

# The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**



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## **Table of Contents**

Abstract.....	1
Dedication.....	2
Acknowledgements .....	3
Preface .....	4
Performance as Immaterial .....	7
Belgrade, 1946 .....	9
Marina Abramović: Academic Painter.....	12
Liquid Knowledge.....	15
Early Works .....	18
Marina & Ulay: The Lovers .....	20
Collison Works.....	22
Nightsea Crossing.....	26
Dragon Energy .....	30
Works as Vessels.....	34
Spirituality/Mysticism .....	36
The Artist Is Present .....	40
The Artist Is Absent.....	46
Conclusion .....	48
Appendix–Project Summary .....	49
Appendices–Event.....	50
Event Description .....	50
Event Poster .....	51
Exhibition Plan–Interfaith Center .....	52
Exhibition Plan–Installations.....	53
Rhythm Series Print .....	54
Works with Ulay Print .....	55
Balkan Baroque Print.....	56
The Hero Print.....	57
Transitory Objects Print .....	58
The House with the Ocean View Print .....	59
References.....	60
Works .....	61

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this creative project is to conduct a cross-content interpretive synthesis on the “Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ”. In this context, mindfulness is indicative of the conscious awareness of the present moment. Marina Abramović’s body of work explores concepts such as power and hierarchy, art and existence, artist and audience. Its extensive nature encompasses painting, photography, film, objects, installations, and, most famously, performance art. The works are vessels for journey toward inner freedom from suffering. This is why Marina Abramović declares: *Art is transformation of matter*. There is no “before” and “after.” What solely exists is the “timeless” situation, the energy field Here and Now. As for methodology, this review is heavily sourced from Marina Abramović’s retrospective *The Cleaner*. This compilation catalogue was produced in conjunction with Moderna Museet, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, and Bundeskunsthalle. Covering over five decades of Marina Abramović’s legendary works—the collection is accompanied by essays and curators’ insightful contributions. Supplied texts are access points to the art of Marina Abramović set against the backdrop of Balkan history and politics. Other featured sources include Marina Abramović’s autobiography *Walk Through Walls* and documentary *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*, as well as a number of international academic journals in disciplines such as performance art and psychoanalysis. As Marina Abramović’s oeuvre lives on through reperformances and analysis in new constellations, this thesis contributes an academic examination and communal exploration of the artist’s function: to be conscious-raising.

**DEDICATION**

For Marina Abramović and the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI)—that this thesis is conscious-raising, contributing to the viewing of the artist’s work in new constellations.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The heights and intensity to which this thesis has achieved would not have been possible without the mentorship of Dr. Julie Volkman and Dr. Marie Saddlemire. Your care and commitment to guiding me along this path of both academic and personal transformation showed no bounds. Thank you for curating a space for my creativity to be limitless, channeling the energy of Marina Abramović.

Thank you to the Bryant University Honors Program leadership of Dr. Edi Tebaldi, Susan Baran, and Marcia Beaulieu for fostering an environment to pursue this creative project. Your backing and support allowed me to break the traditional thesis mold, just as Marina Abramović has done in the world of performance art.

Lastly, thank you to the on-site staff of Academic Programs International (API) Florence—Ellen Oyasaeter, Monica Gabbrielli, and Valentina Scalini—for exposing me to the work of Marina Abramović through taking our group on an excursion to “The Cleaner” retrospective at Palazzo Strozzi. By enriching my life through our endeavor, you illuminated my mind to the liquid knowledge of the artist.

## **PREFACE**

“Describing the indescribable. Teaching the unteachable. Pointing the way to ‘the way’. What does [Marina Abramović] think she is doing here? It can’t be done. No way.” For those familiar with Confucius contemporary and founder of philosophical Taoism Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* (translated by Stephen Mitchell), the intersection of mindfulness and the oeuvre of Marina Abramović will be understood by the elucidation of one word: *presence*. “Still, for complicated minds,” as Lao Tzu would say, “drastic measures are needed.” Therefore, this thesis is being written as a response, out of personal transformation made through examining one of the most remarkable life stories ever told: that of Marina Abramović.

While spending the Fall 2018 semester abroad in Florence, Italy, studying at the Istituto Lorenzo de’ Medici, my host program, Academic Programs International (API), planned an excursion to Marina Abramović’s retrospective exhibition “The Cleaner” at Palazzo Strozzi. Since I had arrived in Florence, the city had been waiting in anticipation for Abramović’s arrival. This would be the largest retrospective Abramović had ever put on to date, featuring installations of iconic works performed live. From palace walls, to taxi doors, even market stands, Abramović’s alluringly intense face was adorned all around the city. Even with virtually no previous knowledge of Abramović, except for a faint childhood memory of hearing about a woman living in box-like compartments at a New York City gallery, I sensed I knew the person seductively staring at me at every turn. I would later come to understand why I felt this immediate connection when hearing curator Klaus Biesenbach say, “Marina seduces everybody she ever meets. When I first met her, I thought, ‘Oh, God, she’s in love with me.’ And it took me a while to understand that she is in love not only with me, she is in love with the entire world.” Her gaze had a story to tell, one of enlightenment. It brought about a feeling of gem-like-lucidity and large-heartedness. When the night came to experience “The Cleaner,” I arrived with excitement and curiosity. Entering Palazzo Strozzi to the installed deafening sound of heavy machine gun fire, passing through and far enough on to where the noise became a faint muffle, my mind was cleansed and ready for transformation.

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ****  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---



It was the coming together of seemingly every life discipline that captivated me: the arts, history, linguistics and languages, communication, philosophy, religion, geography, economics, political science, psychology, sociology, the natural sciences, the formal sciences—all interdisciplinary. The existence of an omnipresent concept that transcends any boundary is the essence of how Abramović's work embodies a macro universal society and a micro perception of self, that is, the recognition of consciousness. No matter what perspective one

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

may take to approach the ever-present question of life's purpose, there is only one thing that is for certain. That is, as the Dali Lama says, "Existence." We are all existing, at some capacity, in the present moment. The permeation of understanding that there is no tangible grasp of the past nor the future, only the present, is captivated in the practice of mindfulness. Simply put, mindfulness is a conscious awareness of the present moment, the Here and Now. It is the key that unlocks the door to understanding. This *liquid knowledge*, as Abramović calls it, is the foundation of her work—through performances, she engages herself and invites her audience on a journey of enlightenment. Within this thesis one will encounter a variety of words and phrases that are indicative of mindfulness, such as: presence, present, present moment, transformation, energy, energy field, consciousness, etc. In attempts to describe the indescribable, the contents of this thesis are as malleable as the subject. For what I lack in words, Abramović makes up for in performance.

The purpose of this thesis is, affectionately put, to provide a home for that of which intersects with the mindful immateriality of Abramović's oeuvre. In concrete terms, this thesis is a creative project featuring a cross-content interpretive synthesis of existing material on the intersection of mindfulness and art of Marina Abramović. It is sourced heavily from Marina Abramović's retrospective *The Cleaner*. This compilation catalogue was produced in conjunction with Moderna Museet, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, and Bundeskunsthalle. Covering over five decades of Marina Abramović's legendary works, the collection is accompanied by essays and curators' insightful contributions. Supplied texts are access points to the art of Marina Abramović set against the backdrop of Balkan history and politics. Other prominent sourcing includes Marina Abramović's autobiography *Walk Through Walls* and documentary *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*. In addition, a number of international academic journals have been included in the sourcing. But the most essential preparation for my work has been my privilege of participating in the Abramović Method during "The Cleaner" at Palazzo Strozzi. It was there I partook in practices that I continue to do in my daily-life for almost two years now; this has brought me to understand the real meaning of Abramović's work. As Marina Abramović's oeuvre lives on through reperformances and analysis in new constellations, this creative project contributes an academic reviewal and communal exploration of the artist's function: to be conscious-raising.



## **PERFORMANCE AS IMMATERIAL**

In the second half of the 20th century, Marina Abramović emerged into an art world that was breaking away from the concept of art as creation of objects. She brought with her the concept of the present, the Here and Now, the experience of what was undergone during the action. In an art market that thrived off of negotiating and exhibiting material and permanent works, performance challenged the institution. In performance, behavior and attitude were worth more than the creation of something concrete. The artist herself became the fundamental element. Performance sought out to achieve a closer relationship between art and life, in a place that would allow subjects to express themselves and convert their lives into creations, thus making themselves the objects.<sup>1</sup>

Abramović's performative body of work is correlated with the vanguard of other movements within the history of art. The artist's oeuvre broke away not only from materialism through transforming and breaking up the art market, but also especially through transforming the relationship with spectators. In this, passivity towards a preconceived work was abandoned and "activation of the public" was proposed, i.e. the public was called upon to become the co-creators.<sup>1</sup>

This notion became fully realized decades later in 2010 during Abramović's pinnacle performance *The Artist Is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where she created a performative space that produced a transformational experience for the artist and the spectator. In this space, Abramović became the embodiment of the transitional object that the audience engaged in a relationship with. In this way, *The Artist Is Present* can also be viewed as Abramović's self-portrait. Here, the artist became self as subject, as encounters between her and the public simultaneously sparked the present moment that materializes in space and time, thereby providing transformative acquisitions for these subjects. This can be understood as a representation of individuals that are continually transforming us: not only through words, but also as a presence occurring in a moment that is experienced or an aesthetic contemplation. This is exceptionally so in analyzing Abramović's art: her pieces create space for possibilities, and these spaces together with the moment that arise from this encounter between the artist and the public mindfully bring us to become aware of consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

The word 'performance' is derived from an old French verb 'parfourinr,' meaning 'to complete' or 'to do in its entirety'. This is precisely the moment of action that is completed through an experience.<sup>1</sup> Abramović's work is an example of a visual practice that maintains a pertinence and theoretical impact regarding the *mise en scène*, or arrangement, of the body in relation to performance. The ritual forms through which the body can be transformed shifts an individual experience (that of the artist) into a collective one (that of the audience).<sup>2</sup> Through various rituals, Abramović sought experiences of liberation and transformation over the span of her life. The artist's works are associated with rites of passage that can be observed: a feature that has been embedded in societies since their earliest days and which function as a transitional experience. Anthropological studies reveal that the importance of ritualistic events in different societies are fundamental to the collective dynamic of the community. This is the quintessence of Abramović's work, provoking the transformation or affirmation of a living order.<sup>1</sup>

