday, 13 December.

Audience members are directed to surrender their electronics and other belongings in a locker and sit silently for 30 minutes while wearing noise-cancelling headphones. Then, a gong sounds and Levit plays a 75-minute rendition of the 1741 composition *Goldberg Variations*, by Johann Sebastian Bach.

At the panel, Abramović hinted that her next project might shift the focus from classical music to classic works of art. “You have these [masterpieces selling for millions of dollars], and [the people who buy them] can sit with the painting by themselves in their homes,” said Abramović, “My hope is to create a safe situation similar to [*Goldberg*] where the participant can be together, alone and without distractions, with a masterpiece, regardless of their income or status.”

# Making the audience earn its Bach

Performance artist's take  
on 'Goldberg Variations'  
demands concentration

BY JASON FARAGO

"They want to listen to Bach, so they have to suffer," Marina Abramovic said with a laugh. Notorious for her severe and physically demanding performances, she was being interviewed in the midst of preparations for "Goldberg," her largest project in New York since "Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present," a 2010 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art.

The new work is a characteristically rigorous version of the "Goldberg" Variations, Bach's intricate, ecstatic solo-piano epic. While they have been used in numerous dances, including a Jerome Robbins ballet, it's safe to say the "Goldbergs" have never provided the score for a production quite like this. It marks Ms. Abramovic's first foray into classical music, and she admitted to nerves. But this time, the nerves were not from stage fright.

Ms. Abramovic, 69, may be the grand master of public perseverance and self-control, but she has stepped out of the spotlight for "Goldberg," which runs through Dec. 19 in the Park Avenue Armory's soaring drill hall. (She was last seen there in 2013 as the ambiguous protagonist of Robert Wilson's dreamlike,

semi-autobiographical "The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic.")

Instead, another performer will be on display: the Russian-German pianist Igor Levit, 28, who made an acclaimed American debut at the Armory last year. He will play on a stage of Ms. Abramovic's devising: a motorized platform that will slowly move from the far side of the drill hall to the center, then turn a single revolution as Mr. Levit goes through Bach's theme and 30 variations.

He will do so only after a new, improbable overture that could be described with a single musical term: *tacet*. As they arrive, audience members will be asked to surrender their mobile phones,

watches and other electronic devices before entering the drill hall, where they will put on noise-cancelling headphones and sit in cloth deck chairs designed to Ms. Abramovic's specifications.

The artist expects total concentration, so concertgoers will sit, and sit, and keep sitting, silently, until Mr. Levit's platform reaches its target and he begins to play.

"Most of the time I leave the public complete freedom," Ms. Abramovic said. "With performances, you can come for one second, three minutes, or 10 hours, it's up to you. But here, it's so related to the 86 minutes of 'Goldberg.' We don't have the choice, so the public doesn't have the choice either."

"Goldberg" may be of a piece with Ms. Abramovic's recent practice, which has foregone the almost superhuman

endurance of her early performances, instead encouraging New Age-style wakefulness. She came to prominence in the mid-1970s for unrehearsed actions that combined oblique symbolism with extreme physical risks.

In the autobiographical performance "Lips of Thomas," from 1975, she cut her stomach with a razor blade, flayed her back with a whip and lay on a cross of ice. In other works she combed her hair until her scalp bled or lay down in the midst of a fire until she passed out or stood stock-still while her collaborator and romantic partner, the German artist Ulay, aimed an arrow at her heart. (Last month, Ulay sued Ms. Abramovic in the Netherlands. He claims she has represented their jointly conceived work as hers alone; she strongly denies the assertion.)

"Goldberg" applies Ms. Abramovic's method to the already quite disciplined practice of classical piano, and to spectatorship itself. Being forced to sit in silence — for an unspecified period — may be arduous, but being forced to surrender one's cellphone is an almost unthinkable

demand in today's art world, in which museums have reluctantly ended prohibitions on photographs and performers now accept that their improvisations or endurances will be mediated through the lenses of a hundred camera phones. (One working definition of performance art, as distinguished from theater or dance or music, might be that audiences are permitted to take pictures.)

But even in the more regimented space of the concert hall, the phone has found a way of asserting itself. It is increasingly common of late to see fellow concertgoers checking Twitter between the movements of a concerto, or switching on flashlights to fish for candies.

Turning the phone to vibrate is not enough. As Sherry Turkle, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, writes in her new book, "Reclaiming Conversation," the mere presence of a cellphone, even when not in use, is enough to derail concentration and depth of thought.

Ms. Abramovic's confiscation is meant to force listeners to confront their dependence and find, if only for a little while, a new sensation of focus.

"I think the problem is the first 15 minutes," Ms. Abramovic said. "After that, you let it go. And then it's just wonderful. But those first 15 minutes are a crisis moment."

Over the summer, Ms. Abramovic and Mr. Levit took a break from preparations to teach a master class in one of the Armory's Tiffany-decorated anterooms. The students, mostly high schoolers, immediately understood the appeal of phone-free performance. They were seated on low-slung chairs similar to those that await "Goldberg" listeners, while Mr. Levit sat at a baby grand piano and told the students he once dreamed of being a guitarist. (He owns two guitars, as well as a banjo.) Ms. Abramovic observed from a rocking chair

and invited questions.

"How do you deal with fame?" one student asked.

"Fame is a side effect of a lot of hard work, but it's not the goal," she responded. "The most important is to be humble. Such attachment to your ego, which is so wrong. You're here to stage your art. He has the gift," she said, pointing at the genial Mr. Levit, "but it's useless if you don't share it."

There was a silence. Another student lobbed her a softball: "What's your favorite color?"

"Black," she answered instantly, pointing at the baggy floor-length shift she wore. "Look at me! I look like a cockroach!"

That loosened the room up. The students' questions grew more pointed. "How do you think the audience will re-

act when you take their phones away?" one asked.

"I love to torture audience!" Ms. Abramovic exclaimed. The students giggled. But, she went on, she was uneasy about how listeners would respond to such a requirement. It could be seen as hostile.

She instructed the students to close their eyes for five minutes and to do their best to think of nothing. Everyone obeyed. When the pause was over, Mr. Levit played the Aria and the first 10 variations of "Goldberg," with precise yet sometimes puckish phrasing. He permitted himself a few vocalizations: a "chukka-chukka-chukka" over some runs in the middle of the third variation, a "da!" at the end of the spirited fifth.

In the more imposing space of the

drill hall, Mr. Levit will play for an audience that will have been sitting silently, expectantly, for much longer than five minutes. (How long, exactly, the artists would not disclose.)

Asked if he worried about the heightened expectations that may come with "Goldberg," Mr. Levit brushed aside any concern. "I'm never nervous about an audience," he said. "Whatever

I've done so far, when you're honest with the audience, when you don't act like someone you're not, if you share with the audience, then the whole thing is going to work out. In the end, it's about the piece, and 'Goldberg' speaks for itself."

In the master class, as Mr. Levit wended his way through Bach's variations, almost all of the students saw that honesty. One fell asleep, but the rest listened closely. Asked whether the preparation helped them focus, they all said yes. "The music actually carried my thinking, in some way," one said. "Like, it made me think, and changed me."

Another student had a more physical reaction, one that made Ms. Abramovic smile: "I was listening so intently," he said, "that I forgot to breathe."







MICHAEL KIRBY SMITH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; THE MARINA ABRAMOVIC ARCHIVES, LEFT; DA PING LUO, RIGHT

The performance artist Marina Abramovic and the pianist Igor Levit at the Park Avenue Armory, where they are collaborating on “Goldberg,” her largest project in New York since 2010. Left, lockers and headphones from a previous Abramovic installation. Ms. Abramovic and Mr. Levit discussing their project with students at the Armory.



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At 23, Marina Abramović lay on a table and invited the public to do what they wanted to her. Various objects and implements sat at the ready: flowers, a feather boa, a knife, a pistol. The first attendees were shy. But soon enough, someone cut off her clothes. Another pushed the thorn of a rose into her flesh. The gun was aimed at her head. After six hours, Abramović says, she rose, battered and bloodied, and limped out, with a kind of terrible knowledge about the harm that humans will inflict on one another.



Some 40 years later came a different kind of experiment. In “The Artist Is Present,” a three-month-long performance at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, Abramović sat for eight hours a day in a simple chair. Opposite her, a few feet away, sat strangers, who had waited hours to sit down opposite the stern-looking Serbian with jet-black hair and “exchange energy” in the longest, and perhaps most demanding, ongoing performance work ever mounted in a museum. It consisted of nothing more than eye contact between strangers — and, as Abramović recounts in a TED Talk that will co-premiere on OZY today, it changed her life.

