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***AS ONE: MAI + NEON***  
**An artistic project  
for raising consciousness in  
Greece**

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To all the artists and inspiring people, I “met” during my research who envision a better world and bring Art into Life.

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## Introduction

This master's thesis examines the project *As One* developed in 2016 by the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) and Neon, a Cultural and Development Organization of public benefit in Greece. *As One* was held at the Benaki Museum in Athens, where was presented with a parallel program of performance and intangible art and consisted of a participatory social project lasting seven weeks and based on the Abramović Method. Neon and MAI shared the same vision: to promote the art of performance, to contribute to the education of the broadest possible audience and, last but not least, to highlight a new generation of performance artists in Greece. As Abramović referred in her Workshop with the artists and audience in *As One* “[...] The public is tired of simply seeing art in museums. They want to be inspired, to take part”<sup>1</sup>, and on his side, Dimitris Daskalopoulos, the founder of Neon, affirmed “I believe in people, their appetite to change this place”<sup>2</sup>. The analysis of the project will focus on the artistic and the managerial aspect of this production, and more specifically, on how the institutions collaborated, how the artists worked, and the audience participated in the event.

This particular project was chosen because of my interest in art forms that break down the barriers between artists, the work and the audience. *As One*, was an example that made the audience part of the process, the emotions and even the release afterwards. The Project explains in its website the definition of performance which is usually “involves four elements: time, place, the performer's body, and the relationship between the performer and the audience”<sup>3</sup>. More specifically, Marina Abramović has said: “Performance is to be in the present time, in the here and now”<sup>4</sup>. Abramović is referred to as the grandmother of performance art and the one who made this art form mainstream. Moreover, she is still remaining artistically

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<sup>1</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 1, March 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/edition-en-one.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> NEON+ MAI, *AS ONE – FAQ*, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-FAQ-EN.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

active and innovative. Although, she has received a lot of criticism during her 50-year career, it is generally accepted that she has dedicated her life to art.

It is significant that *As One* took place in Greece, at a time of economic, social and humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, the Greek public was not very educated and experienced in contemporary art. On the other hand, it is a fact that during difficult periods, people find their liberation in creation, expression and in arts. In Greece solidarity was also starting to rise and people were coming together to think and organize a new environment for better changes. As Marina Abramović has said the need of the community is huge now.<sup>5</sup> *As One*, was inspired by Neon and especially by its founder Dimitris Daskalopoulos. Daskalopoulos is a businessman, one of the world's most important collectors and he founded Neon in 2013, at the beginning of the crisis. His contribution at the time was based on his belief that contemporary art is indeed a form of democracy and general development.

In the first chapter, I introduce the organization Neon and the reasons why it was founded at the time of crisis. It is also important to refer to and explain the contribution of Neon's founder and director, the people at the forefront. Neon has supported many innovative projects and is a pioneer in believing and acting towards the new possibilities in contemporary art in Greece by overcoming the country's bureaucratic system. Thus, in the first chapter I include Neon's major projects and collaborations with international and national artists in various public spaces that aimed to awaken society and bring art closer to the general public.

The second chapter analyzes Marina Abramović's art and poetics. More specifically I discuss the major changes she brought to performance and contemporary art by valorizing interaction with the audience and the need to share with them the process of creation, and inner transformation. Her Method is also presented and analyzed in this chapter.

The third chapter is dedicated to *As One* which is the outcome of a collaboration between two organizations with a shared vision of the role of the arts in our societies. An integrated project was created that aimed to showcase what

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<sup>5</sup> M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2018, p.50

performance art is and what the connection is between art and life. After presenting the space and the architecture of the Benaki Museum that hosted the project, I dedicate the next subchapters to the interviews that I have conducted with the various participants, artists, facilitators and the audience. The interviews were done in April 2022 and are based on different questions to each of them, except for the question concerning the audience. With some of the interviewees I had live interaction via Zoom while others sent me their answers via email. The interviews were conducted in Greek which I then translated into English. No general conclusions can be drawn from the public responses as the sample is very small, but it is important that the five interviewees, each of whom has a different relationship with art, describe different and unique moments of the project that they can still recall, six years later.

The last chapter presents a quantitative evaluation of the project and some personal testimonies and stories of the performers. Overall, the expanded content of the project was about the new art, with the aim of raising awareness. To further analyze this concept, I had the honor to meet and interview three important personalities in Greece and talk with them about consciousness and art and in everyday life. It seems that these open perspectives of art are more understood and needed for the Greek audience now, and for the world in general. It is the art that is directly connected to life, the community, and internal and social change. Thus, *As One*, is an early example that shows, even from the title, what the audience needs and what the new art is called to be.

## Chapter 1: NEON, “Our space is the city”

Neon is a nonprofit organization founded in 2013, in Athens by the Greek collector and entrepreneur Dimitris Daskalopoulos.<sup>6</sup> Its mission is to “broaden the appreciation, understanding, and creation of contemporary art in Greece”<sup>7</sup>. The organization communicates this mission with the simple phrase that Neon works “to bring contemporary culture closer to everyone”<sup>8</sup>. It is Daskalopoulos’s belief that the enhancement of contemporary art to the citizens and the cities goes hand and hand with the overall development and the economic, social, and cultural evolution of the country. This is the reason Neon was founded and the reason that drives it to expand and grow.

### 1.1. The Greek crisis and the emergence of communities

It is interesting to note that Neon was created during the big economic, political and social crisis in Greece. The Greek economy was suffering structural problems even before the adoption of the single currency in 2001. The years after, brought a large credit expansion, led by low-interest rates and, because of the optimistic forecasts about the economy, to an increase in domestic demand, which in turn led to an increase in imports.<sup>9</sup> Low-interest rates also affected the activity of the state whose lending gradually increased, resulting in a further strengthening of domestic demand. With these developments, the capital flows to Greece from the EU Structural Funds (structural funds, NSRF) grew, and further financing needs were created due to the organization of the Olympic Games in Athens, in 2004.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> Neon, <https://neon.org.gr/en/about/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Π. Τσακαλογλου, Γ. Οικονομιδης, Γ. Παγουλατος, Χ. Τριαντοπουλος, Α. Φιλιποπουλος, *Πώς Έφτασε Η Ελλάδα Στα Μνημόνια; Μια ανάλυση των παραγόντων που οδήγησαν την οικονομία της στα προθυρα της κατάρρευσης*, in “Dianeosis”, April 2016, [https://www.dianeosis.org/2016/04/pos\\_ftasame\\_sta\\_mnimonia/](https://www.dianeosis.org/2016/04/pos_ftasame_sta_mnimonia/)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



article *How did Greece end up in the Memorandum?* published by *Dianeosis*, a research and policy institute, stresses that the drastic expansion of domestic demand was based on an unprecedented “bubble” of economic activity. Moreover, it refers to the uncontrolled increase in public and private borrowing which was mainly directed to non-productive activities.<sup>11</sup>