Abramović's work in relation to the potential of rituals and transformations as a relationship of dialogue between her otherness and that of others should be observed. The artist's work enables changes that arise from these meetings: changes that are aesthetic at the moment when the subject sees himself before a work of art and perceives that he is changing. That is, the subject's identity is no longer what it was if it had been determined before this event and has shifted to another context.<sup>1</sup> These elements, the space in-between, the very idea of border crossing and therefore of constant translation and testing limits and possibilities of one's own as well as others' subjectivities, constantly return in Abramović's works; a kind of work which not by chance brought her to travel to Tibet, live in Australian with Aborigines and in Brazil with mine-workers, learn Sufi rituals, and continue to explore cultural and physical body limitations.<sup>2</sup>

Abramović appropriates space, material symbols, memories, and her public for creating her works. This is done not as concrete art objects, rather, as works that exist in the present, ephemerally, and which would terminate in the field of transformation. Thus, the performance would be concluded when this environment that the artist created together with her movements and interactions with the audience resulted in the transferal of energy, catalyzing

## **The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ** *Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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this transformational experience. It is for that reason one should conceptualize Abramović's performance spaces as energy fields that promote encounters with transformational objects, whether that be the artist herself or another medium, causing emotional turbulence that would give rise to these identity-modifying experiences.<sup>1</sup> 'Energy' can be considered as a form of symbolic efficacy operated by and through a text for and to a receiver. The transformation induced then is a particular *effet du sens*, or effect of meaning, which primarily invests the meaning of relation which unites the receiver (the viewer) with the discourse he is consuming.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, Abramović is 'writing the body,' not in a way of simply turning it into an object of inscription, but one of translation and transduction. That is of passage and transformation of sense and sensation into and through the flesh of the body: in the case of Marina Abramović, the vehicle of a relation between space and time, images and concrete objects and subjects. The body performed and used as such as a vehicle tries to actualize that transformation between matter and form. But there are many and different levels at which the transformation occurs: a *pragmatic* one, involving all the textual effects investing the context and the behavior of the viewers; a *cognitive* one, where 'what is' changes the meaning of the semiotic systems to which the viewers are referring, i.e. a process or rearrangement of perceptive data; and an *emotive* one, which invokes directly the emotional state of those who participate in the interaction. It is through this passage from level to level, which operates simultaneously, that a performance and the performed bodies become a potential site for transduction. Between the plays of semantic variables of the objects and the images and the interpretation and reading of the performers, the invisible power of the transmutation from one code to the other is enacted, starting from the correlation between discourse normally considered distinct.<sup>2</sup>

### **BELGRADE, 1946**

Marina Abramović was born on November the 30<sup>th</sup> in the year 1946 in Belgrade, Serbia, the then capital of President Josip Broz Tito's former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Her parents, Vojin ("Vojo") and Danica Abramović, were two Yugoslav Partisan military national heroes brought together by the Second World War. Born into an affluent family, Danica attended schooling in Switzerland where she learned about Communism as an abstract

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

idea, studying Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. For her, becoming a partisan was, as Marina describes, “an idealistic choice, even a fashionable one.” Contrastingly, her father, Vojo, was born into a poor family that was comprised of warriors. “He was the real Communist,” Abramović pronounces, “Communism, he believed, was a way through which the class system could be changed.” From the beginning of her life, Marina bared witness to the exchange of energy between two polar opposites.<sup>3</sup>



Marina’s parents, Danica and Vojin Abramović, 1945

Marina depicts her mother as a terrible real control at home enforcing extreme discipline. In her words, “I was trained to be military soldier, literally. My mother would wake me in the middle of the night if my bed was not straight, because I sleep to messy. I mean, that kind of insanity. There was no love there.”<sup>4</sup> On a constant basis, Marina was slapped and hit by her mother, enduring cruel and unusual punishment. She watched as her parents’ marriage fell apart as they traded physical blows with one another preempted by screaming matches. It was their fundamental ideologies that drove them apart, being from two different worlds seeing, Communism through different lenses. As it ended in divorce and her father leaving, Marina would be subjected to the supreme ruling of her mother for years to come.<sup>3</sup>

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

Marina knows the idealism of communism in the beginning and the failure of communism in the end because she lived it. Decades later in reflection, she recounted its problems and why it could not succeed. According to her, “These concepts do not work because the mentality and consciousness of people are not raised to a level that could make it work. The solution is that society has to have a completely different relation to the materialistic world, not being attached to money. Only by changing ourselves can we in turn change others, and that is a long pioneering process.”<sup>5</sup>

But in this dystopia, Marina received love from her maternal grandmother, Milica Rosic. A deeply spiritual woman and devotee to the Orthodox Church, she cared for Marina during her childhood as her parents were off pursuing their political careers, never having time for her. As a result, Marina states, “there’s a kind of strange mixture between spiritually and Communist discipline. Looking now back, it was very important to me, and actually, this is what make me what I am now.”<sup>4</sup>



Marina with her Aunt Ksenija, her grandmother Milica, and her brother Velimir, 1953

Marina speaks fondly about the innocent curiosity of her childhood, narrating “When I was a child I believed in parallel realities. I would sit at home looking at the particles of dust in rays

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

of light. Thinking there are other galaxies in our planet. I believed in the spirit world: not only a belief but I could see it, I felt the existence of it. I never played with toys, but I played with the shadows.” Fascination was found in fellow Serbian Nikola Tesla and the strange mystical relationship between technology and spirituality; in how spirituality travels so far in front of science, then science finally finds devices to measure its realities. It was out of this she knew “I want to deal with intuitive knowledge. I want to live in synchronicity, where you are so attuned to existence, your self and your surroundings, that things happen without effort.”<sup>6</sup>



The clothes Marina made from curtains, 1960

**MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ: ACADEMIC PAINTER**

At the age of fourteen, in 1960, Marina asked for, and got, her first set of paints.<sup>7</sup> Life in her childhood apartment was a strange paradox as a result of having decorated war heroes and political elites as parents. “It sounds like a life of privilege, and in a way, it was—in a world of Communist drabness and deprivation, I lived in luxury. I never washed my own clothes. I

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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never ironed. I never cooked. I never even had to clean my own room. Everything was done for me. All that was asked of me was to study and be the best. I had piano lessons and English lessons and French lessons. My mother was completely into French culture—everything French was good. I was very lucky, but in all this comfort, I was so lonely. The only freedom I had was freedom of expression. There would be money for painting, but there would not be money for clothes. There would be no money for anything that I really desired as a young girl growing up. Yet if I wanted a book, I would get it. If I wanted to go to the theater, I would be given a ticket. If I wanted to listen to any classical music, the records would be provided to me. And all this culture was not just provided to me, but pushed on me.” At the age of six or seven Marina knew she wanted to be an artist. While her mother punished her for many things, this was one she encouraged. In her large apartment she not only had her own bedroom, but her own studio. So, when Marina requested her first painting lesson, she received.<sup>3</sup>

Arrived was Filo Filipović, one of Marina’s father’s old partisan friends. Filipović rolled out a canvas onto the floor, poured various materials onto it including sand, topped them off with a splash of gasoline, and lit a match leaving the young aspiring artist with a painting, literally ablaze, which he called “sunset.”<sup>7</sup> In complete awe, she waited until the charred mess had dried and carefully pinned it to the wall. Shortly thereafter, she went on vacation with her family. Upon returning, the August sun had dried up the painting. The color was gone, and the sand had fallen off. There was nothing left but a pile of ashes and debris on the floor; the sunset ceased to exist.<sup>3</sup> From this lesson in anti-painting, temperament, experiment, unpredictability, energy, transformation, and process, Marina had received the impression she needed to begin her work.<sup>7</sup> “Later on, I understood why this experience was so important,” Marina accentuates, “It taught me that the process was more important than the result, just as the performance means more to me than the object. I saw the process of making it and then the process of its unmaking. There was no duration or stability to it. It was pure process.”<sup>3</sup>

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ****  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Marina painting in her studio, Belgrade, 1968

From then on, Marina kept painting in her home studio. An often used basic shape and subject emerged in a series of painting with clouds as the principal motif: individual contemplation and interest in immateriality.<sup>7</sup> One day, while lying in the grass, just staring up at the cloudless sky, Marina saw twelve military jets fly over, leaving behind white trails. Watching in fascination as the trails slowly disappeared and left the sky once more perfectly blue, she dawned upon a moment of transformation, “All at once it occurred to me—why paint? Why should I limit myself to two dimensions when I could make art from anything at all: fire, water, the human body? Anything! There was something like a click in my mind—I realized that being an artist meant having immense freedom. If I wanted to create something from dust or rubbish, I could do it. It was an unbelievably freeing feeling, especially coming from a home where there was almost no freedom.”<sup>3</sup> However, Marina did not stop painting all at once. She attended the Art Academy in Belgrade and later went on to teach courses as a means to support her nomadic lifestyle.<sup>3</sup>





Marina Abramović, *Clouds in the Shadow*, 1969 & *Black Clouds Coming*, 1970

Marina’s early paintings reveal the subject that has continued to interest her throughout her career. These works are clear embodiments of the artist’s interest in the relationship between matter and immateriality, and in the mental transformations that might be experienced along one’s quiet, concentrated presence in the world. A number of paintings and works on paper could seem to depict a process of transformation almost diagrammatically, with a cloud-like shape emerging from a square block of seeming solid matter. Marina describes the often black cloud-like shapes as a kind of black hole—that is, as extreme condensations of matter and energy—juxtaposed to the more atmospheric white clouds. Several works feature a classic “Rückenfigur,” a figure seen from behind that has been positioned as an observer of what is happening—or, perhaps, more accurately, as the agent making it happen.<sup>7</sup>

## **LIQUID KNOWLEDGE**

In the early seventies, Abramović explored public performance and the presence of each person who participates through her sound environments and conceptual works—an obvious

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

connection to her later works. One point of departure is always the location: a transformative space, occupied together and charged with new connotations by the artist and the audience.<sup>8</sup> In 1972 the artist prepared a sound installation for the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary Art called *War*. As visitors walked down a narrow corridor formed by two sheets of plywood, they were met by the deafening roar of machine gun fire. Abramović explains, “I was using sound as if it were a broom cleaning the minds of visitors before they entered the museum.” Once inside, the aftermath of total silence allowed visitors to appreciate the art around them in a new way.<sup>3</sup>

At times, Abramović’s pieces ask us to let go of a linear understanding of time and the idea of autonomous individuality. And yet the self-as-subject individual experience, personal responsibility—is central to the artist’s work. Questions about existence and art are brought to head in ways that are provocative and moving. “Performance’s only life is the present,” the artist exclaims, “Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented... Performance’s being... becomes itself through disappearance.” Abramović probes core words such as loss, memory, being, pain, endurance, and trust. For the audience to engage with the work’s scenography and remains is to also engage with a wider discussion about their status as bearers of experience. “In the archive, flesh is given to be that which slips away. Flesh can house no memory of bone. Only bone speaks memory of flesh. Flesh is a blindspot.” The Western mode of recording history seems only to rely on objects or documentation—a notion that is, to an extent, taboo in performance, which has the immaterial act at its center. Through the application of mindfulness in experiencing Abramović’s work, the transformation as a result of engagement maintains performance’s effects in the present.<sup>8</sup>

