

AS ONE

SPECIAL EDITION FOR THE PROJECT AS ONE

INTERVIEW

SERGE LE BORGNE PAULA GARCIA

"To conquer oneself is the greatest victory" — the thinking behind AS ONE.

PERFORMANCE ART

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

Right time, right place, right public.

LONG DURATIONAL

CLEANING THE HOUSE

Six artists challenge themselves and the public with six long-durational performances.

PRESENTATION

THE PERFORMANCE WORKS

AS ONE's artists talk about their experiences, and about how their work was received by the public.



A LIVING LABORATORY

AS ONE sprang from NEON's intense desire to bring another form of contemporary art — long-durational performance — closer to everyone, and from Marina Abramović's passionate efforts to perpetuate her legacy through the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI).

For seven weeks, the Benaki Museum is being transformed into a living "laboratory" dedicated to performance that is free and open to everyone. AS ONE is a chance for the public to see works by 29 artists alongside re-performances of two legendary Marina Abramović pieces, to experience the Abramović Method for themselves, and to attend compelling talks, lectures and workshops on performance and its interrelationships with other forms of art.

AS ONE is a power station producing new energy, a space overflowing with the fervour of artists creating and presenting their work in the here and now, before the eyes of the public. And by experiencing and taking part in AS ONE, visitors create their own energy that feeds back into the project.

Here in the Greek capital, at the Benaki Museum, we are proud to present one of the largest programmes dedicated to performance art anywhere in Europe — a project that will help both the city of Athens and Greece emerge as international hotspots for culture that inspire and fuel contemporary creativity.

Elina Kountouri
NEON Director

LONG DURATION PERFORMANCES: GIOTA ARGYROPOULOU////////DESPINA ZACHAROPOULOU////////VIRGINIA MASTROGIANNAKI////////LAMBROS PIGOUNIS////////NANCY STAMATOPOULOU////////THEODORIS TRAMPAS. **PERFORMANCE INTERVENTIONS:** THANASSIS AKOKKALIDIS////////RAFAEL ABDALA AND JESSICA GOES////////YIANNIS ADONIOU AND STAVROS APOSTOLATOS//////// ELENA ANTONIOU////////CHRISTINA VASSILIOU////////SERAFITA GRIGORIADIS////////THOMAS DIAFAS////////MARIANNA KAVALLIERATOS////////GIANNIS KAROUNIS////////AMANDA COOGAN////////ALEXANDROS V. MICHAIL //////////KIRA O'REILLY////////KATERINA OIKONOMOU////////NIKOLAOS////////ANASTASIA PAPTHEODOROU////////YIANNIS PAPPAS////////PASHIAS////////EVGENIA TSANANA////////SPIROS CHARALAMPOPOULOS////////DIMITRIS CHIMONAS////////MARIA HERRANZ.



— 29 ARTIST'S FOR 7 WEEKS AT BENAKI MUSEUM

A living “laboratory” dedicated to performance — created by NEON in partnership with the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) — that aims to bring performance art closer to everyone, and the work of young artists to the fore.

—TO CONQUER ONESELF IS THE GREATEST VICTORY

MAI artistic director Serge Le Borgne and the performer Paula Garcia discuss the thinking behind AS ONE, and their hopes for the project

YIANNIS N. BASKOZOS

“To conquer oneself is the best and noblest of all victories” says Plato in his *Laws*, in the guise of Clinias. It is this notion that Serge and Paula hope will remain after seventy days filled with performances, talks, lectures, screenings, and the Abramović Method have come to an end — an ambitious project organised by NEON in partnership with MAI and presented at the Benaki Museum.

Many have wondered what place such a large-scale project has in a country that faces so many problems. Serge draws from his personal experiences to answer: “I am French, and I can tell you that the atmosphere is much greyer and sadder in France than here. People here smile, and that’s already one of the most incredible ways to face the situation. One of the meanings of the title of the project — AS ONE — is that we can face these troubled times if we fight or move as one entity, and not individually. One of the reasons the project exists is to make each of us think more deeply about how we can become part of this strong entity.” “Perhaps we are in the middle of a revolution, without even knowing it. And performance practice along with artistic development are our weapons,” says Paula, who adds: “I think the most important thing to understand is that the only way to change this system is actually through the empowerment of the body, that is to say the re-discovery of the immense power that all these bodies have together, that can break the economic power structures whose only aim is to generate profits.”

