

Press release

From 15 September 2021

Marina Abramović & Ulay

to 2 January 2022

Collection:

performances 1976-1988

macLYON



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Nightsea Crossing*,
Sitting at Musée d'art contemporain, Lyon - 9 and 10 October 1986
Collection macLYON
Photo Blaise Adilon
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In 1986, the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon hosted an exhibition by performance-art pioneers Marina Abramović and Frank Uwe Laysiepen, a.k.a. Ulay. It was an opportunity for the two artists to present and bring to a close the cycle of performances that brought them international recognition, *Nightsea Crossing*.

The work having taken on its final form with the Lyon performance was acquired by the museum: photographs and objects preserve the memory of the (sometimes extreme) moments they record. The work of the two artists, which is well represented in the collection of the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, touches on fundamental issues that today would be described as anthropological: the couple, gender issues, awareness of corporeality and challenges to the body, the mental management of pain and endurance, exposure to danger, links with the environment and other cultures, and indeed social and political criticism.

In addition to *Nightsea Crossing*, 1981-1986, *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk*, 1988 – the piece that sealed their separation – some of the most important performances from the beginning of their collaboration will be exhibited.

In 1986, the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon hosted an exhibition by performance-art pioneers Marina Abramović and Frank Uwe Laysiepen, a.k.a. Ulay. Abramović was born in Belgrade (at the time in Yugoslavia, today in Serbia), and Ulay in Solingen (Germany). They met in 1975 in Amsterdam and from 1976 lived together while developing a radical body of work in a fusion of their individual artistic practices.

It was an opportunity for the two artists to present and bring to a close the cycle of performances that brought them international recognition, *Nightsea Crossing*. The work consisted of 22 performances which they took all over the world (including Sydney, Ushimado, Chicago, and Kassel), some of them lasting several days. They sat face to face in the presence of an audience, immobile, imperturbable and silent, in a meditative state of extreme attention. The work having taken on its final form with the Lyon performance, it was acquired by the museum: photographs and objects preserve the memory of the (sometimes extreme) moments they record.

A few years later, in 1995, when the couple had separated and their artistic partnership was over, they decided to go back to the recordings of their various joint performances and to condense the material into an archive of essential moments. In 1999, the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon (macLYON) and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven co-produced this project and acquired all the resulting "video-performances". The macLYON consequently owns recordings of all the artists' joint work. A selection from that oeuvre is the object of this exhibition.

Nightsea Crossing, 1981-1986, will be presented of course, along with *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk*, 1988 – the piece that sealed their separation – along with a few landmark performances from the beginning of their collaboration. The works of Marina Abramović and Ulay drew on individual perspectives and concerns shared by the two artists; they tested the physical limits of their bodies, the limits of their relationship and their mental capacities, as well as the social or cultural codes that influenced them or made them conform to stereotypes of gender, sex and normality.

Imponderabilia, 1977, obliged visitors to the exhibition in which the performance was given to choose which person to face as they entered: Ulay or Marina – the man or the woman – both standing naked on either side of the door. In *Breathing in/Breathing out*, 1977, the two performers, are locked in a sustained kiss, breathing in each other's exhaled air to the point of potential asphyxiation; in *Talking about Similarity*, 1976, the question is whether it is possible to speak for the other, Ulay having sewn his lips together leaving Marina to speak for him.

The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk, 1988, was the last performance they did together and it was also the end of their relationship. It took them eight years to get approval from the Chinese authorities and was a way of testing the potential of a relationship they both knew was over. They started walking from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China to meet at its centre, but when they finally met again, they realised they could no longer continue communicating and they parted company for good.

The work of the two artists, which is well represented in the collection of the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, touches on fundamental issues that today would be described as anthropological: the couple, gender issues, awareness of corporeality and challenges to the body, the mental management of pain and endurance, exposure to danger, links with the environment and other cultures, and indeed social and political criticism.

In *Nightsea Crossing*, the idea for which came to them during a trip to Ayers Rock (Australia); Watuma Taruru Tjungarrayi an aborigine and Ngawang Soepa Lueyar a Tibetan lama were invited to the "sitting". In Japan, they actually dug the space for their "sitting" out of the ground.

In the space of a few years, Marina Abramović and Frank Uwe Laysiepen created a powerful body of work that has left a lasting impression on the spectators who were fortunate enough to attend one of their live performances.

Marina Abramović, born 1946 in Belgrade (at the time in Yugoslavia, today in Serbia), was a war baby. In her early performances, she often put her life in danger, as in *Rhythm 5*, 1974, a work in which she stretched out between the points of a burning star, eventually passing out from lack of oxygen.

