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## The Legacy of Marina Abramović's "The Artist is Present" Lives On with New Generations of Artists



[Marina Abramović](#)

[For One Person, The Artist is Present - Installation Experience and Portrait](#), 2022

Artsy Impact Auction

\$4,750 (8 bids)

[Marina Abramović](#) is no stranger to the mythology of her artistic oeuvre. When asked about her biggest contributions to the role of performance art within institutions, Abramović responded succinctly: reperformance and long durational performance art. Abramović's ninth solo show at [Sean Kelly Gallery](#), "[Performative](#)," continues that commitment of revisiting performance as a way to reopen past durational performances to new audiences. The exhibition revisits four key performance works that are central to Abramović's career: *Rhythm 10* (1973), *Freeing the Voice* (1976), *The Artist is Present* (2010), and *Seven Deaths* (2020).

The highlight of the exhibition lies with Abramović's restaging of *The Artist is Present* (2010). The piece was originally held at the [Museum of Modern Art](#) as part of the artist's retrospective in 2010. *The Artist is Present* featured Abramović sitting in a chair locking eyes with visitors, who sat down one by one across from her for eight hours a day, for nearly three months—the duration of her retrospective. The piece has since been instrumental in moving performance into museums and other art spaces, creating a way for curators to navigate performance as a tangible artifact beyond its ephemeral nature.

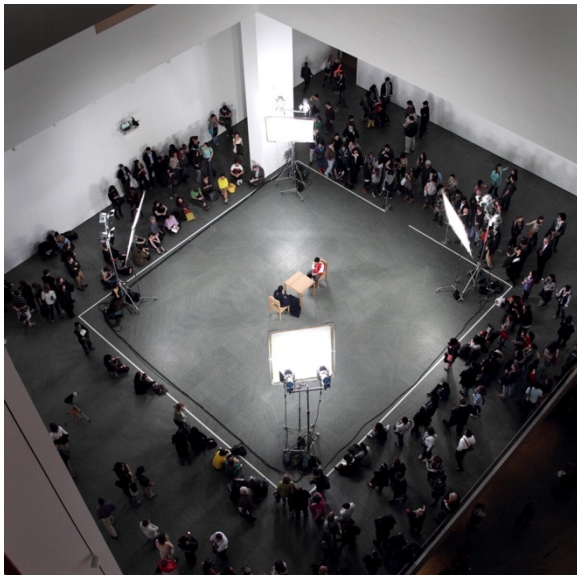
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Marina Abramović, installation view of *The Artist is Present*, 2010, at The Museum of Modern Art, 2010. Courtesy of the artist; The Museum of Modern Art.

Abramović is not only revisiting this work through the exhibition. In collaboration with Sean Kelly Gallery, Artsy will host [“The Artist is Present: A Benefit Auction for Ukraine,”](#) which will allow people to bid on the unique opportunity to sit with Abramović in the installation, where the original photographer, Marco Anelli, will document the encounter. Two of these installation experiences are on offer, with 100 percent of proceeds going to nonprofit Direct Relief in support of Ukraine.

For its reexhibition at Sean Kelly Gallery, *The Artist is Present* is presented through its core elements. The same two wooden chairs that were used at MoMA stand opposite each other, while on the adjacent walls, we see video footage of the original sitters’ faces as well as the artist’s face, assembled in a grid corresponding to the dates of the original performance. This restaging restores Abramović’s commitment to the “now” of the original piece. Gone now is the hullabaloo of the audience and spectacle of lights that shrouded the performance at MoMA, which is how it is often remembered.



Marina Abramović, installation view of *The Artist is Present*, 2010, at The Museum of Modern Art, 2010. Courtesy of the artist The Museum of Modern Art.

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Marco Anelli, *Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramović*, 2012. © Marco Anelli. Courtesy of Jodie Lyn-Kee-Chow.

In the accompanying 2012 HBO documentary of the same name, the cameras capture the slow rise of the eccentric gathering, which saw audiences steadily grow and extend to lines that wrapped around MoMA over the course of the exhibition. Although not necessarily orchestrated as a spectacle, MoMA's second-floor atrium was the perfect stage for the encounter. Onlookers were able to look down upon the performance from the upper floors, in addition to the second-floor cluster of spectators who were prospective participants waiting in line. Stripped bare from the media circus, *The Artist is Present* installation at Sean Kelly Gallery reminds us of the simplicity of Abramović's intention of providing audiences access to the artist.

To return to the original work this way creates an opportunity for the visitor to time travel. Speaking at the press preview, Kelly and Abramović expressed an awareness that in the decade since the staging of *The Artist is Present*, a generation of performance artists and scholars have emerged who did not have the chance to see nor engage with the work. This restaging cannot replicate a one-to-one experience of the original but allows the audience, through recordings and installation, to feel the presence of the original.

Reperformance and long durational performance are practices that Abramović has spearheaded for other performance artists. Speaking with performance artists [Ayana Evans](#) and [Jodie Lyn-Kee-Chow](#) about their experiences sitting for *The Artist is Present* in 2010 also revealed how Abramović's work has shaped their own performance practices. Evans remarked that "while my work heavily cites the legacies of [Lorraine O'Grady](#) and [Pope.L](#), without Abramović's work, you do not really get mine."

