

# Marina Abramovic and destiny of performance art

## Introduction

In this thesis I would like to dedicate myself on researching and explaining some important elements related to the performance art as a particular sort of visual arts, Marina Abramovic as a pioneer of Performance Art and to try to predict potential destiny of the performance or may I say less pretentious, to give some remarks regarding possible direction of performance art toward new generation of performance artists as well as performance practices.

At the beginning I must give a very short overview of what exactly was performance art in the near past. In the 1960's performance art has been established as action against museums, galleries, and any kind of commercial value. Artists involved in performance practice in that time have decided to refuse any sort of documentation such as video, photographs or sound during the performing. The work would only exist afterward by word of mouth.

In the 1970's performance art becomes a radical form against every political and moral in justice in the world. In the 1980's when commercial art becomes very popular, performance art has faced a complete crash without any possibilities of surviving or developing. Paintings and commercial sculptures were produced for art trade and dealing. Performance artists who faced the problem of what else to do started to switch from performance to architecture, installations and commercial art pieces in order to benefit of their art.

Marina Abramovic and her former partner Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen) faced the same problem, as well. Through the 1980's and in 1990's, Marina Abramovic continued performing, deeply believing in the possibilities of the body transformations and the energy transition via performance art. Abramovic has made several performances during the 1990's and has started making the performance about her own life titled *The Biography*.

After leaving Serbia in 1975, she has situated herself in Amsterdam for 25 years.

In 1997 she became professor at the art academy in Braunschweig-HBK for teaching performance and remained there until 2003 when she left the professorship and established a new performance group named IPG -Independent Performance Group situated in Amsterdam. She left Amsterdam in 2003 and removed herself to New York City in the United States of America. Until now, she is working as an artist and as a curator of performance festivals.

In 2007 Abramovic bought a huge building of a former theater in the Hudson district of New York. She would like to adapt that building to become her own Foundation for Conservation of Performance Art. Opening is planned for September 2012.

In the following chapters of this thesis I would like to pass through some of the most particular events organized or curated by Marina Abramovic, which has to give the reader a clear image of what was going on with Performance Art at the beginning of 2000's and to respond on the main question what in fact is a possible direction of the performance art in the close future.

In the first chapter I'll explain what was happening in Van Gogh Museum in 2005 when Marina Abramovic and Christina de Chatel were curating Egon Schiele retrospective bringing performance art and contemporary dance into this museum for the first time. What really impressed me was a way of co-relation and cooperation in between performance artist's and the paintings within the museum's structure.

In the second chapter I'll draw attention on *The Biography- work in progression*, made by Marina Abramovic as the stage performance in which Abramovic is dealing with the theatrical elements and environment in order to perform episodes from her own life as an regular theatre piece. This is a very important chapter of this research because *The Biography* has opened some new levels of approaching the performance art in the close future.

The third chapter discusses what is one of Abramovic's most important and distinguished performance events, the *Seven Easy Pieces* performed in Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York City in 2005. This chapter is questioning the possibilities of performing/re-performing/reenacting and giving possible answers to the questions concerning legal rights of the artists, copyrights and respectable approach to other performance pieces.

The fourth chapter investigates Alba Art Show in Italy in 2008. This chapter is problematizing the idea of independent performance artists and possibilities of performing independently of distinguished performance artists.

Finally at the end of this thesis I am going to write about Abramovic Foundation for Preservation of the Performance Art and 'll try to research the possible future of the performance and what would be a logical development of my own work in the fields of performance art.

## Chapter 1

### **Love and Death - Egon Schiele's retrospective in Van Gogh Museum in 2005 Collaboration between Marina Abramovic and Chrisztina de Chatel**

Researching Abramovic's performance practice for a very long time, I found her not only as a performance artist, which she is now for 35 years. I found her as a curator as well.

Her curatorial practice has started when she became a professor at HBK Braunschweig in Germany. But, regarding earlier sources she held several workshops in Australia for instance. In that time Abramovic was still in collaboration with her former partner Ulay (*Uwe Laysiepen*). She made a workshop with several students from all over the world, organising performance workshops in several countries, collecting materials and publishing books about workshops and performances. Abramovic has established contacts with the most important institutions all over the world as well as in The Netherlands.

One of the institutions without any doubts was Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. She has started negotiating for three years in advance concerning a guest exhibition: the Egon Schiele retrospective in the Van Gogh Museum. Abramovic has collaborated with one of the most distinguished choreographers in The Netherlands, Chrisztina de Châtel.

Together they decided to turn the Van Gogh Museum into a performance platform for three months. Also, the most important fact was that performances were permanently part of Schiele's exhibition curated by Edwin Becker.

The connection between Schiele's paintings and the performances was the body and sexuality. The human body, often deconstructed, shown as a product of sexual desire, psychological problems of humans and sexual obsession of young adulthood. His themes of eroticism, sexuality and death still have the power to shock today's contemporary establishment. Performers were performing combining elements taken from Schiele's paintings or water colours. Sometimes the performers were mostly static, sometimes, like in Nezaket Ekici's performance so dynamic and powerful, sometimes completely naked and exposed to the audience, or covered with numbness elements in order to express that strong connection between love, sexuality and death.

It was a spectacular performance event curated and designed by two on the one hand completely different artists but on the other hand one huge passion has been connecting both of them. It is their obsession with the human body. Chrisztina de Châtel investigated the human body as a dancer's body and has been very well known for a long time as choreographer who can make the public very surprised and also confused during the performance by unexpected movements and reactions as well as the body gestures.

Marina Abramovic has always had a different approach to the performer body and has always insisted on body preparation and extreme physical and mental conditions.

De Châtel dance group was performing on the first floor in Van Gogh Museum several times per day for a limited duration but Abramovic's performers were performing continuously for eight hours per day and twelve hours on Friday as Van Gogh Museum has extended working time because of Friday Night programme.

The public was so surprised and at the same time so confused due to they have never had such an opportunity to see the dance and the performance involved within the museum's programme, and also, the Van Gogh Museum has never had such a mixture between paintings, drawing and performance art.

I chose particularly this collaborative project to show to the audience Marina Abramovic as a curator and designer of the exhibition. But, here we might be surprised because Abramovic wasn't just curator of this collaborative project and designer of exposition elements, she was performing the first night her well known living installation with a human skeleton on her body titled "Cleaning the Mirror II".

Now, I would like to come back on how it was organised.

Van Gogh Museum has a very particular architectural construction and extraordinary shape. That building belongs to modern architectural period. Also there exist one new part of the Museum so called "Museum wing" opened ten years ago.

So, when you entered the museum's building, after passing through the security zone you were almost immediately in front of dancers of De Châtel group. Visitors were able to see contemporary dancers making such a distorted body movements. Some of them were in the glass cubes, specially designed for that exhibition, some of them were performing on the cubes mostly dressed in specially designed costumes to allude on Schiele's paintings and drawings.



*De Chatel Group: "Gradual and Persistent Loss of Control" Van Gogh Museum ,2005  
Photo by Luuk Kramer  
Abramovic Foundation Archive*

After Dance Group of Christina de Châtel visitors were able to attend something very special. Between walls with Schiele's paintings and drawings there was one horizontal white shelf installed on the wall, almost 1,60 meters from the floor and a performer was on the shelf performing. The shelf and all

those walls with plasma TV screens were originally designed by Marina Abramovic. So, we have in this example Abramovic as a designer as well. Program schedules were organised that each single performer has one week of his/her own performance linked to the Egon Schiele Exhibition. Each performer was starting performance before the audience has arrived and leaving the shelf after the last visitor had left Van Gogh Museum. By this tactic the public always have illusion that performer is permanently on the shelf as a living installation and as a several other paintings and drawings. They were performing for eight hours per day and for twelve hours during the Friday Night programme. This is a possible way of animating the audience to experience the performance within the museum's structure. The audience were able to feel almost same strength and such a strong connection in between different mediums of the artistic expression. To me, involving performance art to contribute to the permanent or temporary exhibition is one way to, somehow, refresh and update the global image of one period passed long time ago. That's like in the Theatre, you have to change and refresh the scenography and costumes as well, in order to better approaching an historical image to the contemporary audience.

