

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

10.10.2025 TO 1.3.2026

ALBERTINA modern



Marina Abramović, *Four Crosses* (detail), 2019, Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives
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Exhibition Facts

Duration	10 October 2025 – 1 March 2026
Venue	ALBERTINA MODERN
Curator	Bettina M. Busse
Works	4 Performances, 100 Artworks
Catalogue	Exhibition Book available in the ALBERTINA Shop and at https://shop.albertina.at/ (German EUR 51,30 English EUR 51,30)
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 1010 Vienna T +43 (0)1 534 83 0 presse@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Öffnungszeiten	ALBERTINA MODERN Karlsplatz 5, 1010 Vienna Daily from 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Saturday to Tuesday 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. October & November
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MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

10.10.2025 – 1.3.2026

The Albertina Modern, in cooperation with the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien, is presenting the first major retrospective of Marina Abramovic in Austria.

Marina Abramović (born 1946 in Belgrade) is one of the most eminent contemporary artists. Considered the founder of modern performance art, she has written art history with her legendary appearances. From her beginnings in the Belgrade of the 1970s, she has, over the course of a career spanning more than fifty years, firmly established performance as a genre of visual art. Already in 1978, she had her first appearance in Vienna at the International Performance Festival. The exhibition, curated in cooperation with Kunstforum Wien, will offer a comprehensive overview of the artist's oeuvre. The focus of the presentation at the Albertina Modern will be on reenactments of the historical performances, which will be shown daily throughout the exhibition. Performance art has a long tradition in Vienna, with Actionism as its best-known manifestation.

Marina Abramović's early performance series *Rhythm* combined concept with physicality, endurance with empathy, complicity with loss of control, passivity with danger. Already it was about time, silence, energy, and the heightened awareness evoked by long-duration performances—themes that run through Abramović's entire oeuvre. To her, the body was both subject and medium. By exposing herself to pain, total exhaustion, and danger, she kept pushing her physical and psychological limits, always in quest of emotional and spiritual transformation.

From 1976 to 1988, she performed together with her life partner Ulay (1943–2020). Since then, she has created solo works that involve more interaction with the audience, objects that invite participation, and performances such as *The Artist Is Present*, in which she gave visitors an opportunity to take turns sitting across from her at a table for one minute of silence each, eight hours a day for almost three months at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 2010. This performance finally made her known to a wide public.

For the retrospective the rooms were set up in a collaborative exhibition design created with the artist. They are dedicated to a specific theme such as participation, communism, body limits, energy from nature, or enlightenment. Exhibits on display there will include early works created in Belgrade, the first solo performances, her collaboration with Ulay and the legendary joint performances, the

participation-inviting *Transitory Objects for Human Use*, which marked the beginning of her second solo career, the spectacular *Balkan Baroque* performance, for which she received a Golden Lion at the 1997 Venice Biennale, as well as more recent video and sculptural works. In addition, her installation *Four Crosses* (2019) will be shown.

A total of four performances will be restaged live in the exhibition: *Imponderabilia*, *Luminosity*, *Nude With Skeleton* and *Art must be beautiful – Artist must be beautiful*.

The exhibition is organised by the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien and the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in cooperation with the Albertina Wien.

Exclusive special opening

Saturday to Tuesday | 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

October & November

CURATED BY

Bettina M. Busse

COOPERATION

Royal Academy of Arts, London

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

Kunsthaus Zürich

Exhibition Texts

Room 1

Introduction

The Albertina Modern, in cooperation with Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien, presents the first major retrospective of Marina Abramović in Austria.

Marina Abramović (born 1946 in Belgrade) is one of the pre-eminent artists of the present time. She is considered the founder of modern performance art and has made art history with her iconic performances. Since the early 1970s she has worked to establish performance into a recognized form of expression within the visual arts. The exhibition gives a comprehensive overview of Abramović's work spanning more than five decades. At the Albertina Modern, the focus is on reperformances of her historic performances: daily showings of newly staged works relate them to the rich tradition of Austrian action and performance art. As early as 1978, Abramović participated in the International Performance Festival in Vienna.

Her early *Rhythm* series combines conceptual art with extreme physical experience, endurance with empathy, passivity with danger. Themes like time, silence, energy, and spiritual transformation through long-term performances run through her entire oeuvre. Her medium is always the body—an instrument to explore emotional and mental states. She exposes herself to pain, exhaustion, and danger in order to break through to new states of consciousness.

Between 1976 and 1988, Abramović works closely with Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen, 1943–2020). Their joint practice is characterized by symbiotic intensity and radical physicality. She then moves on to develop her solo career, increasingly focusing on interacting with the audience—for example, in *The Artist Is Present* (2010, MoMA, New York), where she sits across a table from visitors in silent presence for hours. This work makes her famous worldwide.

The exhibition presents thematic rooms that highlight central aspects of her work: participation, physical boundaries, energy from nature, spirituality, and political memory. Included in the show are works from Abramović's early days in Belgrade, early solo performances, iconic duo works created with Ulay, participatory objects (*Transitory Objects for Human Use*), video and sculptural works. Also in the show is her performance *Balkan Baroque* (1997), which earned her a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale.

