

AS ONE

SPECIAL EDITION FOR THE PROJECT AS ONE

LECTURE PERFORMANCE ART

Marina Abramović lays out her theories on long-durational performance and the philosophy behind her Method

INTERVIEW MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

"The Method has left my side and now belongs to the public"

INTERVIEW DIMITRIS DASKALOPOULOS

"I believe in people, in their desire to change this place"

PRESENTATION THE PERFORMANCE WORKS

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

MAXIMIZING THE AUDIENCE

The first four weeks of AS ONE were a revelation for everyone. For those who visited the project. For those who worked for it, recorded it, conceived it and organised it. Never before has Athens seen a programme dedicated to performance with so many artists, so many visitors, and so much energy. Some have called it the event of the year, many were impressed, others came and left troubled. What is certain is that AS ONE, the performances, the Abramović Method, the lectures and talks made an impression, be it positive or negative — they spoke to the hearts of the public, where they were accepted or rejected. That is NEON's mission, to bring the public in contact with all kinds of contemporary art, to broaden possibilities, to trigger consciences, to offer the public the opportunity to taste the energy of contemporary art.

Over the project's five weeks to date, 30,000 people have visited the Benaki Museum, drawn in by their friends, press articles or their curiosity, most of them young, full of energy and seeking new experiences. More than 9,000 people felt the need to put their impressions down on paper, to record their experiences. 29 artists test the limits of body and mind, connecting with the public for eight hours each day. The Benaki Museum is filled each day with the enthusiasm of 121 people who work to ensure the production excellence of AS ONE. To date, 26 artists and professionals from various art fields have given 21 talks and 12 workshops, discussing performance, its history and its relationship with other forms of art.

AS ONE is living up to its reputation as a living laboratory of art, created by the vision shared by NEON and MAI — to promote performance art and to bring Greek artists working in this field to the fore. And it gives NEON the strength to continue what it began so passionately three years ago: to bring contemporary art to a broader public, free for everyone, across the city, in museums and public spaces.

Elina Kountouri
NEON Director



— PERFORMANCE ART

Marina Abramović lays out her theories on long-duration performance and the philosophy behind her Method.

YANNIS N. BASKOZOS

Performance is a very important and powerful form of art. It is a form of immaterial art which, exactly because it is immaterial, gives life to this medium. Friends might tell you about a specific performance or you can read about it, but it's not the same. The true, the real, is to see it up close. It is important because it teaches us to be in the present moment. It is common for us to reminisce about the past, to feel regret for all that has happened in the past and to place ourselves mentally in the future, but for some reason we do not think about the present. For some reason the here and now escapes us, because mentally we are constantly somewhere else. You might be here, listening to me, but at some point you might look at your phone, or think about what messages you want to send and that is how you lose the present moment. The present is the only reality, there is no other. The present, in this space, me and you, in this exact moment in time, this is the only reality. In the next moment, an asteroid might hit the Earth and we might disappear. That is something unexpected that we cannot know now. In the 1970s, we had body art. An American artist said that the body is the place that "will happen". And so performance artists used the body. The first thing they did was to see how the body is. Where is the pain? How do I cut my body? The razor blade was the material, blood was the colour. Then, in the 1980s, the trends in art changed, since galleries and art dealers emerged. Performance cannot be sold and so artists were pressured into dedicating themselves to painting. The end of the 1980s saw the appearance of AIDS, and many people died. And so an awareness of the body came to the fore once more. It also returned in other ways, such as Leigh Bowery, who worked with homosexuals and transgender people, giving a different kind of sensuality to his performances. Then we passed into video art and then back to performances. Now, during economic crisis, we

return to performances because material art is an expensive good.

THE FUNCTION OF THE ARTIST

Performance deals with the present and it is interesting how an artist in the past worked on a piece of art. It is not a simple process. They had to prepare. Take the example of Cennino Cennini, the Renaissance painter and writer, who gave this advice to the artists of his day: if you want to paint the Sistine Chapel or create a great work of art, how do you prepare? First the artist must stop drinking wine for three months, for two months he must not eat meat, for one month before starting work on the work of art he must not have sex, three weeks before he starts work he must put his arm in plaster (right or left, depending on whether he is right- or left-handed) and just before he starts work on the work of art, he breaks the plaster. Only then is he ready! In Asia (Japan, India, China) they had many ways of preparing themselves. They say that an artist must go through long periods of isolation, in places close to waterfalls or special configurations of rocks, on mountain tops, near nature, and to put themselves in a meditative state for long periods of time, without eating a lot of food or drinking a lot of water, and to face what is called "chi energy" that

exists in nature. With this kind of preparation, he will find himself in his studio and he will create a real work of art.

An artist must be "called" and I was thinking what this could mean. I feel myself like a rift. I was born in the former Yugoslavia, which is geographically on a right between East and West, a rift between western conceptions of time and eastern conceptions of time. I felt I had to go to the East to take and return to the West to give. Even though I was born in the former Yugoslavia, I never felt I belonged there as an artist. I lived in Holland for 30 years, but I never felt Dutch. I feel like the whole planet is my studio. I always give this advice to young artists: you must travel, you must see the world, see variety, see how this planet is and learn from it.