It seems the Greek artists were able to easily and creatively adjust to a process that was unfamiliar to them at first. Serge describes their reactions as “amazing”, and notes: “There are some particularities — Greek culture is strongly connected to theatre and dance, so we had very interesting discussions with these artists about the differences between theatre and performance, or dance and performance.” Paula found the artists “absolutely committed to their work, and struggling to survive in a time where money for culture is scarce. But in all our long conversations, we were unanimous in our belief that we

can change this system through artistic practice, and performance is, in this case, a tool for the transformation of both the artist’s body and the public. The exchange of energy during the performance between the artist and the audience is a practical exercise of body empowerment.”

Will performance be the dominant form of art on show at the Benaki Museum? Paula explains: “Performance is a time-based practice and has an open

format, which means that you cannot define performance in the way you can define painting, sculpture, installations, drawing, and so on. One of MAI’s goals is to develop a structure for artists who are generating new ideas of immaterial forms of art, and the interaction between those different languages and technologies. Here in Greece, we will have works by a writer-performer, an opera singer-performer, a dancer-performer — it is absolutely incredible to see artists who are not from performance practice per se, taking risks and breaking boundaries between artistic languages.” Serge adds: “The main and most interesting difference from ‘traditional arts’ is that you cannot buy a performance or a theatre play, but you can buy a painting or a sculpture. You can download a David Bowie song, but you cannot buy the time or special moment when Bowie was recording or singing or performing that song.”

But what exactly is the Abramović Method, on which so many of the happenings visitors will see are based? Serge begins by clarifying that “both MAI and AS ONE contain the Method, which is part of Marina Abramović’s future legacy

that MAI is in charge of building and communicating.” The Abramović Method is a series of exercises designed by the artist over forty years that allow you to briefly step outside your daily routine and everyday problems and come face to face with your own self.

Marina Abramović’s projects are usually aimed at adults. Here in Greece, AS One is also open to young people. What would they say to younger visitors? Serge

believes in education through the arts, but does not think age is an issue. “A teenager is not going to understand or analyse a performance in the same way an eight-year-old is going to understand it. But the little one is going to catch something for sure, and if not, they will at least ask ‘why?’. And this ‘why’ is already an education.” Paula poses a question asked by Beatriz Preciado — “How can we produce new forms of subjectivities, new forms of social relations, other sexualities...?” — and answers: “Through education, artistic practice, the production of memory, and the creation of the future.”

What needs to happen for this huge undertaking to be considered a success? Both reply that the project will be judged a success if it resonates with

both the public and the artists. If it leads to the creation of a platform for performance and other projects. And if NEON and MAI’s philosophy is taken on. In the words of Serge: “If we, all of us, finally understand that we cannot move forward as individuals unless we work together as a group.” They both say they are ready to face any negative reactions — they love them, in fact. They are open to criticism, do not fear it, and are ready to deal with it in creative ways.

«HOW CAN WE PRODUCE NEW FORMS OF SUBJECTIVITIES, NEW FORMS OF SOCIAL RELATIONS, OTHER SEXUALITIES...?»

”



—MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

NEON and MAI share the same vision, the same interests, the same mission. To work with the broader public, to work in public spaces. It doesn’t need to be a museum, it can be an empty factory, a street — any space where large groups of people can gather. And one of our most important interests is education, to bring people in contact with immaterial forms of art.

Performance is a serious business. You must be in the present time, in the here and now, with the body and your mind. Only in that moment can you give your complete attention to the public, otherwise energy does not flow and the miracle will not happen. I am inspired by the words of the art historian Alexander Dörner: “The new type of art institute cannot merely be an art museum as it has been until now, but no museum at all. The new type will be more like a power station, a producer of new energy.” AS ONE means to be together, all of us as one unity, to produce new energy. And in this moment, Athens is the right place, the right time, and the right public for this project.

Because art can help in times of struggle, can make a difference in places where there are problems, financial difficulties, cultural and social crises. Art can truly bring people together, open their hearts and change their consciousness — it can do many things. Art cannot give all the answers and cannot change the world. But it can help by changing people’s minds. Never has this been more relevant than for Greece, in these trying times.

I am very happy to be here in Greece with you. The Greek public is a great public — passionate, emotional and dedicated. We are preparing and building an artistic platform for everything that will happen here over the coming years. Athens will be a very important place for the international arts scene. Let us all be as one.