2007 was the beginning of the global financial crisis that lasted until 2009. It started in the U.S but soon spread to Europe, exposing the Greek economic situation. The recession weakened Greece’s already small tax revenues, and led to an increase in Greece’s public and external debt ratios.<sup>12</sup> The article *Understanding the Downfall of Greece's Economy* in “Investopedia” explains the moments of downfall: “In 2010 investors were no longer willing to keep on financing the Greek government and U.S. financial rating agencies stamped Greek bonds with a “junk” grade. As capital began to dry up, Greece faced a liquidity crisis [...]”<sup>13</sup>. George Papandreou, the prime minister at the time, asked for a bailout in a fear of bankruptcy and Grexit. Troika, the group of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Central Bank (ECB), and the European Commission, extended emergency funding to Greece. For the first bailout, the Greek government was lent 110 billion euros to avoid default and used it to pay off the creditors, while it was committed to higher taxes and lower spending to bring the country back into a surplus.

During that period, between 2010 and 2018, the country experienced austerity measures and relied on international creditors to keep its finances afloat. This eight-year period was characterized by political and social unrest and the policies that followed, left behind several negative records. Greece was at the highest EU-levels in unemployment, from 9.6 percent in 2009 to 27.5 percent in 2013 with long-term unemployment amounting to 70 percent.<sup>14</sup> At the end of 2017, the unemployment rate stood at 21.5 percent, compared to an average of 9.1 percent for

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<sup>11</sup> Π. Τσακαλογλου, Γ. Οικονομιδης, Γ. Παγουλατος, Χ. Τριαντοπουλος, Α. Φίλιποπουλος, *Πώς Εφτασε Η Ελλάδα Στα Μνημόνια; Μια ανάλυση των παραγόντων που οδήγησαν την οικονομία της στα προθυρα της κατάρρευσης*, in “Dianeosis”, April 2016, [https://www.dianeosis.org/2016/04/pos\\_ftasame\\_sta\\_mnimonia/](https://www.dianeosis.org/2016/04/pos_ftasame_sta_mnimonia/)

<sup>12</sup> M.Johnston, *Understanding the Downfall of Greece's Economy*, in “Investopedia”, 23 June 2021; <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/070115/understanding-downfall-greeces-economy.asp>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

those countries that share the single currency.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the already high ratio, Debt to GDP(Gross Domestic Product) from 127% in 2009 reached in 2018, the last year of the adjustment, 186%, as a result of the austerity measures which brought pressure and decreased the real GDP of the country.<sup>16</sup>

The first memorandum didn't succeed in solving the economic instability in Greece and two more were signed during the next years, as well as stricter austerity measures. Snap elections occurred in 2015 and people broke over 40 years of two-party rule and elected a new anti-austerity party, Syriza. The new government, still afraid of a Grexit, proceeded in negotiation with Troika, shut down its stock exchange and banking system, and accepted the third bailout of 86 billion euros.<sup>17</sup>

The Greek president of “Doctors Of The World”, N. Kanakis, argues that Greece at that period was also in a humanitarian crisis in which a large number of citizens were unable to cover their basic needs, such as food, housing, medicine, and doctors.<sup>18</sup> Into this situation and together with the refugee crisis in 2015, Chrysí Avgí (Golden Dawn), a far-right ultranationalist political party, made its appearance in Greece period. It was the first time since the 1974 referendum that the Far Right in Greece managed to form a coalition and from 2012 to 2019 they were represented in the Greek Parliament.<sup>19</sup> In 2020 after continuous accusations the leadership of Greece's neo-Nazi party was convicted of running a criminal organization.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, during the crisis a large number of citizens with the support of people of letters, science, and art came together and raised their voices for democracy. New forms of solidarity were created, sometimes bringing together state and non-state actors in partnership.<sup>21</sup> The article *Social policies and solidarity during the Greek Crisis* examines the development of new initiatives in four core social

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<sup>15</sup> M.Johnston, *Understanding the Downfall of Greece's Economy*, in “Investopedia”, 23 June 2021; <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/070115/understanding-downfall-greeces-economy.asp>

<sup>16</sup> G.Alogoskoufis, *The pandemic and Greece's debt: The day after*, in “VoxEU”, 23 February 2021; <https://voxeu.org/article/pandemic-and-greece-s-debt-day-after>

<sup>17</sup> 2011, *DEBTOCRACY*, [Video], by A. Chatzistefanou, K. Kitidi, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqm9eXpe5Ho>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> D. Psarras, *Greece Golden Dawn: Neo-Nazi leaders guilty of running crime gang*, in “BBC”, 7 October 2020; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54433396>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> N. Kourachanis, V.Lalioti, D.Venieris, *Social policies and solidarity during the Greek Crisis*, in “Wiley”, 8 June 2018; pp.678- 692, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/spol.12420>

policy areas, health, employment, housing, and education.<sup>22</sup> Examples of these are the “Social Clinics” consisting of a group of volunteers, doctors, and citizens, the “Solidary Schools” which provided enhanced courses or the “Community Kitchens”. People’s participation and collectivity were reignited and at the same time, some public spaces were transformed into gathering places for communication, open dialogue and empowerment.

## 1.2. Neon’s Foundation

Neon had to take into consideration the Greek environment and the needs of the people at that time. For Daskapoloulo, art is both a passion and a necessity.<sup>23</sup> He perceives art as a “basic human need, as important as the food in our daily life”<sup>24</sup>. He also expresses his own need and passion to walk in the desert, but opposite to this he argues, “in the art world you are never alone, millions of people come looking for something in it”<sup>25</sup>. He believes that contemporary art is important because it can enhance people’s curiosity. More specifically, he explains that the contemporary works of art speak about today or tomorrow and can be provocative or even incomprehensible. Thus, interaction with them, triggers the audience and furthermore, can generate a space for dialogue and critical thinking. Neon's vision is “to expose the Greek people to reflection, so that our generation can become more open-minded, united with the rest of the world and more open to the challenges that are happening everywhere”<sup>26</sup>. Neon, as the founder says, with the many exhibitions and international artists is “an opportunity for Greek people to be exposed to something they would otherwise have to travel to see”<sup>27</sup>.

