

Naomi Even-Aberle

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KHAN Academy Marina Abramović, *The Artist is Present* Essay by Rebecca Taylor
Modern and Contemporary Art, 1945-1989 videos *What is Performance?*, and
Body and Medium by The Museum of Modern Art.

You enter a gallery and are immediately confronted by a tremendous line of visitors. Assembled around an open square of light, sits two chairs, a table, and a tall dark haired woman completely covered by thick rolls of fabric. Only her face and hands are displayed. Directions on a plaque invite audience members to silently sit in the chair across from the woman. To be present in the moment.

That woman was Marina Abramović, and her piece described above, *The Artist is Present*, was a new performance presented during her retrospective show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010. Abramović's newest performance cements the use of body as a medium and calls into question the reliance of intense and intimate relationships between the performer and the audience, demonstrating that the immaterial and intangible moments within performance are the moments in which artists must engage.

At the age of 63, Abramović tackled her longest-duration solo work of her career, *The Artist is Present*, and it was by far the most physically and emotionally demanding work that she had ever attempted. For three months, Abramović would sit in her chair for 8 hours a day with no food, no water and no breaks. By being physically present with every visitor for every day, every hour, every minute and every second, Abramović presented the spectacle of a celebrity status.

Abramović believes that performance is the moment when the performer, with her own ideas, steps into her own mental, physical, and emotional construction in front of an audience. This working definition is shown exquisitely through her newest performance. She is physically present in the chair (i.e. she takes up space), but is also socially present as a celebrity artist, inviting audience members to share in her celebrity status as they sit in front of her. The exchange is immaterial and is only quantified by the waiting audience members and the presence of social media representation. That is precisely why the artist and audience must be present. This exchange could not be replicated in the studio, or by one's self, and thus the performance must exist to coax out this spectacle.

Abramović does just that, creates a spectacle where her body is the vessel through which we experience the art. By placing her body in a

masochistic position, she is forcing herself to be perceived as special. Furthermore by inviting the audience to observe the durational performance, and inviting members to share the spotlight with her, she is the authority, the celebrity.