The first trips I made were to deserts. For me deserts are important. I was thinking that Jesus Christ went to the desert, Mohammed went to the desert, Buddha went to the desert. They all went to the desert as nothing and came back as something. There must be something in the desert. Exactly because there is nothing there, you have to face your own mind. And the mind is your greatest friend and your greatest enemy at the same time. It is easy to control the body, but very difficult to control the mind. Performance has to do with the balance between body and mind. I would like to mention Maria Callas here, who I love. She said that, when you are on stage, you have to be sure that one part of the brain is

in complete control, but the other part of the brain has to be relaxed and free. That is exactly what performance is. Absolute control on the one hand, and absolute freedom on the other. When you manage this kind of balance, you can send the audience into space. Then you are not thinking about the past or the future. You are in the present, and time ceases to exist. Of course there are bad performances, which make you feel like you are losing time, but when you see something good and deep, you feel it is an experience that can change your life.

LONG-DURATIONAL PERFORMANCES

Something I realised over the 45 years of my career, that truly changes you, the most intense emotional moments of my life, are long-duration performances. Exactly because life goes by so fast and there is such a great influence of technology on our lives. We are addicted to technology. Even though technology invents things so that we have more free time, in the end technology takes up all our time. I personally believe that the less time we have in our daily lives, the more time we should dedicate to art.

That's how I conceived long-duration performances. When one performance lasts two-three hours, a few days, then you have time to rebuild your strength. But when it lasts for one, two, three months, it is not just a performance, it is life itself. When you play a role for so long it is exhausting, you can't pretend for such long periods of time. It is what I call "true self", you have to face your own self. Long-duration performance is deep art. Long duration isn't only to do with performance. You find it in science, in nature. There are long-duration works everywhere.

What is important in performances is how you can shift to what is called the "higher self". When you create something, it is like

giving birth. You give all your energy, expend great efforts to create something amazing. But the higher your rise as a creator, the lower you fall as a person. That is the great problem with body drama. The same thing happens at a huge concert, with hundreds of thousands of people inside a stadium. The musician gives a magical concert and feels all the energy of the crowd collecting inside him. When the concert is over and the lights go out, the musician is left with all the energy of the crowd inside him. And he doesn't know what to do with all this energy. The energy that brings him alive during the concert kills him after it ends. And so he finds escape in drink or drugs, so that he can calm down. In the East, there are various systems. Practical ways in which you can handle this overflow in energy and create something positive.

In Eastern cultures, in meditative situations, like those practised by Tibetan monks, Indians or the shamans of Brazil, they can handle this energy. Tibetan monks can sit outside, naked, in

minus 25 degrees celsius. They get their students to put wet towels on their shoulders and meditate on who will dry the most towels and they do this for fun. They have what they call the "tummo technique", which they train for for four years, so that they can raise the temperature of their bodies at will. The mental visualisation of a fire can raise the temperature of the body between 10 and 20 degrees. It is impossible to understand how they do it, but they really do it and the really dry out towels! It was one of the reasons why I travelled to the East. I was curious to learn how exactly these things work and how they could help me do performances.

THE ABRAMOVIĆ METHOD

A mixture of the older techniques I have learned is the rice counting exercise. You must first decide how much you will count. If you have rice and lentils together in a pile, you will need to decide if you will count only lentils or only rice,

if you will separate the lentils from the rice, or if you will count both kinds together. If you decide to do it all together, you will have to find the force of will to do it to the end. Because if you manage it with the rice, then you can manage it with the lentils and in life. This is exactly the power of will. If you think the counting will take you five hours, don't do it. Try smaller amounts. Create manageable goals and complete them. The idea of completing a goal is very important. The rice is a good example of how the mind works. You start counting and in five minutes you start to get bored, to think what you are doing is crazy, to get angry, to get disappointed that you cannot see the end of your goal. But if you feel all these things and get to the point where you say "I'm going to do it", then you are filled with an amazing sense of happiness. Then your breathing changes and, when that happens, it means that all the cells in your body have the same amount of oxygen and that stabilises the processes of the mind and especially of thought.

Then you came into the present moment and it doesn't matter how long you will stay there. The rice no longer matters. All that matters in the sense of the present. The rice is just a means that will lead you into this state.

Something similar happens when you stand on a platform, in front of the public, with headphones blocking out external sounds and with your eyes closed. You stand alone on the platform, with your own energy, but you have the invisible support of the energy of the public who are watching you. You are alone listening to your heartbeat, but you feel the presence of the public. Out of all the techniques I have learned over the years, I thought to create something useful. You don't have to be an artist to take part in this process. It doesn't matter what your job is. Anyone can take part in this process and learn from it.

[Extract from the talk given by Marina Abramović at the Benaki Museum, 19/03/2016]



—THE METHOD HAS LEFT MY SIDE AND NOW BE-LONGS TO THE PUBLIC

MS. ABRAMOVIĆ, HOW DO YOU FEEL TODAY, NOW THAT AS ONE HAS BEEN RUNNING FOR ONE MONTH? I am at the Benaki Museum drinking a large, sweet Greek coffee, having stolen away a little time to enjoy it, and I am taken back to my childhood years, when my grandmother would make me coffee and I would sit at a small table looking out of the window, without doing anything, silent. I was just there, living the moment. And then I changed myself, I turned towards the world, doing all sorts of impossible things, and here I am at the Benaki Museum, with a completely different goal, to train Greek performers, long-duration performance artists, drinking again this long-duration coffee.

I NOTICED THAT YOU OFTEN TALK ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS IN YOUR LECTURES... That's true, I often reminisce about my childhood years. That was when I had my first ideas as an artist, my first dreams, my first hopes, these feelings

were very important. I always go back to these and feel inspired. I went years without realising how important these experiences were, until I matured, time went by, like a good wine, and I realised their importance.