Later works expand the concept of performance by addressing physical absence. The artist develops objects intended to be used and activated by the public. Her works increasingly function as energetic catalysts—with the objective of triggering inner processes in viewers.

A central part of the exhibition is dedicated to Abramović's exploration of spiritual themes. Her intense preoccupation with natural forces, rituals, and energy fields has brought forth works that address cyclical processes such as growth, decay, and renewal. She focuses particularly on feminine connoted forms of spirituality—outside of established religion.

From her early conceptual works to the iconic long-term performances, Abramović has continuously honed her artistic approach. Today, she sees herself less as an active subject and more as a quiet initiator—a medium that sets off processes and invites active participation from the audience.

The exhibition is organized by the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien and the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in cooperation with the Albertina Wien.

Room 2

Public Participation

Marina Abramović's performances create a vibrant connection between art, artist, and audience. From early on in her career, she has sought to bring out that moment of bonding, making visitors of her exhibitions an active part of her work. She describes dialogue and exchange with them as essential:

"I cannot do anything without an audience, I need their energy. Before I start, I do nothing else but look at people; that's how I take in their energy. During my action, I translate that energy into my feeling, and give it back to them through my performance."

Abramović has explored this exchange throughout her career and sees it as a central element of her work. Two works, created decades apart, are particularly significant here: *Rhythm 0*, which takes place in 1974 at Studio Morra in Naples, and *The Artist Is Present* of 2010 at MoMA in New York. She invites visitors to engage with this specific moment of performance, the work, themselves, and their reactions to the artist—in fact, to expose themselves to the situation. In both works, her body provides a mirror for the emotions and projections of the person across from her. The reactions are remarkable in both instances, ranging from sad and indifferent to fascinated, amused, and sceptical. Sometimes people even burst into tears. In *Rhythm 0*, the interactions escalate over the course of the day. Restrained at first, they later become aggressive, intrusive, and violent.

The Artist is Present

The relationship with the public is central to Marina Abramović's work. In her famous performance on the occasion of her 2010 retrospective at MoMA in New York, she enters into a silent dialogue with visitors: two chairs, a table—Abramović sitting on one side, and the audience being invited to take turns Sitting down across from her. They look at each other for as long as the person wishes: The

central element is eye contact, a rare experience in an anonymous city like New York, and silent communication through the eyes as the “windows to the soul.” Although the encounter remains wordless, many describe this brief experience, which lasts only a few seconds or minutes, as an extremely intense emotional experience. For Abramović, it is one of the most challenging works of her career.

Room 3

Rhythm 0

*Engaging visitors in her work is particularly significant for Marina Abramović’s oeuvre: “The audience is my mirror, and I am the mirror for my audience,” the artist emphasizes. In 1974, Abramović stands motionless for an entire day for *Rhythm 0* at Studio Morra in Naples. Set up in front of her is a table with objects that promise pain and pleasure—from a feather to a gun to a single bullet—which the audience was free to use on her at will. “I am the object,” the artist declares. During this time, she takes full responsibility for anything the visitors would do to her. Over the course of the day, silence and scepticism give way to increasingly violent interactions: Abramović is stripped down to the waist, her skin is scratched with rose thorns, her hands tied, and finally a man holds a loaded pistol to her neck. Only when she starts to move and looks back again at the end of the performance, many of those present leave the room in shock—confronted with what they had done.*

Room 5

COMMUNIST BODY

Marina Abramović is born in former communist Yugoslavia in 1946. Her parents, partisan fighters in World War II, are celebrated as heroes and rewarded with state positions. The constrictions of communist ideology—from extreme physical discipline to limited freedom of expression— are keenly felt by the artist at home as well as on the street. They shape Abramović’s early years and artistic development. Some of her performances from the mid-1970s, such as *Rhythm 5* (1974) and *Lips of Thomas* (1975), are explorations of those restrictions. By using the communist star, which the artist carves into her stomach in violent defiance of ideological dogma, Abramović metaphorically represents the restrictions she experienced through her body art translating them into painful signs of the past. In these early, arguably the most melancholic of Abramović’s performances, which also include *Balkan Baroque* (1997), the personal meets the political, history meets myth, culture meets folklore. This well-known performance was created in reaction to the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, which were associated with extreme interethnic violence. As the title suggests, *Balkan Baroque* represents a culture of dramatic extremes, which Abramović perceives as typical of the Balkan spirit, the mentality of her homeland. These extremes are, however, also a typical quality of the artist’s own work.

