

# Artist Abramovic turns from the extreme to decompression

AFP- Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic, known for works that push her body and her audience to extreme limits, is these days inviting people to decompress by taking a break from digital overload.

For a retrospective at the Kunsthaus Zurich art museum tracing her 55-year career, Abramovic created a new installation called "Decompression Chamber".

Inside, the 78-year-old artist invites visitors to put away their mobile phones, watches and any other distracting items, don a pair of noise-cancelling headphones and sit back in a deckchair to relax, lose track of time and reconnect with their inner selves.

Abramovic told AFP it was "my response to the overuse of technology".

"This allows visitors to get in touch with the here and now and go into their own selves. It is an opportunity to detach from the external and reattach to the internal," she said in an email.

It is a riposte to a world in which "the younger generation takes photographs with their phones" in an exhibition "before they have any experience of actually seeing the work" and engaging with it on a deeper level, she said.

In June at Britain's Glastonbury music festival, Abramovic got the crowd to remain silent for seven minutes to meditate on the state of the world, while she stood on stage in a white dress shaped like a peace symbol.

These recent works focusing on silence contrast sharply with

some of her performances earlier in her career, which are screened in several videos at the retrospective.

The artist is seen screaming until she is exhausted, flogging her naked body for hours, or frantically washing a pile of bloody cattle bones to illustrate the horrors of the 1990s Yugoslav Wars.

– Disturbing performances –

The exhibition is the first comprehensive retrospective in Switzerland of Abramovic's work, and encompasses every phase of her more than half-century career.

The Belgrade-born artist is known for her performances that put her body to the test and sometimes push visitors to the darkest corners of the soul.

The exhibition shows photos from the 1974 performance "Rhythm 0", which propelled Abramovic onto the global contemporary art scene.

During six hours, she let the audience do whatever they wanted to her, with 72 objects for pleasure and pain at their disposal.

They included a rose, a feather, grapes, a whip, honey, an axe, a saw, an arrow, chains, knives, a pistol and a bullet.

It began playfully but resulted in ever-worsening levels of abuse, with one person slashing her and drinking her blood – and the revolver being loaded then put in her hand, with the barrel pressed against her skin.

The Kunsthaus has recreated the table of objects.

This retrospective, which runs until February 26, mixes video recordings and live performances.

To enter, visitors must first squeeze their way between a

completely naked man and woman standing opposite each other in a narrow doorway.

The museum warns from the outset that the retrospective contains disturbing scenes.

“It’s very, very challenging, but I’m happy I saw it, without any doubt,” said visitor Winfried Knust, 61, as he left the exhibition.

“It opens your mind; it challenges you about what you define as art,” he told AFP.

But retiree Lilo Muhlemann, 74, said: “It’s too much for me. She is an impassioned woman. But there is already too much violence in the world these days. I could do with something more harmonious.”

The exhibition’s curator Mirjam Varadinis confirmed that the retrospective was invoking a wide range of reactions.

“Some people can’t stand it; it’s too much. Some people start to cry. Some cannot relate to it,” she told AFP.

“But what the guards say is that people, when they enter and when they come out, have a different look on their faces. So there’s a transformation. That’s what’s amazing.

“It’s not just an exhibition that’s going to pass by without any traces. It creates strong emotions. It’s a unique experience.”

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