

Seductive, fearless, funny, ironic... In any case, the Serbian performance artist who has never passed unnoticed for her nearly forty-year career. Marina is always redefining what art is with her own body using physical and mental limits as vehicle. Last April she presented *The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic* in Teatro Real, Madrid. A co-production with Manchester International Festival, where the première took place in summer, almost a year ago. Now she is preparing other worldwide destinations with this piece and introducing his legacy as well: the Marina Abramovic Institute (MIA) for the Preservation of Performance Art.

Some days ago, several media from different countries around the world (Bulgaria, Slovakia, Norway, Brazil, Italy and Spain) were sharing coffee and croissants with Marina at tea time just before her making up appointment and other preparations for her evening performance, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic*, an Opera piece directed by Bob Wilson with special details that makes it unique. It is thought that he is one of the most innovative and influential figures of the theatre scene.

Talking about the theatre atmosphere, this was the context we could live in the meeting we had with Marina in Teatro Real: a salon with decoration of mid-nineteenth century, red velvet curtains and gold lamps. In this place she let us know a little more about her personality, intimacy, present and future projects. Her body language, eye contact and voice showed us the vitality and enthusiasm she feels with this autobiographical project narrated by the Hollywood actor Willem Dafoe and sung by Antony Hegarty and Svetlana Spajic. But beyond this we could talk about Spanish style of life, beauty, fashion, art, politics, dirty jokes, healthy habits, gardening, daily life anecdotes and more unmentionable things...

*'I work so much with my body, so I have to keep healthier and keep in some kind of shape. This is the reason why I respect nature, the natural system. I think that at least one a year, twice a year, we should have a total cleaning: no food, just do some exercises, go to nature... It's very important!'*

Marina Abramovic

So... you think that the basic recipe to create is 'having a total cleaning'. What does it mean?

Yes, sure. The idea is 'cleaning the house', cleaning your body because it's the only house we have. It's not an outside house, it's inside. And in addition to this, as a performance artist you should have much smart self-control, perception, an insurance and passing limits are much more stronger. Then, after this kind of experience you make really a great work of art, because your mind is very clean. It means that a good artist should be preparing itself physically and mentally to find purity. The state of mind is everything! And getting a clean state of mind is very hard. Specially in my case, living in New York which is so polluted with everything. Not just information, style of life, stress... but also it is so polluted because of the sound pollution. There are so many people living in one place, so everything goes through your body, so you have to go to nature. Nature is the key to everything I think. I made a manifesto, an artist's manifesto in which I'm really saying the artist that they have to go to solitude and experience silence.

Where do you get this solitude? What is your refuge, the place you feel really comfortable to have the suitable state of mind to create?

After all this craziness I'm going to Brazil. This year I've been twice for one month each. I'm always interested in different cultures, right now I'm very interested in chamanism. So I go just to the jungle and stay with chamans and they teach me some things to do. I really enjoy living with this distracted and disconnected civilization. On the other hand, I discovered an amazing place very close to Brasilia where there is a special lab in the middle of the waterfalls. It's a scientific lab with Japanese scientists who follow Nikola Tesla's experiments. He was an inventor in the early twentieth century that left us lots of interesting experiments, such as remote control. However, these scientists now have discovered that water has consciousness. If you take two glasses of water like me (she smiles and serves water), completely identical water, and to the other one you project negative feelings like hate; then you look into micro-

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scope and the water where you projected love have crystals completely symmetrical and harmonious, but the one you projected hatred is disharmonious and completely irregular. So basically the water you will drink can become as a medicine or become something that can make you sick. I think the future of our planet is water, we will have huge problems with water. I think it is so interesting, how it works and how I can apply it to my own work. This is why I'm going to visit it again, in my view it is very important reach between science and art today.

Talking about interdisciplinarity and synergies in art, What meant to you bring the performance to the theatre, to the Opera? What do you think now about your famous phrase 'To be a performer artist, you have to hate theatre'?