Balkan Baroque

*In 1976, Marina Abramović leaves Belgrade, but continues to feel an emotional tie to the region. The Balkan identity, characterized by violence and eroticism, also informs her later works. In 1997, Marina Abramović presents *Balkan Baroque* at the Venice Biennale as a response to the war in the Balkans, which breaks out in 1991 with the breakup of Yugoslavia. For four days, six hours a day, she sits on a mountain of 1,500 bloody cattle bones, which she scrubs of remains of meat using water and a brush. As she does so, she sings Yugoslavian folksongs and funeral songs from the various republics. The performance is a metaphor for war: "Even if I try to clean the bones, it is impossible to wash the blood off my hands." The accompanying three-part video installation shows Abramović with her parents, tells the story of the "wolf rat," and ends with a Hungarian folk dance, a czardas. Originally planned for the Yugoslavian pavilion, the work is moved, because of its antinationalist message, to the basement of the Italian pavilion. It is awarded the Golden Lion.*

The Hero

*As a homage to her father, who dies three years after her performance in Venice, Abramović performs *The Hero* (2001) for the camera. The work is highly emotional: Sitting on a white horse, the artist holds a white flag that flutters in the wind. She sits there for an indefinite period of time, staring into the distance, while, in a voice-over, a woman sings the Yugoslav national anthem from the Tito era, which is now banned in the successor states of former Yugoslavia. Tito has gone from national hero to national enemy. A glass display case in front of the projection contains memorabilia and photographs relating to her father and the time they spent together, including a photo of a victory parade showing him on horseback. "Why a white flag?" the artist asks. "My father never surrendered to anything. But he is dead, and white is also the color of death. We must all surrender to change, and death is the biggest change of all."*

Room 6*Lips of Thomas*

*In 1975, in Galerie Krinzinger Innsbruck, Marina Abramović presents *Lips of Thomas*, one of her most complex performances. She eats a kilo of honey with a silver spoon, drinks a liter of red wine, flagellates herself, cuts a five pointed star into the skin on her stomach, and lies down on a block of ice while a heat lamp is directed at the bleeding wound. After two hours, she is rescued by the audience. In 2005, Abramović re-performs the action, which reveals an almost shamanistic quest for liberation and purification, once again at the New York Guggenheim Museum as part of her *Seven Easy Pieces* series of re-performances of works by herself and other artists. The use of the communist*

star and Christian symbols helps the artist to confront social and political oppression and liberate herself from power structures and ideologies. Abramović's early performances are not just about personal and physical boundaries but also address social injustices and abuses as well as state-controlled norms and laws.

Luminosity

Marina Abramović describes her artistic practice as "more and more of less and less," referencing the Tibetan concept of "full emptiness." Reflecting on her early performances in 2002, she noted that while she experienced altered states of consciousness, she did so without any deliberate connection to meditation or spirituality. It is only later that she realizes that she was in fact going through meditative states. For Abramović, her long-lasting performances are paths to transformation. In Luminosity (1997), she sits suspended against a wall, bathed in light, with her arms and legs extended. She calls it "liquid knowledge": when the body becomes exhausted, the boundary between body and mind starts blurring, and a state of intense awareness arises – "like a divine knowledge, but it's not religious." Abramović acknowledges this threshold between physical and mental existence for example in Portal (2022).

Rhythm 5

In Rhythm 5 (1974), performed at the Studentski kulturni centar, the student cultural center in Belgrade, a burning five-pointed wooden star is laid out in the room. In a ritual-like ceremony, the artist first cuts off her nails and hair and throws them into the flames before lying down on the floor in the center of the burning star. After losing consciousness, nearly asphyxiated due to the lack of oxygen, she is pulled out of the burning star and saved by the audience. The five-pointed star is a charged symbol that plays a role in communist and socialist as well as Christian symbolism, and even long before that. Marina Abramović uses it as a metaphor in her performance Rhythm 5, for example, to express criticism of the communist state system in Serbia at the time. Simultaneously, the five-pointed star is also a pentagram—a symbol of the Five Holy Wounds of Christ.

Room 7

BODY LIMITS

Post World War II art sees the beginning of the success story of action and performance art with the rehabilitation of the human body, from idealization to realistic representation. The happening and Fluxus movements emerge. In Austria, Viennese Actionism develops in the 1960s with Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler as pioneering figures. VALIE EXPORT becomes an important voice, who, like Marina Abramović, makes her own body her tool and instrument. Especially from the 1970s onwards, female artists use performance as an alternative, non-male-dominated medium to address their role in society, drawing attention as part of the feminist avant-garde. Against the backdrop of existentialism, Abramović explores endurance as a method of probing the limits of the body and the capacity of the mind to endure pain. She becomes famous for her *Rhythm* performances, in which she exposes herself to extreme physical and psychological situations, venturing on experimentation with loss of control and powerlessness. In *Freeing the Voice* (1975), she lies on her back, screaming until she loses her voice. In *Art Must Be Beautiful / Artist Must Be Beautiful* (1975), she keeps brushing her hair with forceful aggression while repeating the performance title like a mantra for almost an hour. These works are emotionally intense and cathartically express universal human experiences such as pain, anger, and fear.

Imponderabilia

Marina Abramović first performs Imponderabilia in 1977 in Bologna along with Ulay (1943–2020), her partner at the time. The pair stood naked opposite each other in the door frame at the entrance to the museum, and visitors had to squeeze their way between them. The work was a metaphor for artists' role as pillars of the museum, and the fact that passing through this doorway grants visitors admission to a new world, that of participatory art. This aesthetic experience is "imponderable" (incalculable) on many levels and widely different from person to person. Today, reperformances of Imponderabilia are no longer enacted by Marina Abramović herself, but by local performers. Passing on her knowledge is particularly important to the artist. It was with that in mind that, in 2013, she set up the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), in which new generations of performers are trained in the mentally and physically demanding Abramović method.