RIGHT TIME,
RIGHT
PLACE,
RIGHT
PUBLIC

”

—CLEANING THE HOUSE

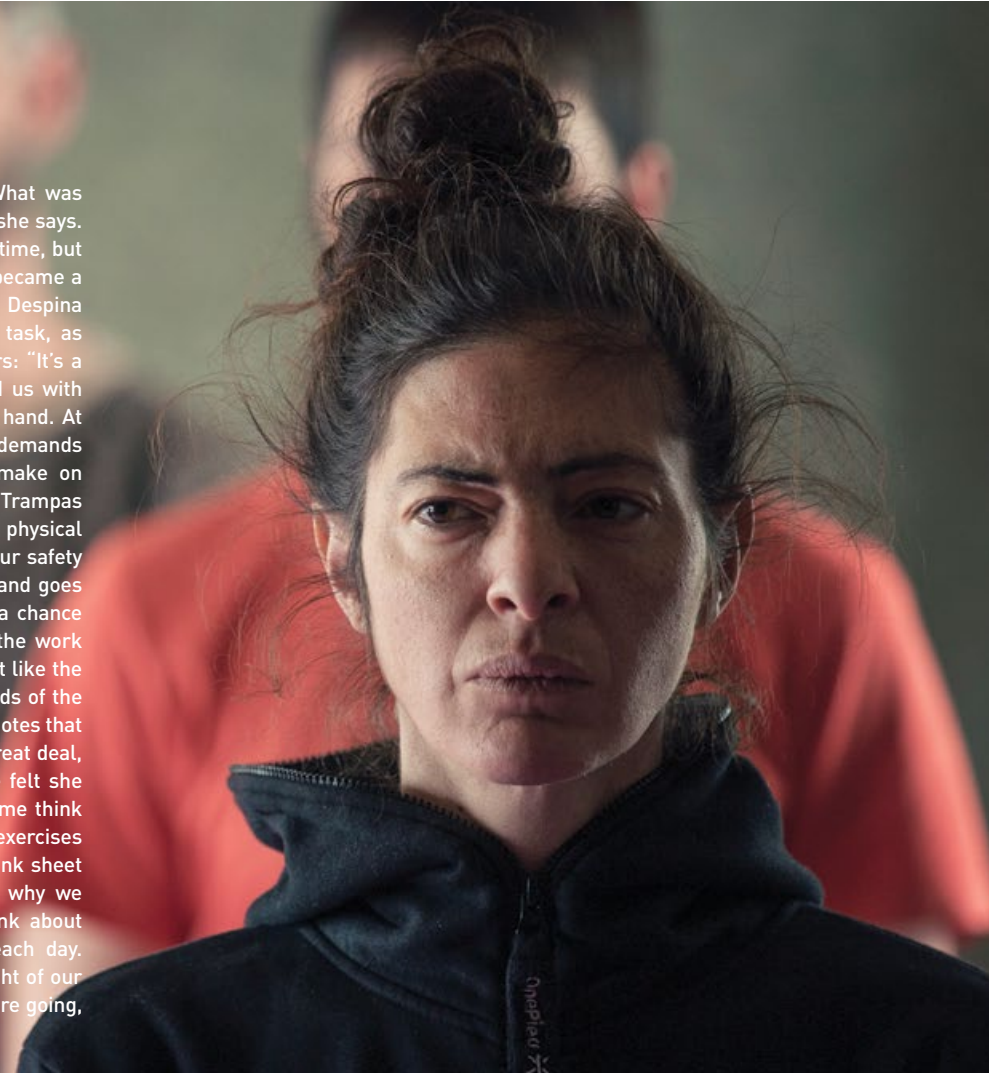
Six artists challenge themselves and the public with six long-durational performances

“we are what we are not”

AS ONE's most demanding, painful and challenging works are the six long-durational performances, where six artists face a difficult task: to set themselves against time, silence, the body, the spirit and, finally, the public for seven whole weeks. They are: Yota Argyropoulou, Virginia Mastrogiannaki, Lambros Pigounis, Nancy Stamatopoulou, Thodoris Trampas and Despina Zacharopoulou.