Now, I would like to draw attention on some of the performances from Van Gogh Museum: First night after the opening of the exhibition "Love and Death" Abramovic was performing on the shelf one of her most notorious performances with the human skeleton. Abramovic used to perform "Cleaning the Mirror II" for video but that night in Van Gogh Museum she was performing it live, in front of countless public. So, Abramovic was that night performer again. In her case I would like to talk about her complex personality to be in same time and organiser and manager and curator and designer and artist as well. After her other performers as well as her former students were performing for the next three months.



*Marina Abramovic- Cleaning the Mirror II  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam 2005  
The Netherlands  
Photo by Luuk Kramer  
Abramovic Foundation Archive*

The next performance which I wanted to discuss is performance of **Anna Berndtson**. Anna is a performance artist from Sweden living in Germany. She has graduated in Marina Abramovic Class and she is now working parallel as performance artist and graphic designer. Berndtson was performing naked with the platform completely covered with several infantile sex dolls, both male's and female's. It was reminiscent of Schiele's nudes on his paintings that sometimes

look almost as an orgy. Beside her were screened previously done performances on the same shelf.



*Anna Berndtson  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam 2005  
Photo by Luuk Kramer  
Abramovic Foundation Archive*

*"Using the shelf, mounted to the wall, I pose in different positions, between nude modelling and pornography. I am surrounded by male and female inflatable sex-dolls. As I myself am changing the position, I also change the position of the inflatable sex-dolls and either dress or undress myself, as well as the inflatable sex-dolls. The dress consists of underwear, stockings and shoes."* Anna Berndtson



*Herma Wittstock  
"Fan Me"  
Van Gogh Museum  
Amsterdam 2005  
Photo by Luuk Kramer  
Abramovic Foundation Archive*

Performance by **Herma Wittstock** titled *"Fan Me"* was one of few which really impressed me so much.

*"For the "Egon Schiele Project" in the Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam I did an interpretation of Schiele's drawing "Squatting Woman". For me the woman in his drawing exudes a feeling of arrogance and boredom. I show the same emotions and request fresh air from the audience. But they can not fan me with air because my shelf is too high to reach me."*

*Herma Wittstock*

To me, this performance was one of the most telling regarding both parameters, aesthetic and conception. It was so minimal but she was dominating on the shelf regarding her fat body and nice incarnate. The light was so beautiful and she seemed to look like one of the female nudes from Rubens's paintings.

The next performance which I really like personally has been performed by Ivan Civic. Ivan is performance artist born in Sarajevo-Bosnia but he has been relocated in Germany and finished as one of the students from Marina Abramovic Class in Braunschweig. He has always been obsessed by his body trying to approach a level of self satisfaction. Also, most of the time Civic returns to his family inviting his mother to be an important part of his work.

Here is a statement from Ivan Civic:

*"trespassing loss of control... There is a thin line, out there somewhere. It is fluid and yet definite. Life goes on and all seems to fit in each day routine. It's a typical day in the life of a family. Everybody belonging to the family follows certain rules... It has been like that since the dawn of man. Sometimes, those rules are broken because we lose control upon ourselves. The family suffers a crisis. After some time we try to "make things good again", we try to regain control. Only then we trespass that thin line. We trespass the loss of control. The entire piece was about being contained in a closed space, meaning also emotionally, and not being able to break out. I was inspired by Egon Schiele's obsessive bonding to his models, wife, mother..."*



*Ivan Civic -"Trespassing loss of control"  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam 2005  
Photo by Luuk Kramer  
Abramovic Foundation Archive*

When this retrospective of Egon Schiele's paintings and drawings had started on 25th of March 2005 I was in Belgrade completely unable to travel and I have received invitation from one of the performers Snezana Golubovic. Because I was unable to go to Amsterdam to visit this spectacular happening, I was wondering whether I could find some pictures, documentation or video material perhaps but I didn't have any success. On Van Gogh Museum web site I found just a press release information that Van Gogh Museum for a first time has an opportunity to present paintings and performances together. I found there just one picture in a very low resolution which in fact was unable to explain me what was going on during the three months from 25th of March till 19th of June 2005.

I couldn't find any practical information regarding the Egon Schiele exhibition until the moment when I talked personally to Snezana Golubovic in Belgrade on December 2006. She has explained to me most of the things which I couldn't know as I wasn't there. She told me, after long discussion, something what really changed my image of that performance. Golubovic has explained, when she was performing her performance titled "Dear Egon" at the end of the first day, she has finished before the public left Museum and received a critique from Marina Abramovic that she shouldn't leave earlier because the public have to go home believing that performance artist is constantly in the museum , performing on the shelf. Just like the painting or sculpture. The performance artists had to become a permanent part of the exhibition. If the artist is outside of the performing place that literary means that one piece of art is missing. Works are supposed to be on the wall or on the shelf or on the floor.

The performers were selected for this event regarding their visual outlook as well as close connection in between performers bodies and the Schiele's bodies. For instance to young performance artist Anton Soloveitchik was enough just to stand in front of the public and without any action to exist really like somebody from the Schiele's paintings. Snezana Golubovic told me, during our meeting , that there had been an audition a few months before the exhibition and just thirteen performers were selected for this show.

From some sources I know that Abramovic has never insisted on the idea which she personally appreciated to be performed by the performers. To her, the most important was that each performer might be able to perform full time long duration performance, that means between 8 hours per day, sometimes, on Friday 12 hours. It was the major challenge for the performers. To perform continuously without a break until the audience leave the space.

Great documentation from this event I have got last year when I was in Berlin visiting Declan Rooney and Eunhye Hwang. They were also performing in the Van Gogh Museum. So, after Declan gave me some of the most significant photographs from the performance I found something and broke my delusion I had until that moment.

What's happened. I was thinking for a long time that several performers were performing on several shelves in the same time during the one day. It wasn't true. There was only one shelf installed on the wall. So, I figured out that each week was for single performer and single performance, except in one collaborative performance from Melati Suriodarama and Oliver Bloemier. What I really like in this conception actually is that each performer had a special and unusual opportunity to dominate in the museum during one week and to have his/her own show, which is in fact a huge grant for an emerging artist. Otherwise ,if the conception supposed to be, as I imagined before, several performers in same time performing, that would be too much in the viewers eye and also would disturb Schiele's paintings and water colours,as well . I think, after three years of continual researching, Marina Abramovic and Chrisztina de Châtel really succeeded in establishing a perfect balance between static and movement, between recognised and experimental, between two dimensional and three dimensional also showing to the audience the highest level of professionalism and unusual approach to the curatorial practice.

As I already said, this exhibition has opened some new possibilities of performing, extending the performances life within the museum's or the galleries structures, as well as giving the opportunity to the emerging artists to benefit of their work. Unfortunately, in this moment it is still very difficult, sometimes almost impossible for the young artists to arrange such a project like this one from the Van Gogh Museum and to get some benefits of it.

## Chapter 2

### The Biography

Marina Abramovic has been working parallel on three great projects in 2005. Two of these projects were very important for her personal history and heritage. At the beginning, I would like to remind readers that Marina Abramovic after her well known performance *Great China Wall Walk* in 1988 and after breaking her relationship with Ulay, had one period of constant identity crisis.

*"I started on the eastern side of the wall at the Yellow Sea. My partner Ulay started on the western side in the Gobi Desert. We each walked 2,500 kilometres to meet in the middle and to say good bye. This performance symbolically ended a very important period in my life, in which I had collaborated with Ulay for 12 years. After meeting in the middle, I experienced a deep state of depression, confusion and difficulty in continuing on my own."*

*Marina Abramovic- The Biography Remix-Charta, 2004, page 12*

The public has been accustomed already to the duo Abramovic/Ulay and Marina has been searching for a way how to avoid that past time, to her, very painful history. She has decided that the best idea and only way how to avoid that dramatic period, is to stage her own life. Abramovic has started working on the idea to repeat her life and also led by idea of staging a fear and bad moments in order of total freeing. It was a way to see herself outside of herself, as she said.