It was Daskalopoulos’s belief that “we will exit the present crisis-which conventionally we have labeled as ‘economic’, when it is primarily a crisis of

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<sup>22</sup> N. Kourachanis, V.Lalioti, D.Venieris, *Social policies and solidarity during the Greek Crisis*, in “Wiley”, 8 June 2018; pp.678- 692, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/spol.12420>

<sup>23</sup> [Hellenic Parliament TV], 31.10.2021, *Συνάντηση με τον Δημήτρη Δασκαλόπουλο*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzMvwI9FKcc>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

civilization, only if we engage once again in the production of art, ideas and culture”<sup>28</sup>. For him, the founding of Neon was a political act and a natural development in his career as a collector and a businessman concerned about the economic and cultural progress of his country and its prosperity.<sup>29</sup> It is important to add that Neon does not support or accept voluntary work even if young people have asked for it. The organization’s philosophy is based on the idea, that a balanced working relationship should be based on a trade-off between working hours and money.<sup>30</sup>

Since the goal is to show contemporary art to the general public, Neon had to take two important decisions from the beginning. First of all, Neon’s actions don’t revolve around the Daskalopoulos collection but instead, they work on free, new, commissioned or curated exhibitions and outdoor places and second, Neon will not have its own space.<sup>31</sup> Daskalopoulos explains this latter decision:

If we want to reach the wide audience, we have to go where it wants to be, or go where a new interest can be aroused, greater than the white cube in order to challenge them. The same applies to artists who are also tired of the white cube and therefore an opportunity to act in such spaces increases their creativity<sup>32</sup>.

### 1.3. The founder, Dimitris Daskalopoulos and the director, Elina Kountouri

Dimitris Daskalopoulos was born in 1957 in Athens, Greece. He holds a B.A in Management Studies from the Athens School of Management and an MBA from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management. He is known as the founder of Damma Holdings SA, a financial services and investment company, and he was the Chairman of the Board of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV) for the years 2006 to 2014. From 1983 to 2007, when he sold the company, he was the principal owner

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<sup>28</sup> [NEON], *NEON*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPWSH-6anP8>

<sup>29</sup> Y-J.Mun.–Delsalle, *The Greek Collector Championing Contemporary Art at Home and Abroad*, in “Artsy”, 05 September 2021; <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-greek-billionaire-championing-contemporary-art-abroad>

<sup>30</sup> [Hellenic Parliament TV], 31.10.2021, *Συνάντηση με τον Δημήτρη Δασκαλόπουλο*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzMvw19FKcc>

<sup>31</sup> [NEON], 1.05.2020, *NEON TALKS | Λίνα Μενδόνη, Υπουργός Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού & Δημήτρης Δασκαλόπουλος, Ιδρυτής NEON*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT5Sj6Lc6Co>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

and CEO of Delta Holdings/Vivartia SA, Greece's largest food conglomerate with 13.000 employees in 29 countries. In addition, he served as Vice President of the Confederation of European Business from 2013 to 2015. In 2016, he founded *Dianeosis*, an independent research and policy institute in Greece. He is also the chairman of the foundation.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to his business career, Dimitris Daskalopoulos is a collector of contemporary art. "It was an unconscious decision to become a collector, an inner urge,"<sup>34</sup> he explains. The first time he felt the power of art and its influence, was at the age of twelve in front of a series of Ruben's paintings at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich and at the age of eighteen, he bought his first artwork, a small statue. *The painting in the Inner Egg* (1993) by Rebecca Horn was the initial acquisition for his collection. Among the most famous and important works in his collection, is Marcel Duchamp's readymade *Fountain* (1817/1964), a piece that represents the origin of contemporary art. The D. Daskalopoulos Collection which started in 1994, now comprises around 500 works by 220 artists from Greece and abroad. Some of the artists are Matthew Barney, Louise Bourgeois, Lynda Benglis, Damien Hirst, Martin Kippenberg, Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Bruce Nauman, Mike Kelley, Kiki Smith, Marina Abramović, Joseph Boris, Robert Morris.<sup>35</sup> As he has said "My collection focuses on works that explore the human struggle to create and leave a mark during our short, fragile lives"<sup>36</sup>. His collection does not include nice abstract paintings but any kind of contemporary and visceral work through which he wants to express the agony of existence and creativity. He is not interested in decorating his house with these works but instead, he desires to put them in a dialogue so that people can see them.<sup>37</sup>

His involvement in arts is valuable at an international level. More specifically, he is a vice president of the Board of Trustees and chairman of the

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<sup>33</sup> [https://www.sev.org.gr/Uploads/pdf/Daskalopoulos\\_GS08\\_EN.pdf](https://www.sev.org.gr/Uploads/pdf/Daskalopoulos_GS08_EN.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Y.-J. Mun.-Delsalle, *The Greek Collector Championing Contemporary Art at Home and Abroad*, in "Artsy", 05 September 2021; <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-greek-billionaire-championing-contemporary-art-abroad>, [last access on 10 May 2022]

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Collections Council of the Solomon R. Guggenheim.<sup>38</sup> Further, he is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Tate international Council, the Leadership Council of the New Museum, the International Board of the Palais de Tokyo.<sup>39</sup> His collection has been exhibited at the most known museums around the world. In 2018, he was honored by the foundation at the Guggenheim International Gala for his art philanthropy and in 2014, he was awarded by Independent Curators International (ICI) with the Leo award in Manhattan.<sup>40</sup> The Leo Award is given every two years to an influential art world figure, as a collector, dealer, artist or patron. The award acknowledged Mr. Daskalopoulos's innovative approach to collecting, through the D. Daskalopoulos Collection, and the vision and impact of Neon. Other artistic influencers who have been awarded are Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Miuccia Prada, Dorothy, Roy Lichtenstein.<sup>41</sup>

Elina Kountouri has been the director of Neon from the beginning. She has studies in Law and in Political Theory. Before Neon, she was a director of Outset Contemporary Art Fund in Greece, the leading international, independent charity, supporting innovative art projects that engage the widest possible audiences. As she says, the strategy that they are laying out for Athens follows their desire “to elevate the city to a point of reference and a production center of contemporary civilization”<sup>42</sup>. Their mission is to bring contemporary art closer to the wider public. “We have to link the city to what we are doing. In Athens, our heritage is in our DNA. So, we have to transfer this emotional connection from past to present”<sup>43</sup>. Their offer is art experiences, free and open to all. The question she asks herself about each project is how relevant it is to the needs of Greeks. She answers with an example: “When there was the referendum, for example, we had an exhibition in the gardens of the French School of Athens. It was free, as all our shows are, and people

