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Brown, Mark. "Marina Abramović's naked living doorway to be recreated at RA."
The Guardian. September 3, 2019.

The Guardian



Marina Abramović's Imponderabilia at the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn, Germany, in 2018. Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy Stock Photo

The Royal Academy of Arts is to recruit young men and women to stand naked in a doorway facing each other while total strangers squeeze through an uncomfortably narrow space between them.

Will exhibition visitors breathe in and face the naked man, or the naked woman? Will they make eye contact? Will they avoid the experience altogether?

The RA on Tuesday gave details of a work which resulted in the police being called when it was first performed by the artist Marina Abramović and her then partner, Ulay, in Bologna in 1977.

That scenario is unlikely in 2020, although similar levels of audience apprehension are on the cards.

"When it was first performed some people just stood back ... they couldn't quite handle it and weren't entirely sure of what they were seeing," said the RA show's curator, Andrea Tarsia. "Some went through. Some fairly charged through. A few went through a number of times, actually."

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The performance, called *Imponderabilia*, will be one of a number of pieces recreated for a retrospective of Abramović's work to take place across the RA's main galleries in autumn 2020.

In Bologna, the work was positioned at the entrance of the gallery as a living door. In London – the first time it has been performed in the UK – it is likely to be between two adjoining gallery rooms with space for people to go round if they choose.

Abramović will oversee workshops at which the young performers will be selected and prepared for what promises to be an unusual addition to anyone's CV.

Tarsia said the work was a simple gesture which "proposed a confrontation with nakedness, with gender, with sexuality, with desire".

The Belgrade-born Abramović is an art world superstar, a pioneer of performance who has been using her own body, testing the limits of her physical and mental endurance, for more than four decades.

The London show will include photographs, video, objects, installations and recreations showing more than 50 works across her career.

One work, *Rhythm 5*, which she performed at the beginning of her career in what was then Yugoslavia, involved her making a large star with wood shavings soaked in petrol. She cut her hair and nails and threw them in the fire before lying down in the middle of it until she passed out because of the fumes. The performance ended when she was rescued.



Abramović participates in her 1974 artwork Rhythm 5. Photograph: The Marina Abramović Archives and Sean Kelly, New York

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Another highlight will be *The Lovers*, created by Abramović and Ulay to mark their separation in 1988. They walked for 90 days from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China, meeting in the middle where they ceremoniously parted ways.

Abramović, 72, will be in London for the duration of the show, although in what way remains to be seen. For her retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010 she simply, and astonishingly, sat on a wooden chair for seven hours a day, six days a week. For her 2014 show at the Serpentine Gallery in London she was a hologram.

The RA's artistic director, Tim Marlow, said Abramović could not be expected to be in the galleries for the duration.

"Her concern at the moment is as much looking forward to the legacy of how performance art can exist when the performer is no longer around," he said. "Her main concern is how her own work will be reperformed, as theatre is, as music is, in the future.

"Never say never with Marina, but one thing she won't be doing, because we won't let her ... she won't be in the galleries for 80 days. Will she be in the galleries doing something? Almost certainly."

By the time it opens Abramović will have worked with the RA for four years preparing for the exhibition. She follows living artists including David Hockney, Anish Kapoor and, later this month, Antony Gormley in being given all of the RA's main gallery space, and is the first woman.

Details of the Abramović show were revealed as the RA announced its exhibition programme for 2020.

In the main galleries from January will be what promises to be the most comprehensive show devoted to Pablo Picasso's use of paper ever held.

Other shows in the smaller galleries include ones devoted to the 18th-century history painter Angelica Kauffman, one of the RA's founding members; the early 20th-century Flemish artist Léon Spilliaert; and one of New Zealand's most important 20th-century artists, Rita Angus. In November 2020 the RA will present an exhibition of works by Tracey Emin and Edvard Munch, an artist with whom Emin said she had been in love since she was 18.