Marina and Ulay

Marina Abramović and Ulay meet in 1975 and continue to have a close relationship until 1988. They dress similarly, wear their hair at a similar length, and alternately "sign" their works as Ulay / Marina Abramović and Marina Abramović / Ulay. "The idea was unification between male and female, symbolically becoming a hermaphrodite. This became increasingly important as our relationship grew more symbiotic. We were living and working in total unity. We used to feel as if we were three: one woman and one man together generating something we called the third. Our work was the third," says Ulay, describing the obsessive love affair they publicly explored in what they called the Relation

Works, created between 1976 and 1980. Their joint performances are borderline experiences and liberation rituals that break through personal and artistic boundaries. They confront the audience with existential themes such as love, pain, danger, and fear of death. One of their works, Rest Energy (1980), is inspired by an image they both imagine when going into hypnosis in search of their subconscious. The performance, in which Ulay, like Cupid, aims a taut arrow at Abramović, who is holding the bow, expresses the extraordinary trust in their partnership in the face of danger: the bow and arrow are held taut solely by the body weight of the two performers. Microphones placed next to their hearts amplify their heartbeats growing ever louder under the strain.

Room 8

ENERGY FROM NATURE

“I always want to go to the source. And to me the source is nature—places with magnetism and energy: waterfalls, volcanoes, cracks in the earth, great rock formations on top of mountains,” says the artist. Marina Abramović’s works act as catalysts that send the audience out on inner journeys. While using her own body as a tool in her early years, she gradually withdraws from the foreground and begins to create instead what she refers to as Transitory Objects. Following in the tradition of artists like Joseph Beuys, these are not to be viewed as sculptures, but as healing objects that are activated through interaction. The works are inspired by Abramović’s intensive study of Chinese and Tibetan medicine, which recognizes the influence of the energy stored inside the earth on the human constitution. Abramović chooses different minerals based on their regenerative properties and positions them on the wall so that, when used, they can connect with three vital organs: the brain, the heart, and the genitals. Equally formative for the Transitory Objects is the Buddhist practice of vipassana, the perception of the self within its own environment, emerging through sustained concentration. The four most important meditative positions of vipassana—sitting, lying down, standing, walking—are depicted in Abramović’s *Dragon series* (1989/1994), but also in other works such as *Shoes for Departure* (1991) and *Inner Sky* (1991).

Dragon Heads

Following her experience of walking the Great Wall of China, Abramović spends much of the late 1980s and 1990s exploring the relationship between matter and immaterial energy. Her intuitive connection with nature gains more and more significance. In Dragon Heads (1990), a snake slowly winds its way along the artist’s face and head as if following the energy lines within her. The piece is inspired by the myth that the Great Wall is built in the shape of a dragon’s tail along the energy lines of the earth. In Sleeping Under the Banyan Tree (2010), Abramović is seen under a tree that is considered sacred in many South Asian traditions and revered for its medicinal properties. A banyan tree seeds itself on a host tree before eventually suffocating it. Its huge branches then extend outward

and form external roots of their own that nourish and support them, an embodiment of the natural processes of growth, death, and renewal.

Dragons

During the performance The Lovers, The Great Wall Walk (1988), Marina Abramović observes how her energy changes depending on the ground beneath her feet—sometimes it's clay, sometimes iron ore, quartz, or copper. She wants to convey these different energy states to the audience. In addition to the Transitory Objects, she also embarks on working on the Dragons series. The title "Dragons" refers to a story Abramović learns while preparing for The Lovers, namely, that the Great Wall of China represents a giant dragon reflecting the Milky Way. Older villagers tell stories of battles between dragons of different colors, which stand for mineral resources—the black dragon for iron, the green for copper. Based on this, she has so-called cushions made of different minerals installed in the exhibition spaces at head, heart, and stomach height. Visitors are invited to spend time here sitting and recharging their strength at these "power stations."

Red, White and Green Dragons

The Red, White, and Green Dragon are among the first Transitory Objects that Marina Abramović creates after her return from China. The color derives from the respective crystal used by the artist. They resemble spartan beds: long planks sheathed in oxidized copper and mineral cushions made of rose quartz or obsidian. Each is to be mounted on a wall, horizontally or vertically, so that visitors can use them in three basic body positions: sitting, standing, and lying down. She calls them Red Dragon, White Dragon, and Green Dragon. They are a reversal of Abramović's usual relationship with her audience. Abramović says about these works, "I would like for my work to function as a constant mirror for the users of my objects, so that they do not see me in the work, but rather themselves. That's the fundamental thing."