I WANTED TO ASK YOU FOR YOUR FIRST ASSESSMENT OF EVERYTHING HAPPENING HERE AT AS ONE. The AS ONE project has created strong feelings in me, it was an effort that I didn't know where it would lead and how the Greek artists would see it. In Greece, there is a strong tradition in theatre, dance and poetry, but there was great interest from Greek artists. Having now experienced four weeks, half-way through the journey, I see the changes in the artists, in the participation of the public, it is fantastic how it has worked. The Benaki Museum has become a power station of energy, for the creation of a new communal process. I see this in the long-duration performances, which do not have a clear beginning or end, and where the public

Marina Abramović. A conversation with Yiannis Baskozos and a first assessment

come, and come again to support them, bring their children and their friends, create circles that produce energy.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE PUBLIC AND PARTICIPANTS OF YOUR METHOD? I feel very close to the Greek public. We are made of the same stuff, we are Orthodox, we wear black, we are emotional, there is a sense of drama, pride and dignity. You have the same traditional values we have in Montenegro. The Greek public, when they understand that something is real, they open their hearts. Even though they hadn't had much experience of performance, the Greek public was very open, ready to receive, to understand, to learn. I think the Greeks welcomed the Method with enthusiasm just like in other, more difficult countries, such as the English with their sarcasm. The Method has been accepted everywhere, crowds of people experienced it in Australia, in South America and elsewhere. The Method was not created just for the public who follow the arts but for the broader public and for very diverse social groups, be they farmers or science-fiction writers or anything else. Each one brings with them their own experiences. The Abramović Method is not elitist, on the contrary, it is a very democratic method.

AND WHAT WERE THE FIRST REACTIONS OF THE GREEK ARTISTS? As far as the Greek artists are concerned, they belong to the generation who don't know what they are thinking exactly. Perhaps they see me as the competition or perhaps they appreciate my advice. But I think young people understand my efforts. Unfortunately,

young Greek artists are forced to function as I did, to leave their country in order to create. I want to show them the path that lies before them.

It is difficult for me to judge the long-duration performances at the Benaki Museum yet. First because they have not finished yet, they are artists who are testing themselves for the first time and they need our support. Keep in mind that a performance can start wonderfully and sag in the middle and return later to a high level or take time to reach the energy it needs to connect with the public. Each one has its own time, is a learning process.

IN CONCLUSION, DID AS ONE OFFER SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR YOU? Yes, it is the first time MAI has operated without me, without my artistic presence, but as a mechanise for training artists in the art of performance. The Method has left my side and now belongs to the public.

«YOUNG GREEK ARTISTS ARE FORCED TO FUNCTION AS I DID, TO LEAVE THEIR COUNTRY IN ORDER TO CREATE. I WANT TO SHOW THEM THE PATH THAT LIES BEFORE THEM»



—THE ECONOMY AND CULTURE

Thanos Argyropoulos, Director of MAI, in a talk with the journalist Katerina Anesti, laid out the relationship between the economy and culture, picking out four fundamental categories that constitute this relationship, which are cultural heritage, the media and publishing, art, and the information industry. Mr. Argyropoulos stressed the importance of direct and indirect cultural investments. He feels that Athens has failed to find a solution to land-use issues that would have helped support an explosion in housing development that would have attracted cultural investment. The second issue that could be further exploited is the relationship between tourism and culture, with incentives that could develop cultural tourism. As regards art, he referred mainly to the film industry and the incentives that should be given to support it. Finally, speaking about MAI, he focused on the Institute's educational role with regard to young performers and judged the initiative to spend such a long period of time in Athens positively.



—BEHIND THE SCENE CREATORS



PHOTO: PANOS KOKKINIAS

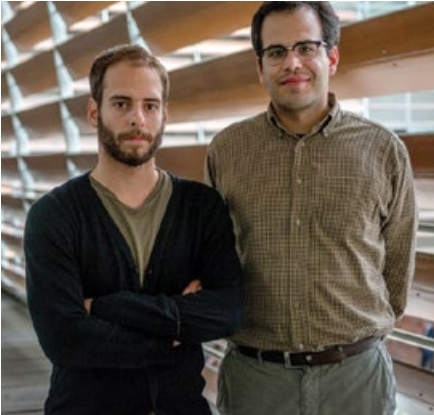


PHOTO: PANOS KOKKINIAS

In close collaboration with NEON and MAI, we designed and oversaw the realisation of all exhibit spaces and experiences within the Benaki Museum for AS ONE.

The ground floor is dedicated to the Abramović Method: having been hosted in different places around the world, there were no specific requirements for the space and objects. Instead, the design adapts itself to the characteristics of each team and location, thus contributing to the uniqueness of each experience.

Working with Lynsey Peisinger, we created a flexible environment capable of adapting according to the energy generated daily during the exhibition. The main space, devoid of natural light, is uniformly lit and shadowless. White paint and blonde wood predominate, contributing to the feeling of timelessness and relaxation.

Furniture and props, such as the platforms, tables and fabric room dividers, were custom designed and constructed.

A large room on the 1st floor was divided in

three parts, each of which was furnished and lit accordingly: a 'green room' for facilitators, a workspace for MAI and NEON staff, and a workshop/learning center for presentations and projections.