In 1990, Abramovic has started working by herself on designing such a particular event which wasn't really theatre yet happened on the stage. Her idea was to break theatre conventions of presentation and just to keep duration of performance on the stage, just like in the theatre. This new performance has been titled *The Biography*. Abramovic has performed a first version of *The Biography* for Spanish television directed by Charles Atlas in 1989 but the piece was just 4 minutes long. Using just minimal stage elements and her dominant body expression, Abramovic has succeeded to open a new door for performance art.

*"The Biography starts in 1946, when I was born, and continues until today. I always add the new chapters of my life as they happen. Or I make completely new versions."*

*Marina Abramovic- The Biography Remix-Charta, 2004, page 13*

*I found one interview with Marina Abramovic where she said:*

*"it's a work in progress, a staging of my life. And it's going to keep going even if I have Alzheimer's disease or I'm in a wheelchair."*

Marina Abramovic- Interviewed by artist Monica Bonvicini, Stromboli, Italy 2005

This is perhaps a crucial moment in the idea of performance art repetition. This is a very important and a bit of a radical movement, not just in Abramovic's approach to the performance art. I must remind that one of the main and leading statements of performance and body art in 1960's and 1970's was in fact the rejecting of the performance repetition. Now, after more than twenty years, Marina Abramovic has decided to break that rule and to try to experiment in the fields of possible performance re-enacting. Abramovic has explained a bit later, that working by herself on *The Biography*, in fact wasn't the best idea, because an artist is usually too subjective and can't take an objective look on his/her piece.

Sometimes it becomes melodramatic sometimes a bit pathetic. Abramovic has decided, after almost fifteen years from her first *Biography*, to collaborate with a very good friend of her, Belgian theatre director Michael Laub in 2004.



Marina Abramovic- The Biography -Remix  
Theatro Paladium, Rome, 2004

This is also a very important moment because performance artists used to design performances and to perform , as well by him/herself without involving somebody from different professional background to co-operate. In Abramovic's new *The Biography* ,now titled *The Biography Remix*, directed by Michael Laub, many previous postulates were broken and Marina has been criticised by local art critics that she is abandoning performance art and entering, by this new piece in something that is not theatre, nor dance exhibition, nor even acting. It's become something completely new.

In *The Biography Remix*, Marina Abramovic stages her past as theatre. Her legendary performances from the 1970s are transformed into short scenes in the story about Abramovic's public life. The artist repeatedly appears as herself in *The Biography Remix*, but the historic performances by Abramovic and Ulay are enacted by a younger woman and man.

It is a crucial part of this research and I am going to explain it more deeply very soon. Premiere of *The Biography Remix* took place in Teatro Palladium in Rome, Italy in 2004. A year later, in 2005, Abramovic has participated in Avignon Theatre Festival with *The Biography Remix*, together with Michael Laub. *The Biography* was performed four days per one hour and half, like classical theatre performances.

This particular *Biography* is very special because it is the very first time that the role of Ulay is played by his son and roles of Marina are played by herself and by some of her former students from her performance class in Braunschweig.

Abramovic followed that she didn't want to give the role of herself to be performed by some professional actor, as actors are not trained to do an obsessive performance that confronts mental and physical limits on the stage, but performers are. This *Biography* is also very special, as I said earlier, because it makes it possible for the performance to be repeated, interpreted and experienced by a different generations of artists and public.

*" To me it is important to make clear that it is not just a work about my life. It is much more about the idea that the performance can belong to anyone who is able to perform it. The Biography can go on without me."*

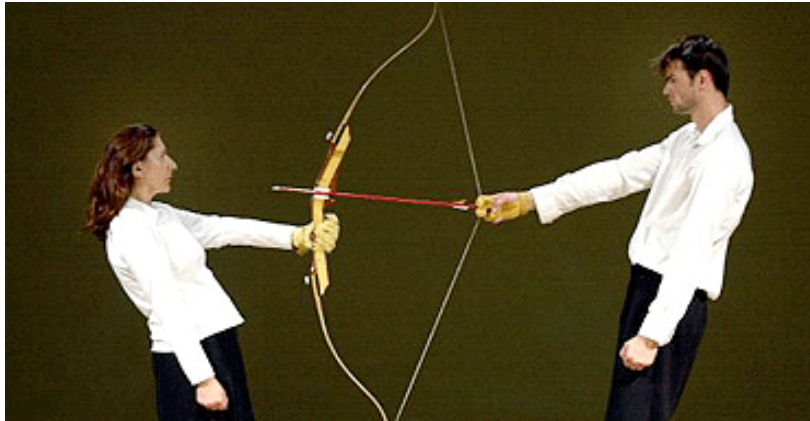
*Marina Abramovic- The Biography Remix-Charta 2004 , page 14*

I would like just to give a short overview of Abramovic's *The Biography*, about stage and story construction and what was actually happening.

The introduction scene Abramovic kept till today as it was designed in collaboration with Charles Atlas in 1989. In this scene she is suspended above the floor by a metal construction in the shape of a cross, bared breasts, holding two living snakes in each hand and looking towards some in undefined point in the space. Below her , on the stage ,there are two rottweilers eating fresh bones.



As a third element, there is a female singer singing some Spanish songs. After that scene of introduction, there is a scene when Abramovic re-enacts the performance *Rest Energy*(1980) when Abramovic and Ulay hold a bow drawn with an arrow pointing at her heart. In this scene Marina started re-enactment with Ulay's son Jurriaan Loewensteyn Laysiepen, who was the same age as Ulay was in that moment in 1980. After a while, Abramovic stopped and transferred her part to one of her students, Viola Yesiltac. This was a symbolical transfer of the responsibility and continuation of the performance. Parallel with that live scene, there is a huge projection beside them of Abramovic performing "Dragon Heads", a performance with living pitons moving around her head and body.



*Marina Abramovic and Jurriaan Loewensteyn Laysiepen - The Biography, remix Avignon, France 2004*

Soon after, there is a scene from the performance *Light/Dark* (1978) when Abramovic and Ulay were on their knees, each in front of the other, continually hitting each other till

one stopped. This scene is one of the most disturbing because the public can see five couples on the stage hitting each other at the same time. After that, there are scenes from *Bye, Bye* performance for video, *Illumination*, *AAA-AAA*, *Freeing of Memories*, *Freeing of Voice*, *Freeing of Body*... Most of those scenes are performed by Abramovic's students but some of the most radical scenes like the scene with a knives and finger game, Abramovic performed by herself. Perhaps the most telling detail is that, during the performing *Freeing of Body* by her former student Herma Wittstock, Abramovic took a position of the teacher who is sitting on the chair next to her and observing her interpretation of the performance. That , somehow, reminds me of Master classes in operas where the professor is on the stage and rehearsing some arias or musical scores until it becomes representative. Here it is the same, but this is a bit different approach because everything is directed and designed in forward.

The duration of *The Biography* is determined by the nature of the theatre space. In the theatre you have a stage and seats in front of the stage. The public in a theatre is required to remain silent and to take seats till the theatre piece is finished. Abramovic had in mind that restriction, shall I say restriction toward performance and from the very beginning we are not talking about performance time any more, than we are talking very consciously about theatre time. So, *The Biography* is a compressed piece of Abramovic's life and it usually lasts for one hour and half. I would like to draw attention on one detail which is of great importance for explaining what is the difference between some theatre piece and this *The Biography* piece, placed in a theatre. Abramovic has said in one of the interviews that for each day of performing they have to change the group of performers because slaps are real and it is very difficult enduring them.