Ulay, short for Frank Uwe Laysiepen (born 1943 in Solingen, Germany - died 2020 in Ljubljana, Slovenia), trained as a photographer. At first he worked with polaroid cameras and made self-portraits in which he explored gender differences using stage make-up. In 1976, he stole a painting reputed to be Adolf Hitler's favourite, *The Poor Poet* by Carl Spitzweg, from the National Neuegalerie in Berlin and left it with a Turkish family in the suburbs.

Marina Abramović captured the action on film.

Marina Abramović and Frank Uwe Laysiepen met in a Dutch television studio in 1975 and worked together from 1976 to 1988, when they separated.

During those twelve years, the two artists created performances in which many aspects of human existence were put to the test.

Whether it was physical strength, resistance to pain or emotional and psychic states, Marina and Ulay tested the limits of female and male identities, which they transformed into a more universal form of dualism: light/dark, male/female, positive/negative, silence/noise, active/positive, stillness/movement, rest/energy.

The "Relation Works" were performances done with no preparation or rehearsal, and their outcome was accordingly unpredictable. They were filmed nonetheless, in order, Marina Abramović tells us, "to see in retrospect what processes we managed to achieve".

Those films were originally intended just as a record, which the artists had never envisaged publishing, but they decided to turn them into a *posteriori* works in the form of installations, and these were co-produced in 1999 by the museums of Eindhoven and Lyon.

Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Nightsea Crossing*, 1981-1986

Translated extracts from the catalogue raisonné of the collection in the macLYON:

Documenta, Kassel, 1982: 14 days of performance, 9 hours per day. Ulay and Marina Abramović present a phase of *Nightsea Crossing*. There will be 22 phases to complete the 90-day cycle.

... The hieratic presence of the bodies, the degree of silence, the constant deferment of the unexpected, the strangeness of duration, the suspension of time.

It was at the end of that unique performance that the Musée issued an invitation to the two artists, and it was in Lyon in 1986, after a six-year journey that had taken the artists to every one of the continents, that they finally completed *Nightsea Crossing*: on 9 and 10 October.

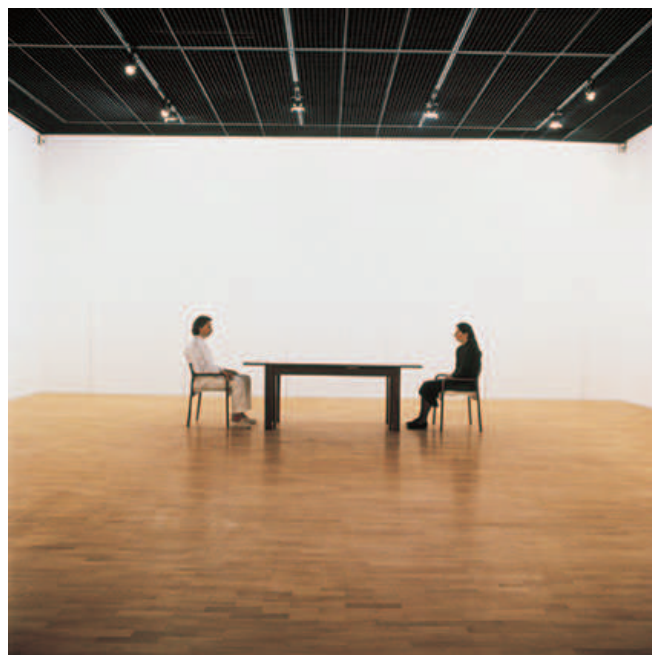
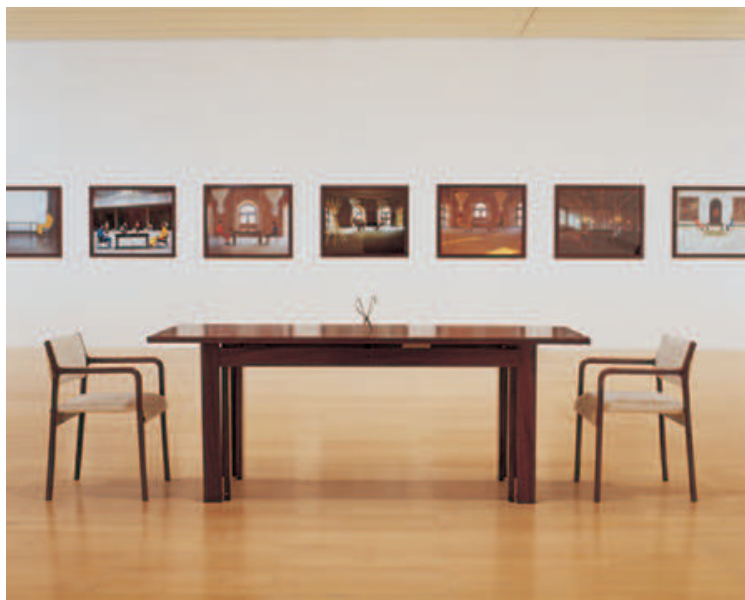
[...] The concern that we shared with the artists was the inability of a photograph, the record of an instant, to convey the duration of those moments.