The design process of the performance spaces in the courtyard and on the 2nd floor was dynamic: working intensively and daily with Paula Garcia, Serge Le Borgne and each artist individually, we created uniquely painted, furnished and lit environments and enclosures representative of each artist's vision, yet part of a wider aesthetic and composition. Visitors are encouraged to weave through the spaces, while creating mental snapshots one can afterwards recall.

Due to the continuous rotation of performance artists, the exhibition design procedure becomes an organic element of AS ONE.

As architecture translates art into experiential spaces, design itself assumes a discreet, supportive and embracing role. **AK-A / Katerina Apostolou, Minna Colakis**

We were asked to give our opinions on how the project looks through the lens, what the camera captures that the human eye cannot, what changes when the camera is present — you'd expect we'd write about that.

But the most characteristic element of this project for us, who are documenting it, are the thousands of visitors, the hundreds each day who pass in front of our lens and say "sorry". Some think for a few minutes that we are part of the performance they are watching, others strike a little pose, and others still avoid us discreetly.

Some suspect that they have something in common with the artists who are performing. This is what we saw through the lens, and we remembered this story about cameras:

In 1885, Auguste and Louis Lumière filmed a short feature, the first film in the history of cinema, and screened it for select friends.

On 28 December, the Lumière Brothers showed it to the public, along with nine other short films they had made in the meantime, all of which recorded simple moments taken from daily life, such as a gardener watering a garden, a train arriving at a station, and so on.

Sitting in the audience at this screening was Georges Méliès. Méliès saw he had something in common with these films by the Lumière Brothers and, in his excitement, asked to buy their camera.

The camera wasn't for sale, of course, so he was forced to invent his own.

Tokomburu

—DIMITRIS DASKALOPOULOS

Speaking with Dimitris Daskalopoulos, the founder of NEON, you understand that he serves a cultural strategy. What is it?

"NEON has been active in the arts for three years now. In the long term, I expect all these efforts will contribute something to the cultural horizons of Greece. To leave something in the soul of each person.

I want our cultural offerings to be attractive and to be directed to large audiences, which is why we organise them in open or large spaces. We want the public to come and to be enriched by their experiences.

The AS ONE project, which is being realised in partnership with MAI, is central to the philosophy and strategy of NEON. I believe that in this country, with its crisis and its difficulty in finding solutions, we deserve much more than the political system gives us. I think that with the AS ONE project, we gave a strong push to the young artists taking part, we are helping them to become more visible in the arts scene and to continue, perhaps with us once more."

I BELIEVE IN PEOPLE, IN THEIR LIVELINESS, THEIR SKILLS, THEIR DESIRE TO CHANGE THIS PLACE



Have you drawn any conclusions from this project at the Benaki Museum? "I believe in people, in their liveliness, their skills, their desire to change this place and move forward, just as I believe that through gradual contact with contemporary art — I do not believe we can change people with our actions alone — we will bolster these skills, the curiosity of the Greek people, their liveliness and their creativity, so that our children will never again see such a crisis. I have a great dream: to see queues outside cultural events — and there were queues here. But what is important is not just visitor numbers, but also repeat visits and the amount of time each person spends here. In a museum, they will see 30 paintings in fifteen minutes and leave. Here they stay for a long time, because it touches most people somewhere deep inside. Here they have to chance to come in contact with their own selves, to collect their thoughts. This is a revelatory experience for many of the visitors. I see them all leave the Benaki Museum as if they have a little light inside them, lit a little brighter. And it's not the kind of light that goes out as soon as they go back to their normal lives."

—ARTISTS PROJECTS



Dimitris Chimonas: Although I began by celebrating my birthday over and over again, I gradually effaced it. The act of transporting oneself from one age to another was transformed into an act of categorising and partitioning time inside the Museum. Every moment became a rebirth, a new foray into time's unknown that wears us down and tricks us with futile celebrations. The public played the birthday game with me, sang, wore hats, brought gifts, spoke to me about the time we lose and gain. All that remains of the performance is awe at the realisation that we were all children once. "Birthday"



Serafita Grigoriadou: My project took as its central motif a song that I repeated over five days, for eight hours each day. I had no specific space; instead I was free to be in any part of the Museum I wanted. After the first day, the song became deconstructed inside me... After many hours of improvisation over the course of the performance, the melody was lost and was succeeded by other melodies... The lyrics became fragments of words, echoes of shattered vocalisations... With the original song always at the core, and as I looked into the eyes of people and shared with them a communal moment, the song always became something else. A witness to a momentary collective memory. And I was no longer myself... I had no identity... I was the intermediary of the experience of a collective memory, and the song bore witness to its existence. "The Never-Ending Song"



In the piece "Medea: Impulse & Ear", the viewer and the actress Maria Herranz engaged in a symbiotic relationship that resulted in the actress' impulsive selection of a tract of text from Seneca's "Medea". Chairs were both secured to the floor and freely situated in such a way as to be most conducive to a natural engagement between the actress and the viewer. As Medea's various monologues were repeated in ever-changing scenarios over the course of the day, the nature of Medea's tragedy, the actress' interpretation and the exchange between actress and viewer greatly morphed, as did the depth of one of Medea's subtler plights: to be a stranger in a strange land.



Loneliness and repetition, wild nature and tranquillity threaded through the work "I Justify My Existence" by Spyros Charalampopoulos. Physical labour struggles with nature. The environment, both as a concept and as a material, has an effect on the loneliness people feel, provoking violent actions and a need for connection. For eight hours, the artist laboured over hunks of wood, battling to sculpt them with human-made tools, to bring them down to his scale, to reshape them. The movements and sounds made may have been repetitive, but the dimensions and forms of the sculptures were in constant flux.



