In a unique work created for the Serpentine, the internationally acclaimed artist Marina Abramović will perform in the Gallery for the duration of her exhibition: 10am to 6pm, 6 days a week – for a total of 512 hours. Creating the simplest of environments in the Gallery spaces, Abramović’s only materials will be herself, the audience and a selection of common objects that she will use in a constantly changing sequence of events.
On arrival, visitors will leave their baggage behind in order to enter the exhibition: mobile phones, cameras and any other electronic equipment may not accompany them.

Marina Abramović (b. 1946) is a pioneer of performance as an art form, using her own body as subject and object, she has consistently pushed the physical and mental limits of her being. 512 Hours is the first major performance by Abramović since her monumental piece The Artist is Present, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2010, in which visitors were invited to sit in silence opposite the artist and gaze into her eyes for an unspecified amount of time. Abramović performed this work every day for three months.

Julia Peyton-Jones, Director, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Co-Director, Serpentine Galleries, have said:

“Incredibly, this is the first time a public art gallery in the UK has staged a durational performance by Marina Abramović who, since the early 1970s, has done more than anybody to define what performance art is. With a simplicity that harks back to her earliest solo performances, this time there are no rules. There is no formula. Just the artist, the audience and a few, simple props in the empty, white space of the Serpentine Gallery. Marina requests your presence at the Serpentine this Summer. And so do we.”

Marina Abramović: 512 Hours. Serpentine Diaries
Co-commissioned by The Space
Broadcast at midnight from Tuesday to Sunday (13 June - 25 August) on www.thespace.org; www.serpentinegalleries.org; www.illy.com; www.mai-hudson.org
Marina Abramović will record an account of her day, every evening throughout the duration of her performance of 512 Hours. The Serpentine Diaries will trace the fluctuations and developments of her performance piece, which begins with an empty space and unlimited possibilities.

The exhibition by Ed Atkins takes place concurrently at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, bringing together two extraordinary artists from different generations who focus on performance, the body and language.

The Serpentine Galleries summer programme, including both exhibitions and the Serpentine Galleries Pavilion 2014 have been generously supported by the Lars Windhorst Foundation, a leading supporter across the entire summer season at the Serpentine.

Notes to Editors:
In the early 1970s, as a young artist in Belgrade, Abramović began exploring the relationship between artist and audience. Since 1978 she has conducted a series of workshops with art students, using a series of simple exercises to increase physical and mental awareness. Over the course of her career, Abramović has continued to develop these workshops, expanding their content and scope. In the future, the Marina Abramović Institute will facilitate these experiences to the general public, within its broader mission of being a platform for immaterial art and long durational work.

Marina Abramović was born in 1946 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Abramović remained in Eastern Europe until 1976, when she met the German artist Ulay. The two lived and worked together, travelling and exhibiting throughout Western Europe, the United States, Australia and Asia. In 1989 Abramović returned to her solo career in Amsterdam. Since 2001 she has been based in
New York City. Her pioneering works of performance art have made her the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions worldwide at institutions including Kunsthalle, Vienna (2012); the Garage Centre for Contemporary Culture, Moscow (2011); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2005). Abramović’s work was also included in Documenta VI, VII and IX (1977, 1982 and 1992); Venice Biennale 1976 and 1997, with the exhibition of *Balkan Baroque* earning her the Golden Lion Award for Best Artist.

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Serpentine Sackler Gallery, West Carriage Drive, Kensington Gardens, London, W2 2AR

Entry to all exhibitions at the Serpentine Galleries is free on a first come, first served basis according to capacity.

Image credit:
Marina Abramović
Photograph © 2014 by Marco Anelli
Visitor information

Marina Abramović: 512 Hours

- The exhibition is free of charge.
- The exhibition is only for ages 12 and over.
- You are invited to stay as long as you wish in the exhibition.
- You will be required to leave all bags, coats and electronic items in the lockers (including cameras, recording devices and mobile phones).
- Due to limited capacity, you may need to queue.
- You may leave whenever you choose.
- By entering the exhibition spaces you confirm that you agree to being filmed and photographed.
- The exhibition is wheelchair accessible.
- Those who leave the exhibition are not permitted to re-enter automatically and will need to queue.
The Serpentine Galleries is honoured to host a major performance by internationally acclaimed performance artist Marina Abramović. The invitation to hold an exhibition at the Serpentine has been long-standing, sparking an ongoing dialogue that resulted in Abramović’s participation in the Experiment Marathon (2007), where she performed Cleaning the House, one of her methods for preparing to undergo a long-durational work; Manifesto Marathon (2008), in which she presented her Artist’s Life manifesto; and Map Marathon (2010), an examination of the human body map. Marina Abramović: 512 Hours marks a new phase in this ‘infinite conversation’—to quote Maurice Blanchot—between the artist and ourselves.

