

SEANKELLY

"Marina Abramovic," *Gilded Birds*, March 22, 2013.

GILDED BIRDS

A snapshot of contemporary ideals of beauty

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ



— Marina Abramović chose a glass of water

Marina Abramović, Water Study (D) – With Eyes Closed I See Happiness, Photograph
2012 courtesy Marina Abramović Archive and Sean Kelly Gallery

Marina Abramović, artist, on a glass of water

GB Tell me why you chose a glass of water.

MA We always forget about drinking water. We do so many activities at the same time without thinking. I think to take a glass of water and make it into a ritual is really important. There are so many objects that are always around that we don't think about at all. I think water is one of the most beautiful things in my life. It's clean, it's nourishing and we can't live without it.

GB And when you perform, a glass of water is one of the only things you have with you.

MA Exactly. Even for the long durational works where I go without eating I still have to have a glass of water. When you think about precious objects, a glass of water is the most precious. I hope that more people will choose a glass of water for this project!

GB Do you ever find beauty in useless, decorative things?

MA Some people are collectors and can enjoy objects in different ways. I don't collect anything and for me the most beautiful spaces I could relate to would be prison or a sanatorium or a monastery. Somewhere functional and empty, so your body is there but your mind can be freely travelling anywhere you want. It's important to have less information around so you can fill the space with ideas. I need white walls. I hate coffee table books that people have just for decoration, when no one ever looks at them and they take up space and collect dust. We don't need all these things. The Japanese have a good solution. They have storage and so in the spring they'll take a spring vase and enjoy that in the house, then after the spring, take it back to the storage space and take a summer vase, and so on. That way, I think the objects are appreciated for a time. But if you put everything together you don't see anything any more.

GB Do you think your art is separated from ideals of beauty somehow – so as not to have to be related to one particular time or culture?

MA I think even the ideal of beauty for the human body changes. Look at the renaissance and the enormous human body that was ideal for being voluptuous. And look at how that's changed so people shrink to be almost shadows of themselves. With objects now, globalization has meant that you can go to the furthest corner of Africa to bring back an object but then see the same thing in a market in Paris. We're so saturated with things, I think we need to empty our houses and learn how to drink a glass of water consciously and slowly.

GB One of your most well known pieces is "Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful." Have your ideas about that changed over the years?

MA This piece is so misunderstood. It's very sarcastic. I think art should be disturbing and not beautiful at all. The idea of just having beautiful things for a living room is the kind of art I hate. So I used a metal brush and destroyed my hair in that piece.

GB Yes, the sarcasm certainly comes across, but I'm wondering if that's still your view, that cynicism towards beauty?

MA Absolutely. More than ever! The idea of that piece is to say that art is not about beauty at all, it's about meaning and concept and layers of ideas. Good ideas can live for a long time.

GB When you're performing does it make you aware of your own beauty, having all those people stare at you?

MA I don't care at all. I use the human body as a tool just as the painter uses a brush, whether it's fat, skinny, beautiful or ugly. The message is what's important. In my own private life I'm very conscious of my looks, but I'm not interested in whether or not I'm perceived as beautiful when I'm naked in front of the public. It's about emotion. And the body is mortal. It's not beautiful for long. In American culture we have such monstrous examples of plastic surgeries on people who can't stop trying to look young.

GB What makes something worthy of the word Beauty to you?

MA I think for me beauty comes from the inside, not the outside, it radiates. It's an energy that gives off a kind of glow. It's the same with people and objects. Every good work of art has this energy. It's like when you walk into a room and feel strangely as though someone's looking at you. In a museum you can sense something behind you, pulling you, and you turn around to see it. This is a great work of art because it has that energy. The creator gave it an inner beauty.