Alexandros Michail: In the work "The eternal fire which lights them up inside and makes them glow", I carried sacks of sand from one side of the space to the other. A futile, labour-intensive and repetitious action that tested the limits of my body, my endurance and my will. In the beginning, I was quite heroic about it. But soon my body started to desert me. I battled with anger and acceptance. When I collapsed completely, I was defeated. Weight forced me to come to terms with reality. I found peace. The public empathised with me. Many wanted to help me. The battle against gravity is very familiar to us all.

Giannis Karounis: This was the first time I subjected one of my works and my own self to long-duration performance and I was pleasantly surprised by the stamina and limits of the human body and how these can be broadened and also surpassed during a performance. I can say with certainty that I have unlocked something inside myself that is full of tools and mechanisms for understanding the present situation and the importance of the moment in which events are experienced. It was essential for me to understand the behaviour of the viewing public, but also the relationship between us that was happening in the now, where past and present dance in the arms of reality. "Orbital"

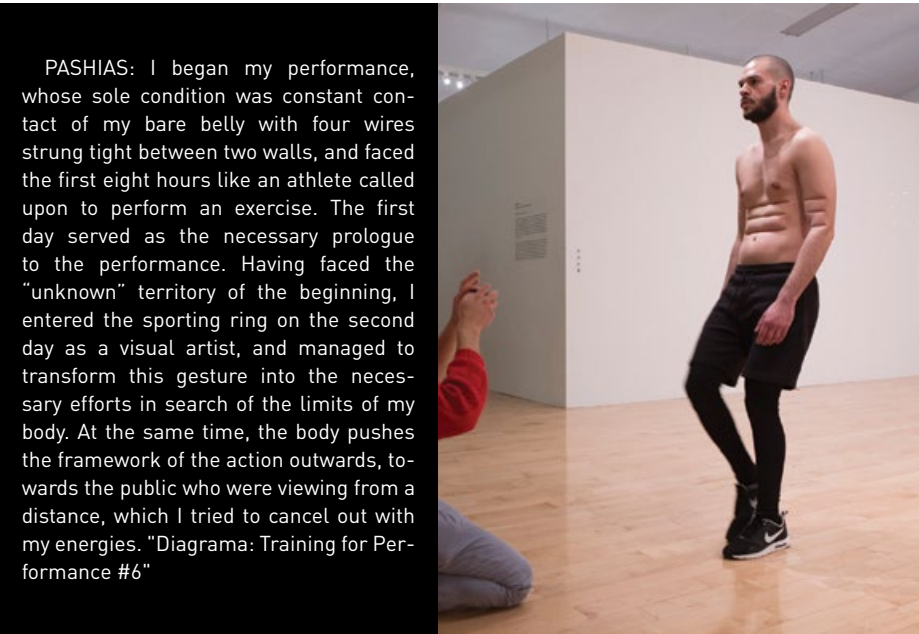


For eight hours each day, the Irish artist Amanda Coogan walked the gallery. She carried with her a few objects to distinguish this activity: three ladders and 25 metres of fabric. Through the use of ladders, innovative costumes, her own body and time, always time, Coogan proposed to explore strangeness in the ordinary. Ladders, Coogan suggests, are a means to change our position, to transport us to a completely different place. She walked, carrying this possibility; awkward, heavy and dangerous. The fabric she carried, draped and wrapped suggested infinite allegories. Time and duration radically affected the live performance, with extensive amounts of time inviting chaos, the unknown, failure, and moments of terrible beauty. Coogan played with a poetic reading of the materials she employs. The meaning-making for this newly-commissioned work is porous; the audience were invited to "read" the performance through their own experience. "Don't Push the River"



Yiannis Pappas: Containing as it did an interventionary practice, the performance "Demi-Gloire" forced visitors to witness, from the exterior spaces of the Museum, the expansionary raising of a white flag, from the interior spaces of the Museum transformed into a workshop, inside which the entire action was produced. Both the commonplace and hours-long production procedure inside the Museum, and the "communication" with visitors who gradually discovered the relationship between destination and source, created the impression of a call to international truce through a symbolic procession, which in the end made its way towards the centre of Athens — Omonoia ("Concord") Square.

Nikolaos: The performance titled "Demi-Gloire" was yet another experiment, and also a lesson for me. I placed myself in an unprecedented situation, and in order to understand it I had to both concentrate and free myself from all constraints at the same time so that my real self could emerge, as in fact happened quite naturally in the end. The public seemed to understand when I wanted to stay closed off inside myself and when I was open to interaction, and there were many emotional moments and many beautiful reactions to as well as opinions on this performance. It was a powerful and illuminating experience.