First of all, I said that in the 70's, when performance art was born. To grow you must kill the father, and at that time the theatre represented to me artificiality, something that was not real and far from radical as I wanted to do. Since then, things have changed a lot. Quite a lot theatre directors have taken performance art strategies, such as Pina Bausch, who created atmospheres with elements like rain... Even Bob Wilson has made total changes in the theatre concept. So in 2012 I can say that I don't care about being in a scenario like this. In fact, this piece I brought to Madrid has nothing to do with performance art or with interpretation. It's rather a poetic piece of biographical theatre in which my life is stronger than my work.

And... regarding the Opera, I knew it wouldn't be like *Traviata*, for sure! And I'm a big fan of Maria Callas. In Opera women always die! She was always dying: strangulation, in the fire, buried alive, from tuberculosis... We like aesthetic death, however when we see real death on tv, we change immediately. So, for me it was interesting. And in addition to this, I thought that was a challenge to make certain changes in the Opera, what I consider the dinosaur of the arts.

You told that you have given Bob Wilson free hands. Is there anything you absolutely don't like?

Of course, I play my mother who I hated.

Is it all?

No... no... There are so many things! My attitude about my art work is also doing things I don't like, not things I like. Because with the things you like you will never change. It's always the same. You do the same shit over and over again. You fall in love with the same wrong guys. You repeat your stories always wrong. But if you like things you don't like, you are afraid of, you are mysterious, that's where you really learn. Why people always change with the dramatic experiences in their lives? It is a kind of learning process... I stage difficulties I'm afraid of, I stage them in front of the public, I use the energy of the public... and do it in front of the public. And get freedom from it. This piece is so hard... I am showing the most shameful moments of my life, that I have really suffered. All things in my childhood that had hurt me. In the rehearsals I cried every single day. For example, I have never being kissed by my mother. One of the hardest moments is when I'm holding a glass of water and Antony is having a hand on my shoulder and Willem Dafoe is speaking up different stories about my life at random. I really have lived very strange moments, very strange days. It is very important because somehow everybody can project on this biography his own life. Somehow... somewhere... there is a problem that you can identify and this is why this biography should be like very abstract in many ways. It's abstract!

But... in the end Bob Wilson releases you from all your pain in a way... Do you agree?

Yes, I think so. The last scene is wonderful, it is my favourite. It is when I'm hanging up and Antony comes with his incredible song 'Volcano of snow'. It is really transcendental! There is spiritualism, a cosmical luminosity and lightness. For me, one of the most deepest moments about all play is in the end when Antony is singing snow... snow... snow... and he is coming with this drama and in one moment the voice stops and everything stop. The curtain comes down and the public is in complete silence reviving it. So I try to have my hands very very up and give every kind of love to the public just before the curtain comes down. This is the most incredible moment for me, every night I experience like a complete transcendental feeling.

I know how special it is for you your public, the energy you exchange with it, how do you feel facing a traditional audience as this one in Teatro Real?

The public is quite different from the audience I have when I'm doing performance art in museums. The audience in Teatro Real is used to begin in front of Opera, so it's other kind of public. However, it is amazing, how I can feel the

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pulse of the public. The differences between the young people with a very open mind, like yesterday public, or another one who is purist and conservative. These three nights we had different public. For example, yesterday public really loved the piece, they participated, they were breathing and we know they were there. Moreover, we had the first time. There were lots and lots of people coming to see us. A lot of Antony and Bob's friends, so the public was warm. But second night, wow, this was like ice. They didn't laugh at the moments they should laugh, they didn't applaud when they had to applaud. Oh my God! What I have to do to them! It's really interesting. You try your best and you can't do anything else. You can't have everybody on your sight. It's impossible!

And if we think about the performance art public... What can you say about the transformation it has suffered during your career?