Regarding *The Biography piece*, I can say that Marina Abramovic is preparing probably her last version of this complex performance and she will start working intensively on this piece, as soon as she finishes retrospective of her in MOMA( Museum of Modern Art) in New York in 2010.

Abramovic will collaborate on this piece with Robert Wilson and the new biography is going to be titled very cheerful "Life and Death of Marina Abramovic".

The premiere is planned for September 2011 in Manchester Performance Festival , UK and in New York's City Opera, New York, USA.

I must admit I have been mostly impressed by the idea of staging my own life in front of the audience. This is for me the most personal form of artistic expression when every single detail from your own life and every secret can take shape and be presented to the audience as one spectacular happening.

For me this concept of staging your own life, performing or giving to somebody permission to perform instead of you in order to prevent and to extend your life by the performance, in fact is one of the possibilities and directions of the performance art future.

### Chapter 3

#### **“Seven Easy Pieces” in Guggenheim Museum in New York City 2005**

New York-Solomon Guggenheim Museum 9-15 November 2005

*Seven Easy Pieces* is in fact Abramovic's decision as well as desire to reenact some of most notorious performances by various artists of the 1960's and 1970's.

Marina Abramovic has been preparing for this, one of the greatest performance happenings almost for twelve years. To be performed, *Seven Easy Pieces* has required many researches, personal negotiations with artists or their foundations, and searching for lost or hidden documents and statements about performers and their performances. Sometimes, documentation is available but under such a bad condition or even as pure and unclear proves from the photographs negatives. To Abramovic it was one huge archeological act.

For this chapter it is extremely important to explain what in fact is the main idea of *Seven Easy Pieces*.

Marina Abramovic has faced many problems related to copy rights and mostly illegally taken ideas of her as well as other performance artists. Most of the ideas have been published in fashion magazines like Vogue... taken from fashion photographers and very often for the Theatre and Television's purposes. Usually fashion photographers take just a surface of the original performance piece and that is, off course absolutely the same as in the music: if someone takes the violin and makes a photograph and after that, declares himself to be a violinist. Marina Abramovic has been revolted and unsatisfied because the elements from the performances might not be taken without artist's permission. Taking something of the value from somebody without permission is a criminal act, it's piracy. Also they have been using elements from the performance photographs, very often with commercial purposes without any knowledge of the original piece. One example shows to us fashion models from Vogue magazine adapted by Steven Meisel in same position as Abramovic and Ulay were in one moment during the performance "Relation in space" on Venice Biennale in 1976.

I said "were in one moment", because, originally, the performance "Relation in Space" lasted for one hour.

For reenacting Abramovic has been collecting materials for almost 12 years. Documentation from several sources in order of reenact some of the most notorious performance pieces which she couldn't see at the moment when they happened. When Abramovic lived in Yugoslavia, during the 1960's and at the beginning of 1970's, the real informations from the performances couldn't be forwarded in real time as it is possible today.

*" I lived in Yugoslavia and it was very difficult to get information about performance events from abroad. All I could get at the time were Xeroxed images. Occasionally, there were also bad quality pirate video recordings. Most of the time, testimony was just word- of- mouth from witnesses who claimed they saw the performance or said that they knew somebody who had seen it."*

*Marina Abramovic- Seven Easy Pieces, Charta, 2007 , page 10*

Abramovic started to talk to some of the performance artists to whom belongs the original performance piece which she has never seen live and which she would like to reenact in Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Some of the performers passed away in the mean time as Gina Pane and Joseph Beuys and she wasn't able to speak to them personally. In case of Joseph Beuys, Abramovic has contacted his widow, Eva Beuys and, after many hours of personal negotiations, she gave to Marina some of completely unedited materials and documents about Beuys famous piece "How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare" from 1965. At the beginning she could find only one or two photos from the performance but in any case she has been faced with problems what exactly was happening during the performance and one photo of Beuys holding a dead Hare, couldn't represent the whole performance very well. Also, Abramovic has got information how the public and journalists were commentating Beuys's "absurd" and "degenerated" piece of art. Abramovic was so dedicated in searching for informations that it really took her 12 years to re-enact. Also, Abramovic didn't like to perform in any other space because, she has explaining, that Frank Lloyd Wright, architect who has designed Guggenheim Museum building in New York, has dedicated that building for spiritual sort of art- for non figurative paintings.

Here is a list of artists or theirs tutors followed by titles of performances:

**BRUCE NAUMAN:** *Body Pressure, 1974*

**VITO ACCONCI:** *Seedbed, 1972*

**VALIE EXPORT:** *Action Pants: Genital Panic, 1969*

**ANNE MARCHAND** of the **GINA PANE** Estate:

*The Conditioning, first action of Self-Portrait(s), 1973*

**EVA BEUYS** and the Estate of **JOSEPH BEUYS:**

*How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare, 1965*

Taken from [www.seveneasypieces.com](http://www.seveneasypieces.com)

Performance ironically titled "Seven Easy Pieces" consist of seven different performances which were performing seven days, each day for seven hours .

### **Day 1 – 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2005**

Abramovic has started her performance marathon re-enacting Bruce Nauman's performance titled "Body Pressure" Yellow Body , Gallerie Konrad Fisher, Dusseldorf March 1974.

During the original exhibition, the pieces of paper with the following instructions were placed for viewers to perform at will:

*"Body Pressure*

*Press as much of the front surface of  
your body (palms in or out, left or right cheek)  
against the wall as possible .*

*Press very hard and concentrate.*

*Form an image of yourself (suppose you  
had just stepped forward) on the  
opposite side of the wall pressing  
back against the wall very hard. ...*

*The rest of the text is available in the book Seven Easy Pieces, Marina Abramovic, CHARTA, 2007, p59*

For the "Body Pressure" performance as well as for the whole cycle of Seven Easy Pieces Abramovic has designed a stage in the rotunda of Guggenheim Museum shaped as one circular platform with diameter 5 meters , high 1,5 meters with one huge glass transparent wall in the middle of circle platform, one small battle of water and instructions from loud speakers.

Within the seven hours of performing Abramovic didn't make any break or stopped at any moment. She was so concentrated, carefully listening and following instructions. Regarding visual documents from her book *"Seven Easy Pieces"* we can see Abramovic in several position during the *Body Pressure*. She was standing and pressing against the transparent wall with her palms and with her back, as strong as possible, she was sitting on the floor and pressing back, lying and pressing available body parts, pressing face until image of her become deformed, and all those things again and again in such a obsessive repetition.



It is very important to say that after every seventh hour of each performance when public were leaving the museum, Abramovic was still performing until there were nobody in the space. This fact is important to make difference between theatre –acting and performance art as radical art. In this performance, the public must believe that the performance artist is still on the stage performing timeless. After each day of the performance *"Seven Easy Pieces"* public were unable to see Marina leaving the space and going for having a coffee, for instance. Abramovic was going home, taking a good rest and preparing for the next performance day which had a completely different nature.

*Marina Abramovic- Body Pressure, Bruce Nauman, 1974, Guggenheim Museum, 2005*  
*Photo by Attilio Maranzano*

## **Day 2 - 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2005**

Second day of performance marathon *Seven Easy Pieces*, Abramovic re-enacted one of the most notorious performances by Vito Acconci titled *"Seedbed"* which Acconci originally performed in Sonnabend Gallery in New York in 1972 between 15<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of January. During the performance *"Seedbed"*, Acconci masturbated hidden under the gallery floor and talked in trance whatever was on his mind during the masturbation. Microphone was installed in front of him and even public in the gallery couldn't see him they could hear his voice.

Acconci has been performing *Seedbed* for six hours per day in the same gallery space. Masturbating until the exhaustion. Abramovic had same concept during the performance but little bit different approach. Second day Abramovic was under the circular platform also masturbating, and public could stand on platform and listening to her.

The main difference between Acconci's *"Seedbed"* and Abramovic's re-enactment is that Marina couldn't produce seed because of her female gender. Abramovic wanted to show to the public through this performance, that women can be in the same trance and producing same feeling masturbating even if she is unable to drop seed on the floor but she is able to produce wetness and female fluids and also to reach orgasm.