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<sup>38</sup> Y-J.Mun.–Delsalle, *The Greek Collector Championing Contemporary Art at Home and Abroad*, in “Artsy”, 05 September 2021; <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-greek-billionaire-championing-contemporary-art-abroad>, [last access on 10 May 2022]

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> <https://neon.org.gr/en/about/>

<sup>41</sup> E. Kinsella, *Why Dimitris Daskalopoulos Wants to Sleep at Whitechapel Gallery*, in “Artnet”, 17 November 2014, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/why-dimitris-daskalopoulos-wants-to-sleep-at-whitechapel-gallery-172409>

<sup>42</sup> [NEON], *NEON*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPWSH-6anP8>

<sup>43</sup> R. Spence, *Greece's Neon foundation*, in “Financial Times”, 30 October 2015; <https://www.ft.com/content/9d12e640-7d65-11e5-98fb-5a6d4728f74e> [last access on 10 May 2022]

stayed there for hours because it was a refuge from what was going on”<sup>44</sup>. Kountouri stresses that Neon wants to keep citizens awake to everyday life, and to provide “a space for enjoyment that has been lost, and a small net to rescue people from social exclusion”<sup>45</sup>.

Daskalopoulos calls Neon “a nomadic organization by conscious choice”<sup>46</sup>. It works to show art in many different areas for free of charge, to renovate forgotten places and to surprise and connect people with their open spaces, the cities. Since then, they have staged more than 28 exhibitions in 25 different venues in collaboration with public and private entities in Greece and abroad.<sup>47</sup>

#### 1.4. Neon's collaborations

First of all, Neon collaborates with the Greek National Opera for the project “The Artist on the Composer”, a long-term project focusing on the relationship between visual arts and opera. This project brings together visual artists and filmmakers with live orchestral performances and offer to the audience a completely new experience. The first commission was to the artist Nikos Navridis and the following to the Greek film director Yorgos Lanthimos. In addition, since 2012, Neon and the Whitechapel Gallery have partnered and have created a cultural dialogue. This dialogue happens through the annual Curatorial Exchange program and Curatorial Award and in co-presenting exhibitions in public spaces in Athens. More specifically, the Annual Curatorial Exchange Program provides Greece- and UK-based curators with the opportunity to connect and exchange ideas and experiences. Neon has also supported the National Museum of Contemporary Art

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<sup>44</sup> R. Spence, *Greece's Neon foundation*, in “Financial Times”, 30 October 2015; <https://www.ft.com/content/9d12e640-7d65-11e5-98fb-5a6d4728f74e> [last access on 10 May 2022]

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> M. Pournara, *NEON Founder Dimitris Daskalopoulos on Bringing Art to the People*, in “Greece Is”, 12 June 2020, <https://www.greece-is.com/neon-founder-dimitris-daskalopoulos-on-bringing-art-to-the-people/>

<sup>47</sup> Y- J.Mun.- Delsalle , *Neon And The New Cultural Center It Opened In Athens Is Shaking Up the Greek Art Scene*, in “Forbes” ,19 September 2021; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/yjeanmundelsalle/2021/09/19/neon-and-the-new-cultural-center-it-opened-in-athens-is-shaking-up-the-greek-art-scene/amp/> [last access on 30 March 2022]



(EMST) since 2012, with two annual programs for enriching the Museum's permanent collection with new acquisitions.<sup>48</sup>

A partnership was built also with the Museum of Cycladic art. Dimitris Daskalopoulos and Neon present works at the museum of international contemporary artists such as Martin Kippenberger, Mario Merz, Mike Kelley, Paul Chan, and Lynda Benglis and offer educational programs. Moreover, the Neon foundation is the sole patron of the philanthropic organization Outset, Greece. It supports contemporary creators to produce their work and advance their studies. Between 2012-2020, Outset Greece has allocated funds through grants and scholarships to support 77 institutions and individuals, for the implementation of exhibitions, performances, contemporary productions and residency programs in Greece and abroad, enhancing and promoting the work of the most promising Greek artists. A total of 867 creators and curators presented their work to the public through that support. Lastly, another partnership has been developed with the Hellenic Children's Museum for the educational program *Is this Art?* in Greece. This is an innovative approach to the art education of young people and the primary of its kind to be held in Greece. The program running from 2014, has bring more than 16,200 middle school students in Attica in conversation with a variety of contemporary art forms and the artists.<sup>49</sup>

Neon wants to take active action to enliven the city of Athens. It contributes to the interaction of art, society and the city through City Projects and aims to activate public and historical places through contemporary art. More specifically, every year Neon commissions a Greek artist to create a new work for temporary display in a public space. The first artist to participate was Aemilia Papaphilippou in 2014, who created the work *Pulsating Fields*. Papaphilippou's work is based on the concept of the Chess Continuum, used as a tool of transmission. More specifically, it relates to synthesis, to networks and connections. The artist creates 'an artwork in action', the installation of which was presented in the historic urban center of Athens, at the foothills of the Acropolis. The installation invites the visitor to participate and interact in order to experience the relationship between contemporary

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<sup>48</sup> Neon, *Partners*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/partners/>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



artistic creation and classical culture.<sup>50</sup> In 2015, Maria Loizidou presented her contemporary art installation on the grounds of the ancient cemetery and museum of Kerameikos, a significant monument of Ancient Athens. Using modern techniques to weave stainless steel fibers, the artist created a dialogue between the old and the new.<sup>51</sup> Zafos Xagoraris took on the Neon City project in 2016. Inspired by the performance *Our Great Circus* by Iakovos Kambanellis which was performed for the first time in 1973, the Performance focused on the staging of the play and its importance in Greek cultural history. In 2017, the project was completed with the production of a film and associated publication.<sup>52</sup>

