

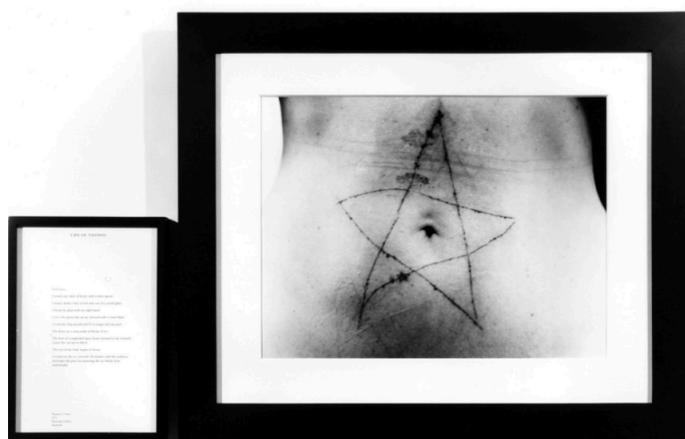
SEANKELLY

Conklin, Emily. "The Performances Marina Abramović," *surfacemag*, February 10, 2018.

## SURFACE

# The Performances Marina Abramović Made When Nobody Was Looking

A show at New York's Sean Kelly gallery offers an intimate look at the artist's earliest experiments.



Marina Abramović, "Rhythm 10" (1973), publ. 1994. © Marina Abramović. Courtesy the Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York.

"Marina Abramović is not a performance artist. She's a living artist," says Sean Kelly, whose eponymous New York gallery is presenting a selection of her preliminary creations in the exhibition "Marina Abramović: Early Works," opening today. The show is a product of their three-decades-long friendship: the twelve black-and-white photographs on view were selected by Kelly and the artist from deteriorating film strips—which depict formative performances from the mid-'70s—discovered in a backpack Abramović used while living out of a van years ago. Each image, produced in an edition of 16 in 1994 with an accompanying text, acknowledges Abramović's focus on the body as a subject and a medium—a defining concept of both her work and its time.

Five of Abramović's first films are also featured, revealing her investigation of physical strength and mental endurance. All the works, created between 1973 and 1977, when Abramović was teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in Serbia, were performed throughout Europe before modest audiences. For Kelly, the exhibition's imagery captures the courageous potential he saw in her nearly forty years ago. "We're looking at a young woman who comes from a very isolated communist country," Kelly says of the work on view. "She was making these extraordinarily radical works at a time when nobody was looking."

These early performances required little more than a body: materials seemed frivolous to Abramović, who was inspired to perform while gazing into a clear, cloudless sky when an airplane flew by, trailing strokes of smoke that slowly dissipated into the air. Her body became the airplane, and her performances, the

smoke. Now 71 (and increasingly conscious of the legacy she'll leave behind), Abramović's ingenious younger self remains influential today. Linger while looking at the formative work on view: you're witnessing how an icon was born.



Marina Abramović, "Rhythm 10" (1973), publ. 1994. © Marina Abramović. Courtesy the Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York.



Marina Abramović, "Rhythm 4" (1974), publ. 1994. © Marina Abramović. Courtesy the Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York.



Marina Abramović, "Rhythm 5" (1974), publ. 1994. © Marina Abramović. Courtesy the Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York.