*Watch Marina Abramović’s TED Talk — click above.*

“When you give the public things to harm, the public can actually harm. But if you give them things to make them better, they will become better,” she told OZY in an interview last week. The connection she witnessed in that chair turned her on to the ever-growing “need of people to actually experience something different” in a world in which online networks and electronic devices have in some ways isolated us from ourselves. And so Abramović’s latest, and most ambitious, experiment invites her audience to discover themselves as never before — in a kind of culture spa where visitors purify themselves for six hours before experiencing “immaterial” art.

Abramović’s fears, as well as her hunger for a connection, originate in her youth in postwar [Yugoslavia](#), where her parents gave her a first-rate education in the arts but not a loving childhood. She found love in 1975, at age 28, in the form of a tall, flamboyant artist named Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen). Sparks flew during their first encounter, the married Abramović wound up staying in Ulay’s bed for 10 days and the two artists quickly became lovers and collaborators. Abramović put aside the implements of pain (and her first husband) in favor of love and trust, albeit with an often pointed edge, as in the pair’s famous collaboration “Rest Energy,” in which the two pulled on opposite sides of a drawn bow and arrow, the arrow aimed straight at Abramović’s heart. Her early work with Ulay, says Peggy Phelan, a performance-art expert at Stanford University, demonstrates a “commitment to performance as a way of understanding love and power that remains ... unsurpassed in the history of live art.”



## Art and design

# Ulay v Marina: how art's power couple went to war

Partners in love and performance art, Ulay and Marina Abramović made passionate, pioneering work together for more than a decade. Now things have turned sour - and he's taking her to court

Noah Charney

Wednesday 11 November 2015  
18.21 GMT



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Frank Uwe Laysiepen, better known as the artist Ulay. Photograph: The Ulay Foundation

A bearded old man with a weathered face stands in pink knickers. As part of his performance *A Skeleton in the Closet*, he is writing numbers on the wall of Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum: 252, 253, 288, 289. The lucky spectators who made it in to the sell-out show - 500 hopefuls remain outside - try to work out what it all means.

Frank Uwe Laysiepen, who has worked for more than 50 years as Ulay, is one of just a handful of performance artists featured in art history textbooks. The only one better known is Marina Abramović: Ulay's partner in life and art from 1976 until 1988. Since their break-up, Abramović has become famous worldwide, thanks to a 2010 retrospective at MoMA in New York, a major HBO documentary, celebrity friends including Jay Z and Lady Gaga and a line of Adidas commercials. Ulay, however, is hardly a household name.



### Marina Abramović sued by former lover and collaborator Ulay

[Read more](#)

The art they made together was passionate, pioneering and powerful; their extraordinary relationship lives on in indelible images, such as [the pair holding a bow and arrow in tension](#), the arrow's tip pointed at Abramović's heart. This month, it faces its greatest crisis: in the law courts, where Ulay claims that Abramović has been writing him out of his own history. In his lawsuit he alleges that she has withheld money from him for 16 years, and failed to give him proper credit for their joint legacy. Those numbers in *A Skeleton in the Closet*? They refer to the collaborative works which, he says, Abramović has censored. She vigorously contests the claims, and says she is confident she will win the case.

Together, Abramović and Ulay made scores of artworks.

They include *Incision* (1978), in which a naked Ulay runs toward a clothed Abramović, only to be pulled back by an elastic rope and, in the same year, [AAA-AAA](#) in which the pair scream at one another. Their relationship is symbolised in 1977's *Relation in Time*, in which they performed bound together by their braided hair while facing away from one another - for 17 hours.

More recently, Ulay reappeared in Abramović's performance of [The Artist is Present](#) at MoMA, where visitors queued (for hour upon hour) to sit silently opposite her and simply share eye contact. [One day, Ulay showed up as a surprise](#). Both grew teary as they sat staring at one another and the moment was captured on film. It went viral, and has now been seen by millions on YouTube. The background music and explanatory text make it seem like the reunion of long-lost lovers. But the truth is rather less romantic.

How I Became The Bomb - Ulay, Oh | Music Video



📍 [The artists' reunion at MoMA, New York](#)

Now 72, Ulay splits his time between Amsterdam and Ljubljana, Slovenia. We meet in his spacious flat, overlooking the Dragon Bridge. He first came to Ljubljana for a show of his work and met his now-wife, a renowned Slovenian graphic designer. Their apartment is full of art and found objects: antique apothecary jars, handwritten notes in a number of languages, an ornately carved south Asian screen. But Ulay is rarely in one place for long: invited to perform at [Art Basel](#), teaching on the Greek island of Hydra, filming in Paris.

In 2013, he was the subject of a documentary film, *Project Cancer*, which followed him for a year after he was diagnosed with lymphoma. After extensive chemotherapy, he beat the cancer and is now in fine form. He mocks what nearly killed him with a Marlboro Red for ever curling smoke around his fingers.

Warm and soft-spoken with a haggard handsomeness, he seems to have more stories than could fit in one biography.

He was born in Germany, but is synonymous with Amsterdam's art scene, where he lived for decades and still keeps an apartment. His art career began with his role as a photographer for Polaroid, travelling Europe and the US, taking photographs with their colossal 20x24 and 40x80 inch cameras. The majority of his work remains photographic, but he made his name with his (frequently cross-dressing) performances.





📷 A Polaroid self-portrait by Ulay. Photograph: The Ulay Foundation



The most famous relationship in performance art ended dramatically 18 years ago, after a piece in which Ulay and Abramović set out from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China – then met in the middle to say farewell. Ulay says that from 1988-99, he and she did not speak. With the encouragement of Abramović's gallerist Sean Kelly, a contract was drawn up to manage their joint oeuvre and Ulay sold his physical archive – including negatives and transparencies – to Abramović. According to the contract, it could be used to produce saleable work at Abramović's discretion with 20% of the profit going to Ulay. She agreed to tell him about any reproductions or sales of their work.

Since then, Ulay claims she has violated that contract. He says he has received surprisingly little money - no more, he reckons, than half of what he should have received. Each of their works sell regularly for five or six-figure sums, yet he has received a total of €31,000. "There is a lot of money going through her accounts - and of course they have a very good accountant." He says he only learned of a major Adidas commercial that used their joint work while it was being filmed.

Ulay claims she has paid him only four times - and that Marina argues he should receive only 20% of her 30% profit, or 6% in total. Ulay explains what he hopes to achieve through litigation: "The points I'm asking of her are: every six months, a statement on sales and my royalties. And I'm asking for absolute proper mentioning of my name." Ulay is also seeking access to her accounts dating back seven years, so his accountant can check whether money is owed to him. He alleges she has provided only three statements over the last 16 years.

What concerns Ulay more, though, is his sense that Abramović is trying to write him out of art history. He claims their contract stipulates that their works must be joint credited, but that Abramović has been claiming sole authorship. "She has deliberately misinterpreted things, or left my name out," he says.



📍 Ulay performs A Skeleton in the Closet at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Photograph: Maarten Hartman/Hollandse Hoogte/Corbis



Ulay also claims that *The Artist is Present* “borrows from” one of their joint works, the epic 90-day performance series *Nightsea Crossing*, which they performed between 1981 and 1987. “At MoMA, she just cut the table in half and invited visitors to sit opposite her instead of me.” He says his own initial indifference to the issue of authorship has contributed to the problem. “Because I don’t want to always struggle with her.”

Their relationship remained cordial and might have continued so, he says, had Abramović not interfered with the publication of his 2014 book, [Whispers: Ulay on Ulay](#). The book - which included images from their joint works - was begun when Ulay was undergoing chemotherapy. Abramović originally agreed to give an interview - “She was extremely kind,” recalls its author, Maria Rus Bojan - but later claimed through her lawyer that she had not given permission to use either the interview or any pictures.

The publisher decided to exclude the 28 images, printing a pink square in place of each. It is the page numbers of these missing images that Ulay scribbles on the wall in *A Skeleton In The Closet*. “I was hurt, very much hurt,” he says. “It is unthinkable, so unjust, so not right. When I was working with her, she was great. But then, you know, the direction she went to, to become a star, is something I do not envy. It’s far away from my intentions, wishes, desires ... it went to her head.”

Curator Tevz Logar, who organised Ulay’s first show in Slovenia, points out that, until recently, Ulay had showed no interest in maintaining a position in the contemporary art world. Now he is represented by the MOT International gallery, and will have a solo exhibition in London next year. “That meant that he started to enter Marina’s symbolic space, space that until now she ruled over.

“Every single person in the art world knows that the *Relation Works* [their most famous collaborative series] worked because of the balance between them, and of their equal and joint efforts,” says Logar. “That is how it entered the history of art and performance.”



When approached to comment on the case, Abramović's lawyer replied: "Mrs Abramović totally disagree[s] with Ulay's allegations. My client doesn't want to comment on them, they are libellous. My client considers that this lawsuit is abusive and aimed to damage her reputation in public, which is proven by his allegations to you. My client is very confident in her position in front of the court. She will defend her rights and reputation by all legal means."