All six had to go through a huge test, beyond the realm of their usual experiences: the “Cleaning the House” workshop. For one week, they were isolated inside a farmstead in the Corinthian Highlands, ready to undergo a series of trials — exercises that would help them leave the world they had just abandoned behind. Three days of fasting and meditation, a dip in ice-cold waters, hours spent separating and counting rice and lentils, exercises that demanded they struggle with their own selves. How do the artists feel about this experience? Yota Argyropoulou says that, in the beginning, she had nothing in mind: “I didn't try to rationalise it. I did everything I was asked to do. It clears your mind, and you can see how strong you are and how much you can do.” Virginia Mastrogiannaki spoke about how you can be both together and alone: “We kept each other going, even though we were all strangers. No-one left. If someone had made the first move to break the chain, then I don't know, perhaps I would have left, but it's

not something I can answer now.” What was the most difficult part? “The fasting,” she says. “On the first day, I was hungry all the time, but then my mind got used to it. Hunger became a small pain, like an ache in your leg.” Despina Zacharopoulou was prepared for the task, as she has practised yoga for many years: “It's a very effective workshop that provided us with the tools we need to face the task in hand. At the same time, it gave us a taste of the demands long-durational performance would make on our bodies and minds.” Thodoris Trampas judged the exercises as follows: “This physical and mental preparation takes away your safety net — you get as much as you give,” and goes on to say that “this entire method is a chance to reconsider your relationship with the work of art, to become part of the work, just like the person watching it. As one, in the words of the project's title.” Nancy Stamatopoulou notes that the meaningless tasks helped her a great deal, and that from a certain point on, she felt she had lost her boundaries. “This made me think that the repetition of meaningless exercises wipes you clean, leaves you with a blank sheet of paper, without information. That's why we also are what we are not, if you think about how much information we take in each day. Somewhere along the way we lose sight of our own reality — who we are, where we are going, what we want...”



—A WORKSHOP WITH MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

The Conversation of Marina Abramović with artist's and audience

“You should know that performance is an art where there is energy dialogue between the performer and the public. The public is tired of simply seeing art in museums. They want to be inspired, to take part.” With these opening words, Marina Abramović set the criteria by which the work of six artists — her students and admirers, sat in wait for her on the stage of the Benaki Museum auditorium — would be judged. This first workshop given by Marina Abramović as part of AS ONE was enthusiastically received by both the audience and the artists.

Her first piece of advice to shy Georgia: “Do not be afraid of the audience. Look them in the eye.” She points out that some of her videos were not carefully edited, and stresses that “the presentation of a work must be perfect.” When she sees a video where an artist is talking constantly and by the end is frothing at the mouth, she asks him how long the performance lasted. On hearing that it lasted just 24 minutes, she shakes her head. “I don't believe you can exhaust yourself in so little time. What you are doing is like theatre. In theatre, blood is ketchup. In performance, it's real blood.” Marina praises a work by Nikolaos where, suspended from various hooks in his skin,



he lifts a woman in his arms. She notes that if he were alone it would be just a show, but in this specific piece he transfers his energy to others. Eliane is a dancer, but Marina is not enthused by her work. “This is not performance, it is dance.” Eliane explains that her idea is to create a character and to deconstruct it. “Sometimes the idea is good as an idea, but not necessarily in its

application.” When Yiannis performs a dance on stage, Marina has the opportunity to note the differences between the dance body and the performance body. Thodoris and Paris perform a poem that Thodoris has written, accompanied by some very sentimental music. “The music is wrong.” She shows them what to do. She tells one of them to carry the other on his back. “Say it again.”

she says. They both struggle and pant, but their words now take on a physicality, a weight. The audience applauded loudly.

She was so specific and straightforward, so pointed in her criticism but always polite, and so insightful with her observations that her every intervention was a lesson in performance.

Y. N. B.

—REPERFORMANCES

Completing the programme are two re-performances of works by Marina Abramović, “Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful” (1975) by Martha Pasakopoulou, and “Cleaning the Mirror”

(1995) by the artists Dimitris Bampitis, Dimitra Billia, Gitsa Konstadoudaki, Martha Pasakopoulou, Eliane Roumie, Vassiliki Spachou and Kalliopi Zervoulakou.



—REFLECTIONS ON THE ABRAMOVIĆ METHOD

Artists as enablers of the universe

Maria Loizidou, visual artist

The concept of the mutual gaze functions here at the Benaki Museum — now transformed into a laboratory for the production of human energy — as a tool for the spiritual tracing of personal pathways.