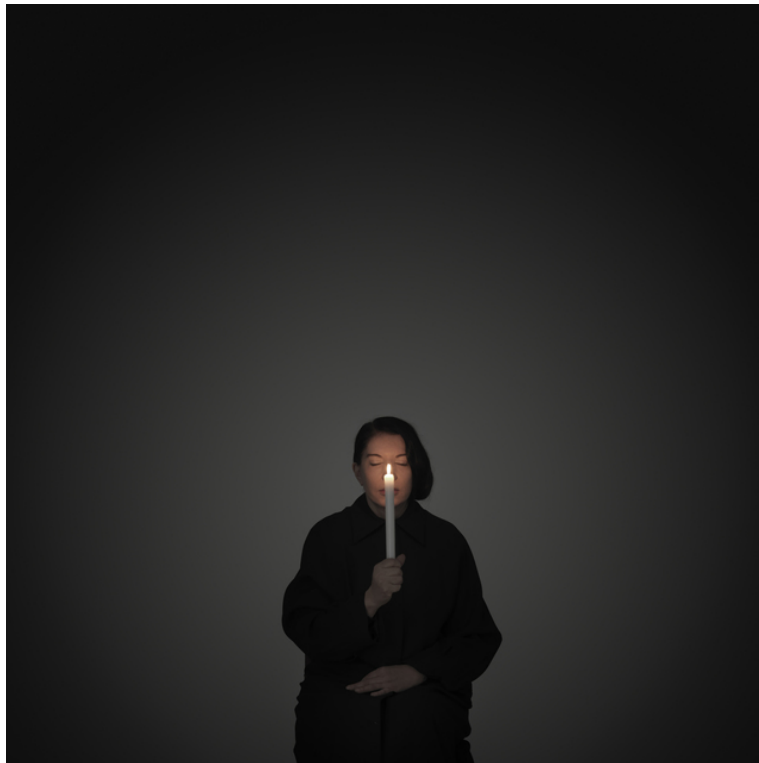
Throughout Abramović’s career she has invested in creating different ways of being and attending to time—the long durations and the slower times of art experience. The traveling lifestyle has been one of discovery and anthropology; the artist heightened her knowledge of mindfulness and meditation in dialogue with Tibetan Monks, Sikhs, and Australian Aborigines. Abramović’s shift to longer durations as her career progressed originated in the Australian outback under extreme temperatures. There is a direct link between durational aesthetics and environmental consciousness being attuned to the elements. This

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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interconnectedness to the other life energies is why performance art is transformative art. The energy transmitted cannot be found in painting or sculpture. Here it is cellular, molecular, life energy: everything living in unity. Abramović defines:

“I call it *liquid knowledge*. When the body is exhausted you reach a point where body doesn’t exist anymore. Your connection with a universal knowledge is so acute. It’s not even an awareness: things that come to you, an avalanche of deep understanding, of life on this planet, of simply being here. You can’t put it in words... Somehow a clarity is there. There is a state of luminosity. You really need to prepare the body and mind for this kind of understanding. It’s such a difficult task to actually get there. It’s rare, but artists and scientists sometimes have this. It’s something I can’t explain, like a divine knowledge, but it’s not religious. I believe in that kind of energy that is so subtle that our own energy obstructs its entrance. Only when you exhaust your own energy can it enter and become that kind of realization. It gives an immense feeling of tranquility. I enter it through pain.”<sup>6</sup>



Artist portrait with a candle, 2012

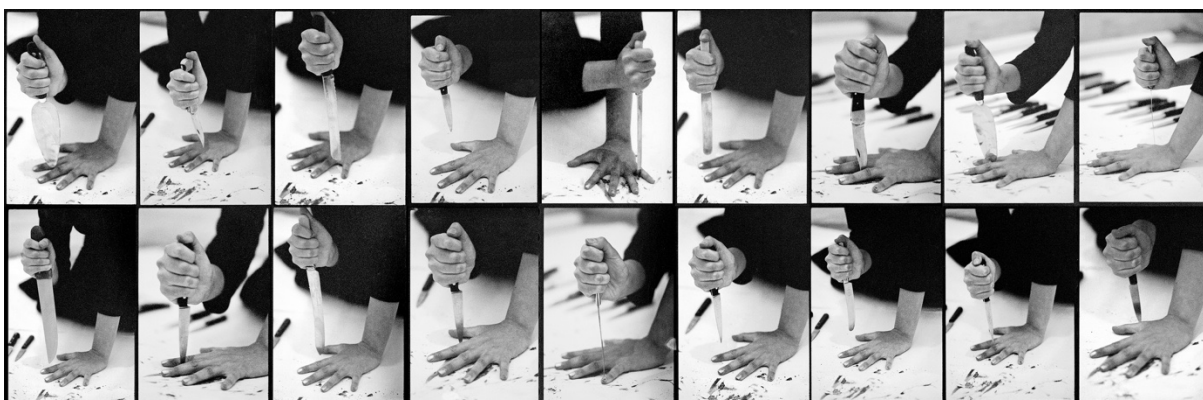
## The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ** *Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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In discussion with a Tibetan monk, the monk relayed to Abramović that years of meditation leads to the realization that humanity is molecules and light. The artist associates this certain energy with her admiration of Vincent van Gogh’s “vibrating” artwork or Mark Rothko paintings that “always moves me to tears.” So, when it comes to what some would think of as the religious dimension of Abramović’s work, it actually has little to do with formalized religions. It is a spiritual dynamic, not simply transcendent, but very *enfleshed* and material, coming from within and without, from an experience of bare existence.<sup>6</sup>

### EARLY WORKS

Abramović’s early pieces were immediately distinguished by a preoccupation with time and attempts to transcend the limitations imposed by the human body. Performing *Rhythm 10* in 1973 at the Villa Borghese in Rome, the artist took a knife and quickly stabbed between the fingers of her hand in a dizzying repetitious manner (a dangerous and painful variation on an old Slavic drinking game). As some critics cited this and other early performances to be gruesome—even sadomasochistic—Abramović emphasizes that this kind of self-inflicted pain was neither gratuitous nor an end itself. Rather, the pain was a gateway or *door* to a space beyond it, a tool to reach a transcendent state of mind.<sup>10</sup> She explains, “There is pain but the pain is like a kind of keeping secret. The moment you really go through the door of pain, you enter to another state of mind.”<sup>4</sup>



Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 10* (performance, 1 hour), Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, Villa Borghese, Rome, 1973

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Throughout the 1970s, Abramović created numerous museum performances that formed an artistic philosophy, what she calls the Here and Now. It is embodied by engaging herself and or the audience to reach the condition of the mind-body unity—the energy of pure presence. In this state, memory is absent. The artist's 1975 performance *Freeing the Memory* achieved exactly that: over some two hours she tried to reach the mind-body state by continuously speaking words that came to mind until nothing did, then, the performance ended. The objective, to release the body from its language code.<sup>10</sup>

It is of importance to note that the concept of performance art in this context is connected with psychoanalysis, which is consequently relationships, expression, elaboration, creation, and transformation. Abramović uses the moment of the performance as a means of returning to her memories so as to give them a new meaning. At the time of calling on the public to participate, the artist proposed an aesthetic experience in which the audience can, together with her, become involved in the performance moment. The experience she proposes brings the spectators into the work, such that they can transform her and be transformed by her.<sup>1</sup>

These experiences not only relate to the actions of which Abramović's body was subjected or what the public proposed to do to her, but were also moments at which new meanings were assigned and views came back as the public enabled her to pose the problem of her memories and emotions. Abramović's works brought out aspects of her life and led her to cross emotion limits that seemed to be intrinsic to the performance art movement.<sup>1</sup>

Marina Abramović has produced her autobiography with her body. Speaking about herself, her environment, her personal and social histories; she has borne witness to her life and contexts. Through performance, the artist has explored introspective investigations and analyzed the body's interaction with day-to-day life. The concept of joint participation has led Abramović and the public to share these histories. This structural relationship expands the notion of performance beyond something that is only to be watched. It is then exactly upon moment of shared experience in this space that the correlation between artist and audience occurs.<sup>1</sup>

## **MARINA & ULAY: THE LOVERS**

Together, Marina Abramović and Ulay fused two different languages: One derived from ‘popular culture,’ concerned with alternative lifestyles, social radicalism, higher state of consciousness, and cosmic experience; the other learned from the formal investigation of Conceptual and Minimal art, focused on the questions of critique, de-materialization.<sup>10</sup> In 1975 Marina flew to Amsterdam to perform *Thomas Lips* for a Dutch TV show, *Beeldspraak* (Picture Speech), for de Appel gallery. It was there she was introduced to the German artist, Ulay, who would be her guide while in town. Marina describes, “The interesting thing [about Ulay] was that the two halves of his face were different. The left side was shaved smooth and powdered, with a plucked eyebrow and light rouge on the lips; the right side in profile, you would get a completely different impression—masculine on one side, feminine on the other.”<sup>3</sup>

Ulay had been living in Amsterdam ever since the 1960s and took photographs, usually with a Polaroid and often of himself. Marina notes, “If my childhood had been materially comfortable but emotionally desolate, [Ulay’s] early years had been even harder. He was born in Solingen, Germany, in the middle of the war; soon afterward, as Hitler desperately mobilized thousands of older men and young boys, Ulay’s father, who was over fifty already, was drafted and sent to fight in the Nazi siege of Stalin Grad. It would be a long time before he returned.” The internationality that the two artists brought to their work implored the concept of polarity.<sup>3</sup>

In Ulay words, “[After the grisly performance of *Thomas Lips*] I didn’t lick her wounds, but I cared for the wounds and cleaned it and put something on it. And I think that was the crucial point. At the time we met, there was immediately a fascination. Type-wise, character-wise, personality-wise, the work we had been doing singularly, she and me. You know, there was a recognition like you have found a lost brother or sister, or something like this. Plus, we were born on the same day November the 30<sup>th</sup>, both Sagittarius. Obvious. You know, destiny brought us together.” “And for me,” Marina says, “was when we start working together, this was forever. I was thinking, this is the *relation*, this is work and it will never stop. It was like two twins connected with the body together, and soul.” Ulay reminisces, “We were lovers, we were friends, we were performers, all at once. And our love was always on top of it.”<sup>4</sup>