As for Ulay, he is defending his reputation by more subtle means. A tiny note in the acknowledgments pages of his book *Whispers* reveals the reason for the pink squares - and the missing images. "I think it must have pissed her off," he says.

● Noah Charney is a professor of art history and author of [The Art of Forgery](#) (Phaidon).

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ArtReview

# POWER 100

## 8 MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

Artist Serbian Last Year: 5

Following the triumphant 2013 Kickstarter campaign to raise seed funds for her Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), the 'grandmother of performance art' has found the remaining \$31 million required for the Hudson, New York, headquarters somewhat harder to extract. Numerous events held at Art Basel Miami Beach last year brought in precisely zip. Clearly narked with celebs paying lip service but failing to dig deep, Abramović started a beef with Jay Z, suggesting he'd 'used' her for his 2013 *Picasso Baby* stunt, before issuing an apology when it turned out 'Hova' had in fact coughed up.

While she may not be feeling the love from the global ultrarich (or the artworld in-crowd – one prominent critic dismissively described her as a 'crossover star' earlier this year), Abramović's popular status continues to blossom. In 2015 she focused her considerable charisma on the Southern Hemisphere, with extended residencies in both Brazil (at SESC Pompeia, São Paulo) and Australia (Kaldor Public Art Projects, Sydney, and MONA, Hobart). It's not just the artist who was present: these days she brings an itinerant version of the MAI, which runs workshops (in Brazil, 250 Abramović Method sessions were held with a total of 14,264 participants) and helps mentor local performance artists whose work is presented under the MAI banner. Between the crystal therapy, the mass group-hugs and the recent announcement that she wanted a trinity of interments (with coffins in Amsterdam, Belgrade and New York), it's hard not to ponder where the tipping point might be between cult artist and cult actual.







# LISSON GALLERY

Telegraph Magazine  
17th October 2015

## The Telegraph

### Art house

At her star-shaped home in the New York countryside, the performance artist Marina Abramovic has created a calming minimalist retreat.

By **Anabel Cutler.**

**The exterior** Star House is an ever-evolving project. 'A few months ago we painted the wooden facade in dark grey. We opened an entire wall with glass and painted the barn bright red [pictured, p89],' Abramovic says. 'I call it Marlboro red – it changes with the light. Against the green grass it's like a painting.'

**The barn** acts as a practice space and the headquarters of the Marina Abramovic Institute, where the artist runs 'consciousness-raising exercises'.

'I am always clearing out. I have two hangars full of stuff from my shows and my life. They are hidden from the house, which I like to keep completely bare'







Photographs by **Reto Guntli**



It took me around 30 seconds to make up my mind to buy Star House,' the performance artist Marina Abramovic says of her home in Malden Bridge, New York State. The house, which is in the shape of a six-pointed star, had languished on the market for five years before she snapped it up for \$1.25 million in 2007.

Too avant-garde for American sensibilities, it spoke to the artist on many levels. 'I was brought up in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, a communist country, so the star is a potent symbol for me,' Abramovic, 68, explains. 'It is on my birth certificate; it was on all my textbooks in school.'

It has also been a recurring theme in her work. Performances have seen her lying in a burning star (nearly dying of asphyxiation in the process), and carving a star in the flesh around her navel in what she refers to as an anti-communist act. Abramovic, whose work explores the boundaries of the body and mind, has spent four decades putting herself through trials most people would pay to avoid.

She became a cultural sensation with her 2010

'I was brought up in a communist country, so the star is a potent symbol for me.

It is on my birth certificate; it was on all my textbooks in school



**The terraced seating area** and swimming pool lie to the west of the house, making the most of the early evening sun.

**The central atrium** forms a polygon, and the white walls of the two-storey stairwell are entirely unadorned.

**The study** 'I hate coffee-table books that don't get used,' Abramovic says. 'I only keep books out if I'm reading them.'





show Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present, at the Museum of Modern Art (Moma) in New York. The show involved Abramovic sitting motionless and silent for up to nine and a half hours a day (no eating, no toilet breaks) for three months while members of the public queued up to sit opposite her. It broke attendance records at Moma, attracting 850,000 visitors – including Björk, Isabella Rossellini and Sharon Stone. Most recently Abramovic art-directed Givenchy's spring/summer 2016 fashion show, last month.

It is the physically and emotionally demanding nature of her work that led Abramovic to seek refuge in the country, away from her apartment in Soho, New York City. 'I moved to Manhattan from Amsterdam, and knew within two years that the place would kill me if I didn't have somewhere to escape to,' she says. The 26-acre plot that Star House sits atop, complete with woods and a river, was a perfect salve. 'The river is a life force. The house has an unbelievably peaceful energy. It's a place to rehearse, rest and think between projects.'

'In Manhattan everything is generic. I hate all this Nordic furniture. I browse antique shops in Hudson for original Italian and French pieces'







**The crystal cave** is empty but for a quartz crystal, which Abramovic believes radiates positive energy. 'I'm very interested in things that our rational brains can't explain. There are lots of things that science proves later on that spirituality has actually practised for a long time.'

**The dining room** The table is by Cappellini ([cappellini.it](http://cappellini.it)), and the 18th-century candelabra are from a Catholic church in Mallorca, Spain. 'In Manhattan everything is generic. I hate all this Nordic furniture. I browse antique shops in Hudson for original Italian and French pieces.'

That said, the decor and gardens needed paring down to comply with Abramovic's minimalist aesthetic. She contacted the New York architect Dennis Wedlick, who designed the original 3,400sq ft house for a heart surgeon in the 1990s so that he and his three adult children could all have an equal and private space. (Each of the four bedrooms on the third floor occupies a different point of the star; the two bathrooms are in the remaining points.) The family's taste was fussy, and Abramovic tasked Wedlick with stripping everything back: columns that were not supporting walls or ceilings were removed; interior walls were painted white; and the wooden floors were refinished in a natural colour.

The clean white interiors are brought to life with pops of colour provided by sculptural vintage furniture Abramovic picked up in Hudson's antique shops. 'I find that colours like red, blue and orange make me feel happy,' says the artist, who often uses colour to punctuate her performance pieces.

Now Abramovic uses the house as a retreat, a work space and the headquarters of the Marina

Abramovic Institute – or MAI – where she workshops 'consciousness-raising exercises' that range from slow-motion walking and sitting in the forest blindfolded to counting grains of rice and meditating inside a 'crystal cave'. A few years ago Lady Gaga came to stay and immortalised the MAI experience in a video.

When we speak, Abramovic has just been training the performers she has chosen for the Givenchy show, who will be standing on high platforms for four hours. 'If you want to perform somewhere for four hours, you have to really train. Where is your body? Where is your mind?' Abramovic spent two years training for the Moma show and believes strongly in the positive power of changing consciousness. 'I have a hut by the river where I can retreat. I sometimes go there for six days without any food and I never come to the house. I wash in the river; I don't read, just write. The transformation is amazing,' she says. 'I could change my apartment in New York easily, but not this house. I feel incredibly peaceful here.' *mai-hudson.org*



‘The river is a life force. The house has an unbelievably peaceful energy. It’s a place to rehearse, rest and think between projects



**The master bedroom** ‘I like functional things and am always clearing out. I have two hangars on my land full of stuff from all my shows and my life. They are hidden from the house, which I like to keep completely bare. The Japanese do this to great effect – they all have big storage spaces and constantly change their environment; they may have a vase that they bring out in winter and another for summer.’ Abramovic adds, ‘I don’t like to hang paintings on the walls. I’m an artist and I need white space to think.’



Bloomberg  
2nd February 2015

## Bloomberg

# It Ain't Easy Being a Performance Artist

**Marina Abramovic's bizarre struggle to turn her art into an institution, a legacy, and decent money**  
**By Caroline Winter**

For nearly three months, Marina Abramovic sat on a wooden chair in New York's Museum of Modern Art, six days a week, 8 to 10 hours a day, barely moving and never getting up, not even to eat or go to the bathroom. Her shoulders ached, her legs and feet swelled, and her ribs felt



as if they were sinking down into her organs. The punishing performance transformed her into an international celebrity and one of the world's most famous living artists.





More than half a million people came to see the 2010 exhibit, titled *The Artist Is Present*. In addition to Abramovic herself, the retrospective featured rooms filled with films and photographs documenting works she'd created over four decades. Some 1,500 visitors, including Sharon Stone, Bjork, and Lou Reed, waited in line, and sometimes through the night, to sit across from the artist and bask in her gaze.

"Why did I have to kill myself for three months?" she would later ask. "I wanted to show the power of performance art, wanted to show how it can touch people's hearts."