Born in 1946 in Belgrade, Abramović began exploring the relationship between artist and audience in the early 1970s, becoming a pioneer of performance as an art form. She uses her own body as subject and object, pushing her physical and mental limits through long-durational performance works. The Serpentine Gallery will become the home of Abramović’s unique durational performance piece, 512 Hours, for the entire length of the exhibition, from opening to closing, six days a week. Creating the simplest of environments in the gallery space, Abramović’s only materials will be herself, the audience, and a selection of props that she may or may not use. The relationship between art and ‘nothingness’ is historically well established; visual artists including Robert Barry, John Cage, Mary Ellen Carroll, Robert Irwin, Yves Klein, Gustav Metzger and Yoko Ono (to name only a very few) have all explored the notion of material absence within their practice. The idea of
emptiness – of minimalism, reduction and simplicity – plays an intrinsic role in Abramović’s own work, and has increasingly led to ‘more and more of less and less’, a longstanding aim that she recorded in her Artist’s Life manifesto of 2009. It is this journey towards immateriality that has led her to this unique moment in her work, where she will commit to an unscripted and improvised performance in the gallery space.

The presence of the visitors will guide Abramović, assisting in the development and changing nature of the exhibition throughout her residency. As she states: ‘It is not … enough that I’m experiencing doing a performance in front of you and you are just passing as witness. If you really want to have your own experience, the only thing that matters is to … perform yourself.’1 As an extension of this statement, Abramović requires the audience to involve themselves directly and intimately in the performance; the public will become the performing body, participating in the delivery of an unforgettable moment in the history of performance art.

Abramović has often called upon the public to form a vital element or catalyst for her work, in such performances as Rhythm 0 (1974) and Imponderabilia (1997). In Rhythm 0, performed over six hours, she permitted the public to interact directly and physically with her body. Laid on a table were seventy-five objects such as grooming tools, food and weapons, with which the audience could manipulate her body in any way they chose. The performance Imponderabilia, which was stopped by the police, consisted of Abramović and her collaborator Ulay standing naked, facing each other at the public entrance to the gallery.2 To enter, the audience had to walk closely between their bodies, becoming the dynamic element that activated the performance. More recently, in the exhibition that Abramović curated at the Whitworth Art Gallery for the 2009 Manchester International Festival, she walked the audience through a set of exercises before they were allowed to view the rest of the show. This process was designed to empty and focus viewers’ minds, preparing them for an encounter with the artworks. Abramović’s method of working, which will be employed during her time at the Serpentine, focuses on the importance of rituals, systems and rules. Everyday experiences such as lying, sitting, sleeping, standing, thinking or dreaming, can become transformative acts.

Abramović’s last major durational performance piece was staged during her retrospective exhibition The Artist is Present at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, 2010. As part of the exhibition, the public was invited to sit across from the artist and partake in ‘mutual gazing’ for as long as they wished to remain. 512 Hours continues from this important work and extends beyond it by experimenting with a set of props and exercises to create a new and unpredictable environment. Abramović has cited the influence of fellow Serbian and noted inventor Nikola Tesla (1856–1943), whose scientific experiments took place as public demonstrations. This understanding of experimentation, as both investigative and participatory, is fundamental to 512 Hours, marking an ambitious moment in the Serpentine’s exhibition history.
Through the self-referential nature of the performance at the Serpentine, and the presence of an audience as the work’s impetus, this exhibition stands to represent the history of Abramović’s practice—her archive. When discussing the afterlife of a performance, Abramović understands the importance of the audience as witness and participant. The work lives in the audience’s memory and they communicate their experience to others. As she says: ‘That’s how a performance really survives, in a narrative way, from word of mouth, because there is no other way. It is the most interesting form of art because it’s so fresh every time, and changes the forms. It is like a phoenix; it always gets burned and reborn from its own ashes.’ This notion of the work’s survival, which links to the role of this performance as a representation of the artist’s archive, is not only apparent within the performance itself but also within this catalogue. Answering the question ‘How does performance survive?’, this publication brings together material from the artist’s private archive: images, texts, diaries and other ephemera that act as points of contact for Abramović’s oeuvre. Through diary entries and photographs, this book also tracks Abramović’s journey through Brazil, the place in which she found refuge after _The Artist is Present_. Her experience in Brazil marked a transformative time in her thinking and planning for the exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery.

