



MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ GATES AND PORTALS

24 September 2022
– 5 March 2023

About Modern Art Oxford

Located in one of the world's great cities of learning, Modern Art Oxford is a leading contemporary art space with an international reputation for innovative and ambitious programming. We promote creativity in all its visual forms as a progressive agent of social change. Our programmes, both in person and online, are shaped by a belief in dialogue between contemporary art and ideas, and celebrate the relevance of contemporary visual culture to society today.

Modern Art Oxford offers opportunities for audiences to be inspired, to enjoy, to learn, and to develop their creative potential.

Marina Abramović Gates and Portals

'What is art? I feel that if we see art as something isolated, something holy and separated from everything, that means it's not life. Art must be part of life. Art has to belong to everybody.'
– Marina Abramović

Marina Abramović (b.1946 Belgrade, Serbia) is one of the world's most significant conceptual performance artists. For five decades, her highly original works have tested the limits of art, artist and viewers in both performances and participatory exhibitions, characterised by instructions and durations set by the artist. *Gates and Portals* positions exhibition visitors as central to the artistic experience. We are invited to perform Abramović's ritualistic instructions and become open to heightened levels of awareness.

Since 1972, Abramović's instruction-based actions have been premised on trust, vulnerability and intense encounters, with the intention of generating connections between people and a present moment in time. From the outset, she respected that audiences are made up of distinct individuals, whose own subjective responses

actively contribute to the meaning of artworks. Her demanding performances have used her body - her whole being - to testify to what a person can endure. She stages the fears that we all share - suffering, pain, mortality - to demonstrate the possibility of self-liberation. 'If I can do this for myself, you can do it for you.' For 50 years, Abramović's participatory art installations have devised situations for visitors that are compassionate invitations for us to notice our own changing states of mind.

Abramović was born into the newly constituted People's Republic of Yugoslavia. Her childhood was shaped by navigating contrasting ideologies; from the anti-fascist communism of her parents, honoured as military heroes, to folklore and her grandmother's Serbian Orthodoxy. Abramović's experiences sparked her fascination with multiple belief systems and personal freedoms. She trained as a painter, and was an activist in the student protests of 1968. The resulting cultural changes attracted international artists to Belgrade, introducing conceptual and performance art that starkly pared art back to key components: an artist's intention, objects/instructions to convey that intention, and visitors' subjective responses. These new ways to experiment creatively with individual freedoms resonated with Abramović. She swiftly excelled in these new art forms that play with how people actively gain new perspectives on life, themselves, and each other, through unexpected artistic encounters.

For decades Abramović has delved into multiple forms of wisdom, including Tibetan Buddhism, Brazilian Shamanism, and the beliefs of Aboriginal Australian communities, to learn routes to higher consciousness, often reached by overcoming fears. In preparation for this exhibition, Modern Art Oxford invited the artist for a residency



Marina Abramović, *Presence and Absence*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Photo by Tim Hand.

last summer, which included research at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. *Gates and Portals* shares what the artist has learnt from a lifetime of using instructions and objects, warmly suggesting ways we may attune to higher levels of awareness for ourselves.

Marina Abramović on Gates and Portals*

The Modern Art Oxford exhibition will not be just an exhibition... It's very rare to experience silence and to stay in one place. It's not going to change your life, but this is an attempt to do something different.

With the Abramović Method, you are asked to do certain things. In a nutshell, you are asked to do things that you would usually never do and this gives rise to different emotions. There is impatience, anger, and the enjoyment of being bored. Then you pass through all of this to get that sense of being truly present, when time doesn't exist, and everything is gone. But to achieve that you need to make a great effort - the words 'offering labour' are incredibly important for me. You don't get something from nothing. You have to invest your time in an unusual activity.

For 30 years, I have been creating *Transitory Objects* as tools for the public to use and to interact with. Some objects are there to empty the viewer, some to give energy, and some to make a mental departure possible. The purpose of the gates and portals is to spend enough time with them, while following precise instructions, to be able to enter states of physical, mental and spiritual transformation.

For me, the gate is something you go through, and the portal is how transformations happen. The portal is really about that changed state of consciousness. It's about going to different time dimensions and from the cosmic to the earthly. You have to learn to empty yourself so that you have the space for what I call liquid knowledge from the universe. There is so much knowledge that could be accessible to us, but we can't be attuned to it because we have so much of our own stuff inside ourselves.

As I have always said, once you enter the space of performance you must accept whatever happens. You have to accept the flow of energy that is behind you, and below you, and around you.

*Marina Abramović quotes from interviews with Emma Ridgway (Chief Curator, Head of Exhibitions and Learning, Modern Art Oxford) and Claire Harris (Curator of Asian Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum, Professor of Visual Anthropology, University of Oxford) featured in the exhibition publication 2022.

The exhibition is curated by Emma Ridgway, Chief Curator, Head of Exhibitions and Learning at Modern Art Oxford, and Amy Budd, Curator, Projects and Exhibitions at Modern Art Oxford.

An illustrated exhibition publication of 'Marina Abramović: Gates and Portals' is available for £32, published by König and Modern Art Oxford.

Marina Abramović's concept for *Gates and Portals* was developed as part of her artist's residency with Modern Art Oxford in summer 2021. The residency was organised by Amy Budd, Curator, Projects and Exhibitions and Jessie Robertson, Assistant Curator, with support from Hannah Healey, Administrator, Exhibitions and Learning, Modern Art Oxford. During Abramović's residency, the artist made drawings and video works as she was granted unprecedented access to the collection and library holdings at Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. This was overseen by Professor Clare Harris, Curator for Asian Collections, supported by Thupten Kelsang, DPhil student at the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, Nicholas Crowe, Assistant Curator, and Philip Grover, Assistant Curator, Photograph and Manuscript Collections.

Marina Abramović: *Gates and Portals* is supported by







Don't miss Marina Abramović
@ The Pitt Rivers Museum
24 September 2022 – 2 April 2023

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