## The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ** *Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Marina and Ulay's relationship is one of the greatest love stories ever told. Marina is very hardcore, and she had met someone who was equally prepared to go to any lengths for his art.<sup>4</sup> The pinnacle of this deep connection was displayed in Dublin during their 1980 performance *Rest Energy* at ROSC '80. In *Rest Energy*, together they held a taut bow and a poised arrow. The weight of their bodies put tension on the bow. The arrow pointed at Marina's heart. Small microphones were attached to both their hearts recording the increasing number of heartbeats. The intended bow caused a sense of impending danger revealing itself as a fragility and paradigm of the body as a momentary and transitory element between life and death. The artists raised the subject over how being alive is to be so close also to the possibility of death. Throughout the body of the artists' duo works, the transitory spaces encountered the need for trust in the other in the moment. This raises the overarching theme of how bodies are often at the mercy of other people's actions. This work is emblematic of the reciprocity between the artist and their public and the evanescent nature of the work, which could only exist in that space and at that time.<sup>1</sup>



Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Rest Energy* (based on the performance for video, 4 minutes), ROSC '80, Dublin, 1980

## **COLLISION WORKS**

Dwelling for a moment on another set of paintings Abramović made from 1963 to 1970, the *Truck Accidents*, it is feasible to single them out as surprisingly clear sketches of the main strands and interests running through the artist's work. Notably both the violently physical and the immaterially spiritual are manifested at this early point. These two temperatures, between which her work is suspended, have long since become standard in describing the dynamism of her oeuvre, and can likewise be illustrated with the classic Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy.<sup>7</sup>

The subject is most clearly rendered in the *Truck Accidents* paintings, one of which shows a white truck and a yellow truck colliding head-on, horizontal to the picture frame and seen from the side. "Crash-bang!" Both vehicles are airborne, their front sections crumbling. The yellow truck is vibrating, while the white truck, with its slightly greater density, appears to be withstanding the collision better. Abramović's keen eye on the laws of physics, her representation, with almost textbook clarity, show two bodies of metal colliding and exerting force on each other. Moreover, in a crash like this—a so called inelastic collision—some of the kinetic energy is transformed into internal energy, or in each other colliding bodies of metal.<sup>7</sup>



Marina Abramović, *Truck Accidents I & II*, 1963



**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

In the paintings, we see the collision of two trucks. Nothing more, nothing less. The pictorial space is almost flat, the subject surrounded by gray and blue paint instead of the Belgrade cityscape. The collision has been isolated, cut off from any context, with no explanation of the “before” and “after.” Instead of relating a story, the artist focused on a highly charged situation and a dramatic “now.” The painting’s formula can be distilled as follows: without explanatory references, two bodies collide head-on, exerting force on each other, that is all.<sup>7</sup>

Abramović recounts her fascination by the big, green Yugoslav trucks she used to see on the streets of Belgrade and how she would go to the site of traffic accidents involving them to work and add empirical experience of the subject. She also tried to re-enact collision at home with toy trucks. However, this did not work because toy trucks are too solid to bring real force in the collisions. This forced the artist to realize that there was real energy only in actual, live collisions, and there were no shortcuts to the powerful exchanges of force that interested her.<sup>7</sup>

Variations on the motifs of collision in truck accidents and contemplation in clouds crystalized in early paintings appear throughout Abramović’s work. The methods and basic shapes Abramović discovered during the 1960s has carried over into various other media. These concepts continue to generate different physical manifestations in performances, photographs, videos, and interactive works and situations with or without the inclusion of objects. Abramović’s early paintings foreshadow illustrations of much later works, which were made as an extension of the investigations of meditation techniques and the spiritual tradition of various non-Western cultures that she and Ulay started together in the late 1970s; that of which she continues to draw upon in her work today. As for, in example, works that situate an observer—sometimes the artist’s body—before hunks of exceedingly material minerals, such as crystal, on the assumption that perhaps the compressed energy of earth can be felt and can affect the observers own energy.<sup>7</sup>

Both strands—the destructively violent and the contemplatively spiritual, the Dionysian and the Apollonian—are essentially about the same thing: the transformation of energy in head-on exchange between different bodies, poles, entities... between trucks, bodies, man and woman, Abramović and Ulay, Abramović and minerals, the audience and minerals, Abramović and the audience, the audience among themselves. Between East and West, communism and

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

capitalism, matter and spirit, light and heavy, human and nature... these two central and recurring formulas are repeatedly articulated throughout Abramović's oeuvre.<sup>7</sup>

The formal schema of the "collision" and fusion in the transformer became a constant in Marina and Ulay's extremely productive collaboration from 1975 to 1988. The duo defined several of their performances as "relation works," but the term "collision works" could be applied to several of them. Witness Abramović and Ulay's description for their 1976 performance *Relation in Space* at the Venice Biennale:

In a given space.  
Two bodies repeatedly pass, touching each other.  
After gaining a higher speed they collide.<sup>7</sup>



Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Relation in Space* (performance, 58 minutes), XXXVIII Biennale, Giudecca, Venice, 1976

The nude bodies moved toward each other in a straight line from opposite ends of a room and met in the middle. To begin with, they passed each other, their bodies only grazing, but as they ramped up the speed, they collided violently head-on. Over and over again. Each time, the collision happened in approximately the same spot against a uniform white backdrop. Showing only the zone where the bodies collide, the video and the photos are composed so that the pictorial space is relatively flat, with the bodies entering the frame from either side in profile to the audience, leaving out the run-up. Everything but the actual collision is cropped out, the uniform back and floor erasing any trace of the context in which the work was performed. Without explanatory reference, two bodies collide head-on—"smack!"—exerting force on each other. Minimal and violent. And, as in the truck collisions, we see tiny

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

differences in density and velocity between two otherwise close to identical bodies that ultimately produce difference in impact.<sup>7</sup>

For the audience, the charge of energy being exchanged in the colliding of a man and woman is open to interpretation. What it does lends to the work's minimal formula, in which nudity is just another erasure of specific time and place. Many of the duo's subsequent performances adhere to the minimal setup of two bodies, or poles, isolated in a head-on encounter and impacting each other in the exchange of both physical and mental momentum and energy. More "collision works" include: *Imponderabilia*, performed in 1977 at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, in Bologna, where the artists stood naked in the main entrance of the museum facing each other, forcing each member of the public to choose which one of them to face as they passed sideways through the small space left in-between; and AAA-AAA performed in 1978 at the RTB Television Studio, in Liège, where the artists faced each other, both producing vocal sounds that slowly built up tension, their faces coming closer together until they were screaming into each other's open mouths. These works pushed the audience through the field of energy created between the two poles, being variations on the collision theme.<sup>7</sup>



Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Imponderabilia* (performance, 90 minutes), Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, 1977



Ulay/Marina Abramović, *AAA-AAA* (performance for video, 13 minutes), RTB Television Studio, Liège, 1978

Just as Abramović’s paintings have no “before” and “after,” the duo mainly began their performances with themselves in position and “in motion” before the audience was admitted—a device Abramović employed in later performances. The essence is the “timeless” situation, the energy field Here and Now. From the 1960s to the present, one of Abramović’s most consistent basic formulas has been: two bodies colliding—or, less violently confronting each other—head-on and exchanging force, impacting each other and transferring energy.<sup>7</sup>

## **NIGHTSEA CROSSING**

Time, duration, and consciousness became more pronounced in the maturation of Marina Abramović and Ulay’s relationship. Informing much of their collaborative work of this period were ideas that came out of a life-altering, extended journey they took through the Australian outback.<sup>9</sup> Marina says, “Ulay and I were looking for a solution—new ways to make performances. I had no desire to go back to painting, and he had no wish to return to photography. So we said, ‘Let’s go to nature. Why don’t we go to the desert?’ We always used to joke that Moses, Mohammed, Jesus, and Buddha all went to the dessert as nobodies and came back as somebodies, so there must be something in the desert...”<sup>3</sup> So, in 1980, the

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

artists received permission to stay with the semi-nomadic Pitjantjatjara Aboriginal tribe for three months in the bush of the Great Victoria Desert. While with the Pitjantjatjara, they experienced incidents of apparent telepathy and healing that defied all Western secular paradigms.<sup>9</sup>



Somewhere west of Lake Disappointment, Australia, 1980

Abramović found great enchantment in the Pitjantjatjara’s ancient nomadic culture that is connected to the energy of the land. For every bit of topography is filled with stories as they travel through mythical landscapes. “An Aborigine will say to you, ‘This is a snake man just here fight with a water woman’—and all you see are some boulders, maybe a bush that looks like some strange form of fish.” Looking at the landscape and hearing this story, the wonder lies in not that it happened in the past, nor in the future: It always is *now*. It has never “happened.” It is *happening*. She recounts how ceremony is their way of life and how they have absolutely no possessions:

“They don’t just perform these rituals at a certain time of year: they’re constant. You’ll see Aborigines all dressed up in feathers and face paint, and walking through the desert—the middle of nowhere, dust flying everywhere and unbearable heat, and

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

you'll ask, 'Where are you going?' And they'll say, in this broken English they use, 'Oh, we have business'—meaning a ceremony. 'But where is the business?' you ask, and they'll show you a rock and a tree in the distance. 'There is the office,' they'll say. The thing that fascinated me most was that they have absolutely no possessions. This is connected to the fact that they don't believe in tomorrow; there is only today. For example, it is very rare to find a kangaroo in the desert. When they find one, they have food to eat, which is a big deal for them. But after they kill and cook the kangaroo, they can never finish it: there's always lots of meat left. But since they're always moving from place to place, when they wake up the next morning, they don't take the meat with them. They just leave everything—the next day is the next day."<sup>3</sup>

This was a revolutionary concept to Abramović—all her ideas about existing in the present came from here. Moreover, Abramović describes that living in the intense heat in a tranquil state with very little food or water made her become a kind of “natural antenna” while practicing meditation:

“One night, around the same time that the flies went away, I was sitting around the fire with some tribeswomen when I noticed that they were talking in my head. We were not speaking, but they were telling me something: I was thinking, and they were answering me. That was when my mind really started opening. I began to notice that we could sit around in total silence and have a full conversation. For example, if I wanted to sit in a certain place next to the fire, one of the Aborigines would tell me in my head that this was a bad spot and I should move. And I would move, and nobody had spoken one word—everything was understood.”<sup>3</sup>

Inspired by this Australian experience was the grueling performance *Nightsea Crossing* that the artists traveled with from 1981 to 1987. This was a durational piece performed asynchronously for a total of ninety days at different locations around the world, in which Ulay and Abramović sat across at a table from one another, locked into each other's gaze, for up to eight consecutive hours at a time—without shifting their eyes from one another or moving once in their seats (though on several occasions the pain became so great for Ulay that he had to break off the performance, leaving Marina to continue performing alone). The