We are extremely grateful to Abramović for her extraordinary commitment and dedication to the project, as well as for the performance itself, and we are particularly thankful for the limited edition that she has produced to accompany the exhibition. We also thank the wonderful Lynsey Peisinger for collaborating with Abramović for the duration of this challenging performance. The project would not have been possible without Abramović’s zealous team: Sidney Russell, Giuliano Argenziano and Allison Brainard, and indeed everyone at the Marina Abramović Institute who were integral to the development and production of this exhibition. We would also like to extend our thanks to the Serpentine’s Gallery Assistants who have played a vital role in the realisation of this exhibition.

We are indebted to the Lars Windhorst Foundation for their incredible level of support towards the Serpentine’s programme, their commitment has been fundamental in the realisation of _512 Hours_. We would also like to extend our deepest thanks to Chrome Hearts, Gareth Pugh, and illy for generously supporting the exhibition. _512 Hours_ would not have been possible without the Marina Abramović Exhibition Circle — Lisson Gallery; Sean and Mary Kelly; Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna; Natascha Jakobs-Linssen, All Arts Initiatives; Lia Rumma Gallery, Milano/Napoli, and Lynne Sable, together with support from Givenchy and Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para el Arte. Arts Council England provides an essential contribution towards all of the Serpentine’s work, for which we are hugely grateful. We would also like to thank Max Brun and Teresa Antonioni for their dedication in recording and capturing the exhibition in its entirety.

Finally, we would like to thank the team at the Serpentine Galleries — Jochen Volz, Head of Programmes; the curator of
this exhibition, Sophie O’Brien, Senior Exhibitions Curator; Emma Enderby, Assistant Curator; Mike Gaughan, Gallery Manager; Jessie Bond, Exhibitions Volunteer, who worked closely with the wider team to realise this project. We are very grateful to them.

— Julia Peyton-Jones
Director, Serpentine Galleries and Co-director, Exhibitions and Programmes

— Hans Ulrich Obrist
Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes & Director of International Projects

2. Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen) and Abramović performed together between 1976 and 1988.
A RESONANT EMPTINESS
May 2014

Sophie O’Brien
The process has always been more important than the result, the performance more important than the object.¹
— Marina Abramović

In the state of imminence before a live performance, we wait patiently amidst the residues of the past, inhabiting this present moment of anticipation and conjuring up an imagined future. In the case of Marina Abramović’s new exhibition for the Serpentine Gallery, 512 Hours, we are here, prior to the work commencing, frozen in the moment before an important event: the realisation of a long-anticipated work, and one for which there will be no script or plan. Preparation by the artist consists of a life’s work, and included in this book are images of her well-preserved archive that maps some of this history, alongside journal extracts from her recent travel in Brazil, which was an important part of Abramović’s development of the London exhibition. Here, as in her performance work, her life and private sphere fold transparently into her artistic practice.

Abramović began working as an artist in the 1970s in Belgrade, and has spent over thirty years travelling the world, studying ancient and contemporary thinking. In this time she has developed an unsurpassed body of performance work and has explored her own physical and emotional limits uncompromisingly. Her trajectory is one that mirrors the achievements of performance art as a whole, while playing an integral role in this history. During that time, she has consciously moved towards a practice that rests between life and art, introducing an ethical dimension to her work whereby each performance, object or activity might have a use beyond the art world.
The beginning of everything is nothing. — Marina Abramović

In describing her starting point for the exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, Abramović has proposed that ‘from nothing, something may or may not happen’. This simple statement encapsulates her desire to strip away all the elements of the exhibition (objects, furniture, lighting etc) and work directly with the audience. The public, the artist, her performance collaborator Lynsey Peisinger and the gallery team will be the material of the show, with the ‘current’ in the room — the energy generated by this encounter — the matter to which the artist will respond, be witness, and direct. Unlike all her previous performances, this work will be to some extent improvisational — a constantly changing piece that will grow and develop every day. In describing the lack of material substance in the space, Abramović refers to the Sanskrit and Tibetan explanations of emptiness, termed ‘suchness’: ‘Suchness is emptiness, but it is full emptiness. It’s a contradiction in terms, and in scientific terms it’s a vacuum. So I will be starting with this vacuum — this full emptiness — where all of the elements are present but they are not yet manifested.’ In order to create this space of encounter, visitors are required to enter in silence, and leave behind their bags, mobile phones, mp3 players, cameras and all recording devices before entering. Free from the obligations and habits of social media and documentation, visitors will also be free from the now normalised state of electronic connectedness and heightened public self-awareness that technology brings. With these basic rules, the public will be invited into a space of simplicity, a charged space where the work is yet to be created with them.