Room 9

COMING AND GOING

From the beginning of her career, Marina Abramović has explored the temporal nature of performance art in various ways, transforming the ephemeral moment: She creates works that are rites of passage and explore what happens when a moment in time is extended to its very limits; she uses video and photography as vehicles for an afterlife of performance art; she is interested in time as a perceptual dimension that our consciousness is largely divorced from, using it as a metaphor for our own mortality. Abramović's most recent performative objects consist of a series of works that thematize the final physical transition: the one from life to death. The artist remarks, "When death knocks on my door, I want to enter this last experience very consciously and free from fear, bitterness

and anger. It is the last experience that we can have in our lives. The experience of transition, of consciously moving from one condition to another, is important for me.” Death is a recurring theme in Abramović’s work, addressed either explicitly or indirectly—through an oscillation between worlds or a simultaneity of presence and absence.

Nude with Skeleton

*Since her earliest performances, photo and video documentation—and through it the extension of the life of a performance—has been a crucial part of Marina Abramović’s art practice. In recent years, she has been exploring other, more specific ways of preserving the moment. Another recurring theme is the transience of human existence. This is exemplified in the work *Nude with Skeleton* (2002/2005), which symbolizes the final physical transition from life to death: In this performance, which is also shown as a video, Abramović has a skeleton lying on top of her, as if she were carrying her own mortality. The work is inspired by the practice of Tibetan monks who, among other things, sleep next to the dead in order to overcome the fear of dying and ensure a “right” death.*

The Kitchen

*Two performances for video from the series *The Kitchen* (2009) are filmed in a nunnery; they relate to the mystical levitations of Saint Teresa of Ávila, one of which occurred in the kitchen of the Carmelite convent in Ávila. In 2001, Marina Abramović published an excerpt from Saint Teresa’s writings about her experiences under the title of “Evidence of Human Transformation.” It is no surprise that the saint kindled Abramović’s interest: Teresa founded the Discalced Carmelites and initiated a reform of the Carmelites, taking the order back to a life of ascetic contemplation. Works like these are evidence of the special attention that Abramović gives to female spirituality. Often prohibited from leading or directing institutional religions, women find themselves forced to explore alternative spiritual traditions.*

Room 10

Four Crosses

*For *Four Crosses* (2019), Marina Abramović created four crosses, each five meters high, marked by the haunting intensity of her facial expressions. They are reminiscent of the famous character heads by 18th-century sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, as well as of late-medieval representations of the Lamentation of Christ, in which pain and intensity become viscerally visible. Abramović translates these historic pictorial traditions into her own artistic language and compounds them with themes like suffering, humanity, and spirituality. The monumental crosses open up a powerful, emotional space for visitors that invites contemplation and reflection.*

Room 11

Count on Us

Count on Us (2003) is a homage to the famed Serbian inventor Nikola Tesla (1856–1943), to whom Abramović feels a kinship through their shared interest in energy and its transmission. 'At the time of his death, he was working on a system for transmitting electricity over great distances without wires – an idea that spoke to my continuing fascination with transferring energy of all kinds.' In the photographic work shown here, Abramović reproduces one of Tesla's experiments: in one hand she holds a neon tube that is not connected to any power source. Two copper coils nearby conduct a current of 35,000 volts. Although there is no physical connection between Abramović and the power source, the tube lights up because enough electricity is passing through Abramović's body.

Portal

*In many cultures, portals stand for transitions between opposites such as life and death or light and darkness. Marina Abramović takes up this theme already addressed in her earlier work *Imponderabilia* (1977). In *Portal* (2022), she once again explores such transitional experiences—this time with the help of selenite crystals. Since her performance *The Lovers, The Great Wall Walk* (1988), she has been fascinated by the energy of crystals. After her separation from Ulay, she spends time in Brazilian mines to consciously take in these energies and to feel how the body of the earth and her own are connected. *Portal* builds on her earlier *Transitory Objects* and is dedicated to the experience of altered states of consciousness. Abramović describes how the body itself can become a gateway—similar to Tibetan pilgrims who lie flat on the ground for hours with arms and legs outstretched in front of temples, a posture of humility through which physical pain is consciously endured and overcome. **Visitors are allowed to walk through the portal.***

Room 12

PRIVATE ARCHAEOLOGY

After leaving Belgrade in 1976, Marina Abramović embarks on a nomadic life. Together with Ulay, she travels across Europe in a van, performing in various cities. Disillusioned by the decline of the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s and the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, they, like many artists of their generation, feel drawn to the East. The pair spend a lot of time in India, Tibet, Thailand, and Australia, where they absorb influences from ritual and ceremonial traditions, which, like performance art, emphasize duration and presence. Responses to such performative and ritualistic influences inform works, experiments, drawings, and research materials. The connection of modern art with

Eastern spirituality goes back a long way, for example to Piet Mondrian or Joseph Beuys. Such references are also found in Abramović's drawings and collages, in which many of her ideas are recorded for the first time.