Oh... you know, I'm so old (she laughs). We are talking about forty years in performance art. In the seventies the public was five people, and we were happy when they were five or twenty, thirty... Nobody was in the territory of the performance art, nobody thought that it was art, and the public was having such a hard time, specially eighties. So they thought there were ridiculous performances. They didn't know nothing, they even didn't understand this form of art and the importance, but now the public have changed. I remember I was really hardcore in the beginning. Specially the performance *Rhythm 0* (1974), when I put the pistol on the table and the public could do anything they wanted to me. I was young and so crazy, but I really realized the public can kill you if you give them the opportunity, they can really kill you. And in that time, my art attitude about energy and ideas about performances and also spiritual aspects, have been changed. So I thought that I didn't want to develop the worse in the human being, I actually wanted to elevate human being spirit in other direction. In the beginning I needed to know what is the body... What are my limits? What is my physical? What is the blood? What are the bones? Where is the spirit? To learn about it, it took me forty years!

So, your mind changed, first you were focused on the physical and now on the mental...

Yes, it took me forty years to get there, where I'm now. It is really important to understand the power of performance art. It is an inmaterial form of art like music for example. It's so incredible! When good performances can change your life if it is a good one, if it is bad it is stupid. Most of the time they are not great, so people just give up bad performances in general, so this is shit. When this entertainment doesn't play... any attention to it, you really need try to find the system which is very simple indeed. We are talking with zero materials and the people are changing, and the people are crying, and something is happening. There is so much of inmaterial and invisible energy. It isn't something that you can touch but is a pure experience and you have to be there to inhabit and memorize it. And you have to tell the other person what your experience was. It's a narrative way of preserving that experience, because if you are a painter you have the canvas on the wall, but with this inmaterial form of art, finally you only have documentation (film, video, photographs...). The thing is when you are there, in the time and in the space... when it happens!

Do you listen to a lot of music?

I love music! Music for me is the highest form of art. There isn't anything highest, because it's the most inmaterial one. I mean you just have your free body straight, so I really love it. I don't listen to only one line, I really like ethnic music and from every country where somebody can give me something new to listen to. I love listening to and also a person who let me listen to silence, he is John Cage. He never had anything to listen to the music in his house. Neither a recorder, nor a radio, nor nothing... and I see why he was listening to silence, since silence is full of music...

In *The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic* Balkan singings have a high profile, why did you choose Svetlana Spajic?

I worked with Svetlana in another piece called *Balkan Erotic Epic* (2005), and I needed her to this piece again. I wanted to have the Balkan ancient sounds and voices in my funeral. She is doing a very complicated and great job with my native culture. Svetlana collects this kind of singings, she went to the villages and talked to the oldest people and she had to ask a permission to continue with this type of singings and to learn to others. These songs bring me memories, for me it's incredible! For example, 'crying women' were very common in Serbia and she has included this sounds in her compositions. Crying women is as a job, if somebody dies in your family they would tell the story of the person and would cry at the same time. There are funeral songs, so I wanted something similar for mine. Other person who I also would like very much to collaborate with Svetlana is Björk. It would be very special. I stayed in a so funny and really beautiful concert in New York and came Debbie Harry, the Blondie, and she liked it too. But this idea was impossible in the end, and precisely at a meal with Björk and her husband Matthew Barney, I met Antony. He is really amazing as well! Both of them!

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Somehow, your roots and origins are present in your work. How has affected the 2<sup>nd</sup> war in your country in this piece... the Bosnian civil war?

Yeah! I made a very big piece about this which was exhibited in the Venice Biennial. Then I gave all the material to Bob and he told the story to the set. He made a stage where Willem Dafoe has to tell the public my biography and the Balkan was dressed as a soldier. There are similarities with *Balkan Baroque* (1997) where I was telling stories about my life and the war, and my parents were on my right and my left. They were Bosnian war heroes, so I interviewed them to that piece. They told me the story, so it's a true story. They have caught rats for twenty five days in their life... It means that past and present pieces are based on truth. I left exYugoslavia in seventy five, and my parents were still living there. And I didn't leave for any political reasons, I only left because nobody understood my work there, they were still out of my mind. However, in this piece Dafoe also tells because of a love story, since I was fallen in love with Ulay, the man of the Great Wall of China. That piece where we were walking two thousand kilometres to say 'good bye'...