[...] The macLYON invited the two artists, concurrently with the last two days of performance – perfectly circumscribed in time and destined to disappear – to conceive of a *Nightsea Crossing* exhibition, to be acquired in its entirety by the Museum, that would preserve every instant, in order to create a unique moment. This “exhibition-collection” was held in two adjoining spaces. One hosted the “live” sitting, accompanied by Cibachrome prints of the 19 previous sittings, while the other was an assemblage of objects, photographic documents and a video (shot with Remy Zaugg). The Cibachrome print *Sitting, Lyon, October 1986*, would shortly thereafter be added to the elements now constituting the work.

This was acquired in 1986.

In 1995, the two artists ceded to the museum all the photos, objects and documents from *Nightsea Crossing* that had not been exhibited in 1986 and were still in their possession.

The 1999 exhibition at macLYON *Ulay/Abramovic, Performances 1976-1988* featured 12 years of performances refashioned as video-installations, the entire corpus of *Nightsea Crossing* and the Citroen bus from the 16 hours of *Relation in Movement*.



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Nightsea Crossing*,
Sitting at Musée d'art contemporain, Lyon - 9 and 10 October 1986
Collection macLYON
Photo Blaise Adilon
© Adagp, Paris 2021

“We are sitting motionless at either end of the table, facing each other, our profiles turned to the audience. During this piece, as well as before and after the performances, we remain silent and abstain from food.”



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Nightsea Crossing*,
Views of the exhibition at macLYON in 1999
Photos Blaise Adilon
© Adagp, Paris 2021

**Marina Abramović et Ulay,
*The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk, 1988***

Extract from the catalogue *Ulay/Abramović, Performances 1976-1988* published on the occasion of the exhibition in 1999:

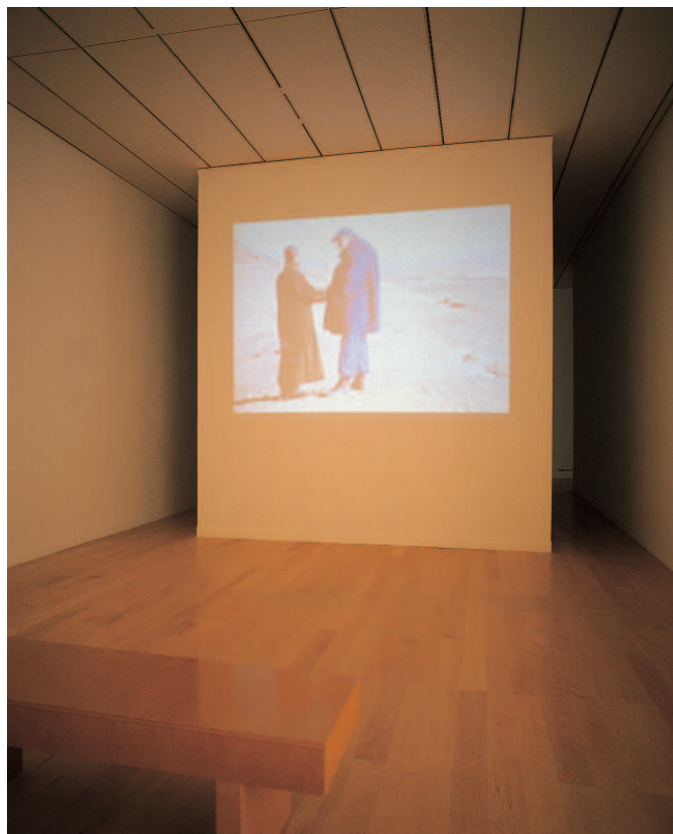
The last "Relation Work" was the most demonstrative, and the longest. The two artists walked the Great Wall of China in 1988. Starting at opposite ends, they walked until they met – in order to say goodbye. It was as if their first performance, *Relation in Space* (1976) – in which they ran at each other naked, colliding with each other over and over again when they crossed, going faster each time – had been replayed in a single, extreme slow-motion shot.

