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MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ AT SYDNEY'S KALDOR PUBLIC ART PROJECTS AND HOBART'S MUSEUM OF OLD AND NEW ART

BY MICHAEL YOUNG



Kaldor Public Art Projects' John Kaldor (right) and Museum of Old and New Art's David Walsh (left) jointly announce arrival of New York-based performance artist Marina Abramović to Sydney and Hobart in June this year.

Two titans of Australian philanthropy rubbed shoulders in Sydney last week while promoting their respective blockbuster exhibitions of Marina Abramović slated to open in the winter. David Walsh, founder of Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) and the museum fraternity wild card (in that you never quite know what he will do or say next), and John Kaldor, the rather more straight-laced founder of Kaldor Public Art Projects (KPAP), both said they had approached the artist independently, but that it made sense to collaborate on their respective exhibitions. Kaldor Public Art Projects will stage "Marina Abramović: In Residence" while the Museum of Old and New Art will host a survey show, "Private Archaeology."

For 12 days in June, KPAP will take over one of Sydney's premier art locations, Pier 2/3 at Walsh Bay, where in 2013 they staged the hugely successful "13 Rooms," which showed Abramović's *Luminosity* (1997/2010). Abramović, who will be on site for the project in June, no longer refers to herself as a performance artist and prefers the term "conductor." Speaking at the project's launch via a pre-recorded video message, she said, "I will be like a conductor in the exhibition space, but it will be the public who will take the physical and emotional journey."

KPAP will show Abramović's *512 Hours*, which premiered last year at London's Serpentine Gallery, as well as *The Artist is Present*, which was featured in the artist's 2010 retrospective of the same name at New York's Museum of Modern Art. For the latter, participants queued for hours to sit opposite her during the staging of the demanding, durational work at MoMA. In Sydney, Abramović will also mentor 12 Australian performance artists. During *512 Hours*, visitors will be transformed into performers and the artist will be "conducting the audience in a number of exercises based on the Marina Abramović Method developed over many years. It is the very essence of her art." These exercises, which had also

been held at the Serpentine, consist of staring at a wall, slow walking and counting grains of rice, which Kaldor himself admitted to doing for two hours.

Both Kaldor and Walsh are obvious Abramović fans. "The best performance artist in the world," Kaldor said. "When you think of contemporary art then Abramović has got to be on your radar," Walsh said, likening a tour by Abramović to that of the Beatles. Nonetheless, Walsh did express some reservations. "Being an atheist, a materialist, and pragmatist, the spiritual basis of Marina Abramović's art isn't overwhelmingly important to me, [but] I don't think I should agree with the art that we at MONA present necessarily."

On the other hand, there are no such reservations for Kaldor. Compliments and accolades for Abramović flew thick and fast as Kaldor heaped praise on the artist. "Marina herself is the art; she is the paint, the canvas, the subject and the object. That is what it is all about," he said.

Walsh recounted how he first met Abramović in Amsterdam a few years ago, "I wanted to look at [her] archives and she had an office there. But what she mainly wanted to do was show me the place where she played the role of a prostitute in *Role Exchange* (1975), and in turn got a prostitute to play her in the exhibition. She showed me the window (and) pointed . . . and said, 'I was there where a human being was being sold.' And I thought, 'You are still doing that, in a sense.'" Ever the loose cannon Walsh added hastily, "I didn't mean to say that."

"Private Archaeology" will be held at the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, from June 13 to October 5, 2015.

"Marina Abramovic: In Residence" will be held at Kaldor Public Art Projects, Sydney, from June 24 to July 5, 2015.

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