

Wilde

PRESS RELEASE
MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ
HAPPY CHRISTMAS
09.06.- 04.10.2019

Wilde is delighted to present HAPPY CHRISTMAS, a solo exhibition featuring new and past works by Marina Abramović. As she approaches her 73rd birthday, the performance artist will share with us her views on mortality as well as the physical and mental limits of the human body through a selection of photographs, installation, and video work.

Happy Christmas borrows its name from a photograph that powerfully depicts Abramović with tears flowing down her face. Taken during the holiday season and far from happy, the work is deeply personal, and a testament to Abramović's ability to mentally conjure up an emotion then physically manifest it. She transforms the power of performance art, which is bound by time and place, to material objects that become vessels transporting the energy of the performer and that of the audience.

In a new series of self-portraits, meticulously milled, backlit, Corian stone form luminous images, which capture a range and depth of emotion. The nature of the medium generously imbues the work with an ephemeral quality. They possess the presence of the artist while simultaneously her physical absence. By using a recognizable symbol of spirituality, Abramović utilizes the cross, made up of nine individual portraits where she contorts her face in such a way to create a spectrum of "evil" facial expressions.

In the adjacent spaces on either side of the central gallery hang Corian diptychs. In one series Abramović sits with ease, as an octopus crawls over her face. Typically, such an interaction could lead the octopus to act in defense, but in Abramović's case, her experience in executing durational performances involving live animals have given her the ability to stay present and exhume calming energy. A video work from her performance series entitled *Dragon Heads* (2018) depicts Abramović as she sits motionless with snakes slithering around her body, occasionally forming a crown on her head. According to Abramović, the starting point for this work was the following observation: "Snakes can follow the energy of the planet, wherever you put them." As the snakes trace the lines of warmth and energy on Abramović's head and body, their movements push against her lips and eyes, distorting her face. They coil around her neck, and a sense of impending suffocation is palpable.

Death as a companion of life has been a central theme to Abramović's oeuvre. New Corian works feature the artist interacting with skulls, a powerful symbol that allows her to confront mortality head-on. These latest works are a logical continuation from past performances such as *Cleaning*

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the Mirror (1995), *Nude with Skeleton* (2005), and *Carrying the Skeleton* (2008). The skeleton serves as a metaphor for the soul's immaterial, invisible energy, a mirror of one's self. As Abramović explains: "The work is really about facing your own mortality. It's something that in our life we fear the most. It is about fear of pain and fear of dying." *Kitchen VIII* from the series *The Kitchen, Homage to Saint Therese* (2009) shows Abramović's hands outstretched behind a ceramic human skull, either as an offering or a miraculous reveal, her hands appear to flutter, calling to mind the movement of angelic wings.

For Abramović, spirituality comes from a deep sense of self. In *The Kitchen I: Levitation of Saint Therese* (2009), viewers watch as Abramović levitates mid-air, a symbolic cross between Christ's crucifixion and his ascension. Saint Therese of Ávila, a 16th-century nun who was said to have repeatedly levitated inspired the Kitchen series, all of which were performed, filmed and photographed in an abandoned kitchen in the former nunnery La Laboral in Gijón, Spain. In Saint Therese's diary, she confesses her anger at supernatural forces, as she is levitated in her kitchen while hungry and trying to make soup. She grows exasperated and frustrated as she fights this powerful force. Although born as an homage to Saint Terese, the works become above all autobiographical. As Abramović states: "In my childhood, the kitchen of my grandmother was the center of my world: all the stories were told in the kitchen, all the advice regarding my life were given in the kitchen, all the future-telling through the cups of black coffee took place in the kitchen, so it was really the center of the world, and all my best memories come from there."

Marina Abramović was born in 1946 in Belgrade, Serbia. Since the beginning of her career during the early 1970s, the artist has pioneered performance as a visual art form and created some of the most important early works in this practice. Employing her own body as both subject and medium, she explores her physical and mental limits. She has withstood pain, exhaustion, and danger in her quest for emotional and spiritual transformation. Abramović was awarded the Golden Lion for Best Artist at the 1997 Venice Biennale. In 2008, she was decorated with the Austrian Commander Cross for her contribution to art history. In 2010, the artist had her first major U.S. retrospective and simultaneously performed for over 700 hours in *The Artist is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. During this performance, museum visitors could sit down across from Abramović at a table and engage in a silent exchange with her. In 2014, she completed the three-month performance *512 Hours* at the Serpentine Gallery in London. Her retrospective, *The Cleaner*, opened at Moderna Museet, Stockholm in February 2017 and toured to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in Oslo, Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn, and Palazzo Strozzi in Florence.

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