Here is the original statement from Acconci's performance during the two weeks:

*"Room A: Activated on Wednesday and Saturday*

*The room is activated by my presence underground, underfoot – by my movement from point to point under the ramp.*

*The goal of my activity is the production of seed – the scattering of my seed throughout the underground area. (My aim to concentrate on my goal, to be totally enclosed within my goal.)*

*The means to this goal is private sexual activity. (My attempt is to maintain the activity throughout the day, so that a maximum of seed is produced; my aim is to have constant contact with my body so that a maximum of seed is produced; my aim is to have constant contact with my body so that an effect from my body is carried outside.)*

*My aids are the visitors to the gallery -- in my seclusion, I can have private Images of them, talk to myself about them: my fantasies about them can excite me, enthuse me to sustain – to resume – my private sexual activity. (The seed 'planted' on the floor, then, is a joint result of my performance and theirs.)"*

*Text on panels written and posted by the artist on the gallery wall during the exhibition at Sonnabend Gallery, 1972. Robert Pincus-Witten, "Vito Acconci and the Conceptual Performance," Artforum (New York) 10, no. 8 (April 1972), p. 48.*

### **Day 3 - 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2005**

For the third day Abramovic choose the legendary performance piece "Genital Panic" by VALIE EXPORT. This performance has been performed for several times under the various conditions in 1969. It was one year after global Student demonstrations all over the world and when, beside many things, consciousness about female gender become expanding, about female rights, ability and compeer with male gender.

VALIE EXPORT held an arm gun and wore special trousers with a hole, through which her genitals should be visible. She was performing "Genital Panic" walking in one cinema



between rows with public and facing each person for same time with arm gun and bare genitals. In Abramovic's way she was on the same platform holding huge arm gun, wearing trousers with opened hole for genitals and seating, standing or walking on or between two wooden chairs. Abramovic has been deeply concentrated for 7 hours observing audience and aim a rifle and vagina at them. From one source I found that some of the visitors didn't know about Abramovic's performance event in Guggenheim and they arrived to see one exhibition called Russia, and when they passed inside they were shocked of the sight and they were confused because they have never expected something like that in the Guggenheim Museum.

*Marina Abramovic, "Genital Panic" by VALIE EXPORT from 1969 , Guggenheim Museum 2005  
Photo by Attilio Maranzano*

This is original statement of VALIE EXPORT for performance Genital Panic:

*"The performance took place in an art cinema in Munich, where I was invited with other filmmakers to show my films. I was dressed in a sweater and pants with the crotch completely cut away. I told the audience, 'What you see now is reality, and it is not on the screen, and everybody sees you watching this now.' I moved slowly up the aisle, walking toward the people; they had my exposed crotch in front of their faces. I had no idea what the audience would do. As I moved from row to row, people silently got up and left the theatre. Taken out of the film context, this way a totally different way for them to connect with a particular erotic symbol." VALIE EXPORT*

#### **Day 4 - 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2005**

Performance “*Conditioning*” of French-Italian performance artist Gina Pane.  
Abramovic wanted to perform first of three phrases in *Self Portrait(s) of Gina Pane*.  
The action consisted of three minimal elements: an iron construction as bed, twelve changeable candles and performer body. Abramovic was lying on iron bed above twelve afire candles and being exposed all the time on candles heating flames.  
When she noticed that heating became low she would change the candles , lit and come back under the same conditions sustain pain and heat.

This is one interview with Gina Pane in 1973 in London :

*"The first action was called 'The Conditioning.' There was a type of iron bed with a few crossbars and below fifteen 25-cm-long candles. The candles were lit and I laid down on this bed, my body only five cm from the flames. Needless to say, the pain started right away and was very difficult to dominate. The public understood my suffering from the way I wrang my hands much more than from my face, so it was actually a very primitive mode of communication. But I feel succeeded in making the public understand right off that my body is my artistic material. When, half an hour later, I was able to get up, I caressed my body very gently. There was no violence; my body hurt but I could feel my touch."* Gina Pane

*Gina Pane, Interview with Effie Stephano, "Performance of Concern," Art and Artists (London) no. 85 (April 1973), p. 24.*

#### **Day 5 -13<sup>th</sup> of November 2005**

For the fifth day Marina Abramovic chose one of the most distinguished performance pieces of famous German artist, Joseph Beuys titled *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* from December 1965.

Beuys has been performing this performance for 3 hours originally.

Concept for performance “*How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*” Joseph Beuys has found in his own mythology and previous experience during the Second World War as pilot. As documentation about this performance there exist just few photos which can't explain to the viewer what actually was happening during the performance in 1965.

For many documents and uncovered materials about this performance piece, Eva Beuys has been responsible and after hours of negotiations with Abramovic she decided to talk to Marina and to show her some of non edited video materials from Beuys life and performances.



*Marina Abramovic-  
How to Explain Pictures to a  
Dead Hare”  
Joseph Beuys , 1965,  
Guggenheim Museum 2005  
Photo by Attilio Maranzano*

To Abramovic the most crucial fact was what Joseph Beuys did for three hours of performance and to find real proves and evident materials to build up her own interpretation of that performance piece which she has never seen before. Eva Beuys uncovered one fact and it is that Beuys has been a very selective person and especially concerning and considering the final documents from performance as photographs. He never gave to the photographers some instructions how to take a shots. At the end of the performance he would receive an amount of different photographs and usually he could select just one photo which is the most closest to his original idea. Abramovic also noticed from photos that Beuys has never cared too much about "aesthetic" in his performances and very often you could notice a radiator in the background or some piece of furniture not closely linked to the performance. In this performance Abramovic is sitting on a stool that stands on a small platform, its back right-hand leg wrapped in a roll of felt. She is wearing the artist's typical outfit: beige trousers, a beige vest, a white shirt, sturdy shoes. A ski-like iron rail about 50 cm long is attached to the bottom of her right shoe; her face and her hair are covered with gold leaf. She is holding the dead hare in her left arm; her right arm is bent, her right index finger pointing to the sky. Abramovic has changed a few positions like lying on the floor holding the dead hare and whispering to his ear very quite to the audience completely unknown language. At every step the iron rail crashes loudly on the stage.

### **Day 6 – 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2005**

Marina Abramovic finally performed her own well known performance "Lips of Thomas" from October 1975.

This is one of her the most radical performance pieces in the history of the performance art. Statement is following:

*"I slowly eat 1 kilo of honey with a silver spoon.  
I slowly drink 1 litter of red wine out of a crystal glass.  
I break the glass with my right hand.  
I cut a five point star on my stomach with a razor blade.  
I violently whip myself until I no longer feel any pain.  
I lay down on a cross made of ice blocks.  
The heat of a suspended space heater pointed at my stomach causes the cut star to bleed.  
The rest of my body begins to freeze.  
I remain on the ice cross for 30 minutes until the audience interrupts the piece by removing the ice blocks from underneath."*



Abramovic has performed "Lips of Thomas" in Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck on 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1975.

In her re-enactment of "Lips of Thomas" in Guggenheim Museum 2005, Abramovic changed construction of this performance in order to extend duration on seven hours. Original performance "Lips of Thomas" from 1975 lasted for two hours.

Marina Abramovic-Lips of Thomas 1975,  
S.R.Guggenheim Museum- New York City ,2005  
Photo by Attilio Maranzona

The action started eating honey and drinking wine, than cutting the star on her stomach with the razor blade ,whipping herself and remaining on the ice cross as finish of performance until the audience interrupted the piece by removing the ice blocks from underneath. In Guggenheim Museum ,Abramovic has faced the problem of the performance duration.

She was thinking how to cut the star for seven hours of the performance. To cut whole star at the beginning of the performance or to start cutting part by part from hour to hour and in the end five pointed star is finished. Abramovic did like that.