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

description for the performance *Nightsea Crossing* reads as an almost alchemical dematerialization:

Presence.  
Being present, over long stretches of time,  
Until presence rises and falls, from  
Material to immaterial, from  
Form to formless, from  
Time to timeless.<sup>9</sup>



Marina Abramović/Ulay, *Gold Found by the Artists* (later changed to *Nightsea Crossing*), Gallery of New South Wales, 1981

This performance is another example of where Abramović employs the concept of the audience never witnessing its beginning or end. Most museums in the world are open from ten in the morning to five at night. The artists decided in addition to sitting for the entire opening time, they would arrive early before and leave after every member of the public had exited. Therefore, they sat seemingly continuously.<sup>9</sup>

In Abramović and Ulay's *Nightsea Crossing* performances, the physical exchange of energy has been replaced by an exchange of gazes and mental exchange of energy replicating what they had experienced living with the Aboriginals—still in profile relative to the audience, as if to underscore the “collision” is a head-on moment occurs in a horizontal field of tension

## The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ** *Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

between two poles.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, chafing against the zeitgeist of materialistic consumerism, the increase of a “society of the spectacle,” and brash Reagan- and Thatcher-era capitalism, the artists had made an artwork that was premised on demonstratively doing absolutely “nothing.” On meditative silence, Abramović had apparently become the anti-material girl of the 1980s art world.<sup>9</sup>

### **DRAGON ENERGY**

In 1988, Abramović and Ulay ended their 12-years of intense personal love and joint fruitful collaboration, symbolically marking the event with *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk*. On March 30th, the artists began their journey of walking the entire length of the Great Wall of China. Marina began on the eastern end of the Wall, at Shan Hai Guan on the shores of the Yellow Sea, Gulf of Bohai, walking westward. Ulay started at the western end of the Wall, at Jai Yu Guan, the south-western periphery of the Gobi Desert, walking eastward. They walked until they met in the middle. After both continuously walking for 90 days, they met at Er Lang Shan, in Shen Mu, Shaanxi province.<sup>9</sup>



Marina atop the Great Wall of China, 1988



## The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ** *Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

Abramović and Ulay conceived the idea for *The Lovers* when living in the Australian desert among the Aboriginals. There, the two read a report containing astronaut statements saying the only human-made construction that can be seen from the moon are the Pyramids of Egypt and the Great Wall of China. Still engaged in a romantic relationship at the time, the artists had a moment of realization: they would walk from opposite ends of the Wall with the objective of getting married in the middle. Studying the Great Wall, they learned that it was not just used as a defense from Genghis Khan and invaders to China, but it was also a metaphysical structure. Chinese legend has it that the Great Wall is a replica of the Milky Way on earth where the Dragon is buried. It starts in the Yellow Sea, where the head of the Dragon is buried, its tail is in the Gobi Desert, and the body is in the mountains. Therefore, Ulay as the male would represent fire, starting from the dessert; and Marina as the female would represent water, starting from the sea. However, during the eight years between the idea's inception and achieving the Chinese Government's approval to perform, Abramović and Ulay's relationship dramatically dissolved. So, instead, they met in the middle and departed from each other as a single artists and single people, a very painful ending for Abramović.<sup>11</sup> This was a slow-motion version of the final collision between them. The two artists collided—although now in an exhausted way—in the middle.<sup>7</sup>



The handshake that marked the end of Ulay and Marina's personal and professional relationship, 1988

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

As difficult and challenging as the break-up was for Abramović, the long peregrination had given her new interests found in the earth and metals—she had become enthralled by the Chinese folk legends of the various dragons supposedly coiled beneath the length of the Great Wall in the nearby mountains, apparently mirroring geo-cosmic energy flows and actual deposits of minerals and ore that lay under the surface of the earth.<sup>9</sup> Abramović recounts:

“I was so fascinated by the relationship of the Wall to the ley lines, the energy lines in the earth. But I was also becoming aware of the changes in my own energy as I walked over different kinds of terrain. Sometimes there was clay under my feet, sometimes iron ore, sometimes quartz or copper. I wanted to try to understand the connections between human energy and the earth itself. In every village I stopped in, I would always ask to meet the oldest people there. Some of them were 105, 110 years old. And when I asked them to tell me stories about the Wall, they would always talk about dragons, a black dragon fighting a green dragon. I realized that these epic stories were literally about the configuration of the ground: the black dragon was iron, the green dragon was copper. It was like the Dreamtime tales of the Australian desert—every inch of land was full of stories, and the stories all related to the human mind and body. The land and the people were intimately connected.”<sup>3</sup>

As she embarked on her new solo career, Abramović did not immediately return to bold and provocative performances that had marked her art prior to living and working with Ulay. Instead she produced a large and varied body of semi-sculptural installations. The so-called *Transitory Objects for Human Use* were not artworks in themselves, but were a means to “trigger physical or mental experiences among the public through direct interaction.” Take, for example, the description for the manifestation of *Black Dragon* from the series *Transitory Objects*:

Instructions for the public:  
Face the wall.  
Press your head, heart, and sex against the mineral pillows.<sup>9</sup>

The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Marina Abramović, *Black Dragon*, rose quartz, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 2018

Abramović narrates, “I had not performed solo since before meeting Ulay twelve years earlier and did not yet have the confidence or concept to face the public alone. Through these objects, the public could perform instead, and feel something of what I had felt during my experience in *Nightsea Crossing* and walking in the *Great Wall*. Through research of Tibetan and Chinese medicine, I formed a correspondence between minerals and parts of the body. Quartz represented the eyes, amethyst puntas the wisdom teeth, amethyst geodes the womb, iron the blood, and copper the nerves. I called my new pieces *Transitory Objects*. Intending a double meaning: the energy given off by them, was supposed to be a means of transit to a meditative, rejuvenated consciousness, and I considered the objects themselves to be temporary, to be discarded once the desired consciousness had been achieved. Despite their being heavy, expensive, burdensome, I considered these objects to represent a step in the direction of a larger ideological goal: art without objects.”<sup>9</sup>

Informed by her research into Tibetan and Chinese systems of traditional medicine, these chairs, pillows, beds, and other kinds of seemingly whimsical objects were made of materials that “correspond” to the different parts of the human body and healing energy flows.

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

Anticipating her much later performance work, which would increasingly demand particular kinds of engagement on behavior from the public (such as *512 Hours*, at the Serpentine Gallery in London, 2014,) the *Transitory Objects* came with explicit sets of instruction for how they were to be engaged, sometimes in contract-like terms, such as in *Shoes for Departure*:

Instructions for the public:  
Enter the shoes with bare feet.  
Eyes closed.  
Motionless.  
Depart.<sup>9</sup>



Marina Abramović, *Shoes for Departure*, hewed amethyst, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1991

## **WORKS AS VESSELS**

In Marina Abramović's work, there is often a fixed set design, constellation of objects, each with its own energy, operating as *keys* or portals into the work. In her earliest performance pieces, select references were taken from Eastern Orthodox and communist iconography—the cross and the star; wine and honey, fire and ice. During the 1980s, talisman in materials

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

charged with special powers, like those in use during *Nightsea Crossing*, were introduced for mediation and transcendence. Real bones in *Balkan Baroque*, and medical skeletons were used in the 1990s in several of the artist's confrontations with violence and conflict in former Yugoslavia. During the 1997 Venice Biennale performance, *Balkan Baroque*, that awarded Abramović the Golden Lion for best artist, the artist sat in the middle of the space surrounded by 1,000 fresh cow bones using a metal brush to scrub away the bloodshed of the Bosnian War that ravaged the Balkans, all while this while continuously singing folksongs from her childhood for six hours a day.<sup>8</sup>



Marina Abramović, *Balkan Baroque* (performance, three-channel video installation, 4 days and 6 hours), Venice Biennale, 1997

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

Around the same time, she developed *Transitory Objects*, meant for public use, such as *Shoes for Departure* carved from amethyst or the four ladders of *Double Edge* with their various trials. These objects are never thought of as sculptures, rather as vessels for inner journeys, tools that can be dispensed with once someone has embarked on their personal passage. They are in a sense related to the simple props that later became part of the Abramović Method's exercises: cots, hearing protectors, color field, and blindfolds.<sup>8</sup>

## **SPIRITUALITY/MYSTICISM**

When art history situates Abramović within larger patterns of spirituality or religiosity, it tends to focus on the East or the global South, looking at Tibetan Buddhism, the indigenous Australian people, and *Umbanda* in Brazil—places where and peoples with whom Abramović has spent considerable time engaging in different forms of ritualized religious practices that have come to change her work. However, in addition, early strands of Swedenborgian mysticism and aesthetics provide a rich context for embedding Abramović's 2018 European retrospective "The Cleaner" within a specifically Scandinavian setting: it shows how Abramović's own self-conscious attempts to function as a "bridge" between East and West, and to restore an authentic experience of the spiritual through the vehicle of her performances, perhaps not so alien from the supposed hyper-security of contemporary Europe as one might think.<sup>9</sup>

The title "The Cleaner" encompasses lines of thinking regarding refinement and intensification of our mental focus that the artist has been pursuing for decades and that lie close to ideas found in Buddhism or mysticism. Cleaning and purification are present themes throughout her oeuvre, from the never-performed piece *Come Wash with Me* to the act of ritual rejection expressed in the *Freeing* works; from the compulsive scrubbing away of guilt and sin in *Balkan Baroque* to the transitory pieces "for spirit use" that are about the idea of purification more than its practice.<sup>8</sup>

Always invested in stripping away as many mediating layers as possible between a thing and the experience of it, Abramović travelled to the jungles of Brazil to work directly with the extraction of minerals in the mines where they were being taken out of the earth, thus going

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

directly to the source. Abramović emphasizes the importance of this saying, “Artists are always inspired by something, so why should I be inspired second hand? Rather than looking at artists for inspiration, I always wanted to look to the source. I think we live in an age which faces emergency: our consciousness has completely separated from our source of energy. I want to reproduce this consciousness.”<sup>9</sup>



From the series *Places of Power*, Brazil, 2015

In Abramović’s new performances from the 1990s onward, be it *Balkan Baroque* or *The House with the Ocean View*, the artist has continued and expanded on her preoccupation with time.<sup>9</sup> In *The House with the Ocean View* performed in 2002 at the Sean Kelly Gallery, in New York, Abramović entered into an existence of extreme solitary exposure with 12 days of silence and fasting. From the edges of the compartments she lived in, with their rudimentary interiors, and dressed in constructivist-inspired *Energy Clothes*, over the course of the project she developed a wordless channel to her audience that generated the power needed for the piece—as she did with the dragons in the Chinese mountains so many years before. Only once she internalized this knowledge and this strength could she take the step towards a personal encounter with the public sort of “everyman” in the *Artist Is Present*. Here, witnesses the description of *The House with the Ocean View* as well as Abramović’s recount of the performance:

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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THE IDEA:

This performance comes from my desire to see if it is possible to use simple daily discipline, rules, and restrictions to purify myself.