Despite her fame, an Abramovic original isn't expensive—at least, not compared with contemporaries such as Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, and Gerhard Richter. While a single Koons sculpture fetches as much as \$58.4 million at auction, Abramovic's biggest sale to date was one of her material works, a 1996 sculpture called *Chair for Non-Human Use*, which sold for \$362,500 in 2011, according to Artnet, which tracks the art market. The chair has a quartz crystal backrest and iron legs

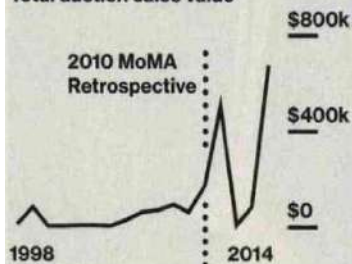
that are 23 feet long. As for *The Artist Is Present*, Abramovic says she prepared for a year, sat for a total of 736 hours, and needed three years to recover from the physical and mental toll. Her fee, she says, totaled \$100,000.

Performance art has never been an easy way to make a living, even by the dire standards of artists. Collectors can't hang it on their walls or, perhaps more important, sell it at a profit. The form is innately ephemeral and self-consciously defies definition; many of the medium's stars, including Abramovic, make works based on time, space, their own bodies, and their relationship to an audience. That's hard to auction, though it's been done.

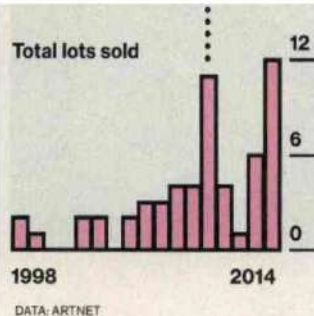
Most of the early stars of performance art, which has been practiced since the Renaissance but first gained mainstream attention in the 1960s, have retired or refocused on more profitable media, such as sculptures and paintings. At 68, Abramovic is an exception. "Marina has done more than anybody to define what performance art is and what it can be," says Julia

#### Abramovic at Auction

Total auction sales value



Peyton-Jones, director of London's famed Serpentine Galleries. "She is a kind of guiding light. She shows us all what is possible." In recent years, she's been the subject of a biography, a documentary, an opera, and a video game. Even hip-hop superstar Jay Z got caught up in the lovefest, staging a kind of tribute to her by rapping his



DATA: ARTNET

song *Picasso Baby* over and over in a gallery for six hours.

"There is this contradiction," says Abramovic, who has a pronounced Serbian accent. "I'm very high on every art list or whatever, but as for market value, I'm less than any mediocre, how do you call it, young art."

Until recently, Abramovic's relatively low earning power wasn't a problem. Her art income is enough to support four employees and two freelancers, although she's quick to point out that "Damien Hirst has 240, you know." She owns a loft in

SoHo and a star-shaped country home in Malden Bridge, N.Y., acquired with money she made off one lucky real estate play. But now Abramovic, who's never professed much interest in money, is trying to raise some \$31 million for her planned Marina Abramovic Institute (MAI), a nonprofit organization to be located in a derelict 33,000-square-foot former indoor tennis center in Hudson, N.Y. The building's redesign is being led by Rem Koolhaas and

Shohei Shigematsu of the architectural firm OMA. They aren't cheap, and they aren't donating their time, as many of Abramovic's famous friends do when she asks for help.

Abramovic hopes the institute will be her legacy, a platform for performance art, and a destination for artists, scientists, and thinkers. Admission will be free, she says, and visitors will be invited to don white lab coats and take part in the "Abramovic Method," a series of exercises designed to improve focus, endurance, and sense of self. These include, for example, walking backward through the woods for hours while looking into a hand mirror.

"If I can change human consciousness, even the slightest bit, this is my job," she says.

But changing consciousness and raising millions are endeavors not often in sync, as Abramovic found last December at Art Basel Miami Beach, arguably the world's most important intersection of art and commerce, attended by everyone from billionaire Steve Cohen to pop star Miley Cyrus. There, Abramovic hosted a number of events to raise awareness for her institute, but failed to raise any money. She had visitors take naps on cots in the art fair's convention center, surrounded by billions of





A PRINT SOLD FOR \$25,000 IN 2008

**ythm 10, 1973.** Stabbing between her fingers in this videotaped performance, Abramovic picked up a new life every time she cut herself.

dollars worth of art, and taught them to walk in slow motion, taking up to an hour to complete a loop that would ordinarily take less than a minute. She encouraged them to sit at tables designed for Abramovic by architect Daniel Libeskind and participate in an exercise called Counting the Rice, which involves sorting uncooked lentils and rice grains for a minimum of six hours. ("How do you write 1 million million million million?" asked one 5-year-old girl, looking to document her progress after 10 minutes.)

One evening, select invitees, including artists, music industry agents, and collectors, muted their

phones and rode an elevator to the seventh-floor lounge of the National YoungArts Foundation's headquarters in Miami. They spent more than an hour in silence, sipping pinot grigio and munching, as quietly as possible, on truffle oil chips and popcorn. The artist was conspicuously not present, but no one was crazy enough to break the gag order and ask why. Finally, Abramovic breezed in, dressed all in black, as she usually is, except for red shoes. "I'm sorry to be late, I'm so sorry," she

declared. It turned out she'd been stuck in traffic caused by protesters for nearly two hours. "I hope you enjoyed your silence," she continued with a sly smile. "Thank you for trusting me to do all these strange things."

Two weeks after Art Basel Miami, Abramovic is back in her SoHo loft, a modern flat with a spacious living room and an enor-

mous walk-in closet filled almost exclusively with neatly hung black clothing. "The best part is the bathtub," she says. "I mean, look, it's enormous." In person, Abramovic is motherly, generous in nature, and, for the most part, calls everybody "baby" (as do her assistants). Her pale skin is unlined, and she has long black hair and full, slightly crooked lips. "Do you want a cappuccino?" she asks, before settling into a designer couch made from quilted gray cloth. "Illy gave me this beautiful machine. I'm not making it so perfect yet. I'm learning."

Many of Abramovic's belongings are gifts, it seems. Her close friend Riccardo Tisci, creative director at Givenchy, supplies her with clothing. On the floor in the living room sits a pile of crystals, including one the size of a football, given to her the previous

night by Lady Gaga, who has been using the Abramovic Method to help cut down on smoking and anxiety. According to Abramovic, Gaga now carries rice and lentils with her everywhere. They've been at a party for James Franco, and David Blaine, an old friend, helped Abramovic lug the crystal home.

Abramovic was born in Belgrade, the capital of what was then Yugoslavia. Her parents were national heroes who fought the Nazis during World War II and were rewarded with high positions in Josip Broz Tito's communist government. Privileges included foreign travel, a seaside villa, maids, and lessons in French, English, and piano. But Abramovic's parents fought incessantly, and her father left the family for another woman. Her mother, Danica, was severe and unsympathetic, subjecting her daughter to a strict 10 p.m. curfew until well into her 20s.

Partly in response to her "militaristic" upbringing and growing interest in political protest, Abramovic began experimenting with performance art at Belgrade's Student Cultural Center. During the '70s, she performed a series of extreme works. She screamed until, three hours later, she lost her voice. She danced for eight hours until she collapsed. She created



a giant star from wood chips, lit it on fire, then lay amid the flames until she passed out from lack of oxygen and had to be rescued by onlookers. In *Rhythm 0*, one of her most famous pieces, Abramovic placed 72 objects on a table, including nails, a rose, perfume, a bullet, and a gun, and gave her audience permission to use them on her. Over the course of six hours, they kissed her, cut her clothes, and put a knife between her legs. One person loaded the gun and placed it in her hands.

On her 29th birthday, Abramovic met Frank Uwe Laysiepen, a West German artist known as Ulay, and fell in love. A few months later, she ran away to Amsterdam to be with him. They collaborated for the next 12 years, five of which they spent living in a black Citroën van. "We didn't need to pay electricity, we didn't have telephone, we didn't need to pay for apartment," says Abramovic. "Basically we would go from place to place, and the amount of money for performance was \$150, \$50, \$60, or nothing."

The couple also worked many odd jobs. "We milked the goats in Sardinia to get sausages and bread. ... We made [sweat-

ers] and sell them on the market," says Abramovic.

For one month, Abramovic even worked as a mail carrier in London—which didn't end well. "First it took me so long time to deliver all the letters," she says. "And I decide that every letter who was written with typewriter machine must be bad news or a bill, and I throw them away. And I only deliver letters written by hand and become much faster. Only beautiful letters. After four weeks working, they could



**Rest Energy, 1980.** Abramovic and Ulay lean back to create tension in the bow. Meanwhile, small microphones attached to the artists' chests record their quickening heartbeats.

not prove anything, but they asked me to give back uniform, which I did."

