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Marina Abramović on Lady Gaga, Marriage and Art

Before her London summer show, the pioneer of performance art talks about her new show, why she isn't marriage material and being connected to Lady Gaga



MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ TELLS really funny dirty jokes. Maybe it's because the self-proclaimed grandmother of performance art has made a career out of timing, but she tells her jokes—too racy to print—with great delivery and panache. This summer at London's Serpentine Gallery, audiences will get a chance to interact—and just maybe share a joke—with the 67-year-old Belgrade-born, New York-based artist during her new performance "512 Hours." The award-winning artist also recently worked with Jay Z for his "Picasso Baby" video and taught Lady Gaga the Abramović Method, a series of exercises to heighten mental and physical awareness.

Known for her intense, serious and oftentimes controversial work, including once using a razor to scratch a star into her stomach, whatever happens this summer at the Serpentine is certain to generate interest when the show opens June 11. Though Ms. Abramović will be in London all summer—the show closes Aug. 25—retrospectives of her work are also being held at the Center for Contemporary Art in Malaga (*until Aug. 31*) and the Kistefos-Museet in Jevnaker, Norway (*until Oct. 5*).

Marina Abramović *Marco Anelli*

I once had: a record of 10 international flights in one week. When I came back to New York, I went to the cinema and went to put on my safety belt over the seat and I thought: Oh my god, I am really lost. This time I went too far.

I need to go to: territories I have never been to before and the possibility of failure is very big here for this show. But if I succeed, I can create a completely new platform and raise the question of what are we doing with art in general. Emotion isn't something you can hang on the wall, it is all about feeling.

I have learned: in the last 40 years that long-duration work has the biggest power of transformation, because we live in a time where there is no time. We need to slow down.

Lady Gaga asked me to: teach her the Abramović Method, which I did. And she has this huge following of over 65 million on Facebook, FB -0.82% it is incredible. No artist has this. So whatever she does, people follow.

If I listened to: criticism in the early 1970s, I wouldn't be where I am now. You have to follow your own intuition and own beliefs.



CONCEPTUAL THINKING: Clockwise from top right, a rendering of the Marina Abramović Institute; 'The Artist is Present' performance with ex-partner Ulay; Damien Hirst's platinum cast of a human skull; Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo; Maria Callas Mark Greenberg (*rocket*); Getty (*Callas*); Courtesy of OMA (MAI); Scottv Rudd/MOMA (*The Artist is Present*); Handout/Getty (*Hirst skull*)

If you say to: yourself, you want to be an artist, you sure aren't an artist. It is not, "I want to be"—you are. It is like breathing. You don't question breathing.

I was at: Necker Island with Richard Branson and I asked him: Is it possible to pay just half a ticket so I can go to space and stay there, so I don't need a return? He is still thinking about it.

From the moment I: start performing, it is paradise. It is hard, difficult, but then you are entering a different state of consciousness. That moment of happiness is overwhelming. I would do anything for that.

I am not: marriage material. That is why the husbands leave me, because I am impossible. I understood that art is my purpose in life.

Performance art has: huge potential. We haven't even explored half of it.

Never mind that: Damien Hirst made diamonds cool or that the young Chinese artist [He Xiangyu] made an egg that is real gold. Why do we need to have the most expensive materials? What are you buying? Are you buying gold, diamonds or art? That is the big question to me.

I am doing: a film on James Franco. I made something like a seven-minute trailer, which is pretty interesting...I am also working on a project called "Seven Deaths," which has to do with Maria Callas and women dying in the opera. Strangled, poisoned, burned, tuberculosis, jumping from the cliffs, whatever. So I am asking seven different directors to direct the last 10 minutes of dying. This is what I want to do, repeatedly, seven deaths, with real filmmakers. I have asked Roman Polanski, Pedro Almodóvar, Marco Brambilla and others.

I am: a sentimental thing. I do something radical and then something really baroque, just to kind balance everything.

I show: everything to the public. I show my vulnerability. That is why I have such an audience because I am never showing one side of me. I show a side I am ashamed of, a side that is ridiculous—and lots of humor about yourself. That is really important.