

Press release

Marina Abramović

8 lessons on emptiness with a happy end

Exhibition from 22nd May to 8th August 2008

Opening on 22nd May from 6pm

The Galerie Guy Bärtschi is pleased to welcome in the entire space of the gallery, from May 22, the new project by the Serbian artist Marina Abramović, born in 1946. This project, titled 8 Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End, coproduced by the gallery and created by the artist over the past years has been realized in Laos. The exhibition will be the occasion to discover recent works, videos, drawings and photographs, produced in this context, and which will be presented for the first time to the public.

This work by Marina Abramović is part of the project initiated in 1995 by the curator and historian, France Morin, bringing together international artists with local communities, based in the United States, Brazil, or more recently in Laos. Titled The Quiet in the Land: Art, Spirituality, and Everyday Life, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, the project elaborated in Laos and gathering artists such as Cai Guo-Qiang, Ann Hamilton, Shirin Neshat, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Allan Sekula or Rirkrit Tiravanija, tries to establish parallels between their artistic world and the daily life, widely rural, and the singular spirituality of this country.

The works elaborated by Marina Abramović are, as usual, very personal: the artist interrogates the impact of images of violence and war, conveyed by the television, the cinema and video games, on our world and particularly on children, symbols of innocence. Inscribed in the Laotian environment, these representations recall the Thai films largely watched by the population of the country and the past of the land affected by conflicts. These visions contrast with the landscapes and peaceful places of Laos, touched by local spirituality, the rhythm of the seasons and the passage of life.

The video installation in five screens, 8 Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End, opposes in that way war scenes mimed by Laotian children dressed as soldiers to sites of the land known for their natural forces and revealed to the artist by shamans. The soundtrack also confronts sounds of breaking glass, explosions, and screams of the children to the sonority of the wind, the water, and the prayers of the monks or the monastery bells. The general feeling gives a strange sensation in which images of violence are purified by sublime nature and religion.

The war leads to mental, spiritual and personal emptiness. At the end of each conflict, it is always the same feeling of loss and absurdity that remains. Here the children, finishing their morbid and warlike game burn the fake weapons with which they were playing. This ritual symbolizes the end of the hate, revealing in the same time the irrationality of a world that makes children fight.

In the large photographs from the series The Family, realized by the Italian photographer Attilio Maranzano, the same children pose with weapons, simulating war or feigning death. In other two photographs taken by a local photographer with children disguised in soldier on her knees, Marina Abramović dominates the composition with her maternal and calming figure. It is another impression that she gives in the photograph The Family XI in which, presented frontally in a khaki uniform, she holds guns in her arms, embodying a war goddess, mother of all violence. Accompanied by a catalogue presenting these works and a text by Jovana Stokić, the exhibition will be the occasion to discover this personal project of one of the most important artists of the last decades.