Regarding lot off documents from the performance "*Lips of Thomas*" I must admit that, somehow, this performance literally was a culmination of *Seven Easy Pieces* performance cycle. Abramovic has started reenacting Nauman's Body Pressure and than over the Acconci's *Seed Bed*, Pane's "*Conditioning*", Export's "*Genital Panic*" and Beys "*How to explain pictures to dead Hare*" she made one line trying to involve the audience to go further and further and nobody even knew which action is going to be the next one. The audience were suspecting regarding the announced titles of the performances which are going to be reenacted, but Marina has never uncovered what exactly is going to happen.

That night was in fact the first night in this cycle for Abramovic to reenact her own well known performance which actually she has never performed any more, except some of the rituals, like cutting the star or wiping herself as a video frames of her *The Biography* project. It was also the great curiosity of appearing within the same performance but thirty years later. For me, when I bought the book "*Seven Easy Pieces*" it was surprisingly interesting comparing the pictures from 1975 and photo and video materials from 2005 . But, however, *Lips of Thomas* from 1975 is more unique in it's own way. To me, I would agree that the performance from 1975 was probably a bit more radically expressed than this one from 2005 but nevertheless the "*Lips of Thomas*" from Guggenheim 2005 was much better proclaimed,documented as well as visited.

What I really personally appreciate in this reenactment was the idea of seeing the artist reenacting the same idea but many years later. Fascinating is an enormous effort of preserving the artist's body to be able to perform under the same conditions and under the same or even better mental and physical frames of mind, finally to be able to show to the audience how exactly it was 30 years ago.



#### **Day 7 - 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2005**

As a crown of whole performance marathon "*Seven Easy Pieces*" Marina Abramovic has performed premiere in Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of her living installation designed specially for the space of Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Living installation is titled "*Entering the Other Side*". Abramovic has ordered one extremely huge blue dress created by Aziz famous Dutch fashion designer in Amsterdam and wore it standing on high ladder covered by the dress.

Abramovic was standing for seven hours, making easy movements by her hands and torso sometimes pointing in public and remaining total silence. In the end of 7th hour Abramovic said following words: "*Please, just for the moment, all of you, just listen .I am here and now, and you are here and now with me .There is no time*".

Marina Abramovic-Entering the Other Side  
Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2005  
Photo by Attilio Maranzona



## Chapter 4

### Alba Art Show

*Alba Art Show* is an art festival organised by Alba city in Italy and collaborated with Anna Bondonio Camandona Art Gallery and supported by several sponsors and institutions from Italy. Alba is one small town, very old but very rich and when I was talking with taxi driver during the trip from Milan Malpensa Airport to Alba, I was told about one curiosity that everyone has a job in Alba and each citizen older than 18 is employed. They are very famous by Wine Festival and sure the most important are truffles, the most expensive sort of mushrooms.

In May 2008 they decided to organise first contemporary art show because they have never had such a modern festival and they brought decision to invite Marina Abramovic for curating a festival specially for Alba. Marina Abramovic has received invitation but unable to contribute, because she has representing her video installation "8 Lessons of Emptiness with a Happy End" from Laos. Abramovic was in that moment in New York City and travelling to Geneva and Luxembourg for organising exhibitions, so she gave responsibility to Jovana Stokic, a young curator from Serbia currently situated in New York City. Jovana Stokic took all of those responsibilities in her own hands and, in the middle of February 2008 she has invited five performers from Abramovic's former class in Braunschweig. As a sixth participant Stokic has invited me. I must admit that I was very excited because that festival was my first professional engagement, shall I say and also the first time to collaborate with Abramovic's former students. I must say it was really a pleasure to me.

Lets come back to Alba heritage. Jovana Stokic has been researching an impulse of European Radical Avant Garde in 1950's also were happening in Alba. Particularly "*Experimental Laboratory of Imaginist Bauhaus*" and one of the founders was Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio a very creative citizen of Alba.

Organisers of Alba Art Show curated by Jovana Stokic made a plan for opening this exhibition. Everything will start with live long durational performances.

It is my duty to induce a name list of performers participants:

Eunhye Hwang, Declan Rooney, Viola Yesiltac, TBL ( TallBlondLadies) duo made by Anna Berdson and Irina Runge and Branko Miliskovic.

Also, beside performance program they have included some of video works made by artists: Sigalit Landay, Davide Balliono, Randy Moore and Jacco Olivier.

Alba Art Festival was dedicated to Marina Abramovic.

Place of happening was Palazzetto Mostre e Congressi. This beautiful building with amazing white marble interior in fact is a place for Fares, as I have said before, Wine Fare and Truffle's Fare.

I would like to explain a little bit of each work to make one global view on the festival.

I will start immediately with performances:

#### **Eynhue Hwang - *Palms*- interactive performance**

I must admit, I know Eunhye Hwang's performances from HBK in Braunschweig and mostly she has been interested in performance pieces which involves the public as an permanent part of the performance. Eynhue Hwang born Korean has been studying visual and performance art in class of Marina Abramovic and in this moment Hwang is finishing her Master Degree in HBK Braunschweig in Germany.

I met her in Alba and she seemed to me a shy and not really sociable person, but, however it was my first pre justice. Later on, I found herself as an vulnerable but extraordinary and extremely self-critical person.

Eynhue has decided to perform in Alba an extended version of her past performances titled "Palms" in close collaboration with the audience.

Due to she doesn't speak Italian, Hwang was obligated to write invitation on piece of paper in Italian and give to the public.



However, public was more or less interested in taking a part of performance and to participate, because, public is usually suspicious about what's going to happen in the performance and which sort of action performance artist would require from them. Fortunately, public in Alba was a bit relaxed and open minded in taking a part.

*Eyunhue Hwang- Palms  
Alba, Italy 2008  
Photo by Branko Miliskovic*

There were from children over the middle age people till very old people and most of them were really prepared to go in the performance and just to believe to the performance artist. Performance artist must have extremely confidence to the public and also, the public must respect performer's intentions and only in that way, if there is established contact between the artist and the audience, art work can get a significant power and unusual energy influence. From my opinion, what I saw, I think Hwang has really succeeded in establishing that contact. Hwang gave instructions to the limited number of participants in one cycle, to follow her and to repeat everything what she requires from them. First, they have started from the main entrance, going together in a group of approximately ten people, splashing hands, wearing gym kitchen gloves and repeating A A A... So after a while they took a place in shape of a circle and they were waiting very nervously for the last instruction. Eynhye was inside of the circle and she was making a juice from red and yellow oranges. She had a big juice maker and has requiring from each participant to press peace of orange inside of juice maker and wait for a juice. In the end of Palms, public was drinking fresh orange juice and Eynhye was holding kitchen gloves in the shape of palm and making some ritual movement turning herself around and screaming. Then, she has started for searching another group of participants for another one cycle of "Palms".

### **Declan Rooney - Turn, Turn, Turn**

Performance artist born in Dublin, Ireland, currently situated in Berlin, Germany.

Rooney is also former student from class of Marina Abramovic in Braunschweig. He has been working on several fields beside performance art. He is a musician as well.

Rooney's performance which he has performed in Alba, to me, was a bit complicated.

Here is a short explanation taken from the catalogue:

*" I have chosen to contextualise both, Alba as a site of historical art production, my own practice and the Alba Art Show itself as a site of art history and current contemporary art production. Unifying three distinct periods of art history: the Renaissance of the 16th century, the "Experimental Laboratory of the Imaginist Bauhaus " that in turn lead to The Situationist International of the 1950's and now what is considered " Contemporary" in 2008 and proposition for it's retrospective analysis. I will link the work trough elements of my own work and that of Macrino d'Alba and Pinot Gallizio in ideas of reproduction, appropriation and adaptation, demonstrating both its live means of production, its historical placement as well as it's contextualization within my art own practice in a three part daily work in progress, illuminating the unifying medium of performance as its central axis point."*



*Declan Rooney  
Turn Turn Turn , 2008  
A Three Part Performance  
Alba ,Italy 2008  
Photo by Branko Miliskovic*

*For this performance Declan Rooney has invited La Schola Youth Choir of Alba to take a part. Choir and conductor were arriving two days in certain time and being well prepared for a vocal part. I must admit I was a bit impressed by the way how Rooney has constructed his performance. In the first part visitors could see Declan drawing some symbols and letters for a half an hour. Second part took a choir and in third part Rooney was recording static scenes with some of La Schola Choir members.*

For me , the most sensual and emotive part was Choir part when they were singing some of Renaissance songs and Rooney was standing in front of camera watching at the choir completely motionless. This is one of examples how performance art can be managed in time and space.