Can I change my energy field?

Can this energy field change the energy field of the audience and the space?

Conditions for Living Installation: Public

use telescope

remain silent

establish energy dialogue with the artist

Clothes

The clothes for *The House with the Ocean View* were inspired by Alexander Rodchenko.

The colors of the clothes were selected in accordance with the principles of the Hindu Vedic square.

The boots are the ones I used to walk the Great Wall of China in 1988.<sup>8</sup>



*The House with the Ocean View* (performance, 12 days), Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2002

“It was just after September 11: people were in a sensitive frame of mind, and the crowds who came to see the piece would stay for a long time, sitting on the gallery floor and watching, thinking about what they were experiencing, immersed in it. My



**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

---

viewers and I felt each other's presence intensely. There was a shared energy in the room—and a thick silence, broken only by the sound of a ticking metronome I kept on the table in my sitting room. One of the viewers was Susan Sontag, who started coming every day. But I had no idea she was there, in part because the gallery floor was unlit, but also because up on my platforms I was doing everything—sitting, standing, drinking, refilling my glass, peeing, showering—with (as a performance transcript shows) trancelike slowness and mindfulness.”

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15: DAY 1

Wearing white

Sitting on the chair

I sit on the chair, shake out my shoulders and push my hair back from my face and forehead with both hands. I shift first my left and then my right buttock back until they touch the back of the chair and I am sitting up perfectly straight. The back of my head is touching the quartz pillow headrest...

I take a deep breath and my chest rises. Then it falls. I remain sitting still. The metronome is on the left-hand side of the table and it is ticking. The glass is on the right-hand side of the table and it is full. My feet are flat on the floor and spaced hip-width apart. My back is straight against the chair. I look at the audience. My head does not move, only my eyes. I blink. My mouth is closed. I blink again. When I take deeper breaths my chest rises and falls. The rest of my body is motionless. After I have been sitting for a long time I have to straighten my back up.<sup>3</sup>

In frequently disrupting the viewer's sense of time, Abramović has certainly drawn upon her lifelong study of Buddhist traditions, in particular Zen. At times her work could function didactically, like *kōan*, trying to jolt the viewer into a startled perception of the real. In 2005, on the culminating evening of her *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Abramović's *Entering the Other Side* featured the artist mounted atop an enormous blue cone that resembles some elaborate and glamorous distortion of a spun-sugar dress. For seven hours, Abramović slowly turned and silently surveyed the crowds that had gathered around her far below on the spiral ramps of the Guggenheim, sweeping her arms in gestures that were like underwater ballet. Shortly before midnight when *Entering the Other Side* was slated to end, Abramović suddenly announced in a slow measure cadence:

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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“Please...just for the moment, all of you. Just listen. [Pause]. I am [pause] here and now [pause], and you are [pause] here and now. With me. [Pause]. *There is no time.*”<sup>9</sup>



Marina Abramović, *Entering the Other Side* (performance, 7 hours), Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2005

## **THE ARTIST IS PRESENT**

Returning to the matrix of presence and feeling “no time” in a now fully realized manner, the 2010 triumphant performance of *The Artist Is Present* held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York over the course of three months, attracting over 750,000 people, is the most iconic of Abramović’s works. Abramović staged a performance in which she sat in a chair, completely still and in silence. Visitors were invited to sit in a chair opposite her and stare at her for as long as they liked. She performed for 736 hours, making eye contact with 1,675 people during this time., engaging the public into great degrees of participation and trust.<sup>9</sup> “How I imagined *Artist Is Present* in Atrium,” Abramović describes, “I actually imagine more

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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like a kind of film set. There is a huge square of light. And just that square, like *Lost in Translation* in some way. In the middle of that square is placed a table and two chairs. It's so simple, it's like nothing there. It's just a artist sitting like mountain. I want to be just like a rock there. And looking you in the eyes." In performing for three months, every single day, the performance became life itself.<sup>4</sup>



Aerial shot of the Atrium in MoMA during the performance of *The Artist Is Present*, 2010

The thick air of expectation in MoMA's cathedral-like atrium, the silence around the periphery of the sitting figures who were patiently waiting their turn, the almost nimbus-like glow of Abramović's bright, monochromatic (and Vedic) dress, were all things akin to the atmospheric hush of the devout as they approached the icon of a revered saint, an unmoving image that might nevertheless grant some miraculous transformation if it were only to be looked at in the proper, enlivening way. To engage with Abramović's eyes was to become locked in the dialectics of the sacred gaze.<sup>9</sup>

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Artist portrait during the performance of *The Artist Is Present* at MoMA, 2010

But the apparatus of *The Artist Is Present* did not result in Abramović being mystified or defined into some kind of lofty bodhisattva; rather, the artist was clearly equally moved by her “energy exchanges” with the members of the public who sat across from her; her eyes occasionally welled up with tears at the unfolding of pain that she witnessed in the many visages she faced.<sup>9</sup> “There are so many different reasons why people come to sit in front of me,” Abramović says, “Some of them, they’re angry. Some of them curious. Some of them just want to know what happen. Some of them, they’re really open and you feel incredible pain. So many people have so much pain. When they’re sitting in front of me, it’s not about me anymore. It’s very soon, I’m just the mirror of their own self.” Abramović layed out this intention to her audience:

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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“The proposition here is just empty yourself. Be able to be in a present time. Put your mind here and now. And then something emotional happen. And that’s what we are looking for in this work. In performance, you have to have an emotional approach. It’s a kind of direct energy dialogue with the public and the performer. And if you’re performing in that way, that you’re there, at least a hundred percent there is emotional moment arrive to everybody. There’s no way out. Everybody feel it.”<sup>4</sup>



*Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramović* by Marco Anelli, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Klaus Biesenbach, Chief Curator at Large at MoMA, who was the curator for *The Artist Is Present*, explains, “What is so beautiful about the MoMA performance—she’s treating, actually, every human being she is encountered with the same attention and same respect. That’s pretty shocking. And some people are shocked by this, and some people anyways think they deserve this attention, and they are finally where they should be. And others fall in love with her.” When watching Abramović’s performance, the audience engaged with her physical appearance, which is very striking. There is clear evidence that she has a lot of physical stamina and strength which the public and its presence gives her, but unambiguously, its innate. Abramović is greatly concerned with how fast the world is moving and how people barely have an attention span at all. Through her gaze, she slowed everybody’s brain down. She asked her audience to stay there for quite a length of time, which they are not used to doing. As a result, she transformed the public.<sup>4</sup>

“Marina’s an artist that visualizes time,” Biesenbach asserts, “Using her body in the space with the audience. By the mere duration she brings time in as a weight. The weight on the performer’s shoulders, taking a piece out of the performer’s life as a value. Time is not a transient just rushing by. Just imagine time as an unbearably large object you cannot move and you are caught in.” Abramović elates that an artist has to be a warrior who has determination and stamina to conquer, not just a new territory, but also conquer himself and his weaknesses. So, in terms of what kind of work an artist may be doing, the most important is from which state of mind the artist is doing what the artist is doing. Therefore, *performance is all about state of mind*. She goes on to explain:

“People don’t understand that the hardest thing is to actually do something which is close to nothing. It’s demanding all of you because there’s no story anymore to tell, there’s no object to hide behind. There’s nothing. It’s your pure presence. You have to rely on your own energy and nothing else. Performance is all about state of mind. The public is like a dog. They can feel insecurity, they can feel fear, they can feel you are not there. So the idea is how you can bring performer and the audience in the same state of consciousness, here and now. And that other state of mind is exactly what public start feeling that something is different.”<sup>4</sup>

The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Marina Abramović, *The Artist Is Present* (performance, 3 months), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010

For the first two months of *The Artist Is Present*, Abramović could not do without the table in the middle between her and a member of the audience. She needed to have the table because it provided structure. And it stayed there until all of a sudden, she got to the point of no longer needing the table. Once this table was removed, she described, it was so much more direct. Commenting on this, Biesenbach says, “She makes herself so much more vulnerable. It’s so much more direct. There’s no obstacle between her and the audience. So she was right. Priest doesn’t need cross.” Describing this directness, Abramović states, “This feeling of beauty and unconditional love and this feeling of there is no kind of borders between your body and environment. And you start having this incredible feeling of lightness and harmony with yourself. It’s something become like a, like a holy. I can’t explain.”<sup>4</sup>

## **THE ARTIST IS ABSENT**

From her earliest conceptual and immaterial experiments to a mode of expression in which the artist herself is, generally, the epicenter, Marina Abramović now reconfigures her position as to become a silent partner in a dialogue or a catalyst for another's engagement—the spark that sets the engaged running. A shift that opens up the participant's choices and abilities to let go of lifelines and limitations, to turn inwards in order to open up outwardly. The work seems to be realized in precisely this process, when the individual becomes part of an endlessly faceted collective that together generates a force field of presences and energy—*like a cloud in the room*.<sup>8</sup>

“Seventy is physically, mentally, and emotionally a preparation for the last stage of your life,” Abramović reflects. “You don't know if it's going to be five, ten, thirty years, who knows? You have to be aware of this and prepare.” For Abramović, this preparation is in the form of stating that the public is her work. By removing herself, the public becomes the work. This idea she could not get before: everything that comes out of each performance experiences a natural flow. For Abramović, the idea reached revelation in the experience of *Generator* (2014), where she developed what she self-titles “The Abramović Method,” a culmination of all of which she has learned throughout her life. The purpose of the Method is to prepare the public to leave their busy life and enter into a concentrated state of mind. Witness the Abramović Method at work in the description of *512 Hours*, taking place in 2014 at the Serpentine Gallery in London:

During this exhibition, the artist would approach the public directly, with no mediation, instructions, or script. Visitors had to leave all their belonging behind and were invited to enter in silence. Inside the gallery they found themselves in an empty space where the work was yet to be created. In this space, the public engaged in simple exercises, such as a gazing at a white wall, lying on a bed, walking in slow motion, counting lentils and grains of rice, or standing on a platform. Each one of the activities helped visitors feel their own presence in the space; sooner or later, they developed enough sensitivity to perceive the collective energy. This work upset all preestablished expectations in an art gallery.<sup>6</sup>