Room 12

THE ABRAMOVIĆ METHOD

To prepare for her long-term performances, Marina Abramović has developed a method that helps strengthen her willpower: "Being a performance artist is a very difficult task. I have created various exercises that allow me to develop willpower and concentration. At some point, I realized that these exercises could benefit not only me." That is why Abramović wants to share them. The "Abramović Method" is an exploration of the conscious perception of space and time. Targeted exercises are used to train willpower and inner strength, enabling participants to confront and overcome resistance with determination. Counting the Rice is one of them. Sit down and start sorting the rice from the lentils and counting the grains of rice. Everyone does this at their own pace and for as long as they want. For Abramović, the decisive turning point is reached once you start hating the exercise and get annoyed. Then, all of a sudden, "deep calm and composure can set in, and time ceases to exist."

Counting the Rice

Counting the Rice (2015/2025/2026) invites the audience to deliberately decelerate. Please take a seat, put on the headphones, and start sorting the rice from the lentils and counting the grains of rice—in silence, at your own pace, and for as long as you like. You may also use a pen and paper.

Biography

1946

Marina Abramović is born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia (now Serbia), on 30 November. Her parents, Vojin and Danica Abramović, partisan fighters during the Second World War, are at the time of her birth employed in the Communist government of President Josip Broz Tito. A sickly infant, Abramović lives with her maternal grandmother Milica Rosić from the age of eight months. Rosić was strongly religious and spiritual, which left a profound impact on the young Abramović.

1952

Abramović's brother Velimir is born, following which she returns to live with her parents. Abramović does not enjoy this change; her mother is a strict disciplinarian who often inflicts physical punishments, and her parents' marriage is clearly unhappy. Her father leaves the family when she is seventeen.

1958–60

Throughout her childhood, Abramović is exposed to the arts through her mother's job at the Cultural Ministry. Together they visit artists' studios and, from the age of twelve, she accompanies her mother to Venice to see the Biennale. For her fourteenth birthday she is given oil paints from by father, who also organises for her to receive painting lessons from the artist Filo Filipović, a family friend. She is given her own studio at home.

1965

Abramović enrolls at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade to study painting. Here she learns to paint in an academic style but also starts developing her own artistic interests, with her work becoming increasingly abstract.

1968

As president of the Communist Party within the Academy of Fine Arts, Abramović is involved in student demonstrations against economic reforms brought in by Tito's government. The protesters occupy the local Communist Party headquarters and demand its conversion into an art centre. Abramović joins a group of students of conceptual art. After the end of the protests, with Tito seemingly conceding to the students' demands, the group continues to meet and discuss art. Their influence leads Abramović to develop two proposals for performances, but both are rejected by the Belgrade Youth Centre.

1970

Abramović graduates and enrolls at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb as a postgraduate student, studying under the painter Krsto Hegedušić (1901–1975).

1971

Abramović returns to Belgrade. In October she takes part in an exhibition at the Student Cultural Centre, planned as a counterpoint to the official October Salon exhibition organised by the government. Abramović exhibits her first immaterial artwork, using recordings of sounds from nature. She goes on to create several other sound-based works. That same month she marries the conceptual artist Neša Paripović (b. 1942). Throughout the marriage she continues to live at home, under her mother's strict regime.

1973

Abramović travels with a group of fellow Yugoslavian artists to Scotland, where she performs Rhythm 10 at the Edinburgh Festival. This is her first performance, and she later describes it as "the moment I knew that I had found my medium." At the festival she meets Joseph Beuys, who would become a key influence. Over the following year she performs four more works in the Rhythm series, exploring the limits of the human body. In December she takes up a teaching position at the art academy in Novi Sad.

1975

Abramović meets the artist Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen, 1943–2020) on their shared birthday, 30 November, at an international gathering of performance artists in Amsterdam.

1976

Abramović divorces Paripović and leaves her mother's home. She moves to Amsterdam and lives with Ulay. They enter into a romantic relationship and begin performing together.

1977

Abramović and Ulay write the ART VITAL manifesto, which lays out their values for art and life. Among these is the maxim "No fixed living place / Permanent movement," and the two travel for the following three years, living in a Citroen van with their dog Alba and performing at venues across Europe. In June, performing Imponderabilia at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna in Bologna, they stand as naked "living doors" through which visitors must pass to enter the gallery. After three hours police interrupt the performance on grounds of obscenity.

1978

Abramović and Ulay take part in the Performance Festival at Österreichischer Kunstverein in Vienna, where they perform the work Kaiserschnitt. Other artists at the festival include Vito Acconci, Erwin Bechtold, Stuart Brisley, Marc Camille Chaimovicz, Giuseppe Chiari, VALIE EXPORT, Terry Fox, Jochen

Gerz, Tina Girouard, Jana Haimsohn, Julia Heyward, Robert Kushner, Hermann Nitsch, Luigi Ontani, Dennis Oppenheim, Gina Pane, and Peter Weibel.

1980

Abramović settles in Amsterdam with Ulay. With the aim of exploring the subconscious, they undergo training in hypnosis. Through this work they feel their energies merging into a third existence they call "That Self" or "The Third". The concept of "That Self" becomes the basis of a series of four new performances, including Rest Energy, which they perform at the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, in August. The couple begin to explore working with video and photography in addition to their performative practice. In October they sell their van and fly to Australia, where they spend six months living with the Pitjantjatjara people, near Alice Springs. Abramović finds this time in the outback a transformative experience, changing her perspective on stillness and immateriality. During this time they first begin to think about creating a performance that involves the Great Wall of China.