**TBL duo** - Tall Blond Ladies - collaborative duo between Anna Berndtson and Irina Runge. Ana Berndtson , Swedish born, lives in Germany and Irina Runge German born lives in Germany. Both of them were attended class of performance art held by Marina Abramovic in Braunschweig.

Anna and Irina are working also as individual performance artists, but as a TBL duo they are much more recognisable.

*TBL( Tall Blond Ladies )  
Ascendant Landing  
Photo by Iris Selke*

Their idea in performance art and in collaboration came from curiosity in representing so-called female typecasts and they are interested in breaking this existing images and barriers. They compose new absurd and ambiguous images out of these typecasts. All performances by TBL are placed in basic forms. Sound is vital as part of each performance. Both sound and form are used by TBL to discover rhythm and timelessness. I have to say that most of students of Abramovic class for performance art possess an amazing ability not just for performing, as well in managing personal projects, searching for grants and really taking care for every single detail in their art practice.

**Branko Miliskovic**  
*Lost in Space and Time*

I have been invited by Jovana Stokic who was a curator of Alba Art Show, to participate in this festival. I personally know Jovana from Belgrade when she used to arrive for several times to hold a lecture about contemporary art practices in New York and worldwide. She has sent me email on February 2008 and asked me if I was interested to take a part of Alba Art Show festival in Italy. I was a bit surprised due to I have never been invited before to take a part in any curated exhibition.



Branko Miliskovic-Lost in Space and Time  
Alba, Italy 2008  
Photo by Viola Yesiltac

I have accepted all of those conditions seriously and have dedicated myself in that direction for a three months. Conception was: Artist as a tourist first time in unknown city. The idea was to invite us for five days in unknown small town in the north of Italy. Five days is extremely short period in adapting on new surroundings as well as making the exhibition. So, live performances were the most suitable art form for this festival.

At the beginning I had so many ideas turning into a performance and no one of these ideas satisfied me, at all. Few weeks later I finally found the title and the concept: "I am going to perform a living installation and I'll give the title "Lost in Space and Time" Being a bit impressed by researching Maria Callas for a long period, I found, after a while, her famous sentence which she has said during a Master class in New York in 1974. What Callas has said impressed me so much: "When I am performing I must be completely sure that one half of my brain is in total control and other half is completely lost."

That sentence turned me into thinking how to establish that equilibrium in between two parts of my brain, how to balance in between extremes. After a while, I made proposition for my performance. I said: "I gonna perform two days per four hours and I need just one big black suitcase for travelling."

The performance "*Lost in Space and Time*" was very minimal concerning the number of chosen elements as well as regarding the number of performed actions. The main idea was just to try to be lost, particularly in certain time. I must admit I have succeeded at the end of the second day. After that performance I found enormous intensity of static actions much stronger than in actions which requires movement. In the end of the fourth hour I remained the same position-sitting on suitcase completely lost in front of the audience.

I would not like to recapitulate all those details during the performing, I would like rather to try to explain importance of this festival on my own development and on opening a new gate for a performance art practice without personal presence of Marina Abramovic particularly in this case. I have figured out something what I really feel as my duty to say. I said opening a new gate for a performance art practice without personal presence of Marina Abramovic. We must understand finally that Abramovic has been one of the pioneers in Performance and Body art during the 1970's. She is one of probably very few artists from that period who is still performing intensively, even she is 62 years old.

But, we must understand that keeping her as an centripetal force can make just non healthy performance surrounding within the younger generation of performance artists. I am going to explain this problem much detailed in my last chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Marina Abramovic Foundation for Preservation of Performance Art

I would like to start with former IPG-Independent Performance Group founded by Marina Abramovic. IPG ( Independent Performance Group) was a non-profit arts organisation founded by Marina Abramovic in 2003. IPG included 36 artists from over 15 countries. After four years of working, Abramovic decided to find a building which is going to be her own foundation for performance art. Soon later, Abramovic has drawn the decision to close IPG office ,also unsatisfied with artists progress within the group. Some of the artists who have been united within the group and supported well, thought that Marina Abramovic is responsible for their own engagements, performance festivals and to organise for them because they are in her group. Most of them became lazy and non productive and very soon later , Abramovic has sent to them an official letter in which she has decided to close IPG office.

*Alba Art Show –Talking to curator Jovana Stokic ,May 2008,Alba,Italy*

On September 2006 I made an appointment with Marina Abramovic who has arrived in Belgrade after long time. Soon after her arrival I had so many problems how to organise our time because she was very busy and occupied by several meetings and personal problems.

Finally, we met each other in front of Majestic Hotel and she was very surprised because of our meeting. I showed to her my performance portfolio and she gave to me so many critiques concerning way of presentation, sort of photographs, also way of documenting the performances and cleaning from unnecessary elements.

After that, Abramovic mentioned that she is searching for a building she would like to buy for future centre of the performance art , explaining to me that she need to collect more than \$ 2 millions for buying one gorgeous factory in Brooklyn in New York City, but main problem is because that factory lies on very polluted earth so she would be obligated to wait for couple of years until they clean whole factory from polluted materials.

However, Abramovic wouldn't like to wait for such a long period just to clean the factory and what about preparation, furnishing, installations and sure she didn't want to pay such a huge amount of money just for an empty and ruined building,even if the factory is situated in New York City. She asked herself , why that building must be situated in New York City or Brooklyn. She has also explained that Robert Wilson, the worldwide notorious choreographer, has a Foundation two hours by train from New York City and, however, Watermill Foundation is frequently visited by the public from all over the world.



Former Theatre Building  
Hudson, New York ,2007  
Photo by Phil Monsfield  
New York Times

Abramovic has finally found one lovely building in Hudson district of New York State also two hours from New York City and very close to Bard College.

The building belonged to Hudson Theatre and later has been covered tennis playground. Abramovic is planning to renovate that building and make it suitable for performance artists, to host a library with all of performance art documentation, video, audio, photo and textual archives which she brought from Amsterdam and to provide a support to emerging performance artists:

*"I want to enlarge the idea of performance, to invite scientists, philosophers, people who are dealing with completely different subjects to talk in relation to the body and the performance world," she says. One idea is to have Hans Ulrich Obrist organise experiments by scientists in front of the public. "Different people will meet, ideas can be exchanged and something creative can take place. My dream about this is like the Andy Warhol factory without drugs," she says.*

*"I would like to have a similar concept to the Watermill Centre of Robert Wilson," she says, referring to the non-profit artist-residency and workshop programme that the avant-garde theatre director established on Long Island. Like Watermill, her space will be open to the public for lectures and open rehearsals in order to introduce audiences to the production and appreciation of performance art.*

Taken from *The Art Newspaper* by [Jason Edward Kaufman](http://www.theartnewspaper.com/article.asp?id=7104)  
<http://www.theartnewspaper.com/article.asp?id=7104>

Until today, I couldn't find any other sufficient document, material or even interview, except previous one, about how the things are going on concerning Abramovic Foundation. From my personal sources I know that Marina is currently busy in organising her biggest retrospective in MOMA ( Museum of Modern Arts ) in New York City which is going to take place in 2010.

In one moment she has said that soon after she finishes her major retrospective which is going to last for three months, she will start to work extensively on her Foundation. Official opening is planned for September 2012. Until that moment ,Abramovic will have to collect a sufficient amount of money to cover the renovation expenses.

