

Marina Abramovic in conversation with Marco Antonini.

Marina Abramovic- So.. what are we going to talk about.. fashion?

Marco Antonini- uhmmmm, I don't know, fashion is not really my thing.

MAB- There is so much fashion here *(on BMM)* *(laughs)*

MA- I like fashion, but I don't like..., uhmm, a LOT of it, and I could say the same thing about contemporary arts

MAB- I do like fashion, but it's the same thing with me...

MA- I have a couple of "general" questions. Going back to your work I can always feel this degree of intensity...

while I try to lay down my first "serious" question, Marina almost literally jumps up, following an unexpected train of thoughts and instead starts talking about her new mug design for ILLY coffee, fetching printouts of the design here and there. The mug has a cheerful design on it ... ("it's just a coffee mug, I wanted it to be cheerful"...). After this unexpected detour, she goes back to my –unfinished– question, as if nothing had happened.

MAB- So... about the intensity you said...

MA- what I was thinking was: do you "plan" intensity when you think about your work? Is it something studied or not? And do you feel this intensity in other work that you relate to, especially the work of younger artists?

MAB- wow that's a lot of questions! I really hate the idea of going to a "studio", I don't have a studio, I have an office, and I really like to keep it as much organized as possible, because that is reality. I can come with an idea at any time, because I am on the road constantly

MA- Where do you live now?

MAB- New York and Stromboli. The two volcanos, the energy of New York and the actual volcano of Stromboli. Last year I spent some months there, it is an incredible regenerator.

My work is very open to life, to experience ideas can come at any time, anywhere, and sometimes they don't come at all. When I was young I was very worried that ideas would come naturally, not only from the intellectual part of my brain but more as a vision, an appearance. I'll let ideas stick with me for a while, writing them down only when I start to be obsessed by them. And when I start to work on them, I need the office. The office is a facilitating infrastructure, I really don't need the idea of "studio" in an old fashioned way, and I think studios create what I call the "pollution of Art", the

idea that you *have to* do something, to make art, and by doing this you end up making too much... and in this way there is no intensity.

MA- in an older interview someone asked you about a suggestion to give to younger artists, and you quoted this concept of "pollution".

MAB- this is what I was teaching at the time. We would go together to their homes and studios and clean them up. By cleaning you can create empty space so that things can come into you. And also, the idea that the artist is a "producer" of art, that everything he touches is art is bullshit... I went to Belgrade and the catalogue of a museum reported a photograph of a performance I never did: "Marina Abramovic throwing boxes in the air", a snapshot someone took of me while having fun in some friend's studio. I discovered that the picture was eventually sold to the Museum!

MA- *(looking at the pictures, indeed in a pretty cool catalogue)* ... I think that the most interesting thing here is that the work actually might look realistic, especially for the quality of the pictures *(laughter)*.

MAB- that's why it is important that artists are ready to completely destroy documents like this one, it is important to have control over the work.

MA- especially important in performance, I guess, where the images are the only document that's left...

(Marina leaves the table again, this time to show me a Steven Meisel VOGUE photo shoot. Inspired to one of her performances with Ulay, it knocks off the original video-documentation of the event with no apparent irony and, most important, with no credit given to Abramovic or Ulay).

MA- So, control...

MAB- Absolutely. People don't leave instructions on how to perform, so when the artist dies there's no other way to read the work then through the documents.

Back to Intensity, I recently was in Paris at the Beaubourg, for the Yves Klein and Robert Rauschenberg retrospectives. Rauschenberg *combines* were like old carpets, they aged very badly, while Klein was still amazing. For him the centre of the work was the artist himself, that actually you have to create a certain balance in yourself so that you can project it outside and create intensity...

MA- do you consider contemporary arts as a "scene", that you relate to?

MAB- there are more things that I consider art, I recently discovered this guy, Anthony and the Johnsons... he has this voice, like a castrato, he touches your heart in the more old fashioned way... there are certain works from certain people, like Lars Von Trier's "Dogville", it's something that amazed me...

MA- I didn't want you to only talk about visual arts, that's fine...

MAB- Performance has an intensity to it, because it really changes the place where it takes place, it changes the chemistry between people. "The house with the ocean view" is a good example of this...

MA- there are a couple of questions I wanted to ask about that specific work. The first one is: did you consider the way September 11 changed the way people reacted to it?

MAB- I was somehow lucky that the work fit in such a moment, because people were very open and vulnerable after September 11.

MA- the other question is: did you mean to create a connection with the voyeuristic mechanisms of reality TV?

MAB- it was really about something else, I'm always surprised when people ask this question

MA- did you realize that many people that don't have a background in arts came to see the show just for the curiosity of watching you onstage in a situation of high distress?

MAB- yes and no, because there was an extreme absence of action. I think that my presence actually focused the audience.

MA- did someone from the public ever interrupt the action onstage?

MAB- not really, there was this drunk guy, he start to mock me, but he was stopped by the audience, almost immediately. People mostly sat there and cried.

MA- I heard you say that you want to be an antenna... with that work you were working as a screen at he same time...

MAB- it's true, people project on you. You become very sensitive onstage, really like an antenna, but at the same time you take everything in and you become transparent.

MA- did you feel like talking to people? was it difficult to stay silent all the time?

MAB- no, there was so much talking with eyes. Long time ago I was in Yugoslavia in the mountains and I met this old shepherd. Every-time he would talk to me he would close his eyes, so I asked him why. He said "when I talk, I don't need to see". In my case it was reversed: when I don't need to talk, I can see.