"We walk the entire length of The Great Wall of China. We set off on March 30th, 1988. Marina at the eastern end of the Wall, at Shan Hai Guan, at the shores of the Yellow Sea, Gulf of Bohai, walking westward. Ulay at the western end of the Wall, at Jai Yu Guan, the southwestern periphery of the Gobi Desert, walking eastward. We walk until we meet.

After we both walked for 90 consecutive days, we met at Er Lang Shan, in Shen Mu, Shaanxi province."

March-June 1988, China.

In the exhibition, *The Lovers* is a double projection on a central wall depicting (back to back) incidents encountered during that long march, filmed from each one's point of view.



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk, 1988*
Collection macLYON
Photo Blaise Adilon
© Adagp, Paris 2021



Extract from the catalogue *Ulay/Abramović, Performances 1976-1988* published on the occasion of the exhibition in 1999:

In *Imponderabilia*, Abramović and Ulay stood like two classical statues, naked and motionless, facing each other in the entrance to the gallery, their bodies forming a real and symbolic threshold which visitors had to cross in order to enter, visitors also had to choose which artist to face as they squeezed between them. A threshold implies a transition. Since one could only get from one space to the other through an intimate, physical encounter with the artists, it became clear that a transition, perhaps leading to another state of being, could be experienced by crossing the performative field created by the space between their bodies. [...] Once in the museum, spectators saw that the exhibition was a diagram of three people – the two artists and the visitor – and there was a text in big letters on the wall that read:

“Imponderable. Such imponderable human factors as one’s aesthetic sensitivity. The overriding importance of imponderables in determining human conduct.”

The text referred directly to the visitors’ behaviour at the entrance when they encountered the artists. The visitor’s reaction had become the subject of the work.

Imponderabilia

“We are standing naked in the main entrance of the Museum, facing each other. The public entering the Museum has to pass sideways through the small space between us. Each person passing has to choose which one of us to face.”

June 1977, Galleria Comunale d’Arte Moderna, Bologna



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Imponderabilia*, 1977-1999
Collection macLYON
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Breathing in / Breathing out

“We are kneeling face to face, pressing our mouths together. Our noses are blocked with cigarette filters.

Ulay
I am breathing in oxygen.
I am breathing out carbon dioxide.

Marina Abramović
I am breathing in carbon dioxide.
I am breathing out carbon dioxide.

Ulay
I am breathing in carbon dioxide.
I am breathing out carbon dioxide.”

April 1977, Studenski Kulturni Centar, Belgrade



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Breathing in / Breathing out*, 1977-1999
Collection macLYON
© Adagg, Paris 2021

Extract from the catalogue *Ulay/Abramović, Performances 1976-1988* published on the occasion of the exhibition in 1999:

Light / Dark

“We kneel, face to face.
Our faces are lit by two strong lamps.
Alternately, we slap each other’s face until one of us stops.”

October 1977, Internationaler Kunstmarkt, Cologne
March 1978, Amsterdam



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Light / Dark*, 1977-1999
Collection macLYON
© Adagp, Paris 2021

Relation in Time

“We are sitting back to back, tied together by our hair without
any movement.
Then the audience comes in.
We continue sitting for one more hour.”

October 1977, Studio G7, Bologna

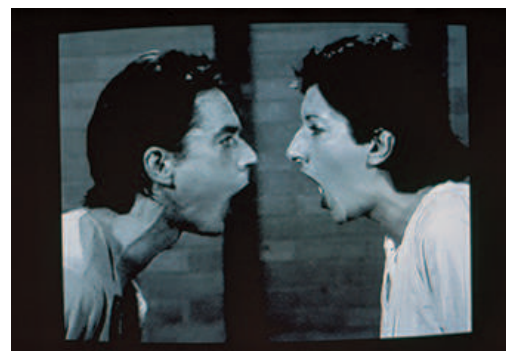


Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Relation in Time*, 1977-1999
Collection macLYON
© Adagp, Paris 2021

AAA-AAA

“We are facing each other, both producing a continuous vocal
sound.
We slowly build up the tension, our faces coming closer
together until we are screaming into each other’s open
mouths.”

February 1978, RTB, Liège
March 1978, Amsterdam



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *AAA-AAA*, 1978-1999
Collection macLYON
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Jasmina Cibic – Stagecraft

For Jasmina Cibic, every film project sees this artist-researcher delving into the archives, the accounts recorded there as well as the silences, in order to reveal the attitudes of all forms of power – whether state, government, party political or diplomatic – towards the arts. For the exhibition *Stagecraft*, she has brought together several years of research into the notion of the “diplomatic gift” and will be presenting her film *The Gift*.