The Neon City Project 2017 took place in a neoclassical building, from 1891, in the center of Athens from 1891 and which is also the last of this period and kind in Athens. Kostis Velonis created the installation *A Puppet Sun*, which consisted of 25 works and highlighted the history and significance of the site by creating a connection of space, time and memory.<sup>53</sup> Neon's City Project 2018 presented the exhibition *Prosaic Origins* by Andreas Lolis, in the British School of Athens garden. Lolis created sculptures that presented as if they disturb the aesthetics of the School's classical architecture.<sup>54</sup> In 2019, Neon reopened a former office space in the center of Athens to present different views of the city and its residents, through a photography exhibition of Panos Kokkinias. *Stock Images* showcases the adversities and the changes that the city experienced through the years.<sup>55</sup> Lastly, for the Neon City Project 2020, Neon and Athens & Epidaurus Festival collaborated to present the site-specific installation, *Disoriented dance / Mised planet*, by Greek artist Dionisis Kavallieratos. This was the first time that a contemporary art exhibition was organized in the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, the ancient venue below the Acropolis. Kavallieratos exhibited about 40 sculptures made of various materials (copper, clay,

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<sup>50</sup> Neon, *City Project | Pulsating Fields | Aemilia Papaphilipou*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/city-project-public-art-commission/>

<sup>51</sup> Neon, *City Project | A Transfer | Maria Loizidou*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/city-project-maria-loizidou-a-transfer/>

<sup>52</sup> Neon, *City Project | The Performance | Zafos Xagoraris*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/city-project-zafos-xagoraris/>

<sup>53</sup> Neon, *City Project | A puppet Sun | Kostis Velonis*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/city-project-puppet-sun-kostis-velonis/>

<sup>54</sup> Neon, *City Project | Prosaic Origins | Andreas Lolis*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/city-project-prosaic-origins-andreas-lolis/>

<sup>55</sup> Neon, *City Project | Stock Images | Panos Kokkinias*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/city-project-stock-images-panos-kokkinias-en/>

resin, wood, mirrors etc.) in a circle. The assemblage of different formal elements refers to the different eras and cultures and placing them as if in a circular dance, comments on the importance of community, laughter, gestures, and physical expression.<sup>56</sup>

During the year 2014, Neon organized a series of open discussions with the title “Public Life, Public Space, Public Art” at the Benaki Museum and in collaboration with the Athens Schools of Fine Art. In the introduction of these discussions Daskalopoulos pointed out that “Public space is a fundamental democratic concept that embodies the notions of equality, egalitarianism and community ownership. The quality of public space reflects the quality of democracy”<sup>57</sup>. He underlines that the quality of democracy in Greece suffers mainly because of a lack of participation and creativity. He also notes that “In our city we are passers-by, pedestrians, passengers, guests, consumers” thus, he raises the rhetorical question “When do we act as active citizens?”<sup>58</sup>.

In addition, Daskalopoulos stresses the importance of contemporary art in the fact that it is “addressed not to fans or spectators but to citizens”<sup>59</sup> in the sense that its visual medium provokes an aesthetic surprise and articulates a critical discourse that generates awakening, awareness and even reaction. Daskalopoulos strongly believes in public art that is exhibited “not as a monument but as a medium for upgrading everyday life”<sup>60</sup>. More specifically, he considers public art to be a political act, because it proposes a new form of communication and participation, and ultimately a growing collectivity. It can be seen as a political commitment, against “individualization”, “enclosure” and “social exclusion”. It gives to the people strong stimuli to imagine their city and their lives differently.<sup>61</sup> Lastly, Daskalopoulos argues that art can fill the void experienced by the citizens in an Athens that alienates them. A key element to him, is the element of participation and he considers himself

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<sup>56</sup> Neon, *City Project | Disoriented dance/Misled planet | Dionisis Kavallieratos*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/city-project-2020-dionisis-kavallieratos/>

<sup>57</sup> [NEON], *OPEN DISCUSSION | Public Life, Public Space, Public Art*, [Video], [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68NaLRfy\\_Es](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68NaLRfy_Es)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

as a temporary caretaker of the art. He has taken this role because he believes that “Art acquires and develops its meaning not as the property of the few but as the privilege of the many”<sup>62</sup>.

Community Projects is an initiative Neon established in 2013. They aim to implement contemporary art programs in Athenian neighbourhoods that rely on the participation of local inhabitants, independent groups and artists. The artistic programs are focus-centered on issues that concern the specific local communities. For Kypseli – In 2016, the Ring Radio Athènes organised a week of events at the open-air municipal cinema Stella which had been closed since 2008. Aside from screenings, artists and visitors were invited to use The Ring as an auditorium or as a more informal ‘theatre in the round’<sup>63</sup>. The Ring was inspired by the original circular steel ring designed by Aldo Van Eyck for the architect’s apartment in Amsterdam in 1948 and reproduced by many other architects as a symbol of a common room.

Aigaleo City is also part of the Community Projects. Aigaleo is located in the western suburbs of Athens. Having addressed the city’s past, in 2016 the project focused on the city’s younger generations. Locus Athens, the responsible non-profit arts organization of the project, brought together a theater director, a photographer and two architectural teams in order to work with groups of children and inspire them to tell stories of their community. In addition, there is an exhibition, outlining an architectural proposal for the reinvigoration of Aigaleo’s cityscape.<sup>64</sup>

### 1.5. Exhibitions and site-specific projects

One of the first and most interactive exhibitions of Neon are the works of the Berlin-based artist Tino Sehgal, around the Roman Agora in Athens in 2014. The exhibition, produced by Asad Raza, marked the first time that a major work of

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<sup>62</sup> [NEON], *OPEN DISCUSSION | Public Life, Public Space, Public Art*, [Video], [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68NaLRfy\\_Es](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68NaLRfy_Es)

<sup>63</sup> Neon, *Community Project | Kypseli | The Ring*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/community-project-kypseli/>

<sup>64</sup> Neon, *Community Project | Aigaleo City*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/community-project-aigaleo-city/>

Sehgal's was presented outdoors.<sup>65</sup> Sehgal's installation included "peripatetic philosophers" and engaged people in dialogue.<sup>66</sup> The project offered the possibility to Greeks to discuss, to rethink the past and the future and challenged them to find their own relationship and version with the work. Additionally, in 2017 the first site-specific, outdoor and indoor installation in Greece was presented by the celebrated Argentinian artist, Adrián Villar Rojas. The artist is known for large-scale sculptural installations that tend to interrupt the status quo of the artistic practice of the place where they are exhibited. The *Theater of Disappearance* is the title covering four separate exhibitions with independent commissions taking place in 2017 across Europe and the US. One of them was held at the National Observatory of Athens. The Observatory opened in 1846 and it was the world's most advanced cosmologic laboratory. Almost 160 years later, Villar Rojas radically altered the whole space and occupied an archeological area of 4,500 square metres, curated by the director of Neon, Elina Kountouri. The artist created a visual language concerning ideas of disappearance, extinction, colonization on Earth and beyond, the politics of commodity, the passage and volatility of time.<sup>67</sup> The visitor had the chance to explore places where he could feel both uncomfortable or astounded by the alternative histories Villas Rojas suggested.