Abramović has for many years spoken of her desire to make a project where there was nothing but herself and the audience. Scholar and critic Thomas McEvilley, writing in the catalogue accompanying Abramović’s project The House With the Ocean View, noted that:

… some years ago (Abramović) said to me that she wanted to do a kind of performance that didn’t involve any mediation; there would be no objects, such as artworks or props, nor anything else, such as words or ideologies or a scenario, to get between her and her ‘viewers’. Instead the viewers would be invited to enter into an ‘energy relationship’ with her, which would have no external visual exponent. I asked her how this might transpire. What would you do, without sets and scenarios, when you walked into the space and there was the audience? In 512 Hours, the artist may finally be presenting her answer to this question.

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It took me twenty-five years to have the courage, the concentration and the knowledge to come to this. It was just a vision, the idea that there would be art without any object, solely between performer and public … I needed all of the preparation, I needed all the works that came before; they were leading to this point. And somehow this really becomes the test. — Marina Abramović
Abramović’s commitment to duration, ephemerality and human exchange and interrelationship has been inherent in her practice since the beginning. Connections between previous projects and 512 Hours are numerous — for example, in Freeing the Voice, Freeing the Memory, Freeing the Body (1975), the artist’s commitment to a single action that will in some way elicit transformation in the performer (or a new freedom) is evident — but several speak more strongly than others as endeavours that had to be realised in order for her to undertake this new work.

There is a clear arc of development throughout Abramović’s work with regards to the audience: a turn from self-containment to complete engagement, from an aversion to looking directly at viewers to a completely mutual gaze. In Rhythm 0 (1974), the viewers were invited to use any of a selection of seventy-two objects on the artist’s body, as they desired. This submission to the public’s will reflected a different relationship to the audience — one where the threat of mob behaviour and violence was implicit, but where this was entirely intentional. A much later work, The House with the Ocean View (2002) — where Abramović built three ‘rooms’ on the walls of the gallery, and where she lived for twelve days without food — invited the audience into the private space of the artist. Here, although silent, she welcomed new visitors with her gaze, making eye contact for extended periods, and sometimes mirroring her viewers’ postures (something to which she was to return in The Artist Is Present in 2010). In The Future of Performance Art (2009), Abramović led a large group of visitors through a training programme to prepare them for seeing the work of younger
performance artists. It was participation through instruction, with the artist guiding and explaining techniques, including mutual eye gazing. This generous gift to the younger generation of artists — not only presenting their work, but also teaching the audience how to prepare as viewers — reflects Abramović’s relationship to other artists and her belief in the importance of performance as an area to be valued and recorded. For her large-scale retrospective exhibition, *The Artist Is Present*, she performed a new piece, set against other re-performances of her work by younger artists. This entailed sitting still and silent in a chair, in a clearly demarcated space during the opening hours of the museum, inviting visitors to sit opposite her and look into her eyes for as long as they wanted.

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(In 1980) Ulay and me went into nature and we spent time in the desert. The tableaux vivants came from this time … it’s life but without moving.  
— Marina Abramović

Two other works form touchstones for *512 Hours*. The first, *Nightsea Crossing*, was a series started in Australia in 1981 by Abramovic and Ulay, with whom she worked from 1976 to 1988.

*Nightsea Crossing:*

*Presence.*

*Being present, over long stretches of time,*

*Until presence rises and falls, from*
Material to immaterial, from  
Form to formless, from  
Instrumental to mental, from  
Time to timeless.  

This work required enormous endurance from both performers: Abramović and Ulay sat opposite each other across a large circular table, gazing at one another for a series of days. Both fasted for the duration, and in the different manifestations of the work, objects were often placed on the table. Abramović kept a record of her experiences, included in this publication; she has always been consistent in her recording and archiving of works and her experience of them.