This project by Jasmina Cibic is part of her research into the notion of soft power, which was the basis of her exhibition for the Slovenian pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale.

Curator: Matthieu Lelièvre



Jasmina Cibic, *The Gift*, 2021 [film still]
Three-channel HD colour video, stereo
Courtesy of the artist

Christine Rebet – Escapologie [Escapology]

Christine Rebet is fascinated by illusion and deception. She prefers drawing because it is manual and spontaneous, and she produces hundreds and thousands of drawings in ink, which she assembles frame by frame using traditional, early animation techniques. Repeated drawing, which is the origin of moving pictures, creates what she calls her “paper cinema”.

Christine Rebet re-interprets personal and collective traumas and mixes history and fiction in fantasy worlds. The subjects of her films are universal and evoke not only political reality, but also the destruction of the world, the oppression of human beings, and the idea of metamorphosis. She transcends imagery with a disturbing poetry, using manipulative techniques to explore the audience’s subconscious mind. She creates an imaginative fantasy through which to escape from the world.

In her exhibition *Escapologie [Escapology]*, Christine Rebet presents six animated films, including one specifically made for this exhibition. This new film is inspired by the traditional songs of pearl fishermen and sailors in the Persian Gulf. For this exhibition, the strange world of the six films is complemented by paintings and murals as well as drawings.

Curator: Marilou Laneuville

Delphine Balley – Figures de Cire [Wax Figures]

The macLYON invites the artist Delphine Balley, photographer and video artist, for her first institutional monographic exhibition.

The exhibition *Figures de cire [Wax Figures]* is conceived as a journey into time and the vernacular. It is a narrative ensemble consisting of three screenings, *Le Pays d’en haut [The Land Above]*, *Charivari [Hullabaloo]* and *Le Temps de l’oiseau [The Time of the Bird]*, as well as a series of photographic prints and a sculpture.

By adopting the hermetic atmosphere of family portraits and the tradition of genre painting, Delphine Balley creates a portrait of universal human stiffness, in keeping with the exposure time needed for a view camera.

The exhibition explores the dysfunction of the social theatre and performances in it and invites visitors to take their place in the procession, in a fictitious symbolic architecture and an incomplete narrative, in which marriage and funeral ceremonies merge.

Curator: Agnès Violeau



Delphine Balley, *Le Temps de l’oiseau*, 2020 [Film still]
HD colour video, sound, 17’27”
Courtesy of the artist



Christine Rebet, *Ultravision*, 2020
Otolithe series
Ink on paper, 24 × 32 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Established in 1984 in a wing of the Palais Saint-Pierre, in 1995 the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon moved to the site of the Cité internationale, a vast architectural ensemble spread over one kilometre on the edges of the Parc de la Tête d'Or, in Lyon's 6th arrondissement and gathering hotels, restaurants, offices, housing but also a casino or a cinema. The work of architect Renzo Piano, responsible for the entire site, the museum conserves the facade of the atrium of the former Palais de la Foire, overlooking the park. The Palais was designed by Charles Meysson in the 1920s.

The 6,000m² museum is spread over several floors and presents modular spaces that are perfectly adapted to the needs of the different artistic projects welcomed by the museum, as well as new forms of contemporary expression. The macLYON focuses on current national and international art, in all its forms, offering exhibitions and a wide programme of transdisciplinary events.

Its collection includes over 1,400 works. A selection of these is shown in rotation at the macLYON as well as in several partner structures. Works of its collection are regularly loaned for exhibitions in France and all over the world. It consists mainly of monumental works and ensembles of works, dating from the 1940s to the current day, created by artists from all over the world, the majority for exhibitions at the museum or for the Biennales d'art contemporain de Lyon, for which the museum oversees the artistic direction.

Brought together in an arts pole with the MBA since 2018, the two collections form a remarkable ensemble, both in France and in Europe.



View of the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon. Photo Blaise Adilon

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Wednesday to Sunday,
[from 11am to 6pm]

ADMISSION
● Full: 8€
● Concessions: 4€
● Free for visitors under 18

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Along quai Charles de Gaulle, carpark
P0 and P2, reduced rate for our visitors
● Ridesharing
www.covoiturage-pour-sortir.fr
● By bus
Stop Musée d'art contemporain
Bus C1, Gare Part-Dieu/Cuire
Bus C4, Jean Macé/Cité internationale
Bus C5, Cordeliers/Rillieux-Vancia
● By bike
Several Vélo'v stations around the
museum
Cycle lane from the Rhône's banks to
the museum