PASHIAS: I began my performance, whose sole condition was constant contact of my bare belly with four wires strung tight between two walls, and faced the first eight hours like an athlete called upon to perform an exercise. The first day served as the necessary prologue to the performance. Having faced the "unknown" territory of the beginning, I entered the sporting ring on the second day as a visual artist, and managed to transform this gesture into the necessary efforts in search of the limits of my body. At the same time, the body pushes the framework of the action outwards, towards the public who were viewing from a distance, which I tried to cancel out with my energies. "Diagrama: Training for Performance #6"



Thomas Diafas: After the first three days of my performance, where I was coming in contact and discussing with over 100 visitors a day, I noticed a certain fluidity in the relationship between the public and the artist-work of art. Since there was nothing material on display or some situation to be viewed reminiscent of anything that is defined as art, people said things like "this isn't a performance" or "you aren't a performer". What would happen of all artworks were true dialogues with the public? Two women revealed to me that they follow art in order to change their lives. Do artists have a responsibility when they address others? Do people have a responsibility towards the societies they affect and are affected by? I can't wait for the second phase of my performance, on 19, 20 and 21 April. "Dance With Me"



Below, seven (7) questions on theatre and performance are posed. Each reader can move around the text at will. The title: theatre and performance does not constitute diametrically opposed poles of any dichotomy; their relationship is not linear. Nor is performance an evolution of theatre, or theatre placed historically in the past. The text: functions as a memory; can also serve as a sun-shade. Or as a seat. It remains at your discretion.

ANNA STAVRAKOPOULOU AND OLGA SPYROPOULOU

—FROM THEATRE TO PERFORMANCE

1 ■ The artist is present. What sort of presence does theatre or performance demand? In theatre, we already have a complete work and/or text before the performance begins. The actor speaks the words of another, speaks as an Other. Furthermore, this is also true on a bodily level, given that their movements are defined by the aesthetic of another, that is to say the director. Even in documentary theatre, where participants appear as themselves, their speech and movements are not in the moment, they are rehearsed. In meta-dramatic theatre, a text exists but is often inhibited by the process of its expression. The body and its functions (saliva, tears, sweat) are exposed on stage and, in their attempts of speak, the actor reveals painful aspects of the process. The body that struggles and suffers comes very close to the kind of presence demanded by performance art, only in the case of the latter nothing is rehearsed. The performer appears before us as a body ready to suffer, exposed to the appetites of the audience, at the mercy of the present moment and pain. In “Nothingtoodoo” (2011), the performer Terence Koh was present, testing the endurance of both his body and mind. He appeared as an ascetic figure who overcomes time and reaches timelessness. His agony is in constant disharmony with the tranquillity of the space. In performance, the differentiation between pleasure and pain ceases to exist. Performance becomes an object produced by the performer and consumed by the audience as a product. It endures as the memory of a presence.



Insenso by Dimitris Dimitriadis, director Michail Marmarinos Greek Festival (2012)

2 ■ What is the role of the viewer? In theatre, the viewer is there to watch, to have an experience through the words and body of the Other and through the temporality of the Other. The role of the viewer in theatre is to be made directly distinguishable by the articulation of the space in which they are placed. At Epidaurus, the viewer is watched back. They are there to receive the performance, and to be a spectacle for the other viewers. In Italian-style theatres, the viewer remains unseen, in their most passive form. They are there — isolated among others — to disappear as soon as the lights go down and from time to time to identify with the characters and actions presented on stage. There are, however, performances that take place without a stage, where the viewer follows the action, such as Dimitris Dimitriadis’ “Insenso” directed by Michael Marmarinos, presented at the Athens Festival. There, the duration and type of audience participation is selected and controlled by the creators of the performance. Rules were also followed during the performance “Rhythm 0”, where Marina Abramović provided her public with 72 items to use on her as they wished. Among them, a loaded pistol. Here, the viewer becomes the subject of the performance — they compose the narrative. They decide what will follow, for how long, in what way. The performer becomes the object, and does not produce speech.

However, there are also cases where the viewer becomes an object for viewing by the performer, and by other viewers. Unaware of their participation in the performance, they themselves become part of the spectacle. “The passive availability of the performer is contrasted with the active voyeuristic behaviour of the viewers,” as noted by Leda Papakonstantinou. Furthermore, a performer can elsewhere create the conditions for a communal experience with the performance’s participants/viewers. The body of the viewer undergoes the experience as if it were their own, embodies it, shares time with the performer, because the viewer’s time is the same as the performer’s time — the present moment.

3 ■ How are theatre and performance funded? In the history of theatre, there are two main trends regarding the funding of performances: on the one hand we have (state and private) subsidies, whose ultimate goal is to use theatre to bolster prestige (either of the State or the private individual) and, on the other, we have audience ticket sales, that is to say commercial theatre in all its forms. This type of funding means artists are in many ways dependent on the tastes of their audiences / “funders”, thus limiting their ability to experiment. An interesting contemporary example of subsidised theatre are the performances of Vegard Vinje and Ida Müller, who received around two million dollars in subsidies from the Norwegian Arts Council to stage works by Ibsen. Performance begins as an event without any income, such as Leda Papakonstantinou’s landmark performance “The Box” (1981). Outside Greece, some very well-known

performers, such as Acconci, were already selling the aesthetic manifestations of their performances during the 1970s. Objects that had been used during their performances, artist’s instructions, photographs and even videos were bought as material evidence of immaterial artworks. Today, even the immaterial aspects of the work are for sale. In 2008, Tino Sehgal managed to sell MoMA his work “The Kiss”, a performance created in 2003, for 70,000 dollars, and it

should be noted that the Guggenheim has acquired at least seven performances since 2010. Funding for performers can be attracted in other ways, such as direct commissions from organisations, galleries and museums. There are also many private subsidies on offer, as well as scholarships, state subsidies, and residencies on offer to artists who wish to develop their work. Finally, one must not forget the example set by Abramović, who brought performance art back to the forefront and, through effective marketing, managed to close partnership deals with major companies, such as Adidas in 2014 (for funding the Marina Abramović Institute) or the Givenchy fashion house, among others.