Abramovic says she never got money from her family after leaving Serbia but didn't worry about finances. "I never felt I was poor," she says. "How can I explain, I always had this feeling that I'm OK, you know? Even if I didn't have the money, I never had the panic like other people or made compromises." After Ulay got involved with another woman, the couple agreed to create one last performance together in 1988. Funded with a grant from the Dutch government, they spent three months walking toward one another along China's Great Wall from opposite ends and finally met to say goodbye. Heartbroken, Abramovic returned to Amsterdam and began teaching at various art academies across Europe. "There were moments where I wake up and wanted to switch on light, and there was no light because I didn't pay bills, or no heat," she recalls. "I just lie on the bed and laugh and laugh and laugh and think this is really disaster but, OK, let's start the day and see what I can do."

In the early '90s, Abramovic had lunch with a gallery owner, Sean Kelly, at a cafe on Spring Street in SoHo. "I knew of Marina and had spent a number of years trying to avoid her," recalls Kelly. After all, her unconventional work was hard to sell. But she persuaded him to





**Chair for Non-Human Use, 1996.** Roughly 23 feet tall, the chair has a quartz crystal backrest.

represent her, and they have worked together since. (She's also represented by three other galleries around the world.)

"I knew that if I met her, I would end up working with her," he explains. "And I hadn't figured out how the hell I could support that practice."

Early on, they began mapping out a strategy for her career. Their first move was to print and frame 12 stills from Abramovic's pre-Ulay performance pieces, which sold to "enlightened, philanthropic collectors" for as little as \$3,500, says Kelly. Early investors were likely looking to support Abramovic rather than turn a profit, but those same works now fetch about \$45,000.

With Kelly's guidance, Abramovic also began creating objects to sell alongside her performances. "Sometimes it would be a photograph, some-

times a video.... The scale would change and whether it was in

black and white or color." Over the next decades, Abramovic's prices rose considerably. "The early video pieces in small editions are €150,000 or €250,000," says Kelly. "The photographs are normally up to about €100,000." In October the gallery staged her latest New York exhibition. Viewers were made to put on blindfolds and headphones before being led into a space and left there, blind and deaf, to do as they pleased. They couldn't see or buy anything. "There's nothing to capitalize on," Kelly points out. "It was free to the public, I paid all the bills...but we recognize that it's a big-picture long-term investment in her as a brand."

It is possible for "immaterial" artists to make money off the performance itself, of course. In the late 1950s and early '60s, French conceptual artist Yves Klein sold a series of "immaterial zones," or empty spaces within Paris, in exchange for gold. His patrons would then watch as he threw half of the payment into the Seine; the transaction was completed when the purchaser burned a certificate of authenticity confirming the amount of gold transferred. Contemporary British-German artist Tino Sehgal has sold several performance pieces to museums, including MoMA and the Guggenheim. He provides no written contracts, insists that the directions for reenacting his works be delivered via word-of-mouth, and requires that collectors never photograph or film his "constructed situations." Online auction house Paddle8 last year sold a one-time performance by Icelandic artist Ragnar

**\$2,500+ PER SEAT DINNER**

**SOLD FOR \$362,500 IN 2011, AN ABRAMOVIC HIGH**



Kjartansson for more than \$36,000.

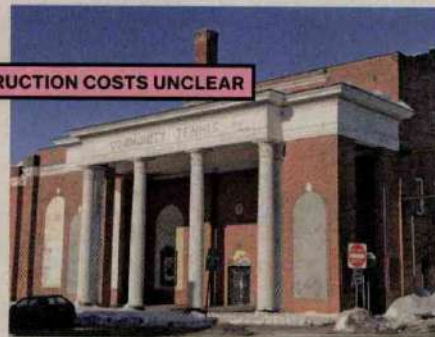
Like many artists, Abramovic has taken the corporate dollar. Last summer she collaborated with Adidas, lending the shoe company one of her and Ulay's 1970s works, *Work/Relation*, for a World Cup commercial. In the three-minute, black-and-white film, 11 performers wearing Adidas sneakers demonstrate that the most efficient way to carry stones from point A to point B is through teamwork. "Marina Abramovic, sellout?" asked *New York* magazine after the commercial aired. The magazine was not her only critic.

Abramovic was surprised by the reaction and insists she did the ad primarily for exposure and to reach an audience that might not yet know about performance art. She was paid about \$150,000, she says, and spent \$50,000 producing the film, a pittance compared with Kanye West's reported \$10 million contract with Adidas or basketball star Kevin Durant's \$300 million deal with Nike. "I'm not sorry," says Abramovic. "It was the right thing to do for my institute." In the past, she points out, art was sponsored by the pope, aristocrats, and kings. They don't seem as interested in art anymore. "Now it's sponsored by industry and by individuals—that's the reality." As for endorsing Adidas, she says, "People have to wear shoes, so what's the problem with black shoes with three stripes. I don't get it.... People have very old-fashioned view that artists should have nothing, for some reason. But I don't understand why I should be paid less than the plumber who comes to fix your toilet." Unlike most plumbers, however, Abramovic is in demand on the lecture circuit, and her fee is around \$15,000.

It's in real estate, however, that her appetite for strange situations truly pays off. "I have an intuition for real estate, just like for art," she says. "You know, it's so interesting, the basic money, it doesn't come from my sales. It comes from completely another story." In the late '80s she bought a run-down, six-story house in Amsterdam that had been seized by a bank. "It was terrible," she remembers. "I mean, baroque ceilings, beautiful cast marble fireplaces, but like 35 heroin addicts living there."

Abramovic had \$5,000 for a down payment, which she'd earned selling Polaroids she shot with Ulay, but she needed a mortgage. Banks weren't interested, she says, explaining that Dutch law is protective of squatters. Abramovic went to neighbors for help, and finally someone explained that a drug dealer lived on the second floor and kept the addicts there so no one would buy the place. As Abramovic recalls, "The next day, I go, and I ring the bell, and this guy opened the door, and I go up, and there is like a table full of every kind of coke, heroin, grass, LSD, ecstasy, and a pistol on the floor. And he's looking at me with bloodshot eyes and says, 'What do you want?'"

#### CONSTRUCTION COSTS UNCLEAR



Future site of the Marina Abramovic Institute in Hudson, N.Y. The former community tennis center, which Abramovic bought for about \$1 million, may cost up to \$31 million to renovate.



tells it, the dealer said, “OK, I think I like you, so this is the deal we’re going to do: I will get the old guys out. You will get the mortgage, and you buy this house, but then you have to come to me with a contract for the lowest social rent, and I can stay forever.”

ONE SOLD FOR ABOUT \$100,000 IN 2014

Abramovic took the deal, and when she returned the next day the heroin addicts were gone. “I take the huge rubbish container, and I throw everything out: old curtains, furniture, s---,” she says. “The third bank I call gave me the mortgage.” To make sure no one snapped up the house before the contract was signed, Abramovic had the drug dealer temporarily move a few heroin addicts back in. “I told him, about 15 will do.” Over the next 25 years, Abramovic says she put roughly \$30,000 into the place. The drug dealer and she became friends; he cleaned up and ultimately moved out. Years ago, she sold the house for roughly \$4.5 million and bought a series of New York properties, some of which she later sold at a sizable profit, including one apartment that earned her at least \$350,000.

She also bought the institute, a grand brick building in Hudson, a formerly down-on-its-luck upstate town now haggling with gentrification. The structure was previously a theater, then a sports center, and the inscription above the entrance still reads “Community Tennis.” White paint is flaking off its four Corinthian columns. Abramovic has donated the structure, which she bought for close to \$1 million, to MAI, her nonprofit, which is currently headquartered in a shared office in Manhattan. In terms of fundraising for the project, Abramovic says she’s “nowhere. Seriously.” In 2013 she completed a successful Kickstarter campaign, in which donors were awarded with hugs and Marina swag. The posted reward for those who gave \$10,000: “Marina will do nothing. You will do nothing. You will not be publicly acknowledged.” The campaign raised more than \$661,000, but that money won’t even cover Koolhaas’s preliminary designs. Proceeds from the Adidas commercial, meanwhile, covered only a few months of operational costs.

In November, Thanos Argyropoulos, a Greek financier who is producing one of Abramovic’s film projects, volunteered to come on as MAI’s managing director. His résumé includes a stint as adviser to Greece’s Ministry of Culture, where he says he helped slash the budget. “Wherever I show up, it means there’s trouble—something needs restructuring,” he says.

Argyropoulos is donating his time, because he’s a fan of performance art and says Abramovic could use the help: “To put it in business school terms, Marina would ace strategy but fail corporate finance.” He thinks the \$31 million figure is, maybe, a bit high and that building costs can be



Counting the Rice table, 2014. Daniel Libeskind designed this desk for free to help raise money for the Marina Abramovic Institute.

reduced to as little as \$7.5 million. "We perhaps did not need such a pharaonic, spectacular headquarters," he explains. To pay for upkeep and operations, Argyropoulos says MAI will earn money by hosting international performance art events and workshops abroad.