After having been living your first public funeral being alive, how do you feel looking face to face with death?

In this piece we have to lie on the coffins before the public arrives and then the public has to sit, so it takes forty minutes. I have to stay forty minutes in my coffin! And when I'm lying there, it is really strange, I think... who is going to be the first? Who is going to cry? Who is not going to come? What is going to happen? It is a very good exercise... The life is a dream and death is waking up and I think it would have a celebration, not with a black color like me, but really an electric green, red, a yellow one or blue. Every color, happiness and lots of dirty jokes! I love dirty jokes! That's another side of me that you don't know. So I don't want a sad funeral. I started thinking about my funeral when I went to Susan Sontag's funeral, the greatest writer. I saw her funeral and I was so disappointed, since it was the saddest funeral I had seen, that I talked to my lawyer to organise my funeral better. I told him, I want three Marina, two fake and one real to be very in three simultaneous parts of the world where I have lived the longest, in Belgrade, Amsterdam and New York. Nobody knows what is the real one and I also want Antony at death time, I love his sentimental singings.

Could we see this project in other international cities? And what can you tell us about present and future projects you are developing?

Yes! We are travelling, we are going to perform in Basel (13-15 June), Amsterdam (22-24 June) and Antwerp, Belgium (28-30 June). We also have invitation from Rio, Vienna Festival, Paris, London, Moscow and New York. Another interesting thing I was thinking about is the suitable person who can replace me, specially when I die. I'm really dreaming of this, and I have a few people that I would like but we haven't talked yet. The first one will be the Spanish Rosy de Palma, we have a similar nose. The second one will be Charlotte Rampling... Anyway, Bob has to decide it as well!

And about other projects, now I have an exhibition in the PAC in Milan, *The Abramovic Method*. It will be at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea till 10 June. Furthermore, I have a project with XI Havana Art Biennial in Cuba. But my real dream which I'm developing at present is my legacy, the Marina Abramovic Institute for the Preservation of Performance Art.

What is the Marina Abramovic Institute for the Preservation of Performance Art exactly?

I'm very interested in educating my audience, and about the fact that the public can experience what I'm experimenting in my performances, so I'm creating my own institute. My school is designed by Rem Koolhaas's OMA, and it combines elements of a museum and a theatre with a laboratory and a boot camp. It will be in the old tennis center of Hudson, New York (two hours from the north of New York City) in 2014, I hope! I would like it could be a kind of laboratory for exploring time based on immaterial art forms, including performance, dance, theatre, film, video, opera and music. Artists and audience will wear white lab coats and will constantly interact. The institute will be focused on the research and production of long-term performance that can last from six hours to several days. And there will be courses for young artists in the field, without food, in total isolation, without talking for a while, because it is very important to have a mind preparing to make a performance work.

I have been looking at your ring during the interview inevitably... Do you think fashion can become 'you' or 'me' in a superficial artist?

The ring was a present, a Spanish designer who came to see the performance give it to me. It's wonderful! It's handmade. This brand made it straight for me.

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And answering your question... in the seventies if you were dressed in the latest fashion, you weren't a good artist. But when I was forty and I broke up with my couple, the man who I worked and loved, I changed my mind. I do my work, I believe in it and I love fashion. Why should I be ashamed? Fashion has people who imitate and there are also great original designers who really invent something else, such as Comme des Garçons, Rei Kawakubo is a really artist who builds in the space and sometimes she designs clothes that you can't wear. Yohji Yamamoto is another fashion designer who talks about the spirit between the clothes and the body. I also adore Martin Margiela and Riccardo Tisci who works for Givenchy and is my roommate in Manhattan. So I really respect the people who is inventing an interesting language in fashion. And on the other hand, make magazine covers with 65 years old, as if you had 18, it's really exciting!