

"Artist Marina Abramovic's body of work," *CBS News*, November 30, 2014.



## Artist Marina Abramovic's body of work



*Art Review* magazine's new list of the 100 most powerful people in the contemporary art world pegs Marina Abramovic as Number 5. She's created quite the body of work, as Serena Altschul is about to show us:

Marina Abramovic is not known for painting canvases or shaping clay. She's a performance artist, and for 40 years, she's been making art with her own body.

In 2010, she staged her most famous performance to date, "The Artist Is Present." Abramovic sat silently in a chair at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, for three months, and people gazed into her eyes.

Altschul asked, "Tell me about what happens when you're sitting across from someone."

"You open the soul, because that is everything there," she replied.

Some of the 750,000 souls who heeded her call seemed hypnotized. Some wept. As for Abramovic, sitting still for hours at a time caused pain in her hands, legs, and her spine.



From the documentary "Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present."

"If you're doing pain and understanding that you can control the pain, and you can liberate yourself from the pain, then pain is OK," she said.

But you might say that pain is Marina Abramovic's medium. And her message? Deal with it.

Back in 1973, she rhythmically jabbed the spaces between her fingers, at times drawing blood.

Shocking stuff, but to hear the art world tell it, serious, important work that breaks boundaries.

"I mean, it's greatness -- that's it, simply," said Sean Kelly, the first gallery owner to represent her work internationally. "I think that Marina's profound ability to touch people comes from the fact that she never felt she was loved enough."

Abramovic was born in 1946 in Belgrade (then the capital of Yugoslavia). Her parents argued violently with each other, and Abramovic says her mother beat her.

"The worst childhood you have, the better artist you become, because you have things to work with," she said. "Just the fact that my mother never kissed me. It was such a huge, painful thing in my life, and damaged me so much."

"Were you wilder as a young woman, as a teenager?" asked Altschul.

"I was black sheep, completely all my life," she said. "I was absolutely rebel. I had to be rebel. I have to rebel everything and everybody to create my own space."

It was a space, says Abramovic, that was hers and hers alone.

"When I was starting the performance art, it was nobody territory. Everybody was thinking, 'Is ridiculous. That's not art in the first place.' So it took me all my life. For years, people ask: 'Why is this art?'"

She says that stopped after the MOMA show.

Because she is known as someone with remarkable mind control, neuroscientists recently brought her to an historic soundproof chamber at Bell Labs in New Jersey.

"So here we are doing experiments, basically experiments with my brain," said Abramovic.

Suzanne Decker explained: "We are measuring the differences in her brain as she is changing her mental state" -- to watch her brainwaves as she makes sounds.

Being the subject of experiments, putting one's body through years of painful performances, and planning new shows can take a toll on an artist.

Since 2007, she's come to a star-shaped house in upstate New York to re-charge. She calls the place "my paradise."

Abramovic was married twice, and for 12 years she lived and worked with another performance artist, a West German known as Ulay. But today, she is here alone.

Her archives are here, and there are 26 acres of meadows and orchards.

"You know, we can learn from nature," she said. "Nature's a very big teacher, which we forgot."

Her favorite tree is here. "Everybody have to find his own tree, you know?" she said, hugging hers.



Marina Abramovic with Serna Altschul. **CBS NEWS**

There is a hut where she meditates, which is just what Lady Gaga did when she came here last year to study Abramovic's meditation techniques: "She's a good student. She doesn't cheat. She go all the way."

Abramovic's current show goes all the way to nearly nothingness. At the empty Sean Kelly Gallery, there is no art on the walls, absolutely nothing to sell. She asks the audience to put on noise-cancelling headphones, wear a blindfold, and make the performance themselves.

"I care about ideas I'm afraid of," Abramovic said. "I care about ideas that are terribly disturbing, that I say, 'Oh my God, how I can do that?' That's the idea I want."



Visitors to the exhibition, "Marina Abramovic: Generator." **SEAN KELLY GALLERY/TUMBLR**

Her next idea is to raise funds to build an institute in upstate New York to present and preserve performance art. And recently, she thanked hundreds of her donors with hugs.

"I hugged 600 people that day," she said. "From the morning 'til the late evening, I stayed there and hugged every single person. And it was very moving moment, very moving."

So today, the little girl who never felt enough love gets more than most people could handle.

For more info:

Marina Abramovic Institute ([immaterial.org](http://immaterial.org))

"Marina Abramovic: Generator" - Installation at Sean Kelly, New York (through December 6)

"Generator" by Marina Abramovic (Tumblr)

Follow the Marina Abramovic Institute on Twitter (@hudsonmai), Facebook and Instagram

"Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present" (Music Box Films) is available on Blu-ray/DVD and on VOD/Streaming via Amazon, GooglePlay, iTunes, Netflix and Vudu

Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present (2010 MOMA exhibit page); Exhibition catalogue