Another key reference for the artist is her re-performance of other artists’ works in 7 Easy Pieces, 2005, particularly her re-staging of Joseph Beuys’ How to explain pictures to a dead hare, originally performed by Beuys in 1965. For three hours in a gallery space, Beuys silently mouthed an explanation of his work to a dead hare, enacting the difficulties of communicating through art. Abramović’s re-presentation of this work — a history performed rather than archived — was taken from photographs and obscure footage, and doubled the artist’s search for unrealisable clarity. It is a work that signals both artists’ relationship to, and fascination with, the concealed, the mysterious, the esoteric and the numinous. Abramović references How to explain pictures to a dead hare as a direct precedent to 512 Hours, which she originally gave the working title How to explain immaterial art to a human being. This earlier title, however, having somewhat pedagogical overtones, was set aside for a more simple durational reference that would be open for anything to happen in the space.

To me, the act of opening up is so important … And for the audience, even if I’m standing there not saying anything, it’s fine. I never believed I could manage that. But with the long duration pieces and the feeling of elevation they invoke, I can get to that stage much faster than I used to. I’m really convinced that I am now able to share this experience with a younger generation.  
— Marina Abramović

Abramović, perhaps more than other artists working with the body and self as material in this way, has committed within her practice to changing our relationship to time. Previous works centred on endurance of difficult physical actions (screaming until she lost her voice, lying within the centre of a fire, ingesting anti-psychotic drugs, whipping her body until she no longer had sensation). From this point, there has been a steady movement towards duration as a focus. Although still rooted in the practice of endurance — Abramović prepares rigorously for her performances, which require stamina, physical strength and fitness — later works are as much about making time, about creating a conscious awareness and about responding to the audience. Mapping time with silence, repetition and inconsistent actions, Abramović pushes to create ‘black holes’, where the audience can experience the depth of time. This shared experience charges the space with psychological and emotional complexities, an energy that is constantly shifting shape and dynamics. In 512 Hours, Abramović
Nothing in one hand
walking stick in other
we each take 2000 km
march to say goodbye
will encourage us to give up everything extraneous to ourselves so that we might have recourse to the body as human instrument and the space of a few hours to experience as limitless time.

—

(My work) is not only about the artist. I want to address the public … without moving, motionless, controlling our own breathing and observing this, you experience something completely different. Your mind will start to work in a really different way."10

— Marina Abramović

The ‘disappearance’ of the work of art in the post-Abstract Expressionist art of the 1960s and the Conceptual art of the 1970s led to artists functioning more as intermediaries than creators, and transforming the relationship with the spectator, who was invited to intervene in the process in an unprecedented way. Body art, which for Abramović was the starting point of her practice, called for a grasping of the moment — existence in all its physicality and pathos — and a bringing of the individual into a renewed relationship to him or herself and to others. Throughout her practice, Abramović has never viewed spectatorship as passive, instead inviting audiences to participate in the making of the work — but also, importantly, increasingly acknowledging them as collaborators, and as interpreters or translators of the work, who might make use of the work in new ways for themselves.

The public become like an electric field around me. And then communication is possible because they can project onto me like a mirror, I hope … The thing is that the space has to be charged differently so you lose this concept of time and it is really now, here and now, just here and now. There is no beginning and no end. There is no end interrupting the image, so the image continues in your head after you leave. Since you don’t see a beginning or an end it’s as if the image goes on forever, as if it expresses something that goes on forever."11

— Marina Abramović

The ‘image’ to which Abramović refers rests at the core of each of her projects; she states that she cannot start a project without a single strong vision in mind. It is often this image that becomes the central core of a work — in this context, it might be described as a meditation object or visualisation, one that centres the work for the artist and becomes the point of departure for the audience.

—

You can start with any object and create an energy field around it again and again through ritual … because repetition of the same thing over and over again generates enormous power. Old cultures know this, that’s why they base their entire ritual structure on repetition."12

— Marina Abramović

Abramović has travelled widely, and is deeply influenced by many traditional cultural forms of knowledge, most particularly Tibetan Buddhism and shamanic wisdom from disparate traditions. The influence of this travel and research is evident in her work; the concepts of her performances often rest at the division between art and life. McEvilley claims that her
practice is radically advanced in its rejection of modernism and Eurocentrism, yet very primitive in its association of art with religion.\textsuperscript{13} Further, he notes that her unusual sense of the role of the artist is tied to this paradox, and parallels roles in religious settings. Within this context, it is notable that she was one of the few female contemporary artists included in \textit{Magiciens de la Terre} (Paris, 1989), an exhibition that aimed to counteract ethnocentric practices and includes 100 artists from around the world. This exhibition brought together the work of the artist and the spiritual leader, both of whom perform rituals for themselves and on behalf of others, laying bare what lies within.

