

Press Release

Marina Abramović *Seven Deaths*

14 September – 30 October 2021
22 Cork Street and 27 Lisson Street, London

Marina Abramović opens two shows in central London this autumn, presenting the culmination of her lifelong passion and empathy for the talented and tragic figure of singer Maria Callas (1923-1977). Abramović has created *Seven Deaths*, a new, immersive cinematic experience for the main gallery at Lisson Street, based on seven untimely demises she undergoes on screen, set to the moving soundtrack of seven Callas solos. In Cork Street, Abramović exhibits seven alabaster sculptures relating to these lethal vignettes, which are also self-portraits of the artist inhabiting different personae – herself, Callas, the jilted bride or the sacrificial paramour, among others – each facing their own emotional, operatic endings.

Abramović has been obsessed with the famous Greek soprano's music and myth since a youthful encounter with her voice proved culturally formative for the artist, while she also cites Callas's heart-rending personal life and lonely death as chilling echoes of her own lost loves and near-death experiences. For all of the *Seven Deaths* in this immersive film installation, Abramović has paired a famous original Callas solo or aria and illustrated it with the theatrical moment of the protagonist's grisly end, albeit adding a new twist or some fresh interpretation in each case.

For example, instead of being strangled by the hands of Othello, Abramović's Desdemona is throttled by a snake in one scene; Tosca's leap from the castle parapets is relocated to the roof of a skyscraper; and the ritual suicide of *Madame Butterfly* is replaced with the artist ripping off a hazmat suit and exposing herself to radiation poisoning. The jealous murder of Carmen outside the bullring – from Georges Bizet's famous opera of the same name – is recreated with long-term collaborator, the actor Willem Dafoe, who stabs Abramović violently, despite her appearance in a full *traje de luces* ('suit of lights') normally worn by the male bull-fighter and Carmen's love interest. This moment of cross-dressing duplicity is also depicted in one of the back-lit self-portrait sculptures carved from alabaster, entitled *The Knife*, exhibited at Cork Street.

Every dramatic killing is transmitted through the imagery encapsulated in these ethereal alabaster pieces, the photo-realistic forms of which seem to dissolve into abstract peaks and troughs upon closer inspection. They are in fact intricately milled from single, natural blocks of stone, the light suffusing the translucent interiors with distinct, internal, performative lives of their own. *The Breath* signifies the slow suffocation of the heroine in Verdi's *La Traviata*; *The Mirror* represents the all-consuming madness of the haunted and fragile *Lucia di Lammermoor* and, finally, *The Fire* recalls the climactic moments as the high priestess *Norma* submits to the flames, here walking hand-in-hand with Dafoe dressed as a diva. In placing herself at the centre of these traumatic, theatrical outpourings of loss, love and longing, Abramović honours and inhabits the spirit of the virtuoso soloist Callas, also suggesting that these roles can be reversed, re-imagined and renewed by future generations of performers.

These shows and their themes coincide with the tour of Abramović's ambitious live action opera, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, which is travelling from its delayed 2020 premiere at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, to the Opéra National de Paris (1-4 September 2021) and then on to the Greek National Opera in Athens (24-29 September), while 2022 dates include the Deutsche Oper Berlin (8-10 April) and Real Teatro San Carlo in Naples (13-15 May). Abramović will be the first female artist to exhibit in the Royal Academy's main spaces in 2023, for her major retrospective *Afterlife*, and will also be showing work across London this autumn, both in an exhibition at Colnaghi and across several public sites throughout the capital.

About the artist

Since the beginning of her career in Belgrade during the early 1970s, Marina Abramović has pioneered performance as a visual art form. She created some of the most important early works in this practice, including *Rhythm 0* (1974), in which she offered herself as an object of experimentation for the audience, as well as *Rhythm 5* (1974), where she lay in the centre of a burning five-point star to the point of losing consciousness. These performances married concept with physicality, endurance with empathy, complicity with loss of control, passivity with danger. They pushed the boundaries of self-discovery, both of herself and her audience. They also marked her first engagements with time, stillness, energy, pain, and the resulting heightened consciousness generated by long durational performance.

In 2012, she founded the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), a non-profit foundation for performance art, that focuses on performance, long durational works, and the use of the 'Abramović Method'. MAI is a platform for immaterial and long durational work to create new possibilities for collaboration among thinkers of all fields.

Abramović was one of the first performance artists to become formally accepted by the institutional museum world with major solo shows taking place throughout Europe and the US over a period of more than 25 years. In 2023, Abramović will be the first female artist to host a major solo exhibition in the Main Galleries of the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Her first European retrospective 'The Cleaner' was presented at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden in 2017, followed by presentations at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen, Denmark, Henie Onstad, Sanvika, Norway (2017), Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany (2018), Centre of Contemporary Art, Torun (2019), and Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, Serbia (2019). Other select solo exhibitions include 'Akış / Flux', Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul, Turkey (2020); 'As One', NEON + MAI, Benaki Museum, Athens, Greece (2017); 'The Space In Between Marina Abramović and Brazil', SXSW, Austin, Texas, USA (2016); 'Terra Comunal – Marina Abramović + MAI', SESC, Pompeia, São Paulo, Brazil (2015); '512 Hours', Serpentine Gallery, London, UK (2014); 'Holding Emptiness', Contemporary Art Center, Malaga, Spain (2014); 'The Life and Death of Marina Abramović', Park Avenue Armory, New York, NY, USA (2013); 'Balkan Stories', Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria (2012); 'The Abramović Method', Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan, Italy (2012); 'The Artist Is Present', Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow, Russia (2011); 'The Artist is Present', Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA (2010); and 'Seven Easy Pieces' at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, USA (2005). Abramović has participated in many large-scale international exhibitions including the Venice Biennale (1976, 1997) and Documenta VI, VII and IX, Kassel, Germany (1977, 1982 and 1992).

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, two in New York, one in Shanghai, as well as temporary spaces opened in 2020 in East Hampton and London's Mayfair district. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estates of Leon Polk Smith, Ted Stamm and Roy Colmer. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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