1981

Abramović develops a new work that draws on her experiences with hypnosis and in the Australian outback. For Nightsea Crossing), she and Ulay intend to sit motionless facing each other, a table between them, with the aim of charging the space with their minds rather than their bodies and actions. They plan to perform the work 90 times in institutions around the world. The pain caused by sitting still for hours is greater than they expected, and several times during early performances Ulay is forced to leave the table. In Boston, they experiment in taking photographs with a giant Polaroid camera.

1982

Abramović and Ulay travel to Bodh Gaya in India, where they meet the Dalai Lama and his mentor, the Tulku Kyabje Ling Rinpoche. They undertake a ten-day Vipassana meditation retreat, and this practice of mindfulness both informs their ongoing performances of Nightsea Crossing and becomes a long-term inspiration for Abramović's work.

1985

Abramović is invited to teach a two-month course at the Art Institute of San Francisco.

1986

Ulay and Abramović make their first trip to China, in preparation for their Great Wall project. In October, Abramović and Ulay give their 90th performance of Nightsea Crossing, at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon.

1988

The Chinese authorities finally grant Abramović and Ulay permission to perform The Lovers, The Great Wall Walk. They set off on 30 March, Abramović walking from the east end of the wall and Ulay the west. Although their meeting was originally intended to culminate in their marriage, by the time

permission is granted for the work their relationship has deteriorated. On 27 June, after 90 days of walking, the two meet, and their embrace marks the end of their personal relationship and artistic collaboration. Abramović returns to Amsterdam straight away. Determined to move on, she buys and starts renovating a house at Binnenkant 21, and turns to creating a new series of works inspired by her experience of walking the Great Wall.

1989

In April, Abramović has an exhibition at Victoria Miro Gallery in London, showing her first solo work in thirteen years. She calls these new works Transitory Objects. Rather than a performance by the artist, these furniture-like sculptures, into which crystals and minerals are embedded invite public participation. Abramović works on different forms of Transitory Objects for the next seven years, travelling several times to Brazil to source crystals.

1990

In May Abramović is invited to Modern Art Oxford, where she performs Dragon Heads, her first public performance since splitting from Ulay.

1991–98

Abramović holds teaching positions at the University of the Arts in Berlin, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Braunschweig. She puts her students through rigorous exercises to hone body and mind. These she develops into “Cleaning the House,” a five-day workshop during which participants refrain from eating or speaking, and are led through a series of long duration exercises to improve focus and stamina.

1992

Abramović collaborates with the director Charles Atlas to create Biography, an autobiographical theatre performance. It opens in Madrid and tours to Vienna, Frankfurt and Berlin.

1997

Having been invited to create a work for the Yugoslav pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Abramović develops a proposal that addresses the ongoing conflict in the Balkans. Relations become strained with the Montenegrin cultural minister, who would have preferred an artist from the region to present a more positively nationalistic work, and Abramović withdraws from the collaboration. Instead, she performs Balkan Baroque in the basement of the Italian pavilion in the Giardini. The performance causes a sensation and she is awarded the Golden Lion.

1999

Abramović takes in her brother Velimir and his daughter at her house in Amsterdam, when they flee the NATO bombing of Belgrade during the Kosovo war. They stay for the next three years.

2000

Abramović’s father Vojin dies of cancer on 29 August.

2001

Abramović produces a video work, The Hero, in memory of her father.

2002

Abramović moves to New York. In November she performs The House with the Ocean View at Sean Kelly Gallery, New York. For twelve days she lives without speaking or eating in three raised units constructed in the gallery, separated from visitors by ladders with knives for rungs.

2003

Abramović receives a Bessie Award in the category of Performance Installation and New Media for The House with the Ocean View.

2004

Abramović is awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the Art Institute of Chicago. She participates in the Whitney Biennial in New York.

2005

Abramović presents Seven Easy Pieces at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Alongside a new work and a re-performance of Lips of Thomas, she re-performs five pioneering performance works by other artists from the 1960s and '70s. It has taken her twelve years to obtain the artists' permission to re-perform their works. Seven Easy Pieces is awarded the prize for the Best Exhibition of Time-based Art in 2005–06 by the United States Art Critics Association.

2007

Abramović's mother Danica dies in Belgrade.

2010

The retrospective The Artist Is Present opens at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. The exhibition's title is shared with the new work Abramović performs throughout the three-month run of the show: She sits at a table, and visitors are invited to sit in silence opposite her and gaze into her eyes for an unspecified length of time. More than 1,500 people do so, with visitors queuing for hours for the opportunity. This exhibition is the first to include younger performance artists re-performing Abramović's earlier works, which allows new audiences to engage directly with her past long-duration performances. Abramović founds the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), with the goal of training performers for long duration work using methods that she has developed over the previous two decades, including running "Cleaning the House" workshops.

2011

Abramović is elected an Honorary Royal Academician.