Abramović has developed a particular way of working with ideas of ritual and the objects that ritual uses through ceremony and repetition — and again, the development from early work to more recent projects is striking. For a re-presentation in 1998 at the Museum of Contemporary art in Los Angeles of the objects originally used in \textit{Rhythm 0} (including a gun, a bullet, blue paint, a comb, a whip and lipstick), the artist obtained a number of similar objects, claiming that the originals were not artworks, since they were things that anyone could buy. Similarly, at the Serpentine Gallery Abramović will have to hand a series of props for use in specific exercises designed to attune or re-attune creative energies; they are, however, standard objects that will remain stored until needed, obsolete until the audience activates them with the guidance of the artist. They are tools for a transformative experience rather than objects of intrinsic value, rendered useless without the presence of the individual.

In 1960, the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark wrote of ‘emptiness-fullness’, noting that a form only has meaning because of its close link with its inner space.\textsuperscript{14} The idea that the form of objects — and indeed our bodies, the containers of our own selves — might only have meaning due to their relationship with an internal empty space has a strong link to Abramović’s work. The implicit confrontation with oneself — both for the artist and for the participating audience — is something that the artist embraces wholeheartedly, and has done from the earliest times. Cutting out all things that are superfluous — from objects in the room to psychological or emotional states — she develops a practice where the only actions are those relevant to the work, so that clarity and transparency are maintained. The props (water, rice, paper, blindfolds), which may or may not be used, are called upon to unite the inside with the outside, to access what Suely Rolnik calls the ‘resonant body’.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{The public has to take a much more interactive position, has to become more of an experimenter and, together with the artist, has to develop the illumination of the state of mind, where objects would no longer be necessary between the artist and the public, and the transmission of pure energy and a kind of wellbeing were the only things necessary.}\textsuperscript{16}

— Marina Abramović

In \textit{An Artist’s Life manifesto},\textsuperscript{17} Abramović included the following directives:

\textit{11. An artist’s relation to silence:}

— \textit{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

Silence and stillness are both devices that have formed the core of much performance work — for Abramović, they are the mechanisms through which she hopes to create a relational field between herself and the viewer, producing a luminous state of being in the individual. These elements were previously counterpointed against actions of physical duration undertaken by the artist, but in 512 Hours, the action may be sublimated into a form of presence.

Performance, by its very nature, exists in the present, and the primary way to understand performance must be to experience it. Of course, following this is a necessary recourse to records and archives and descriptions. However we cannot reproduce the original, irreducible moment — the moment of action that holds a strange satisfaction, making a space to allow us to wonder deeply — since it is a moment where, potentially, the seemingly illogical can break through our everyday understanding and make us open our eyes more widely.

In Unanswered Questions, her foreword for a book on theatre and the body, Marina Abramović asks the following questions:

How should the performer prepare for the performance?
What is the performance body?

Are the photographs taken of the performance a work of art themselves or just documentation?
What happens to a performance if something unpredictable takes place?
Can performance elevate the spirit of the performer and the audience?
What about time?
What about repetition? 18

Abramović has a complex relationship to theatre and theatricality. At first glance, theatre is anathema to performance, which often deliberately eschews the trappings of theatre, and the basic premise of the audience as the ‘fourth wall’. However, it is important to remember the significance of narrative and storytelling to the artist, as well as her recent work with Robert Wilson on The Life and Death of Marina Abramović (2012). She played herself in this work, continuing a line of autobiographical undertakings that have appeared throughout her practice. This sense of ‘playing oneself’ — which cannot fail to be a part of 512 Hours given Abramović’s prominence and fame 19 — is counterbalanced by a serious endeavour: that of finding a new radicality within the sphere of performance in general.

In 1968, Peter Brook documented in The Empty Stage the process that he and his actors adopted in order to find a new language of the theatre — one that could directly lead from Artaud, Brecht and Gratowski.

