

Interruption in Space belongs to a series of interesting photographs that document the performance at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf in January 1977. The institution provided Marina and Ulay with a space characterised by a dividing wall in the centre where the action was to take place. In this piece the two artists appeared naked and ran towards each other. However, unlike in *Relation in Space*, where they collided with each other head-on, here the thick wooden wall between them prevented them from ever meeting. The audience could see the two artists but all the couple could see was the wall that separated them, and the purpose of this performance was to explore their different reactions to the obstacle that kept them apart. During the performance, which lasted forty-five minutes, Marina and Ulay ran increasingly quickly and violently towards the centre, where they crashed against the wall. A microphone inside the barrier amplified the sound of their bodies hitting the wood.



Interruption in Space, 1977
Gelatin silver print
FMCMP Collection

Breathing In-Breathing Out, 1977 ▶
Gelatin silver print
FMCMP Collection



Also dating from that year is *Breathing In-Breathing Out* - illustrated by two of the photographs in this show - performed by the pair of artists during April 1977 at the Studentski Kulturni Centar (SKC) in Belgrade. They blocked their nostrils with cigarette filters to prevent air from entering and attached small microphones to their throats. Kneeling opposite each other, Marina exhaled all the air from her lungs, which was inhaled by Ulay. The artists then pressed their lips together and he blew all the air into her mouth, and she blew it back into his in turn. With their mouths completely touching and the sound of their breathing - which became an agonising panting as the minutes passed - amplified by the microphones all over the building, the artists repeatedly exchanged that mouthful of air, which contained increasingly less oxygen and more carbon dioxide. Twenty-two minutes after the start of the performance there was hardly any oxygen left and Marina and Ulay were forced to stop before they passed out. This piece was a reflection on life, which can at the same time be death, condensed into the image of air, and interdependence and exchange between the male and female principles.

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FUNDACIÓN MARÍA CRISTINA MASAVEU PETERSON

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

PORTRAIT AND PERFORMANCE
IN THE FMCMP COLLECTION

07 - 04
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FUNDACIÓN MARÍA CRISTINA MASAVEU PETERSON

Marina Abramović (Belgrade, 1946), unquestionably one of the leading figures in the emergence and development of performance art over the past five decades, started out in the early 1970s. As performance art is a very open concept encompassing widely different practices and contexts, it should be stressed that Abramović - initially on her own, later from 1976 to 1988 with her partner Ulay and finally alone again - espoused what might be considered the purest version of this artistic practice: that which makes the body both subject and object of the work, the instrument that appears marked, connoted, situated and also manipulated in a public setting or a private environment, that is recorded in photographs, films and a broad variety of documents and is therefore a barely interrupted extension of certain variants of Body Art.

The Serbian artist embraced this practice from the outset and has continued to explore this path to the present day. In addition, as part of this approach to her own cosmivision, as a performer Abramović chose to be closer to the ritualistic turn taken by colleagues of hers - in her case with even more ascetic leanings - than to performance as a mere task or action, a concept to which other equally important creators of her generation subscribed.

For Abramović, exploring the conventional boundaries of the body, consciousness and communication is essential, as is attraction to risk, to the ability to face up to danger and experience desire, and to overcome pain and fear in order to achieve a spiritual and emotional metamorphosis and a link with the universe that has a certain atavistic and mystical component. She does all this either by performing live in front of an audience or through installations, for which she generally uses video.

This exhibition, designed as a small but select sample of her work, on view in the temporary exhibition gallery of the Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias, brings together nine works by Marina Abramović from the Fundación María Cristina Masaveu Peterson Collection and the private collection of its president, Fernando Masaveu. These pieces, in some way or another, reflect all the artist's concerns and ways of understanding the creative process, which is so closely linked to her own life. They span a long period from 1977 - when, together with Ulay, she gave some of the most iconic performances not only of her career but of the whole art scene of her day, such as *Interruption in Space*, *Breathing In-Breathing Out* and *Relation in Time* - to 2018, the date of a magnificent piece designed as a self-portrait. They are furthermore an excellent representation of the holdings of the Fundación María Cristina Masaveu Peterson, which, carrying on the Masaveu family's tradition of collecting and patronage, is focused in particular on contemporary art, with pieces by young and up-and-coming artists but also by established figures like Abramović herself, the winner of a Golden Lion at the 1997 Venice Biennale and the 2021 Princess of Asturias Prize for the Arts.

Through these works and this new exhibition, the Foundation and the Museum have strengthened their commitment to networking and collaboration, which has yielded such good results and will hopefully continue to do so in the future.