An unprecedented site-specific event was presented by Neon on the archaeological site and the Museum of Delos Island in 2019. The island of Delos is one of the most important mythological, historical, and archaeological sites in Greece. As Mythology tells us, its original name was «Ἄδηλος» (A-Delos), meaning 'the non-visible'. It became «Δήλος» Delos, 'the visible', when Zeus sent Leto, his mortal lover, to find refuge there and gave birth to twins Apollo, god of light, and Artemis, goddess of the hunt. This unique history is imprinted on the Delos environment, and in the past was animated through rituals and celebrations. Inhabited since the Early Cycladic 3rd millennium BC, it had become one of the most important centers but in the early Middle Ages faded irreversibly, and be rediscovered during the 19th century with the findings of the large-scale excavations.

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<sup>65</sup> Neon, *Tino Sehgal Roman Agora*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/tino-sehgal-exhibition-in-the-roman-agera-athens-greece/>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Neon, *Adrian Villar Rojas /The theater of Disappearance*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/adrian-villar-rojas-the-theater-of-disappearance/>

The British artist Antony Gormley installed 29 sculptures around Delos, 5 of which were created specifically for this project and commissioned by Neon.<sup>68</sup> Antony Gormley is the creator of the famous sculpture *Angel of the North* and in the 45 years of his artistic career is interested in the viewer's involvement with his work. With his anthropomorphic figures, he challenges the viewers to reconsider and to reposition their relationship with their own body, birth, decay and death. "Visitors to Delos are invited to connect with time, space and nature, which inevitably link to our shared future"<sup>69</sup>. The exhibition was curated by Iwona Blazwick OBE, Director of Whitechapel Gallery and Elina Kountouri, Director of Neon. It was presented in collaboration with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades. As the artist shared to the founder of Neon "in this space, all you can do is to whisper with respect"<sup>70</sup>.

Elina Kountouri visited Delos in 2017. Her idea was that on an island full of myths and history, the connection to Gormley's works was ideal. Her idea was realized with two years of hard work and harmonious cooperation.<sup>71</sup> In an interview with Lina Mendoni, Minister of Culture and Sports and Dimitris Daskalopoulos, the latter says: "The growing courage we see from the central archeological council, went as far as to give us permission for Delos, which was hard to imagine. It is due to the fact that if we work together, we can do serious work without harming anything"<sup>72</sup>.

The Minister also agrees and points out that all these initiatives, the collaboration between the state, the public sector and the private sector, have helped society to mature and see things through a different perspective. For that reason, she

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<sup>68</sup> Neon, *SIGHT | ANTONY GORMLEY ON THE ISLAND OF DELOS*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/sight-antony-gormley-delos-island/>

<sup>69</sup> Neon, *NEON in collaboration with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades presents: Antony Gormley | SIGHT On the sacred island of Delos, Greece*, Press Release, 02.05.2019, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PRESS-RELEASE\\_02.05.2019\\_ANTONY-GORMLEY\\_SIGHT.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PRESS-RELEASE_02.05.2019_ANTONY-GORMLEY_SIGHT.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> [NEON], 1.05.2020, *NEON TALKS | Λίνα Μενδώνη, Υπουργός Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού & Δημήτρης Δασκαλόπουλος, Ιδρυτής NEON*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT5Sj6Lc6Co>

<sup>71</sup> A.Μροζονί, *Ένα ταξίδι στη Δήλο, με οδηγό τις 29 ανθρώπινες φιγούρες του Antony Gormley* in "elculture.gr", 6 May 2019 ; <https://www.elculture.gr/blog/article/dilos-taxidi-antony-gormley-neon/>

<sup>72</sup> [NEON], 1.05.2020, *NEON TALKS | Λίνα Μενδώνη, Υπουργός Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού & Δημήτρης Δασκαλόπουλος, Ιδρυτής NEON*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT5Sj6Lc6Co>

congratulates Neon for its big contribution. Lina Mendoni and Dimitris Daskalopoulos agree that synergies are needed. As Daskalopoulos states “We have accepted that we need to collaborate. We need to make the necessary institutional changes so this potential can enter everyday practice, be widely accepted and encouraged”<sup>73</sup>.

Furthermore, the collaboration between the Hellenic Parliament and Neon brought to life a unique project in 2021 as a way to memorialize the 200th anniversary of the Greek War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire. The project introduced a new cultural space and an art exhibition entitled *Portals* at the former Public Tobacco Factory.<sup>74</sup> The Factory was built in 1930 and was declared a historic monument by the Greek Ministry of Culture in 1989. Even though renovations on the property had begun in 2000, efforts were slowed by the Greek financial crisis of 2009.<sup>75</sup> With the intervention of Neon and Dimitris Daskalopoulos, 1/3 of the building, 6,500m<sup>2</sup>, is completely renovated, open and accessible to all. For this renovation and the transformation of the space for an exhibition, Neon funded €1.4 million.<sup>76</sup> All the equipment and the infrastructure remained an integral part of the building’s assets upon completion of the exhibition and the Hellenic parliament is able to use the halls for similar cultural and educational events.

The *Portals* exhibition, presented an international group exhibition, featuring 59 artists, from 27 countries including 15 new site-specific installations commissioned by Neon. Among them, there are 18 Greek artists. *Portals* is curated by Elina Kountouri, Director of Neon, and Madeleine Grynsztejn, Pritzker Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.<sup>77</sup> Kountouri tells *The Art Newspaper* “I was thinking, how do you make this historical event relevant 200 years after it

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<sup>73</sup> [NEON], 1.05.2020, *NEON TALKS | Λίνα Μενδώνη, Υπουργός Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού & Δημήτρης Δασκαλόπουλος, Ιδρυτής NEON*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT5Sj6Lc6Co>

<sup>74</sup> *Portals Leaflet*, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Portals\\_Leaflet\\_ENG.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Portals_Leaflet_ENG.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> N.Martin, *Greek billionaire Dimitris Daskalopoulos to convert Athens Tobacco Factory into a Cultural Centre*, in “Greek City Times”, 20 December 2020; <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/12/20/daskalopoulos-tobacco-factory/>

<sup>76</sup> Y- J.Mun.- Delsalle , *Neon And The New Cultural Center It Opened In Athens Is Shaking Up the Greek Art Scene*, in “Forbes” , 19 September 2021; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/yjeanmundelsalle/2021/09/19/neon-and-the-new-cultural-center-it-opened-in-athens-is-shaking-up-the-greek-art-scene/amp/> [last access on 10 March 2022]

<sup>77</sup> *Portals Leaflet*, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Portals\\_Leaflet\\_ENG.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Portals_Leaflet_ENG.pdf)

happened, without making it a national celebration, because this is always a danger when a nation celebrates their past”<sup>78</sup>.