Slowly we worked towards different wordless languages: we took an event, a fragment of experience and made exercises that turned...
them into forms that could be shared. We encouraged the actors to see themselves not only as improvisers, lending themselves blindly to their inner impulses, but as artists responsible for searching and selecting amongst form, so that a gesture of a cry becomes like an object that he discovers and even remoulds. We experimented with and came to reject the traditional language of masks and make-ups as no longer appropriate. We experimented with silence. We set out to discover the relations between silence and duration: we needed an audience so that we could set a silent actor in front of them to see the varying lengths of attention he could command. Then we experimented with ritual in the sense of repetitive patterns, seeing how it is possible to present more meaning, more swiftly than by a logical unfolding of events. Our aim for each experiment, good or bad, successful or disastrous, was the same: can the invisible be made visible through the performer’s presence? 20

In this excerpt, Brook could be describing the practice of Abramović, both in terms of her overall aims, and in terms of this moment of making 512 Hours. Early performance, particularly body art, drew directly on Artaud’s desire to suspend time and eradicate the split between observer and observed, removing discursive language, narration and character from the work. 21 However, Abramović takes these elements and adds to them a return to the ‘essence’ of performance with the primacy of the body, and in later projects (as in Seven Easy Pieces) even embraces the spectacle that was rejected in her early works. These operations of the body in space still resonate as original and minimalist, and not of the theatre.
As something that exists apart from theatre, then, performance can be seen as putting ideas into play — both in the sense of the meeting of ideas, and in the sense of a space for experiment and exploration. Abramović’s practice, continually rethinking and reforming the nature of the live act, keeps the questions of performance, theatre and audience very much alive.

You never know how the experiment will turn out. It can be great, it can be really bad, but failure is so important, because it involves a learning process and it enables you to get to a new level and to other ways of seeing your work.  
— Marina Abramović

Remaining open to this sense of ‘the work in play’ is a continual challenge, not only in terms of the physical impact of remaining steadfastly within a difficult endurance practice, but also in terms of retaining a freshness, and a willingness to take on new contexts and developments.

When I do a new piece, the freshness is important: first time for me and first time for the audience. And with this comes unpredictability: anything can happen. And, in this way, when I am performing a piece, anything that happens in that moment is part of the piece. You have to be open to accept it, and that has always been so nerve racking because you never know how things can go.  
— Marina Abramović

Abramović has long been an advocate of the collection of performance works by museums and for the medium to be seen by a broader public. For example, in 2003, the performance of *The House with the Ocean View* was reconfigured and restaged for an episode of *Sex & The City* — a seemingly odd choice of presentation for a radical artist — but this was a way to ensure that the field of performance art would be known to a mainstream audience. However, although the artist has always engaged with the machinations of contemporary culture and the possibilities of new technology, she has always been primarily concerned with the notion of ‘liveness’. Mediatisation of her work and of her self has been, as it is for many people in the public domain, a difficult terrain to navigate, and keeping the empty space of the Serpentine Galleries separate and clear of this has been a response to this circumstance. It is a return to an original idea of performance, where social media cannot intrude, and the primary experience is unmediated.

(When we are in-between), this is where our mind is the most open. We are alert, sensitive, and destiny can happen. We do not have any barriers and we are vulnerable. Vulnerability is important. It means we are completely alive and that is an extremely important space. This is for me the space from which my work generates.  
— Marina Abramović

The potential of failure inherent in Abramović’s work functions to sharpen her physical and psychological presence
in performance. Performance artists are experienced by the audience as a thing in a permanent state of becoming; like an initiate in a ritual, they are suspended in an in-between or liminal state during the work itself. Furthermore, beyond the immediacy of the work, Abramović occupies a complex state: she is between artist, celebrity and individual; between performance art, theatre and exhibition; between endurance work (solo) and offering herself as a guide to other states (shared); between immateriality and the daily stuff of life; between her body and the audience; between structure and improvisation. Abramović has a strong desire for freedom and intensity, but also inhabits fragility and the potentiality of failure. In 512 Hours, she takes this network of relationships and tensions, and transforms it through the body (both her own, our individual bodies, and the collective) into something larger and unspoken.

We will enter the space of Marina Abramović’s performance of 512 Hours without knowing what we will find. She is inviting us to follow her, to come as we are, to trust her and to commit to the particular time and space we are in. This improvised durational work will not merely be an act of communication; it will be an act of compulsion.

Be quiet, still and solitary. The world will roll in ecstasy at your feet. 27
— Marina Abramović

— Sophie O’Brien

Senior Exhibitions Curator