The performance *Relation in Time*, illustrated by a photograph, dates from the summer of 1977. The two artists began without an audience and the action unfolded over a period of seventeen hours in the Studio G7 gallery in Bologna. On that occasion Marina and Ulay appeared sitting with their backs to each other, joined by their hair, and remained in that position the whole time. Every hour the gallery's staff made a three-minute video recording and took photographs. After sixteen hours, when the artists were about to collapse from exhaustion, the audience was allowed in. Marina and Ulay set out to discover how they could use those people's energy to push the boundaries of their bodies and minds a little further, despite their exhaustion, and see how much longer they could hold out (it turned out to be another hour). In addition, starting from a sort of hermaphroditic union, they wished to reflect on aspects such as the self, identity, the relationship between people and bodies, what unites them and what separates them, and the tension between company and solitude.



Relation in Time, 1977
Gelatin silver print
FMCMP Collection



Image of Happiness, 1998
Chromogenic print
FMCMP Collection

Dating from 1998 – by which time Marina Abramović was working on her own – is another photograph entitled *Image of Happiness*, a very expressive closeup of the artist's face, which is red due to the blood rushing to it. The photo originates from a video with the same title she made in 1996, in which she ironically described her image of happiness as the figure of a pregnant woman in her home, sewing by the fireplace as she awaits the return of her husband, a miner covered in coaldust for whom she has a clean shirt and a glass of milk ready. This description, which Abramović repeated over and over again, contrasted with her own life as a creator, which did not fit in with traditional gender roles.

Holding The Goat, which belongs to the *Back to Simplicity* series, brings us forward to the Marina Abramović of the early twenty-first century, specifically to 2010. The work is part of a series of photographs she had taken a year earlier during a ten-day retreat in southern Italy to rest after several months of hard work on her retrospective the MoMA in New York was preparing. *Holding The Goat* shows her standing in front of two rocks holding a goat's head. The Serbian artist, her head tilted downwards in a concentrated pose, has control over the goat, a symbol of power among the flock. The animal, headstrong by nature, appears docile and submissive here. This and other photographs were featured in the book *Italian Works*, published in 2012.



Holding the Goat, from the *Back to Simplicity* series, 2010
Pigment print
FMCMP Collection



Looking at the Mountains,
from the *Back to Simplicity* series, 2010
Pigment print
Fernando Masaveu Collection

Related to this piece as it also comes from the *Back to Simplicity* series is *Looking at the Mountains*, likewise executed in 2010 and belonging to Fernando Masaveu's private collection. This work, like the whole series, relates to the principles of ritualisation of nature that were already present in the ancient world, many of which formed the basis of the Hebrew, Christian and Muslim religions, an iconography rarely espoused in the creative world by women artists as it is more closely linked to male codes. In it Marina, dressed in white with her long black hair gathered in a ponytail, stands with her back to the viewer gazing at a landscape that could represent a desire she expressed that year, in 2010, when she stated: 'I have to be like a mountain.'

A photograph from 2013–14, *The Scream*, *Ekeberg Park*, documents part of the works executed by the artist in this sculpture park in Oslo to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Edvard Munch. The park provided Munch with a setting and inspiration for his most famous picture, *The Scream* (1895). To mark the anniversary, Marina produced three interactive works, various performances, a sculpture and several video pieces. The photograph shows her dressed in black on the left of the composition, emulating the well-known gesture of the person in the painting, silhouetted against the stormy sky and cold-looking city behind her. Everything appears to be enveloped in an icy and oppressive atmosphere. The tree on the right heightens the gothic as opposed to romantic dimension of the scene.



Self Portrait with Quartz Crystal, 2018
Quartz crystals and salt
Fernando Masaveu Collection

Lastly, the exhibition ends with one of the most unusual and striking pieces in the whole group: the sculpture *Self Portrait with Quartz Crystal* – executed in 2018 and also belonging to Fernando Masaveu's collection – which should be interpreted as a self-portrait of the artist herself, a disturbing work laden with feeling and expressiveness. Sculpted in salt, it contains a piece of quartz in the middle of the forehead. Showing her gazing upwards with her mouth open as if reciting a sutra or mantra, the whole ensemble has a metaphysical dimension: the third eye, the doorway to inner sight through which the most significant and spiritual truths can be captured. In this connection it is fitting to stress the artist's interest in travelling the world in search of crystals, minerals and precious stones that she associates with magical properties to compose some of her creations.

Alfonso Palacio
Director, Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias



The Scream, Ekeberg Park, 2013-14
Chromographic print
FMCMP Collection

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