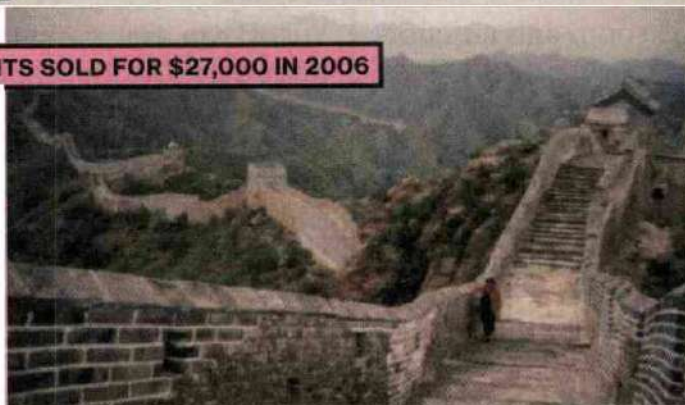
In the meantime, Abramovic abides, undaunted. "If I'm not able to get the money to make the institute run, I will make workshop with entire city of Hudson, for free of course," she says. "I can always go back to immateriality." **B**



**An Artist's Life Manifesto, 2011.** For this event, Abramovic created human table décor.

**"People have  
very old-fashioned view that artists should have nothing"**

**12 PRINTS SOLD FOR \$27,000 IN 2006**



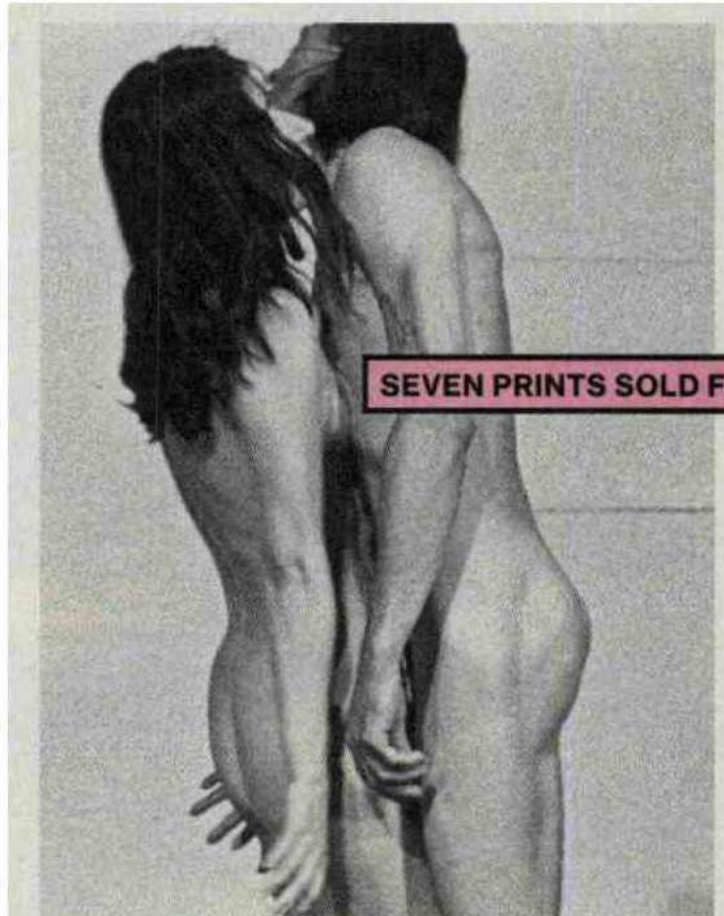
**The Great Wall Walk, 1988.** To end their 12-year relationship with a performance, Abramovic and Ulay started at opposite ends, met, then said goodbye.

**"Basically we would go from place to place, and the amount of money for performance was \$150, \$50, \$60, or nothing"**



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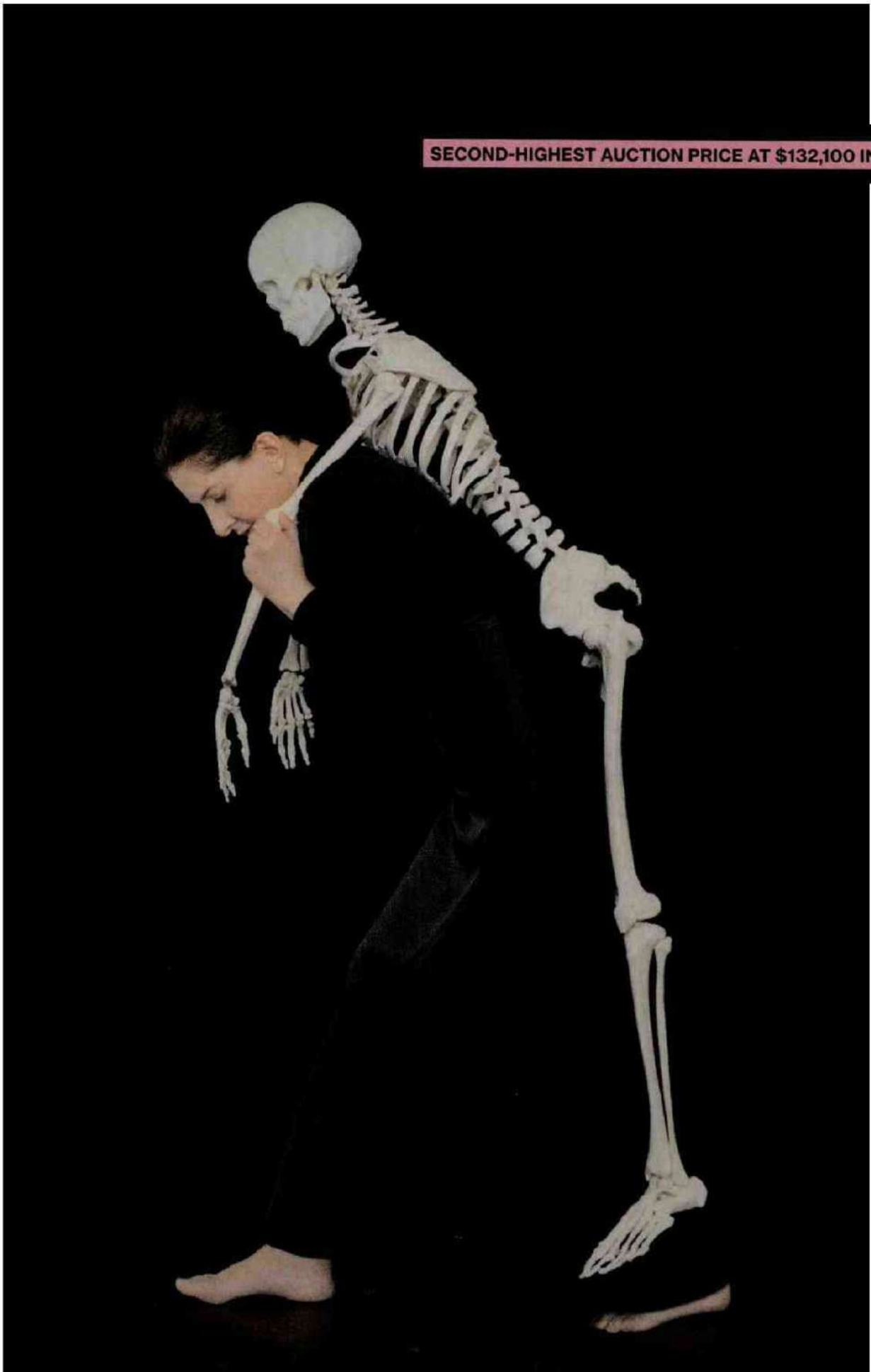




SEVEN PRINTS SOLD FOR \$61,721 IN 2007

**Relation in Space, 1976.** At the Venice Biennale, Abramovic and Ulay, her lover and co-performer, repeatedly slammed into each other for an hour.

SECOND-HIGHEST AUCTION PRICE AT \$132,100 IN 2014



Carrying the Skeleton I, 2008. Some of Abramovic's photographs, like this one, are staged rather than shot during actual performances.

# Creating art in an empty space

LONDON

For new show in Britain, Marina Abramovic has removed all of her props

BY ROSLYN SULCAS

"They warned me that most of the time I would be looking at an empty chair," said the performance artist Marina Abramovic, recounting the lead-up to the 2010 retrospective of her work, "The Artist is Present," at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where she sat motionless, six days a week, seven hours a day, looking straight at whoever sat down opposite her.

Little did they know that chair would almost never be empty. Over half a million people visited the exhibition. By the time the show closed, Ms. Abramovic was no longer just a pioneering performance artist, but a celebrity.

