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Florsheim, Lane. "Marina Abramović on Why the Best Ideas Are the Ones That Surprise You." *WSJ Magazine*, March 14, 2022.

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The performance artist also talks about why she doesn't keep regular studio hours: "You're kind of like a bank employee, where you're going to work every day."



Marina Abramović, 75, is known for performance art that pushes the limits of the body and the mind. In one of her most famous works, *The Artist is Present* (2010), she spent eight hours a day for nearly three months sitting still and silently on a chair in a gallery at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Museumgoers could take turns sitting in a chair opposite her, looking into her eyes. "I literally changed my entire way of living for one year," she says of her training and preparation. "I had to eat and drink water in the night because during the day; I absolutely didn't move. It was like [being an] astronaut, adapting yourself to a totally different way."

A version of that work—a video installation, featuring the show's participants on one wall and Abramović's face across from them on the other—is on view at Sean Kelly gallery through April 16, as part of a career-spanning show of her work.

Abramović, who lives in New York City and upstate New York, also embraces regimented discipline in her daily routines. Every morning, she wakes up before sunrise to go to the bathroom. "People never talk about these things," she says. "I'm very obsessed with being healthy, [and I believe that] when the sun rises, all

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energy goes up, so if you don't go to the bathroom before sunrise, all the toxins of your body go up, too." She goes back to bed afterwards and says it took awhile to train her body to cooperate. "In the beginning, I would just go to the bathroom, sit, nothing happened. Then the body really started learning that I had to do this thing before sunrise."

Born and raised in Belgrade, Serbia, which was then part of Yugoslavia, Abramović studied at the Academy of Fine Arts there and completed her postgraduate studies in 1972. In 1976, she met the German performance artist Ulay, who became her collaborator and romantic partner. In 1988, they commemorated the end of their relationship by walking from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China and meeting in the middle, in a performance called *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk*. (When conceiving it, they'd originally planned to get married at their meeting point.)

For decades, Abramović has also been teaching, both as a professor and at workshops through her own Marina Abramović Institute. Her performances have taken place at museums including the Guggenheim, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. Next year, she will be the first female artist to host a major solo exhibition across the entire main galleries at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Here, she speaks to *WSJ* about her yoga routine and why she doesn't go to her studio on a regular basis.

What do you do after you wake up for the second time?

I like to bring tea into bed and I like to read the newspaper. I like to read what's happening in the world, what's happening in New York, the art section, real estate, climate change, the new restaurants around the world, things like that. After that, I stand up and I do yoga. I have my routine, which takes about 55 minutes, which is not just yoga. It's a mix between yoga and push-ups. I'm very big on stomach exercises. And then I do the bicycle for cardio. Then I start the day. I make my breakfast and then it's mostly Zoom calls I have to do. When I finish, I do my own work.

What do you eat for breakfast to start the week off right?

It depends. Sometimes, like now, I'm eating raspberries and almonds for breakfast. Sometimes I wake up really hungry. Then I would eat rice with one egg on top and kimchi. I like porridge with lots of berries inside, very simple. In the summer, if I can get good papaya, I will only have papaya for breakfast. Papaya feels the best for the body in the morning. But the papaya in America is terrible, unfortunately. If you go to Asia—I was just in Sri Lanka during Christmas—the papaya is to die for. Mango, papaya—it's another world.

Do you take vitamins?

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I only take them for hair and nails. Everything else I'm taking is ayurveda, it's mostly herbal powders.

Is there a time of the day or week when you're most creative?

Anytime after 5 o'clock, it's not productive. When I was young, I wouldn't sleep all night. [Now] I go to bed at 9:30. I don't like evenings, I don't like dinners in the evening. The ideal time that I eat the last meal is 4 o'clock. I really like to sleep eight hours or more. I really like sleeping.



Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ ARCHIVES AND SEAN KELLY, NEW YORK. © MARCO ANELLI

What are your routines like as they relate to working on your art? Do you have certain hours every day?

No. I don't like the studio. I always think that if you go to the studio, you're kind of like a bank employee, where you're going to work every day. I believe that ideas have to come as a surprise. What you have to do is life. Life has to be interesting, and ideas come from life. I'm only interested in ideas I'm afraid of, ideas that are difficult or mysterious. Then I go to the studio to realize them, but not before. The idea has to come as a surprise.

As we continue to come out of the pandemic, how do we create and foster the deep human connection that some of us have been missing?

The pandemic has been so difficult for relationships. I have so many friends who divorced, so many friends who stopped talking. But also people get together on a much deeper level. So I think the pandemic is some kind of cleaning process for relationships. Everything that wasn't important fell off. I think the pandemic is a huge teacher for us for how we can manage life, because life is so temporary and we have to live every day like it's the last, be really full of joy.

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Have you been going to a lot of parties?

My boyfriend took me to Detroit to see the Rolling Stones' last concert. Fifty thousand people without masks. I was thinking, *OK, this is the time I'm going to get Covid*. I was so interested to see the Rolling Stones. Mick Jagger is 78, so he's older than me. So I wanted to see how someone who's 78 could hold 50,000 people onstage and what kind of energy he had with a two-and-a-half-hour-long concert. Two and a half hours of hell. He did it. He is really unbelievable, I have to say.

And then I just go around to places to see jazz, to see concerts, whatever's available. Three days ago, I went to this burlesque place, to see that scene, which is something that I don't know anything about. I'm one of those people who are like a child, new and different every single day.

How do you feel about the present and future of performance art?

Performance is one of the most difficult art categories. You have to be there in the place that it happened; it's time-based art, it doesn't cost money. You can't really buy performance in the way you can a Van Gogh painting or the sculptures of Jeff Koons. Performance never can be an investment, but at the same time it's very important, because performance can lift human spirits like other arts can't.

What do you do to relax?

I love reading good books and I love the movies, but also [I love watching] something which is very simple. What I like about [TV] series is something that has many, many seasons. I found a Canadian series about some horse ranch which has something like 12 seasons, unbelievably long. Literally nothing happens. They wash the horse, they make the meal, they cook pie, then they wash the dishes. It's fantastic. I watch a little bit of this and then I fall asleep.

What's one piece of advice you've gotten that's guided you?

I like the piece of advice I got from my professor of painting many, many years ago when he said to me, "If you're drawing with your right hand and you become so good you can even make the drawing with closed eyes, immediately change to the left." And then he said, "Never repeat yourself." That's the important thing.