In the face of the other, I discern the beauty of humankind, just as I note it in nature, in animals and in plants; it is a truth that connects me with other human beings and frees me from my self.

It is this reaction of wonderment and surprise that allows me to step outside myself and meet the other — spontaneously and without limits — within an environment that is both unpredictable and immensely silent.

I have come to realise that the gaze alone does not elicit a narrative. The peripatetic

observations of a slow walk constitute the intermediate space prior to the event, and our interrelations trigger the narratives.

The opportunity of entering inside what is happening springs from an awakening of the senses, and signals to us the challenge of meeting.

The Method allows for the activation of the primal, slow and deep natural rhythms of the human being. The Method space is conducive to highlighting this natural state. Time, in long duration, is difficult; it is unlike both pain and exertion, and its only prerequisite is the presence of people for people, in chance meetings.

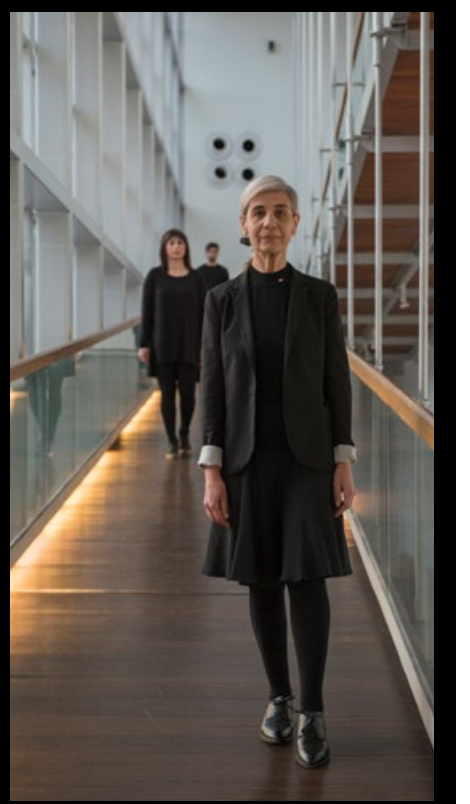
During the course of our preparations, and over the seven weeks that the partic-

ipatory action will last — set amongst the performances and lectures, with the flow of events feeding energy into one other — the Method experience is generously offered up to everyone. And there are rare moments of genuine connection between people, regardless of knowledge, geographic origin, age and interests.

“Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful”, the legendary performance by Marina Abramović that I watched her perform live forty years ago, is revived, before my eyes — bold and powerful — by Dimitris Bampitis. Is this not art? Perhaps here, nothing connects us other than our evident need for human energy, which makes us feel no shame and is a kind of resistance against the hardships of our times.

As artists, we are often faced with these kinds of situations, which take us to the heart's core in order to activate emotion. A chance to restart, for all those who feel the need. To recharge ourselves for that which we share without limits: the dream of all our senses functioning fully.

Maria Loizidou is an Abramović Method facilitator.



— THE ARTIST'S PROJECTS



The actress Yota Argyropoulou presents the project "One Person at a Time". She has created two identical rooms with facing furniture, like a mirror image — one for the performer and one for the public. She notes: "There is ambiguity here, and it poses certain questions: Who is watching whom? And where does reality end and the construct begin?"



Yiannis Pappas: During my performance of the long-duration work "A Key" at the Benaki Museum, I came to understand that the technique required is the same as the approach of an ascetic: a state of knowledge and self-realisation in relation to time and space that encourages an emptying of the mind. I think I was surprised by the fact that a sense of nirvana was stirred in me — while being observed. I wanted the public, who were brought face-to-face with a state of incarceration and exclusion, to reflect on the relationship between the emancipation and subjection of body and mind, under the influence of which the political, economic, religious and social prescripts of our day are articulated — and I believe this is what happened.



Anastasia Papatheodorou: In a way, I won the trust of the public, precisely because the work was long-duration. A meditative relationship was cultivated, and the public's need for understanding, peace and identification was clear to me throughout the performance. This connection had its own need to strip away the inessential, from both them and me. The whole process continues to reposition me on existential and artistic levels, and there were times where I felt we truly managed to meet with something outside our selves. There were moments of shared emotion, of catharsis with the public. I am truly grateful, and hope to consolidate and dive deeper into this difficult art form. (A Woman in a State of Truth).



For "Corner Time", the dancer Despina Zacharopoulou performs inside an enclosed space that the public enters through an opening. Inside this minimal room, she undertakes activities with the aim of interacting with the public — optically and conceptually, without touching.