Artists from different countries and diverse backgrounds created a community of ideas about contemporary culture and political issues. Among them, Glenn Ligon uses site-specific installation of white neon lights to play with language and its interpretation. Navridis’ installation on the rooftop of the Public Tobacco Factory, is inspired by Samuel Beckett’s phrases: “Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better”, as a relevant and motivational quote for contemporary life. Teresa Margolles, uses images of victims of crimes, taken from newspaper covers, so to bring to the surface the high rates of homicide and criminality in Ciudad Juárez, a city on the Mexican-US border. Steve McQueen explores questions of colonial history, representation and identity. Chrysanthi Koumianaki investigates the way of life during the pandemic.<sup>79</sup>

The exhibition aimed to present a “space of togetherness”<sup>80</sup>. The director of Neon refers that around 250 visitors come every day and 400 on the weekend, people from all age groups, from around Greece and abroad.<sup>81</sup>

The theme for *Portals* was inspired by an article written by author and novelist Arundhati Roy in the *Financial Times* on April 3, 2020 which states that “the pandemic is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next”<sup>82</sup>. She suggests:

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky

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<sup>78</sup> A.R. Abrams, *Huge historic tobacco factory in Athens to be renovated into cultural space by 2021*, in “The Art Newspaper”, 14 December 2020, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/12/14/huge-historic-tobacco-factory-in-athens-to-be-renovated-into-cultural-space-by-2021>

<sup>79</sup> [NEON], 07.6.2021, *Press Conference Portals, Hellenic Parliament + NEON*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJnwKK5IhQM&t=5s>

<sup>80</sup> *Portals Leaflet*, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Portals\\_Leaflet\\_ENG.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Portals_Leaflet_ENG.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> Y- J.M.– Delsalle, *Neon And The New Cultural Center It Opened In Athens Is Shaking Up the Greek Art Scene*, in “Forbes”, 19 September 2021; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/yjeanmundelsalle/2021/09/19/neon-and-the-new-cultural-center-it-opened-in-athens-is-shaking-up-the-greek-art-scene/amp/> [last access on 10 March 2022]

<sup>82</sup> A. Roy, *The Pandemic is a portal*, in “Financial Times”, 03 April 2020; <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca> [last access on 10 March 2022]



skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world [...]”<sup>83</sup>.

Moreover, the *Portals* exhibition can be seen as a call for active participation from citizens. Neon presents this exhibition with a message:

It is no longer possible for the majority of us to remain passive onlookers to change. The world has started to search for answers to restructure society, economics, ethics and politics[...]. Today we are being asked to imagine lives born out of upheaval, to determine what it is that we stand for, and to reshape everyday reality<sup>84</sup>.

Exhibitions like the *Portals* treat art as a tool thus, to connect deeper with the world around us, society, and ourselves. Besides, Neon follows and promotes the art that can express our contemporary life and feelings, the art that the audience needs as a tool of healing and of empowerment. Another example that needs to be mentioned here, is the exhibition organized by Neon, *Flying over the Abyss*. It refers to one of the most important cultural assets of Greece, the renowned Cretan writer and thinker Nikos Kazantzakis, and the creation of a dialogue between his philosophical essay *The Saviors of God* and the works of 34 contemporary artists from Greece and abroad. Some of the artists included, are Marina Abramović, Alexis Akrihakis, Matthew Barney, Lynda Benglis, John Bock, Louise Bourgeois, Mike Kelley. The exhibition firstly presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete in 2015, then at the Contemporary Art Centre of Thessaloniki, and lastly at the Athens Conservatoire in 2017.<sup>85</sup>

Once again, the exhibition and the people behind it, wanted the viewer to be active and emotionally present, to be open to all kinds of contradictive emotions. Curated by art historians Dimitris Paleocrassa and Maria Marangou, who are the

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<sup>83</sup> A. Roy, *The Pandemic is a portal*, in “Financial Times”, 03 April 2020; <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca> [last access on 10 March 2022]

<sup>84</sup> *Portals Leaflet*, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Portals\\_Leaflet\\_ENG.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Portals_Leaflet_ENG.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Neon, *Flying over the Abyss*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/flying-abyss-athens/>



artistic directors of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Crete, the exhibition traces man's course from the trauma of birth to the struggle of unto death. Nikos Kazantzakis has said "We came from an abyss of darkness we end in an abyss of darkness: the interval of light between one and another we name life"<sup>86</sup>.

Stelios Matzapetakis, the President of the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum, underlines that Nikos Kazantzakis was able to free his mind, being controlled by matter, while he was seeking the meaning of life, death, responsibility. He was ascetic and in constant struggle with the mind and he held such power, which allowed him to impress it upon one of his magnum opuses, *The Saviors of God* (Ascesis). Kazantzakis and his work inspired many generations of artists in the fields of music, theater and the visual arts, and created exceptional works of art.<sup>87</sup> Neon brought together the intellect and philosophy within contemporary art, making it relevant to Greek society in a period of crisis where people were searching for light.

The Athens Conservatoire, the place where the exhibition took place in Athens, had been out of use for 40 years and in 2016, was refurbished and financed by Neon with the aim of enhancing the Athenian scene and hosting art and cultural events. The Athens Conservatoire, founded in 1871, is the country's oldest educational institution for music and drama with former students and teachers major figures of international acclaim such as Maria Callas and Mikis Theodorakis. The architect of the building is Ioannis Despotopoulos and his design ranks among the top expressions of the radically modern spirit of Bauhaus. Neon funded the refurbishment after which the space remained under the cultural programming of the Athens Conservatory.

Neon is a dynamic and productive foundation, offering a variety of different artistic events, from solo exhibitions to indoor or outdoor exhibitions, from performances, to cultural events and artistic collaborations. The key to its mission is the visitor's interaction and participation, the awakening of his feelings, and the critical thinking ability.