4 ■ What is the aim of theatre, and what is the aim of performance? The livelihood of artists is certainly a central aim. In performance, we have artist-activists whose aim is to debunk various taboos and prejudices. Some performers belong to groups who find themselves on the periphery (such as women who still find themselves sidelined both in theatre and the visual arts) and they use art to send out a political message in the broadest sense. There are also those who aim to trigger changes inside the public, by means of emotion and connection. In any case, the aim of performance is first and foremost to change the artists themselves — their personal development. In theatre, the weight shifts towards changing the audience. The aim of theatre is either to teach you something or to offer you aesthetic pleasure and entertainment. A performance is created to move audiences, but also to bring them face-to-face with problematic issues, so as to make them think and in the end develop.

ANNA STAVRAKOPOULOU IS PROFESSOR OF THEATRICAL STUDIES AT ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI AND OLGA SPYROPOULOU IS A DIRECTOR

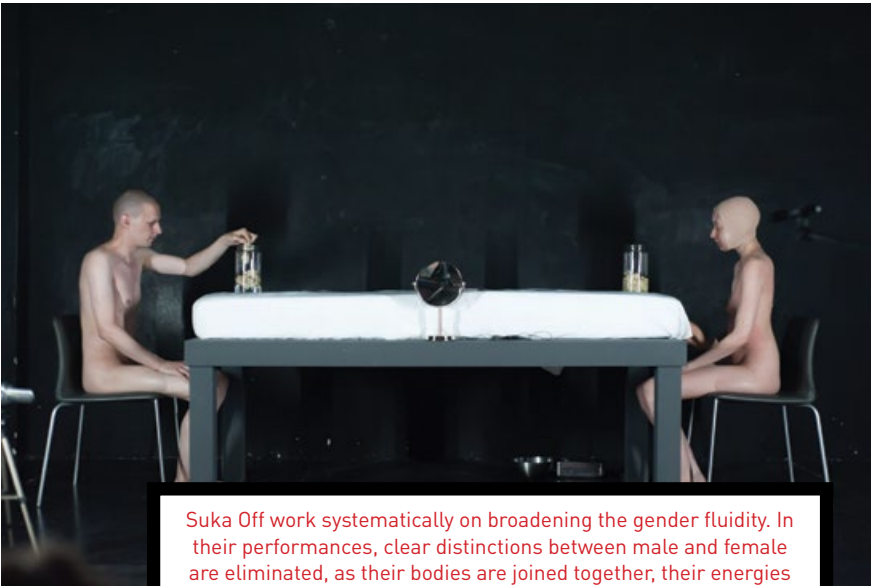
5 ■ How are theatre and performance placed in relation to reality? Reality reverts in both — in theatre we disguise it, whereas in performance we expose it, over-stress it, push it to its limits, go beyond it. In both cases, the familiar is presented as something other. In this way, the necessary preconditions for the defamiliarisation of reality are created.

In theatre, we raise a mirror up to the audience, so that they can see the familiar in the Other. In performance, daily life is reduced into art. Everything must be real and must serve its true aim. No theatrical elements whatsoever.

6 ■ What relationship do theatre and performance have with religion? The link between theatre and Dionysian cult worship in the ancient world is well-documented. It is interesting that Euripides’ “Bacchae”, his last surviving tragedy, takes as its central theme the introduction of a Dionysian cult into life at Thebes by the god Dionysus himself, with the religious element “triumphing” in the end.

There have been many cases in contemporary theatre where an artist is called upon to create a new, personal narrative using religious symbols: in their work Strange Fish, DV8 use the Crucifixion (with a female body in place of the body of Christ) to talk about love — the central tenet of Christianity — and the search for any kind of faith. Nevertheless, love here springs only from an erotic relationship with another. In their search for spirituality and purity, performers have often resorted to religions rituals. Performer-martyrs often long for a messianic quality, offering up their body and blood in exchange for the salvation of the viewer. References to specific religious traditions and symbols are numerous.

7 ■ Is performance dead? Is theatre? Of course not, not in either case. Striking examples of this is the fact that “Athens is the city of 1,542 theatrical performances”, according to a recent article in Athinorama magazine (10/03/2016), and the 370 applications by performers received by NEON. Yes, but is performance still relevant for contemporary audiences? Has it perhaps gotten old? Do we maybe need to find new ways? Many performers are now active on the Internet. An example of this is the performance “Cookies” by Man Bartlett. The question being posed by younger generations of performance artists is whether physical presence is necessary for the realisation of a performance.



Suka Off work systematically on broadening the gender fluidity. In their performances, clear distinctions between male and female are eliminated, as their bodies are joined together, their energies are exchanged, and one enters into the role and image of the other, bringing the public face to face with their certainties.

—THE BODY AT UNREST IN PERFORMANCE ART

Syrago Tsiara on the relationship between the female body and the history of art

The main function of the female body in the history of art is visual pleasure, notes Syrago Tsiara, Director of the Thessaloniki Centre of Contemporary Art, part of the Greek State Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki. A characteristic example of this is the orientalising art literature of the nineteenth century. In her analysis, she goes on to note that feminist critical approaches overturned this paradigm, revealing gender roles in the production of visual pleasure. From the late 1960s, when performance art first appeared, artists attacked these conventions of the engendered gaze in their attempts to invent new expressive means. An important development is the historic role of female artists in the birth of performance and the deconstruction of dominant perceptions of the role of the female body as a passive receptor of the active male gaze. Syrago Tsiara focuses on the characteristics of a

contemporary generation of visual artists who are revising gender stereotypes and absolute dichotomous distinctions between male and female once more, and are exposing the functions of the body to the public gaze in revolutionary ways through performative action. Finally, cinematic theory, psychoanalytical and cultural approaches to social hierarchies and mechanisms of power, and contemporary assumptions regarding gender identity and fluidity are the tools for analysing and understanding performance practice.