On Wednesday, Ms. Abramovic, 67, opened "512 Hours," her first performance work since "The Artist is Present" at the Serpentine Gallery here. This time there is no chair. "There is just me," Ms. Abramovic said. "And the public. It is insane what I try to do."

The idea of "512 Hours," named for the length of time Ms. Abramovic will spend in the gallery over the duration of the exhibition (running through Aug. 25), is both simple and radical. There will be nothing in the Serpentine galleries except lockers, where visitors will put their bags and electronic devices. Ms. Abramovic, as well as an assistant, Lynsey Peisinger, and several museum guards will be there. What will happen next, no one quite knows. At a press preview on Monday, she led people individually to a blank wall, whispered a time in their ears, and left them there.

But she said this was not necessarily what would happen in the space later. "I honestly don't know; I don't have a plan. That is the point," she said in an interview at the house that she is sharing with her assistants during the London show. "The idea is that the public are

my material, and I am theirs. I will open the gallery myself in the morning and close it at 6 p.m. with my key. I want to understand how I can be in the present moment, be with the public."

Ms. Abramovic, who has long black hair and almost spookily unlined, creamy skin, was born in Belgrade, in the former Yugoslavia, to parents who were partisan heroes during World War II. She has lived most of her adult life in the west, and speaks a throaty, lightly accented English. She said that she had been invited to the Serpentine, a small museum in the middle of Kensington Gardens that is mostly dedicated to experimental work, almost 17 years ago. ("Everything takes forever in my life," she declared dramatically.)

When she and the gallery's co-curators, Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist, finally fixed upon a date, she thought that she might show little-known early works, or sound pieces. "Then one night, in the middle of the night, I woke up thinking, this is wrong," she said. "I must do something really radical, there is no time to lose. I had this vision of an empty gallery, nothing there."

The word "nothing" has proved a problematic one. Two weeks ago, the Guardian newspaper reported that a number of American art historians and curators had written to Mr. Obrist, accusing Ms. Abramovic and the gallery of failing to acknowledge the work of Mary Ellen Carroll, a New York-based conceptual artist who has been working on a project called "Nothing" since 2006, when she went to Argentina with only her passport, and spent six weeks traveling there.

"There is a long and interesting relationship between art and nothingness," said Mr. Obrist in a telephone conversation. "There are many people — John Cage, Yves Klein, Gustav Metzger, Yoko

Ono, Joseph Beuys — who have worked with this idea, including Mary Ellen Carroll. Of course we take that seriously."

"From my point of view, it's difficult for anyone to claim nothing," Ms. Abramovic said dryly. "I think it's a misunderstanding anyway. It's not that I'm doing nothing, quite the opposite. It's just that there is nothing except people in the space. But now we are getting letters every day from people who did nothing first. It seems to have become something."

After "The Artist is Present" Ms. Abramovic said she found it difficult to move on to another performance work. She has been mostly concerned with raising money for the Marina Abramovic Institute, a center for long-duration work in Hudson, N.Y., that will, she hopes, bring figures from the worlds of art, science and spirituality together to help to change human consciousness one participant at a time.

"I set up such a high bar, I think everyone was thinking that was it and now I'd do my Institute," Ms. Abramovic said. "And it is true that it was so incredibly complete, I had to figure out how to get out of that. The solution was simple; to take away even the few things I had there — the chair, the structure of sitting and looking."

The controversy generated by "512 Hours," the first performance work that Ms. Abramovic has presented in a British gallery, is nothing new for the artist, who has been criticized for appearing to relish the fame that has accompanied her success and has seen Lady Gaga come to her for instruction and Jay-Z take inspiration from her work. "It's the Emperor's New Clothes," a journalist muttered at the press conference, as Ms. Abramovic spoke of her desire to



create a “charismatic space” in the gallery, and of the work she has done in Brazil to learn how to receive and transmit energy.

Yet, despite the criticism, there is no question of her influence in the art world and beyond. As well as the Serpentine show, there are currently retrospectives of her work in Jevnaker, Norway, and Málaga, Spain, where, Ms. Abramovic said, over 3,000 people turned up for the opening.

“I have moved from an art structure to a larger one,” Ms. Abramovic said. “‘The Artist is Present’ somehow took me into that other territory. This is not a public who usually go to museums, they are super-young, and I become for them some kind of example of things they want to know. I think there is an enormous need to be in contact with the artist. It is a huge responsibility, there are huge expectations. It does not make my ego bigger, it gives me more to do.”

**ONLINE: MORE ON ART**

🖱 *Reviews from exhibitions around the world.* [nytimes.com/art](https://www.nytimes.com/art)

**“The solution was simple; to take away even the few things I had there — the chair, the structure of sitting and looking.”**



# She carved a star into her stomach, fasted for twelve days and nearly suffocated for art

**Now a new play by Robert Wilson  
tells the story of the life and death of  
the very much alive artist Marina  
Abramovic, reports **Lucy Powell****

**D**ays away from the opening of a new play about her life by the iconic theatre director Robert Wilson, its star and subject, Marina Abramovic, makes an interesting confession. "I myself hate theatre," the self-styled grandmother of performance art announces, in her deadpan, Slavic tones. "In theatre everything is fake. Ice is not ice, knife is not knife, blood is not blood. It is a black hole."

In Abramovic's performance art, the ice is always ice, the razor blades are real

and the blood is all her own. In *Lips of Thomas*, performed in socialist Yugoslavia in 1975, Abramovic lay naked on a cross of ice, whipped herself until her back ran red and cut a five-pointed Communist star in her belly with a razor

blade. She has masturbated for seven hours under a gallery floor, fasted in full public view for 12 consecutive days and nearly suffocated to death in the name of art. In *Rhythm 0*, in 1974, Abramovic famously lay 72 objects out for the public to use on her as they pleased, including condoms, a feather, razor blades and a gun with a single bullet in it. She wasn't raped, and she didn't flinch, but one man

held the gun to her head for two hours.

"I don't like pain. I don't do it in private," the youthful, down-to-earth 64-year-old insists, dressed in her trademark black. "I do dangerous things because it is the only way out. If you do only things you like, you never change. If you do things you're afraid of, that's the interesting moment. You go somewhere else. You become a mirror for the audience. It's the same with theatre. I don't like theatre, so I do theatre."

The theatre idea came to Abramovic in 1988. Her 12-year relationship and artistic collaboration with the German performance artist Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen) was breaking under the strain of public scrutiny. To mark their separation the pair walked the Great Wall of China. Abramovic began at the Yellow Sea, Ulay at the Gobi desert. After 90 days they met in the middle and kissed goodbye. "It was so painful, this failure," she says. "I was 40 years old, I lost the man I love and I lost my work. This was the hardest moment in my life. The only thing I found as a solution, I said, 'let's stage my life, let's stage this pain'. I never went to a psychoanalyst, I went to the stage. The

**“  
I hated my**

ARTS

## mother. She was the coldest woman I ever knew

only theatre I'm playing is the theatre of my life."

Freud would doubtless have approved of this "revisioning" from Robert Wilson. Narrated by Willem Dafoe and featuring a new score by Antony Hegarty, of Antony and the Johnsons, the play relays formative scenes from her Belgrade childhood, rather than restagings of her art, and has Abramovic playing her mother. *Little Marina* is performed by members of the 11-strong ensemble, some of whom wear moustaches, with comic-book excess and comicbrio, and the show ends with a lavish staging of her own funeral.

"The stories are so tragic, you have to laugh," Abramovic says. She is the daughter of two national war heroes in Tito's Yugoslavia, who had what she calls a "disaster marriage". Her father left when Abramovic was 15. Her mother exerted complete, iron control over her two children, forcing her to obey a strict 10pm curfew until she left for Amsterdam at the age of 29. "At the time I hated my mother. She was the coldest, most frigid woman I ever knew. Now I am incredibly grateful," Abramovic says. "I would never be what I am if it weren't for this childhood. On one side this communist discipline and complete willpower and the other, from my grandmother," a devout Christian, "very spiritual and vulnerable. This insane mix made me an artist."

The two faces of Abramovic are forever at war, and her work, too, contains a disquieting mix of the monkishly humble and flagrantly self-promoting, earning her reverence and revulsion in equal measure. This was now here more evident than in her last, and most successful show to date, a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art last year in New York, where she now lives. In Abramovic's live piece, *The*

*Artist is Present*, she sat in silence for seven hours at a time on a wooden chair, using Zen meditation techniques to remain still, clocking up more than 700 hours of sitting time over three months.

Members of the public sat opposite her for as long or as little as they chose. The show was a sensation; nearly half a million people came to the gallery. "People were crying, going completely crazy," she recalls, wide-eyed. "I had people wait all night outside the museum to come and see me." Her acolytes formed Facebook groups to discuss their experiences. Sceptics bemoaned it as a media circus attracting queue-hopping celebrities.