In the end of this thesis I would need to write a conclusion concerning performance art, especially long duration living installation and its unpredictable "destiny" as an ephemeral artistic form. Further more, I would like to try to make an explicit connection in between my work, within the performance practice , and perhaps what should be the most clear direction of performance art in the future.

First off all , we have to make a difference in between Performance Art and what we call "street art" or " public entertaining activities" or " circus and acrobatic skills" or "funny theatre" or even "dance exhibition" and so on.

Until today I found so much materials from so many " actions" shall I use that term and most of the artists declares themselves as a Performance Artists, often without any previous elementary knowledge of what Performance Art used to be during the 1970's and what is today.

*"We need to establish what the possible rules are for this. To me it is very important that if you know how to play the piano, you also have to know how to perform. It's not that everybody can do it, same as an actor in the theatre."*

*Marina Abramovic from Seven Easy Pieces, interviewed by Nancy Spector, May 2006, New York, page 19, Charta 2007*

Perhaps every performance artist has their own statement of what is performance art. To me, performance art is *particular communication in between performance artist and the audience in certain moment and certain time under the different mental and physical frames of mind through the extended time.*

I said "particular" communication which means that communication between the audience and the performance artist can be established via energy,vibrations,body signs...

Also,choosing certain moment and certain time are extremely important because performance must be under the best conditions and that fact may give more chances for performance to succeed. Mental and physical frames of mind depend of performance's nature and require adaptation on different circumstances and extended time is quite important in a long duration performances because that is the only way to let the performer's body to pass through the several zones of mental and physical possibilities as well as through the levels of concentration.

To me, Performance is a strongly organised and determinate form of art which deals with the unpredictability of time, the audience's perception and limits of their concentration and attention. Performance also breaks conventional rules regarding ways of performing and places taken for performing. Very often there are places such as galleries or museums, but sometimes performance can take place and time within some of the most extraordinary environments such as the banks or even Trade centres,Mega markets,top of the mountain etc, etc...

However performance art has frequently been misunderstood or even more frequently rejected as a form of art. That's usually happened and still is happening because performance is a fusion of visual and performing arts. So, we already have strongly established rules within the visual and within the performing arts.

For instance, if someone tells me about a new exhibition of some paintings or even sculptures I would immediately know that the exhibition will take place in the museum 's or gallery space. If someone invites me to go to the opera, I would go to the opera house without any doubt. Performance has always been an art in between.

Also, art dealers wouldn't like to discuss possibilities of selling performances as they used to say " performance is practically impossible form for dealing within the art market". Problem has always been about the performance 's ephemerality. To me, the theatre is also ephemeral, opera as well. Sport is very ephemeral but that doesn't concern players or dealers at all.

I found personally very great difficulties of consuming the contemporary art. I think that the contemporary art scene is highly polluted. There are too many art productions. Everyday, all over the world, a countless amount of artists are frequently producing art. The same is with performance art. Numbness students or even persons without any day of artistic education are performing. The global network is full of highly naive videos, concepts, photographs or even more well known performance's re-enacts... Regarding their opinion performance might be everything. Every single trick, or even bizarre action in order to provoke the audience. That is the major reason of art pollution within the performance art, as well.

For instance, if someone would try to sing some very difficult libretto from Cherubini's opera Medea without any previous knowledge of the Italian language, without any day of opera practice and not understanding what the libretto is about , it would be very clear and evident from the very beginning that he or she can't sing. Performance art must have some determinants and already established rules of performing like a way of reading performance,duration,original elements, respectful approach to the idea of original piece... To me, every single artist who would like to perform, must respect at least the basic elements of performance art practice. Usually, performance can be a very simple concept. Like eating or standing, drinking or lying even walking or sitting... If an performance artist would like to ritualise some of these everyday actions it need to be turned into another state of reality or even more different state of mind. That is in fact the biggest problem and the greatest challenge for every performance artist.

To me, of great importance is how I can establish that particular dialogue to the public by the purest and most minimal elements. In the performance everything matters. Every single detail is of big importance and if something is missing or that is too much it's immediately evident. Performance artist must be fully concentrated and dedicated to the concept during the performing. There is some great sentence concerning performance artists:

*"The public is like the dog. If you are afraid they smell it, if you are insecure, they smell it, if you don't know what are you doing in the performance the public can smell you".*

*Marina Abramovic cited during the lecture in TATE Modern in London , 2003*

Marina Abramovic has marked one great period of the previous century and she used to call herself a grandmother of the performance art. Abramovic has dedicated her life to the performance and almost every problem from her life she turned to the state of spectacular action. She is a great example of what the performance is supposed to be and has never been before. But, as an old maxim says "Under the shadow of big things nothing grows up", so the younger generations have to be aware of that great problem.

There is also one more problem I would like to draw attention to concerning the relation **Performance Artist-Performer** and the big difference in between them. To me Performance artist is equivalent to the inventor, in the music to the composer in the cinema to the director. To me "performer" might be anyone who is able to read properly what has been written by the performance artist. Abramovic has one idea which one I would like to follow here, even if I can't fully agree with:

Marina Abramovic has been asked a few years ago what should be the reason of opening the performance independent group. She has answered that having a collection of the performance artists within one group or even more office is a great opportunity to the artists to be noticed by the art dealers and for sure to be even rented for performing. She also said that it is much better solution for the emerging artists to benefit from their art than to work in the factory for instance.

I can understand this initiative to help young and emerging artists but to me in this concept there exists a danger of producing the performers for performing. I personally wouldn't like to be within one group in order to be rented from occasion to occasion to perform.

In my opinion, every single performance artist has to develop himself/herself on his/her own authentic way. Every single artist has it's own life background and personal history within the global history. I think every artist has to give to the audience the most authentic self image. Usually, performance artists as well as the other artists led by current art fashion are producing similar art pieces, very trendy and very often without any personality inside of the work. I can't easily say what should be the most obvious direction of the performance art but I will try to give some overview:

In 1960's we had Fluxus and other artistic movements- freeing of old artistic influences.

In 1970's we had Body and Performance Art. The most radical movement. Promoting self violence and endurance in order of freeing.

In 1980's commercial art was very popular-paintings, graphics and sculpture.

In 1990's there were a global stream of new media art works. Video, installations, computer based art...

In 2000's art has been determined by the world problems, such as Terrorist attack on America as well as in the rest of the world. Islam domination all over the world was so popular theme for artists to be concerned of.

In 2000's we have the domination of Internet based art, fast communication, 24 hours information availability...

Performance art became more staged, fashioned. We can usually talk about multimedia performances, performance involving video screenings, huge video projections and I think that performance artist in 2000's is protecting himself hiding between powerful media elements.



In my case I would like to try to bring back the performance artist as a dominant figure on the scene. To try to fuse elements of the body presence as well as the presence of the personality. Long duration performance and the body endurance will be an interest of mine in the following years without any doubt.

Perhaps performance art will take a shape of the experimental lectures in front of the audience, public laboratories and so on...

Finally here is the part of the interview with Marina Abramovic in which she was told about performance developing in the future:

MB: How do you see performance developing in the future?

MA: I think that performance is very strange – it comes and goes. It was all over the place in the 1970s, but there was too much crap; then in the 1980s it was all about the self and the market, with the exception of the night-club scene and artists like Leigh Bowery – it was all connected to music and AIDS and the awareness of the body. In the 1990s many performances became an element in video installations, and there were lots of performance elements in contemporary dance – people like Jan Fabre, Pina Bausch, Jérôme Bel. Now I find it very interesting that a performance piece doesn't have to be performed by the artist who created it. Any artist who has the courage to do a performance without documenting it is the most radical. But I can't help it – I document all my performances, because my mother is such an orderly woman – I believe in KGB files. But in an ideal world, it should be just word of mouth.

*Interview with Marina Abramovic and Monica Bonvicini*  
[http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/do\\_it\\_again/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/do_it_again/)

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