**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Marina Abramović, *512 Hours* (performance, 20 hours), Serpentine Gallery, London

“Experimentally,” Abramović states, “you are thrown back into your other senses—touch and smell—so you realize that the artwork is nothing but this deeply sensuous experience, which *your* body produces. It’s a space of invention within constraints, and a complex sensual encounter in a void space with others. In a virtual way you are everywhere in that work, but also in practice you are nowhere.” Abramović describes audience members claiming that “Oh, I felt you touch me,” or, “You hugged me.” However, the artist affirms she was absolutely not there. In the Abramović Method, if the artist was there physically interacting with the audience, it would conversely alter the structure she is trying to create. This would make people pay attention to her: people would lose focus. So, in physicality, the artist is absent. Here, Abramović is trying to create systems to give the audience tools for themselves. They are not experiencing something because Abramović is there. The audience is the trigger. Marina Abramović concludes:

“For me, inner freedom is the most important thing. We are the prisoners of ourselves. We imprison ourselves in situations we can’t take ourselves out of, in habits, in repeated bad decisions, in things we think we are obligated to do but are not. Actually, you make all these decisions and you can also break them. So, to me retrospection—making theater pieces, memoirs, retrospective exhibitions, curating my own death—it’s a way to freedom.”<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The mindful immateriality of Marina Abramović's work lies in its existence only within the body. That is, the *doorway* to inner freedom which she seeks, that of which we all seek, can be found only within oneself. The *key* to opening this *door* comes in forms as boundless as Abramović's work. That is because the work is universal. By incidentally becoming one of the world's greatest and most important anthropologists through the pursuit of limitless art, Abramović has concluded a singular concept: *presence*. By being present in the moment, Here and Now, transformation can be achieved. Often in our interconnected age we lose sight of just how big our global society is: Seven continents. 194 countries. Seven and a half billion people. Words do not even begin to convey its vast nature. In her tiny boat afloat in this engulfing sea, Abramović has bridged east and west, north and south, left and right, up and down, front and back, top and bottom, yin and yang. In her *artist's life Manifesto* (2011), Marina Abramović imparts the public words to live by:

An artist should look deep inside themselves for inspiration  
The deeper they look inside themselves, the more universal they become  
The artist is universe  
The artist is universe  
The artist is universe



Portrait of the artist from the series *Places of Power*, 2015

## APPENDIX–PROJECT SUMMARY

Bryant University Honors Program  
**Raising Standards of Excellence and Scholarship**

### HONORS THESIS PROJECT SUMMARY

**Alex Chace**

*The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of  
Marina Abramović*

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Julie Volkman  
*Assistant Professor, Dept. of Communication*

**Editorial Reviewer:** Dr. Marie Saddlemire  
*Assistant Director, Academic Center for Excellence*

**Type of Thesis:** Creative project featuring a cross-content synthesis and immersive retrospective exhibition.

**Creative Originality:**

Inspired by “The Cleaner” at Palazzo Strozzi, the purpose of this creative project is to conduct a cross-content synthesis on Marina Abramović’s artistic journey through spiritual transcendence. The project features an immersive “film night” experience at the Interfaith Center including a retrospective exhibition and screening of *The Artist Is Present*.

**Methodology:**

The literature review component is sourced heavily from Marina Abramović’s retrospective *The Cleaner*. This compilation catalogue was produced in conjunction with Moderna Museet, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, and Bundeskunsthalle. Covering over five decades of Marina Abramović’s legendary works, the collection is accompanied by essays and curators’ insightful contributions. Supplied texts are access points to the art of Marina Abramović set against the backdrop of Balkan history and politics.

**Conclusion:**

Marina Abramović’s body of work explores questions about power and hierarchies, about art and existence. Its extensive nature encompasses painting, photography, film, objects, installations, and, most famously, performance art. The works are vessels for journey toward inner freedom from suffering. This is why the artist states: *Art is transformation of matter*. There is no “before” and “after.” What solely exists is the “timeless” situation, the energy field Here and Now.

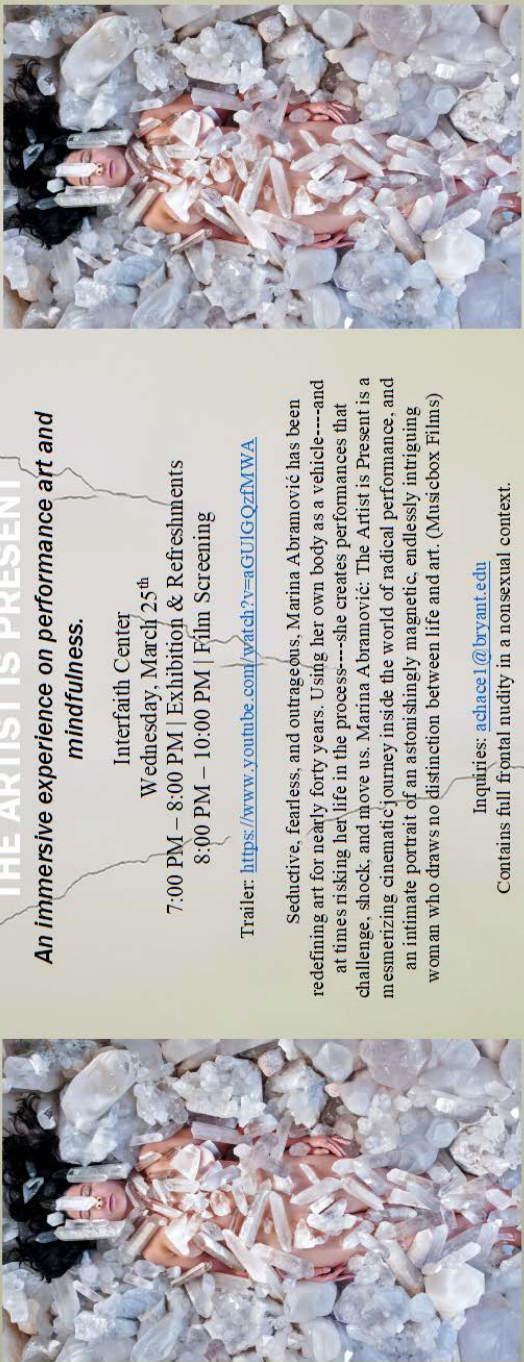
**Contribution:**

As Marina Abramović’s oeuvre lives on through reperformances and analysis in new constellations, this creative project contributes an academic reviewal and communal exploration of the artist’s function: to be conscious-raising.



## APPENDICES–EVENT

### EVENT DESCRIPTION



**MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**

**THE ARTIST IS PRESENT**

*An immersive experience on performance art and mindfulness.*

Interfaith Center  
Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>  
7:00 PM – 8:00 PM | Exhibition & Refreshments  
8:00 PM – 10:00 PM | Film Screening

Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGUJGzFMWA>

Seductive, fearless, and outrageous, Marina Abramović has been redefining art for nearly forty years. Using her own body as a vehicle---and at times risking her life in the process---she creates performances that challenge, shock, and move us. Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present is a mesmerizing cinematic journey inside the world of radical performance, and an intimate portrait of an astonishingly magnetic, endlessly intriguing woman who draws no distinction between life and art. (Musicbox Films)

Inquiries: [achace1@bryant.edu](mailto:achace1@bryant.edu)  
Contains full frontal nudity in a nonsexual context.

The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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EVENT POSTER



**MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
**THE ARTIST IS PRESENT**

**INTERFAITH CENTER**  
**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25TH**  
**7:00 PM - 8:00 PM | EXHIBITION &**  
**REFRESHMENTS**  
**8:00 PM - 10:00 PM | FILM**  
**SCREENING**

**AN IMMERSIVE**  
**EXPERIENCE ON**  
**PERFORMANCE ART &**  
**MINDFULNESS**

**INQUIRIES: [ACHACE1@BRYANT.EDU](mailto:ACHACE1@BRYANT.EDU)**  
**CONTAINS FULL FRONTAL NUDITY IN A NONSEXUAL CONTEXT**

The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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EXHIBITION PLAN-INTERFAITH CENTER

<p><b>Waterfall on</b></p> <p>Chapel</p> <p>Film Screening</p> <p><b>Walls closed (middle doors open)</b></p> <p><b>(2)</b></p> <p>Cocktail Table</p>	<p><b>(1)</b></p> <p>Video Installation</p> <p>Catering</p> <p><b>(5)</b></p> <p><b>(4)</b></p> <p>Print Installation</p>	<p>Description</p> <p><b>(3)</b></p> <p><b>(2)</b></p> <p><b>(1)</b></p>
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**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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EXHIBITION PLAN–INSTALLATIONS

Video Installations:

1. “Relation Works”
  - *Breathing In, Breathing Out* (1977)
  - *Imponderabilia* (1977)
  - *Expansion in Space* (1977)
  - *Relation in Movement* (1977)
  - *Relation in Time* (1977)
2. *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk* (1988)

Print Installations:

1. “Rhythm Series”
  - *Rhythm 10* (1973)
  - *Rhythm 5* (1974)
  - *Rhythm 0* (1974)
2. “Works with Ulay”
  - *Relation in Space* (1976)
  - *Light/Dark* (1977)
  - *AAA-AAA* (1978)
  - *Rest Energy* (1981)
  - *Nightsea Crossing* (1982-86)
3. *Balkan Baroque* (1997)
4. *The Hero* (2001)
5. *Transitory Objects for Human Use* (1989)
  - *Shoes for Departure* (1991)
  - *White Dragon, Red Dragon, Green Dragon* (1991)
  - *Black Dragon* (1994)
  - *Chair for Human Use III* (2015)
6. *The House with the Ocean View* (2008)

Sound Installation:

1. *Forest* (1971)
2. *War* (1972)

Film:

1. *The Artist Is Present* (2012)

The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

RHYTHM SERIES PRINT



*Rhythm 10* (performance, 1 hour), Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Villa Borghese, Rome, 1973



*Rhythm 5* (performance, 1.5 hours), Student Cultural Center, Belgrade, 1974



“ At that same show, something happened, quite spontaneously, that would turn me toward my future. One of the most talented guys in my group of six, Era, had created a piece for the exhibition by simply covering a big mirror in the gallery with transparent packing tape, subverting the normal use of a mirror by forcing visitors to see their reflected images in a distorted way. One day, in the late afternoon, I felt tired and lay down on a low table in the gallery. And suddenly, Era had an inspiration: he decided to wrap me with his tape. I went along with it, lying there, arms at my side, my whole body except for my head completely mummified. Some of the onlookers were fascinated; some, repelled. But nobody was bored. ”

