

Marina Abramović

(Belgrade, Serbia, 1946)

Having become a superstar in the art world, someone who can move masses of people like a pop diva, Marina Abramović, over time, has toned down the violence of her performances, which, in the 1970s, led to her reputation as an artist who defied physical pain and pushed her body to the limit. Instead she has come to accentuate the symbolic aspect and the theatrical dimension of actions, going beyond the need to affirm the body—above all the female body—typical of her earlier work, to focus on a search for universal meanings. In this sense her performance *Balkan Baroque*, which won the Golden Lion award at the 1997 Venice Biennale, and where she spent four consecutive days cleaning the blood and flesh off a gigantic pile of bones, put the artist not only at the center of the suffering in her native Balkans, devastated by war during that period, but also at the center of all wars and all suffering in the world. Alongside the repetitive gesture there is resistance, above all passive resistance, something thus particularly close to meditation, the artist's "weapon." Abramović is a resolutely immobile heroine, but one who, thanks to her shamanic gifts, is able to lead the viewer to reflection merely through her glance, as in her performance *The Artist Is Present*, 2010. Her presence, her life, become exemplary to the point of self-celebration, and the strength of this artist—who, mixing violence, spirituality and love, has created some of the most significant images of our time—is confirmed by the interest she arouses in a public that follows and canonizes her.

Thus it is no surprise that in 2012, two years after her monumental retrospective at MoMA in New York, Abramović presented her "method" (*The Abramovic Method*) in an exhibition at the PAC in Milan, where she placed the public at the center of her performance, inviting viewers to interact directly with her works. To encourage this interaction and the expansion of the viewers' senses, she embellished objects with quartz, amethyst and tourmaline: stones generally used in meditation practices. At the same time as the PAC exhibition, she exhibited a series of photographs and sculptures at the Lia Rumma Gallery. These, including *The Communicator*, were all created from wax casts of her head and hands, which were also studded with quartz crystals and precious materials and arranged on tall glass pedestals. With a process of abstraction that brings to mind the genesis of sacred icons, Abramović's face, which makes her recognizable to her public, is transformed into a ritual object, embellished like the face of a Byzantine empress, a magical catalyst of forces through the presence of the quartz, which in meditation is thought to both receive and emit energies. Abramović once again presents us with herself, sublimated and crystallized in a form ready to be exhibited as a relic. (EV)