Alexandros Plomaritis looks to the past, in search of elements that constitute traditional perceptions of modern Greek male identity and attempts to critically deconstruct them through the use of the nude body.

—TESTIMONIALS



I WAS IN SHOCK FROM THE FIRST MOMENT. AS SOON AS A FACILITATOR TOOK ME BY THE HAND, WALKING SLOWLY, I FELT LIKE I WAS A YEAR OLD. THE HAND OF MY MOTHER LEADING ME TO MY FIRST BOOKS. AS SOON AS HE SAT ME DOWN IN A CHAIR, I FELT LIKE AN ELDERLY WOMAN, THE WAY WE PUT OUR GRANDMOTHER TO SIT COMFORTABLY, RESTING OUR HANDS ON HER SHOULDERS TO MAKE HER FEEL SAFE.

SOFIA

CALM, A NICE SLEEP AND MORE CALM, I THOUGHT THOUGHTS LIKE IN MY DAILY LIFE, BUT IN A CALM WAY.

"CRAZY COLOURS" THEATRE COMPANY FOR THE DEAF

I DON'T KNOW IF THERE WERE MORE LENTILS OR MORE GRAINS OF RICE, ALL I KNOW IS THAT THIS EXHIBITION IS NICE!

LILIAN

I FOUND MYSELF WALKING WITH SOMEONE I DIDN'T KNOW BUT I FELT SURE OF MYSELF AND SAFE. ONE LED THE OTHER WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO SEE ANYTHING. I THE END HE SAID GOODBYE WITH A HUG. THE GIRL TOUCHED ME A TOOK ME TO THE PLATFORM AND I CLOSED MY EYES AND FELT MYSELF ARRIVING DEEP INSIDE

MYSELF... IF WE COULD GET USED TO TOUCHING OTHERS AND BEING OPEN TO THEIR TOUCH, THEN EVERYTHING WOULD BE BRIGHTER AND MORE CLEAR.

OUR RHYTHMS, OUR THOUGHTS, EVERYTHING BEGINS FROM THE MOMENT WE FIND OUR SELVES. I CLOSED MY EARS AND HEARD MY HEARTBEAT. SOMEONE HELD MY HAND AND SHOWED ME THE WAY.

MICHAELA Z.

I REALISED THAT WITH ONE MOVEMENT, TOUCH OR COLOUR, I WAS TRANSPORTED ELSEWHERE, TO EVERY MOMENT AND EVERY DIFFERENT PLACE AND EVERY MOMENT IN TIME WHERE I HAVE EXISTED IN THE PAST.

NATASHA KORENTI

I ALWAYS FIND HUMAN CONTACT FASCINATING — SOMETHING MISSING IN OUR TIMES — AND THIS WAS A WONDERFUL CHANCE TO BE MORE TRULY TOGETHER.

I WENT IN DETACHED AND SCEPTICAL AND CAME OUT CHANGED. EFFECTIVE AND POWERFUL. IT TOUCHED ME.

PENNY KOUTRA

THE SQUEEZING OF HANDS IS AN EVERYDAY GESTURE AND YET HOW MUCH CAN BE SHOWN THOUGH EVEN THIS. I SQUEEZED THE HAND OF MY COMPANION, BOTH OUT OF GRATITUDE AND INSECURITY...

SOFIA — THESSALONIKI

TODAY I MET MY OWN SELF. THANK YOU

MARIA K.

I FELT TIME STOP AT SOME POINT, I FELT MYSELF GIVE ENERGY AND RECEIVE IT, I FELT MY BLOOD CIRCULATING AND AT SOME POINT I FELT MYSELF GO NUMB...

NIKOS

A JOURNEY INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE GAZE, OF CONTACT, OF SOUND, OF MOVEMENT. COMPANIONSHIP ALONGSIDE SOLITUDE. SOLITUDE WITHIN THE GROUP. THE INTENSITY OF OUR OWN COMPANIONSHIP WHEN FACED WITH A WALL...

ISIDORE T.

SUCH SIMPLICITY WHICH LEADS YOU INTO INFINITY. NON-INTERVENTION. LEAVING THE MOMENT BEHIND AND FOLLOWING WHATEVER YOUR HEART DESIRES. THIS IS WHAT BRINGS YOU REST... ONE OF THE GREATEST THERAPIES I HAVE EVER ENCOUNTERED IN MY LIFE.

ELENA GAVRA

I HAVEN'T FELT LIKE THIS IN YEARS. FROM THE TIME MY MOTHER PUT ME TO BED, TUCKED ME IN, LOOKED AFTER ME, SHOWED ME TENDERNESS AND LOVE.

ANNA

A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE. AN OASIS IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES WE ARE ALL GOING THROUGH!

A TEACHER

TO COME IN CONTACT WITH OUR BREATH AND OUR SILENCE IS A TRULY GREAT AND INVALUABLE EXPERIENCE.

ZYRANNA ZATELI