The sound artist Lambros Pigounis explores an auidal environment, and more specifically the "ecology of sound". He stays on a platform, under which is a system that produces low-frequency sound. He says: "The project creates a connection, a sense of shared guilt between me and the public, but without them knowing it. The subconscious effects of sound on the body are another kind of violence." (Micropolitics of Noise)



In "Pangaia", the visual artist Thodoris Trampas explores the relationship between destruction and union. He faces a large rock, which he tries to destroy and then reconstruct by rejoining its fragments. He is interested in "these two processes — destruction and reconstruction — in a process where the self and the sculpture become one".



Nikolaos: My performance, which lasted two days, was the most difficult and painful thing I have ever undertaken. It taught me two great lessons: first that I am my limits, and second that I must always take particular care of my body so that it can follow the mind's will. From the support I received from people, and the words I heard and exchanged with them, I realised with great joy that many members of the public took away the same message. It was a powerful experience and I am very happy with the results. (Look at the Pain in the Eyes and the Pain Passes).



The visual artist Virginia Mastrogiannaki presents the performance "Jargon", an exhausting project for her since she counts every second of eight hours each day, over seven weeks. She explains: "Endurance is the name of the game, it's the long duration that makes this difficult. Half the work are the mistakes I make — it's certain that I will lose track of time. It's a Sisyphean task."

Yannis Adoniou, Stavros Apostolatos: Each day was truly a different experience. When it comes to long-duration performance, the public is free to coexist with the artist and their work for as long as their stamina and interest allows. At first, we focused our attentions on how to survive for eight hours, both physically and artistically. Later, something shifted in us and led us into a more personal process. Some of the public stayed with us for over two hours — their energy was a huge help!



Katerina Oikonomou: Even if the two days of my performance seemed different — since the first day saw me singing non-stop while on the second I was in complete silence (not out of choice, but because nature insisted upon it as a reminder of my physical limits) — they were both equally melodic. All that changed was the intensity of the participatory elements of the flowing orchestra that was the fluctuating presence of the public, who were not an audience but rather teammates in a work of unlimited dimensions, tones, tastes, scents and potential. (And There Was Voice)



In "White Cave", the dancer Nancy Stamatopoulou makes reference to Plato's Cave. In an enclosed space, she observes the slow movements of a virtual turtle and explores "an invisible form of incarceration — the invisible chains that we place upon ourselves".



Thanassis Akokkalidis: The performance "Don't Look Down" brought me face to face with my greatest fear: heights. It took me a long time each day to come into dialogue with this fear, and to come to terms with it. The sun, the rain, the cold and the wind only made things more difficult. I look back on it now as a successful undertaking, with some self-confidence. But the aim of this performance was not to highlight my daring, but to convey a picture of our daily experience — to open our eyes. The public's reaction was encouraging and unexpected. Many stood there, looking up for a long time. Some worried that I wanted to kill myself. Some waited until the end to speak with me.

— FORTHCOMING

INSTALLATION
MUTUAL WAVE MACHINE
 Suzanne Dikker / Matthias Oostrik

TALK
ANNA STAVRAKOPOULOU + OLGA SPYROPOULOU FROM THEATRE TO PERFORMANCE
 02.04

WORKSHOP
AMANDA COOGAN BODY WORK — CREATION METHODS
 05.04

TALK
AMANDA COOGAN AN ILLUSTRATED INTRODUCTION TO PERFORMANCE ART
 06.04

TALK
DAMIEN JALET PRESENTS HIS FILM, "THE FERRYMAN"
 07.04

TALK
TEHCHING HSIEH — A PIONEER OF LONG-DURATIONAL PERFORMANCE — TALKS ABOUT HIS WORK
 10.04

TALK
PAULA GARCIA TALKS ABOUT HER WORK
 13.04

WORKSHOP
SYRAGO TSIARA THE BODY IN PERFORMANCE ART
 15.04

TALK
LEDA PAPAKONSTANTINOY TALKS WITH SYRAGO TSIARA ABOUT PERFORMANCE
 16.04

TALK
JACOPO GODANI TALKS ABOUT CHOREOGRAPHY, DANCE AND HIS WORK WITH LUISA SANCHO ESCANERO
 21.04

WORKSHOP
WITH JACOPO GODANI
 21.04