



Marina Abramović: contemporary art's Beatles tour

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Two projects embed Abramović in Australia for 12-days in a world first, made possible by Australia's leading philanthropists.



Photograph 2014 Marco Anelli; Serpentine Galleries

'Marina is like a Beatles' tour – once you announce it, it is everything,' said David Walsh, Founder of MONA (Museum of Old and New Art). 'When you think about contemporary art Marina is going to be on your radar; it is as simple as that.'

Walsh made the comment as he and John Kaldor, Director Kaldor Public Art Projects (KPAP) announced two contemporary superstar events starring Marina Abramović. A 12-day series of durational performances led by Marina Abramović and her team and incorporating 12 Australian contemporary artists will be held at Sydney's Pier 2/3 from 24 June through KPAP. In tandem, MONA will mount *Private Archeology*, an exhibition exploring Abramović's career and the limits of her work.

Abramović is unarguably one of the world's most famous artists. In London and New York there have been overnight queues to see her. She was listed as one of the Time Magazine's 100 most influential people of 2014 and awarded the Gold Lion for Best Artists at the 1997 Venice Biennale. Her major solo at the MoMA in New York in 2010 sent her career off the Richter Scale. She is currently constructing The Abramović Institute (MAI) in Hudson, New York, a 33,000 square foot space devoted to durational works.

'She's a superstar - it is no surprise that we both approached the superstar and, while we - John (Kaldor) and I - come at it from different directions, we often think about the same things,' said Walsh.

Abramović first came to Australia in 1979 with then partner Ulay for Nick Waterlow's Biennale of Sydney at the Art Gallery of NSW. She stayed, touring the outback where she made one of her most seminal pieces *The Gaze* (formally performed as *Nighsea Crossing*). This work will be performed again some 35 years later as part of the Kaldor Public Art Project.

Kaldor said the Australian influence was significant for Abramović: 'She calls Australia very dear to her heart, like her artistic spiritual home, because spending six to seven months in the outback really transformed her art... Australia was in many ways an anchor to her artistic development.'

Abramović will be in Australia for the event to conduct - her preferred word - the audience in a number of exercises based on The Abramović Method, which she has developed over many years.

Kaldor described it as 'the very essence of her art. The exercise *slow walk, counting rice, energy platform* are the means to enter Marina's world, but importantly also to enter our own, and that is really the magic of the project. The exercise is transforming the viewers into performers, blurring the line between the audience and performance and, in a way, it is the next step from what we did in 2013 with *13 Rooms*.'

Commenting on the project Abramović said: 'I have made a career as a performance artist for 40 years now and my relationship to the public is changing. It used to be very simple; the public was sitting in the audience and I was performing in front of them. Then, with my performance *The Artists is Present*, I created a one-to-one experience where the public was watching and only one person was actually experiencing. In *512 House*, which I did at the Serpentine Galleries in London, the public were actually the ones performing and I just blended in.

'In Sydney, for ***Marina Abramović: In Residence***, I will be like a conductor in the exhibition space, but it will be the public who will take the physical and emotional journey... My function in this new kind of performance situation is to show you, through The Abramović Method, what you can do for yourself.'

Pier 2/3 will present two very different experience for the visitor. Downstairs will be a quiet zone where visitors move through a set of instructions and exercises from 12 noon until 7pm daily. 'The art will be what she describes as the later work - the art of immaterial. There will be no props, just Marina's presence that will fill the whole of Pier 2/3. Marina herself is the art,' explained Kaldor.

Upstairs will be transformed into a live-in residency where 12 Australian performance artists – selected by Abramović – will become part of a kind of "fish bowl" mentoring experience and deeply integrated in the project's public programming. Simply, visitors will be able to engage and "demystify" the performance experience by engaging with these artists. As a zone of conversation and engagement the contrast will be sensorial, emotional and intellectual. Kaldor said it will be a fantastic legacy for performance art in Australia.

Australian curator Sophie O'Brien, who spearheaded Abramović's *512 Hours* at the Serpentine Galleries in 2014, will again work with Abramović as Guest Curator on this arm of the Australian project. It is a natural next step continuing both what Abramović started last year in London, and an element of reciprocity for the legacy that her own 1979 Australian residency returned her.

And, with such celebrity status are visitors expect to queue, as they did in London and New York waiting overnight? Kaldor said the longest wait for *13 Rooms*, at the same venue, was one and half hours. It attracted 30,000 visitors over its 11 day run. Walsh reminded us, however, that was part of the experience, 'It is part of the reality in the conducted works – that is just how it is.'



Australia's two most prominent contemporary art philanthropists, David Walsh and John Kaldor, collaborate to bring Marina Abramović to Australia in June. Photo ArtsHub.

The tone changes at MONA. Opening days prior, and leading into, the KPAP event, this exhibition gives the foundation, the frame. Presenting work across Abramović career and mediums, **Private Archaeology** will explore the physical and mental limits to her making - an act of endurance in itself. While Walsh was reluctant to speak of individual works that will be presented, he confirmed that they had been working closely with the Abramović Archive.

'You don't necessarily curate Marina; you collaborate. The exhibition at MONA is very much a narrative,' said Walsh.

'When artists make art they are usually doing one of two things: they are either unconscious or subconscious...Marina takes it a step further. She engages self awareness. She is constantly interrogating herself at that level ... it is a powerful place to be,' added Walsh.

And, just in case Australian audiences still had doubts about the art world muscle that Abramović wields, then the drone of a helicopter at this week's press announcement was a reminder. Kaldor quibbled with a laugh: 'I wonder if that helicopter is from MCA?'

Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art Australia will also present a Marina Abramović retrospective in 2016. Senior Curator Rachel Kent said that MONA and KPAPs projects will complement the MCAs exhibition, each looking at a different aspect of her career. The MCA show wells from her early '70s work and her time in Australia, while the MONA exhibition springs from Walsh's team delving into the Abramović Archive.

Call it zeitgeist; call it a collective obsession - Marina Abramović has surpassed the one-name status of Marina, and is working on being a household name.

The social media hashtag for the project is #marinainresidence

Private Archaeology

MONA, Hobart

13 June through 5 October

Kaldor Public Art Project 30: *Marina Abramović in Residence*

Presented Pier 2/3, Sydney; Free entry

24 June through 5 July

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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