2013

Abramović is made an Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters in France.

2014

The exhibition 512 Hours opens at the Serpentine Gallery, London. Abramović asks the public to perform alongside her, interacting with the audience in simple galleries that contain only a few props. Each day is unplanned, and Abramović records her experience of the performance in a diary.

2017–19

The retrospective exhibition The Cleaner opens at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, and travels on to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebak, the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo, the Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, the Centre of Contemporary Art “Znaki Czasu”, Toruń, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade.

2019–20

Abramović experiments with mixed-reality art, combining digital elements with the physical world. This culminates in the mixed-reality piece The Life being exhibited at the Serpentine Gallery. It becomes the first mixed-reality work to be sold at auction, at Christie’s in London in October 2020.

2020

In September 7 Deaths of Maria Callas premieres at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich. A film and opera project directed by Abramović, the work includes costumes designed by Riccardo Tisci and films starring Abramović and Willem Dafoe. Over the next three years it tours to the Opera Garnier, Paris, the Greek National Opera, Athens, the Deutsche Oper, Berlin, the Teatro di San Carlo, Naples, the Le Carre Theatre, Amsterdam, the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona, and the English National Opera, London.

2023

Abramović is promoted to Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters in France. In the same year, her life’s work retrospective opens at the Royal Academy in London; the exhibition is scheduled to also travel to Amsterdam, Zurich, and Vienna.

2024

Abramović’s Royal Academy exhibition travels on to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, to Kunsthau Zurich, and will be shown at the Albertina in Vienna in 2025. Her first-ever exhibition in China, entitled Transforming Energy, opens at the Shanghai Doulun Museum of Modern Art. She receives an Honorary Doctorate from the Accademia Albertina in Turin and the Luxembourg World Peace Prize awarded by the World Peace Forum.

Press images

The following images are available free of charge in the [Press section](#) of the Albertina.

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Marina Abramović
Balkan Baroque, June 1997
Performance, 4 days, 6 hours, XLVII Biennale, Venice
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives, and Lisson
Gallery
© Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives /
Bildrecht, Vienna 2025



Marina Abramović
The Hero, 2001
Single-channel video (black and white, sound), vitrine
containing objects that belonged to Vojin Abramović,
video: 14 minutes 21 seconds; objects: dimensions
variable
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives, and
Galeria Luciana Brito
© Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives /
Bildrecht, Vienna 2025



Marina Abramović
Freeing the Voice, 1975
Performance, 3 hours, Student Cultural Centre, Belgrade
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives
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Abramović Archives



Marina Abramović
Lips of Thomas, 1975
Performance, 2 hours, Krinzinger Gallery, Innsbruck
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives
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Bildrecht, Vienna 2025



Ulay / Marina Abramović
Breathing In, Breathing Out, April 1977
Performance, 19 minutes, Student Cultural
Centre, Belgrade
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives
© Ulay/Marina Abramović. Courtesy of the
Marina Abramović Archives / Bildrecht, Vienna
2025



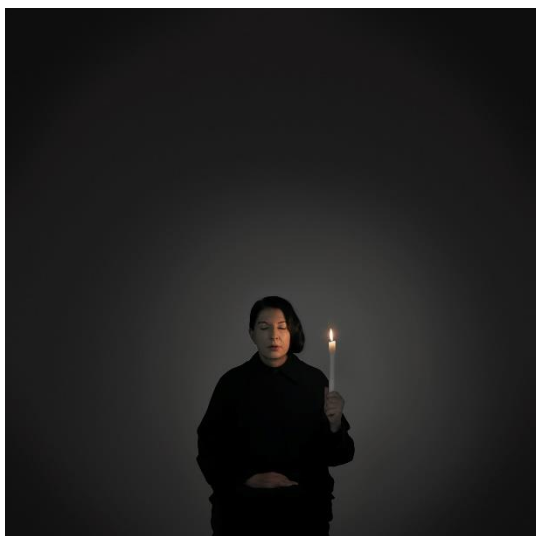
Ulay / Marina Abramović
Imponderabilia, 1977
Performance, 90 minutes, Galleria Comunale d'Arte
Moderna, Bologna
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives
© Ulay/Marina Abramović. Courtesy of the Marina
Abramović Archives / Bildrecht, Vienna 2025; Photo:
Giovanna dal Magro



Marina Abramović
Inner Sky, 1991/2015
Iron, amethyst geode, approx. 200 x 220 x 85 cm
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives
© Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives /
Bildrecht, Vienna 2025; Photo: Heini Schneebeil,
1994



Marina Abramović
Sleeping Under the Banyan Tree, 2010
Performance for video, 56 minutes 43 seconds
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives,
and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York
© Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives / Bildrecht,
Vienna 2025



Marina Abramović
Artist Portrait with a Candle (A), 2012
Fine art pigment print
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives, and
Galerie Krinzinger
© Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives /
Bildrecht, Vienna 2025



Marina Abramović
Four Crosses, 2019
Corian, aluminum, iron, oak with LED panels,
each 550 × 357 × 29 cm
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives
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