

Starey, starey life: Marina Abramovic's eyes as arrows

TIM DOUGLAS THE AUSTRALIAN JUNE 12, 2015 12:00AM



Marina Abramovic with her exhibition Private Archaeology, which opens at MONA tomorrow. Picture: Peter Mathew Source: News Corp Australia

Marina Abramovic and David Walsh — two of the most fascinating figures in contemporary art — first laid eyes on each other seven years ago in Amsterdam and knew they had to work together.

The godmother of performance art and the gambling museum-builder have at last come together

in a collaboration.

“David is no normal human being,” Abramovic said in Hobart yesterday. “He is very intelligent, and pretty extreme, and my work is quite extreme.

“We are not interested in normality. We are interested in pushing limits.” Walsh has a more vivid description of Abramovic's influence: “Marina's work makes my balls shrivel.”

The 68-year-old artist is in Hobart to supervise final preparations for Private Archaeology, a retrospective of her work opening tomorrow at Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art.

Private Archaeology, part of the third iteration of Walsh's Dark Mofo winter arts festival, will feature 40 works by Abramovic alongside antiquities from MONA's collection that speak to the exhibition's broader themes of pain, healing and mortality.

Abramovic attracted worldwide attention in 2010 with her 90-day sit-in at New York's Museum of Modern Art, *The Artist is Present*. At MONA, Private Archaeology will feature some of her best-known works including *Art is Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful* — in which she recites the title while clawing at her hair and scalp with a steel brush — and *Rest Energy*, a four-minute video of her and former partner and collaborator Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen), pointing a tensed bow and arrow at the artist's heart. “Four minutes was long enough,” she said quietly, watching *Rest Energy* being installed. “But I don't look back. There is more to do.”

Abramovic will head to Sydney next week to prepare for John Kaldor's latest public art project, *Marina Abramovic: In Residence*, a 12-day audience-focused program at Walsh Bay.

She had also planned to be working with the Museum of Contemporary Art on a retrospective but the institution cancelled the show last week. “It's heartbreaking for me,” she said. “Very few people know how important Australia is to me and to my work.”

After appearing at the third Sydney Biennale in 1979, Abramovic and Ulay were given a government grant to live with nomadic Pitjantjatjara people.

“We spent a year with the Aborigines,” she said. “And it changed my life. It skewed my perspective on everything. So Australia is so very important to me and my work. Some of the things that happened to me in the desert were just ... impossible to explain.”