There's a messianic whiff to the title of her forthcoming show that's unlikely to silence her detractors. Abramovic declares herself supremely uninterested. "Let them think whatever they want," she says affably. "Everything I do comes from my own experience. Jesus did the same. I have nothing to do with that." And anyway, she points out, she's had no control over the show. "I am just carpet," she says, laughing. "Bob can do whatever he wants."

Wilson is an equally controversial artistic figure. His radically experimental, non-narrative approach to theatre is feted and derided with equal ferocity. His most famous early works were often entirely wordless, glacially paced, monumental epics, based on his observations of deaf or autistic teenagers, which could run for up to a week. *Einstein on the Beach*, his epochal, 1976 opera with the composer Philip Glass, which receives its UK premiere at the Barbican next year, ran to five, surreal, intermission-free hours, with the audience encouraged to come and go as they please.

The 70-year-old Wilson has since directed more than 50 plays and operas, and garnered a formidable reputation as a fierce artistic autocrat. I find him in his dressing room, munching a Subway sandwich, watching Beyoncé clips on YouTube. "Isn't she brilliant?" he says in his slow, Southern drawl. "We're both from Texas, you know." Wilson, the enigmatic, gay, learning-impaired son of a real estate lawyer, says that he had reservations about working with

Abramovic, because he is as committed to theatrical illusion as she is to ripping it apart. But he reports no titanic clashes of ego: "I have a great fondness for Marina," he says. "She was prepared to do absolutely anything, and she has this great power. You can just sit her on a stage and she has this strength. She's blessed with it."

Wilson doesn't anticipate that this long-awaited marriage of their talents will finally woo sceptical English critics to an appreciation of his work. "They've been so mean to me," he says, "from day one. It's like Waco, Texas, here. I think a lot of people will be very critical and say that is not the life and death of Marina." He pauses and, chuckling, adds: "Maybe it'll be the death of Marina. Let's see."

Abramovic, survivor of the astonishing rigours of her own art, has no such fear. "Everybody criticises me, all my life. My art professor in Belgrade says I should be put in a mental institution. I am lucky. I never doubt myself. Doubt takes so much energy. We have only one energy. This energy we can transform into creativity, into hate, into love. It is a lonely life, I sacrificed everything: family, children, but I chose art." Ask whether the cost of that choice has been too much and Abramovic doesn't hesitate: "Don't be so prejudiced," she chides, "in art, too much is just good enough."

***The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic* is at The Lowry, Salford Quays, from Saturday to July 16 (not Sunday or Tuesday) at 7.30pm (0161-876 2198, mif.co.uk)**



the guardian | TheObserver

Culture > Art and design > Marina Abramovic

## Interview: Marina Abramović

In four decades as a performance artist, Marina Abramović has had a stranger point a loaded gun at her head, sat in silence for 700 hours and set herself on fire. Now, as she prepares for a new show in which she enacts her own funeral, the 63-year-old reveals why "Freud would have had a field day" with her

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**Sean O'Hagan**

The Observer, Sunday 3 October 2010



Marina Abramović with white lamb. Photograph: Marina Abramović for the Guardian

Earlier this year, just before she began her 700-hour-long performance at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Marina Abramović was asked by an art critic to define the difference between performance art and theatre.

"To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre," she replied.

"Theatre is fake... The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real."



Marina Abramović, *Balkan Baroque I*. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist for the Guardian

Abramović was born in Belgrade in former Yugoslavia on 30 November 1946. "When people ask me where I am from," she says, "I never say Serbia. I always say I come from a country that no longer exists." (In 1997 she performed *Balkan Baroque* at the Venice Biennale. It involved her scrubbing clean 1,500 cow bones six hours a day for four days and weeping as she sang songs and told stories from her native country.) Her mother, Danica Rosi, came from a very wealthy, very powerful, very religious clan; her father, Vojin Abramović, came from peasant stock. Both were born in Montenegro and fought for the communist partisans during the Second World War, their bravery making them national heroes and earning them prominent positions in President Tito's post-war Yugoslavian government. "We were Red bourgeoisie," their daughter once told an interviewer.

The family dynamic seems to have been explosive. Her parents quarrelled constantly and Abramović was often beaten by her disciplinarian mother for supposedly showing off. For six years she lived with her grandmother, an extremely religious woman who loathed communism.

"The brother of my grandfather was the patriarch of the Orthodox Church and revered as a saint. So everything in my childhood is about total sacrifice, whether to religion or to communism. This is what is engraved on me. This is why I have this insane willpower. My body is now beginning to be falling apart, but I will do it to the end. I don't care. With me it is about whatever it takes."

As a child, Abramović escaped into painting. She had, she tells me, three distinct phases of development as a painter. In the first, she painted her dreams, which tended towards the traumatic. In the second, she painted "big socialistic trucks crashed together" and "little innocent socialistic toy trucks that I have placed on the highway".

She hoots with laughter. "Don't even ask me why. I do not know, I have no answer to this insane behaviour."



From the beginning, pain, suffering and endurance were central to Abramović's art. In the early 70s, she performed a piece, *Lips of Thomas*, named after a lover of hers, which involved her whipping herself, cutting a five-point communist star – a recurring motif in her work – into her stomach with a razor blade, and then lying on a cross made of ice beneath a suspended heater for 30 minutes, bleeding all the while. It was in 1974, during a performance of a piece entitled *Rhythm 5* at the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, that she had to be pulled unconscious from the burning star. "I burnt off my hair. In the morning, my grandmother see me and drop the breakfast tray on the floor and start to shriek like a cat who has seen the devil." Did it make her think twice about her calling? "No. It made me angry that I had not completed the performance."



Marina Abramovic, *Rest Energy* with Ulay, 1980. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist and the Lisson gallery for the Guardian

I ask her about another now legendary and even more potentially dangerous performance she gave in Naples in the early 70s. Called *Rhythm 0*, it involved her lying prone on a table for six hours surrounded by 72 instruments of her choosing, including matches, lipstick, saws, nails and even a gun with a single bullet in the chamber. Visitors were invited to do what they "desired" to her body and many responded with vicious intent, marking, probing and scratching her, blindfolding her, dousing her with cold water and pinning slogans to her skin. "I still have the scars of the cuts," she says quietly. "It was a little crazy. I realised then that the public can kill you. If you give them total freedom, they will become frenzied enough to kill you." What was the worst thing that happened? "A man pressed the gun hard against my temple. I could feel his intent. And I heard the women telling the men what to do. The worst was the one man who was there always, just breathing. This, for me, was the most frightening thing. After the performance, I have one streak of white hair on my head. I cannot get rid of the feeling of fear for a long time. Because of this performance, I know where to draw the line so as not to put myself at such risk."



Of late, Abramović has courted a different kind of controversy, this time within the still small world of performance art, by her decision to re-enact works by other performance artists, including Beuys, Klein, Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci. She stretches the original, often relatively long works to sometimes absurd lengths to tap into their transformative power. This has drawn ire from the purists, including her ex-partner, an artist called Ulay with whom she lived for a year among the Australian Aborigines. He recently told the *New Yorker*: "I don't believe in these performance revivals. They don't have the ring of truth about them."

Abramović is adamant, though, that, as she puts it: "Performance art has to live and survive. It cannot be put on walls. If we do not perform and recreate it, the art fuckers and the theatre fuckers and the dance fuckers will rip us off without credit even more than they do anyway. I am sick and tired of the mistreatment of performance art. Even the pop-video fuckers steal from it. I want to bring young people in afresh so they can experience the beautiful work of Beuys and Acconci. The best way to do that is to bring those works alive, to perform them."

To this end, she has created the Marina Abramović Institute in San Francisco. She is currently raising the money to open the Marina Abramović Foundation for Preservation of Performance Art in downtown Manhattan. It will be dedicated to the performance, cataloguing and propagation of the form and, in the process, the immortalising of her name. Like one of her heroines, Maria Callas, she seems acutely aware of her own greatness.

At her forthcoming retrospective at Lisson Gallery, you can see videos of Abramović's *Rhythm* series and trace the 40-year trajectory of her work from one kind of intensity to another. It is, in every way, an extraordinary journey of endurance, performance and constant reinvention. Now, as age encroaches, she has become an artist whose main subject is time itself. "I still look at my body as a machine and I still use the mind – the will – to control what I do," she says, "but there is something more Buddhist now about the performances. At 63, I can do seven hours, but the energy and the work is more distilled. I could not do that before, but now I have more knowledge of time and energy. For me, the long duration of a piece is the key to real transformation – and performance art is nothing without transformation." She should know.

• Marina Abramović is showing at Lisson Gallery from 13 October – 13 November 2010 ([lissongallery.com](http://lissongallery.com))