Era Milivojević taping Marina to a bench at the Student Cultural Center, Belgrade, 1971



*Rhythm 0* (performance, 6 hours), Studio Morra, Naples, 1974



The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

WORKS WITH ULAY PRINT



Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Rest Energy* (based on the performance for video, 4 minutes), ROSC '80, Dublin, 1980



Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Relation in Space* (performance, 58 minutes), XXXVIII Biennale, Giudecca, Venice, 1976



Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Light/Dark* (performance, 20 minutes), Internationale Kunstmesse, Cologne, 1977



Ulay/Marina Abramović, *AAA-AAA* (performance for video, 13 minutes), RTB Television Studio, Liège, 1978



“ We were happy—so happy that it's hard to describe. I felt we were really the happiest people in the world. We had next to nothing, almost no money, and we were going wherever the wind blew us. The de Appel gallery had tacked up a shoebox next to their window to collect our mail. And once a week we would call them from a payphone, and they would open our letters and tell us where we'd been asked to perform next; then we would drive there. Some weeks nobody asked. That was our life. ”



The Citroën van Marina and Ulay lived in for five years during *Art Vital/Detour*, domestic life in the van with their dog Alba, 1977–78



Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Nightsea Crossing* (performance), Gallery of New South Wales, 1981

The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

BALKAN BAROQUE PRINT



*Balkan Baroque* (performance, three-channel video installation, 4 days and 6 hours), Venice, 1997



Video stills of my parents in *Balkan Baroque* (performance, 4 days, 6 hours), XLVII Biennale Venice, 1997



“ It was an indescribably gratifying award: I had put my whole soul into this piece. In my acceptance speech, I said, “I’m only interested in an art which can change the ideology of society....Art which is only committed to aesthetic values is incomplete.”

During the ceremony, the Montenegro minister of culture was sitting two rows behind me and never got up to congratulate me.

Afterward, the new curator from the Yugoslav pavilion (where they’d replaced me with a landscape painter) came up to me and invited me to their reception. “You have a very big heart and you will forgive,” he said. ”



Video stills from *Balkan Baroque* (performance, 4 days, 6 hours), Venice, 1997

Marina after receiving the Golden Lion for best artist at the 1997 Venice Biennale for her performance *Balkan Baroque*

The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

THE HERO PRINT



*The Hero*, silver gelatin print, 2001/2008



Vojo on liberation day, Belgrade, 1944

My father kneeling next to Tito during an annual partisan meeting, Belgrade, 1965



“ My mother, Danica, and my father, Vojin—known as Vojo—had a great romance during World War II. An amazing story—she was beautiful, he was handsome, and each saved the other’s life. My mother was a major in the army, and she commanded a squad on the front lines that was responsible for finding wounded partisans and bringing them to safety. But once during a German advance she came down with typhus, and was lying unconscious among the badly wounded, with a high fever and completely covered by a blanket.

She could have easily died there if my father hadn’t been such a lover of women. But when he saw her long hair sticking out from under the blanket, he simply had to lift it to take a look. And when he saw how beautiful she was, he carried her to safety in a nearby village, where the peasants nursed her back to health.

Six months later, she was back on the front lines, helping to bring injured soldiers back to the hospital. There she instantly recognized one of the badly wounded as the man who had rescued her. My father was just lying there, bleeding to death—there was no blood available for transfusions. But my mother discovered that she had the same blood type, and gave him her blood and saved his life. ”

Marina’s parents, Danica and Vojin Abramović, 1949



“ Right here, standing at your open grave, I wish to mention just a single event from the many of your life. Belgrade was being liberated for seven days, and there were fights for every street, every building. You were in a truck with five nurses, a driver, and forty-five badly wounded partisans. You were driving through gunfire, through Belgrade, towards Dedinje, which was already free, so as to take the wounded to hospital. The truck is shot full of holes, the driver is killed, and the truck is burning. You, chief nurse of the First Proletariat Brigade, jump off the truck, together with the five

nurses, and with incredible strength pull all forty-five wounded from the burning truck and lay them onto the pavement, another truck to be sent. The hell of war is burning around you. Another truck is coming. The six of you are getting the wounded in, and four nurses are killed in the process, their bodies filled with bullets flying around them. You and the remaining nurse manage to load all the wounded in the new truck, and break through to the hospital so forty-five lives get saved. Your medal of honor remains a confirmation to this story. ”

My mother during the visit of the Bulgarian delegation, Belgrade, 1966

The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

TRANSITORY OBJECTS PRINT



*Black Dragon*, site-specific project, rose quartz,  
 Tachikawa Monument, Tokyo, 1994



*Shoes for Departure*, hewed amethyst, Stedelijk  
 Museum, Amsterdam, 1991

“ I went to see the house. Actually it was two houses: the one in back was seventeenth century; the one in front, eighteenth century. Both had six floors and the two buildings were connected by a courtyard; the interior space was 1,150 square meters.

The place was a squat—thirty-five heroin addicts were living there. The chaos was palpable. It smelled like dog shit, cat shit, piss. A bunch of totally stoned guys were throwing knives at the seventeenth-century carved-wood door. One floor was literally burned—it was nothing but charred floorboards with a toilet sitting in the middle. This place looked terrible. But underneath it all, it was beautiful, with elegant stucco work and marble fireplaces. I had a vision. ”

The house that changed Marina's life, Amsterdam, 1991



*Chair for Human Use III*,  
 quartz and wood, Galleri  
 Brandstrup, Oslo, 2015



*White Dragon, Red Dragon, Green Dragon*, from the series *Transitory Objects for Human Use*, oxidized copper, black obsidian, rose quartz, 1989 installation, Victoria Miro Gallery, London, 1991



The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of **MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

THE HOUSE WITH THE OCEAN VIEW PRINT



*The House with the Ocean View* (performance, 12 days), New York, 2002



**An Artist's Life Manifesto**

**AN ARTIST'S CONDUCT IN HIS LIFE:**

*An artist should not lie to himself or others  
An artist should not steal ideas from other artists  
An artist should not compromise for themselves or in regards to the art market  
An artist should not kill other human beings  
An artist should not make themselves into an idol  
An artist should not make themselves into an idol  
An artist should not make themselves into an idol*

**AN ARTIST'S RELATION TO SILENCE:**

*An artist has to understand silence  
An artist has to create a space for silence to enter his work  
Silence is like an island in the middle of a turbulent ocean  
Silence is like an island in the middle of a turbulent ocean  
Silence is like an island in the middle of a turbulent ocean*

**AN ARTIST'S RELATION TO SOLITUDE:**

*An artist must make time for the long periods of solitude  
Solitude is extremely important  
Away from home  
Away from the studio  
Away from family  
Away from friends  
An artist should stay for long periods of time at waterfalls  
An artist should stay for long periods of time at exploding volcanoes  
An artist should stay for long periods of time looking at the fast running rivers  
An artist should stay for long periods of time looking at the horizon where the ocean and sky meet  
An artist should stay for long periods of time looking at the stars in the night sky*

**DIFFERENT DEATH SCENARIOS:**

*An artist has to be aware of his own mortality  
For an artist, it is not only important how he lives his life but also how he dies  
An artist should look at the symbols of his work for the signs of different death scenarios  
An artist should die consciously without fear  
An artist should die consciously without fear  
An artist should die consciously without fear*

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- <sup>8</sup>Essling, L. (2017), “The Cloud in the Room”. *The Cleaner*. Hatje Cantz.
- <sup>9</sup>Zuber, D. (2017), “Luminosity in the North: Locating the Spiritual in Marina Abramović’s Art” *The Cleaner*. Hatje Cantz.
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**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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WORKS

Marina Abramović, *Truck Accident I & II* (paintings), Belgrade, 1963

Marina Abramović, *The Tree* (sound environment), Studentski Kulturni Centar, Belgrade, 1971

Marina Abramović, *War* (sound environment), Muzej Savremene Umetnosti, 1972

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 10* (performance, 1 hour), Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Villa Borghese, Rome, 1973

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0* (performance, 6 hours), Studio Morra, Naples, 1974

Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 5* (performance, 1.5 hours), Studentski Kulturni Centar, Belgrade, 1974

Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Relation in Space* (performance, 58 minutes), XXXVIII Biennale, Giudecca, Venice, 1976

Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Breathing in/Breathing out* (performance, 19 minutes), Studentski Kulturni Centar, Belgrade, 1977

Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Imponderabilia* (performance, 90 minutes), Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, 1977

Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Expansion in Space* (performance, 32 minutes), documenta 6, Kassel, 1977

Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Relation in Movement* (performance, 16 hours), 10th Biennale de Paris, Musee d'art modern de la ville de Paris, Paris, 1977

Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Relation in Time* (performance, 17 hours), Studio G7, Bologna, 1977

Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Light/Dark* (performance, 20 minutes), Internationale Kunstmesse, Cologne, 1977

**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Ulay/Marina Abramović, *AAA-AAA* (performance for video, 13 minutes), RTB Television Studio, Liège, 1978

Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Rest Energy* (based on the performance for video, 4 minutes), ROSC '80, Dublin, 1980

Ulay/Marina Abramović, *Nightsea Crossing* (performance), Gallery of New South Wales, 1981

Marina Abramović/Ulay, *The Great Wall Walk* (performance, 90 days), The Great Wall of China, 1988

Marina Abramović, *Shoes for Departure*, hewed amethyst, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1991

Marina Abramović, *White Dragon, Red Dragon, Green Dragon*, from the series *Transitory Objects for Human Use*, oxidized copper, black obsidian, rose quartz, 1989 installation, Victoria Miro Gallery, London, 1991

Marina Abramović, *Black Dragon*, site-specific project, rose quartz, Tachikawa Monument, Tokyo, 1994

Marina Abramović, *Balkan Baroque* (performance, three-channel video installation, 4 days and 6 hours), Venice Biennale, 1997

Marina Abramović, *The Hero*, silver gelatin print, 2001/2008

Marina Abramović, *The House with the Ocean View* (performance, 12 days), New York, 2002

Marina Abramović, *Entering the Other Side* (performance, 7 hours), Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2005

Marina Abramović, *The Artist Is Present* (performance, 3 months), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010



**The Intersectionality of Mindfulness and Art of MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ**  
*Honors Thesis for Alex Chace*

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Marina Abramović, *an artist's life Manifesto*, 2011

Marina Abramović, *512 Hours* (performance, 20 hours), Serpentine Gallery, London, 2014

Marina Abramović, *Chair for Human Use III*, quartz and wood, Galleri Brandstrup, Oslo,  
2015

Marina Abramović, *Counting the Rice exercise for public participation* from a series of  
workshop entitled "*Cleaning the House*," 2015