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Portrait of Ayana Evans performing *Stay with Me*, 2018 by Jennifer Coard. Courtesy of Ayana Evans.



Portrait of Ayana Evans performing *Stay with Me*, 2014-18 by Jennifer Coard. Courtesy of Ayana Evans.

Evans recalled that before her sitting, she had tried once before to participate in *The Artist is Present* to no avail. Wanting to ensure her participation in the series, which she described as “historic,” Evans asked the MoMA security guards for tips, which revealed insight into how these participatory events are staged and curated by the institutions, with a preference for spectacle. Upon her second attempt, which was late in the exhibition’s run, Evans ran through the lobby shortly after the museum opened and sat for several hours in the line. Evans remembers the entirety of the experience, which includes the brief friendship she struck while waiting with the participant behind her. She described the actual sitting as moving, for she was able to hold space with the labor of another performance artist in the moment.



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Lyn-Kee-Chow also attended the performance late in the exhibition's staging. She was inspired by the increasing antics that were emerging from other artists participating and decided to wear a wedding dress to mirror what she describes as Abramović's papal presence in white. Having witnessed Abramović's reperformance of "Seven Easy Pieces" at the [Guggenheim Museum](#) in 2005, Lyn-Kee-Chow saw the opportunity as a legendary development regarding *how* performance art occupies space in the institution, a rarity before then. In 2005, Lyn-Kee-Chow was developing her own performance practice by reperforming Abramović's work, like *Imponderabilia* (1977), in grad school at Hunter College.



Marina Abramović, still from *The Artist is Present*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist; The Museum of Modern Art; Jodie Lyn-Kee-Chow.

Evans's and Lyn-Kee-Chow's practices have been on the rise since their *The Artist is Present* sittings, and both artists have brought renewed attention to the value of reperformance and long durational performance for a different generation. Evans notably has several long durational pieces that she has reperformed over the years, including the two-hour-plus jumping-jack performance in heels, *Stay With Me* (2014–18), and *Girl, I'll Drink Your Bathwater* (2015–present).

In the latter piece, Evans confronts the alienation femme bodies experience as both an object of desire and a subject. The expression is taken from her experiences in the club where men would express to her, "Girl you're so fine, I'd drink your bathwater." Evans reflects upon this expression by literally drinking dishwater, in an effort to purify her body for others. There is great discomfort watching Evans squeeze a third or even half a bottle of dish soap into a bucket of water. She gulps the sudsy liquid over the span of two hours while providing clean water in champagne glasses to her audiences. We ponder: When will it come back up?

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Portrait of Ayana Evans performing *Girl I'll Drink Your Bathwater*, 2015 by Geraldo Mercado. Courtesy of Ayana Evans.

While the eventual sickness is not part of the performance—it's strategically timed to end just before—we do witness Evans poisoning herself to fit into historical internalizations of cleanliness that structure Black women's respectability politics. Respectability defines the belief that Black women needed to uplift the race through their appearance to quell anti-Black racism in the 20th century. This pursuit of respectability informs Evans's attire—her signature [catsuit](#), her church shoes (purchased at Payless)—and even the dish soap she uses, Palmolive. Evans described her use of Palmolive as inspired by her grandmother, who swore that it was a one-stop wonder that cures all ails afflicting the body.

Similarly, Lyn-Kee-Chow has performed *Gypsies' Picnic: The Feast of Those Gone By* (2015–2016), which uses iconography across colonial images to challenge the afterlife of colonization in areas where it is not readily discussed like desire, memory, and consumption. Using the framework of potluck, Lyn-Kee-Chow's performance alters each time it is performed as it is based on what the audiences bring to the hyperreal potluck. The piece draws out the discomfort that emerges over time at the “dinner table” that cannot be replicated in a brief encounter.



Marina Abramović, installation view of *Marina Abramović: Performative*, 2022 at Sean Kelly, New York, 2022. Photo by Jason Wyche. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York.

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Both Evans and Lyn-Kee-Chow were active performers at the [Panoply Performance Laboratory](#) space, which they both describe as a space where ideas around performance could be hashed out. The same commitment to reperformance that Abramović pioneered was part of the performance ethos of Panoply. Evans said that it was at Panoply that she talked with other artists about *The Artist is Present* and traded stories about their experiences. Lyn-Kee-Chow expressed her interest in the shared legacies between Abramović's path to the institution through the Lower East Side performance scene and her own through the Bushwick performance scene via Panoply.

Lyn-Kee-Chow also remarked that those outsider roots are still visible in Abramovic's current exhibition at Sean Kelly Gallery, which is where the former Exit Art gallery (1982–2012) was located in Hell's Kitchen. Exit Art was a prominent venue for alternative performance and multimedia art. These connections are further built into the laboratory of performance as something to revisit, reexamine. But most importantly as something to be remembered.

The restaging of *The Artist is Present* creates an opportunity to revisit time itself. Walking through the gallery and seeing the faces assembled as calendar blocks restages time and duration in a way that cannot be repeated exactly but can be reexperienced differently. The work allows for something that many artworks can not accomplish: A return.