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<sup>86</sup> Neon, *Flying over the Abyss*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/flying-abyss-athens/>

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

The big leap in Neon's collaborations came with the introduction of performance art and the arrival in 2016 of one of the most representative artists in the field, Marina Abramović with the project *As One*. The project, which has been organized by Neon in collaboration with MAI, broke the boundaries between the artwork, the artist and the audience. The whole project lasted for six weeks, and the performances as much as the public introduction by the Abramović Method were considered an exceptional event.<sup>88</sup>

Remembering the beginning of Neon, Achim Borchardt - Hume, the previous head of exhibitions at the Tate Modern, said:

What is interesting about Neon is of course that is driven by a strong – minded individual who has brought a very strong team of people together around him. It's interesting that emerges in a moment which many would describe as extremely challenging but very often, very exciting things and initiatives develop under these circumstances [...] <sup>89</sup>.

In addition, Dimitris Daskalopoulos declares:

I am bonded with art in a life-long symbiotic relation. The inventiveness and originality that I demand of myself in all of my activities, are fortified by my preoccupation with art. I am confident that this belief has the potential to be embraced by everyone<sup>90</sup>.

## 1.6. The D. Daskalopoulos collection

Daskalopoulos states that his collection of more than 500 works of art is now complete. In addition, in April 2022 the Daskalopoulos Collection has announced that a major body of important contemporary artworks will be donated to 4 museums, in 3 countries and over 2 continents. Featuring 350 works by 142 international artists, the collection will be donated 140 pieces to the Greek National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens (EMST), 110 works to the Tate while the

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<sup>88</sup> NEON+MAI, *PRESS RELEASE*, 2 March 2016, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR\\_EN.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR_EN.pdf)

<sup>89</sup> [NEON], *NEON*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPWSH-6anP8>

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Guggenheim in New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA Chicago) will be the co-owners of around 100 works.<sup>91</sup> Regarding the works of Daskalopoulos collection by Greek artists, nine of them go to the Tate and five to the USA. Marina Abramović & Ulay work *Imponderabilia* (1977) Black & white video projection with sound, a 30-minute loop is going also to museums in the USA.<sup>92</sup>

Myself and the team sat down and said, ‘This is a coherent collection that cannot go to one place. It’s too big, too heavy, for any museum to handle, even somewhere of the calibre of Tate.’ If our goal is to make it as available to as wide an audience as possible, we have to look at various museums<sup>93</sup>.

He also adds: “There is no meaning to a work of art if it is not interacting with somebody—it’s in a box, it doesn’t even exist. That’s where I become just an intermediary”<sup>94</sup>. With his action, he brings these artworks to the international public and asks institutions to keep them in a dialogue. In addition, he is proposing and laying the foundations for various types of collaborations between the Tate and the EMST, which opens up a whole new opportunity for the Greek museum and contemporary art in Greece in general.

He has been asked many times what the secret of his success is and he answers that there is no secret other than hard work and perseverance, and further he emphasizes the power of what he considers his conquest: “In everything I do there is always a team of people with a lot of love and passion who run the projects and who

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<sup>91</sup> H.Gareth, *Daskalopoulos’s great giveaway: Greek collector donates 350 works to Tate, Guggenheim, MCA Chicago and EMST in Athens*, in “The Art Newspaper”, 13 April 2022; <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/04/13/daskalopouloss-great-giveawaygreek-collector-donates-350-works-to-tate-guggenheim-mca-chicago-and-emst-in-athens>

<sup>92</sup> K.I.Anesti, *Η απρόσμενη δωρεά της Συλλογής Δασκαλόπουλου σε τέσσερα μουσεία Ευρώπης και ΗΠΑ -Το πρόσημο της «ελληνικότητας»*, in “iefimerida”, 13 April 2022, <https://www.iefimerida.gr/politismos/dorea-sylogis-daskalopoyloy-moyseia-eyropis-ipa>

<sup>93</sup> H.Gareth, *Daskalopoulos’s great giveaway: Greek collector donates 350 works to Tate, Guggenheim, MCA Chicago and EMST in Athens*, in “The Art Newspaper”, 13 April 2022; <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/04/13/daskalopouloss-great-giveawaygreek-collector-donates-350-works-to-tate-guggenheim-mca-chicago-and-emst-in-athens>

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

support, share and believe in the same big vision”<sup>95</sup>. Co- operation is at the heart of his venture and he argues that through collaboration greater changes can happen.

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<sup>95</sup> [Ianos], *Συναντήσεις Απρόβλεπτες* | Δημήτρης Δασκαλόπουλος | IANOS, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bts7swm-Z7Y&t=139s>

## Chapter 2: Marina Abramović, Art and Life

### 2.1. Marina Abramović's Art Story

Marina Abramović is a Serbian artist often defined as “the grandmother of performance art”. She was born in Belgrade on November 30, 1946. She has written and spoken a lot about her difficult childhood using it as a source of her art. As she wrote in 2002 “The more problematic your childhood is, the better an artist you become”<sup>96</sup>. Her parents, belonged to the generation of the new, communist Yugoslavia, and during World War II they were Tito partisans. After the war, they were both members of the Party and acquired important jobs. Abramović was raised by her grandparents. Through her religious grandmother, Milica, she learned about love and spirit and she was following her everyday rituals. At the age of six, her brother was born and she began living with her parents.<sup>97</sup> Abramović has spoken about the story of how her father taught her to swim when she was six years old: “To leave me in the middle of the sea and never look back. With the little boat going off. And I am literally drowning [...] I knew from the beginning I couldn't rely on anybody as the love was not there”<sup>98</sup>. But she was accompanied by the spiritual world, “[...] I could see it, I felt the existence of it. I never played with toys, but I played with the shadows”<sup>99</sup>. Art came to her as a way of escaping.<sup>100</sup> From a very early age she had no interest in doing anything else. She read many books and poetry too. Her parents broke up and Danica was responsible for her children's military upbringing.<sup>101</sup>

In 1965 she enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade and she continued with her post-graduate studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb. She

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<sup>96</sup> In her article “Body Art”, in Marina Abramović (Milan, 2002), p.27 as cited in Marina Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2018, p.264

<sup>97</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, New York: Crown Archetype, 2016, p.8-11

<sup>98</sup> M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, cit., p.42

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.44

<sup>100</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., p.16-17

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.20,24-25

painted her dreams, car-crashes and clouds but soon she realized that she could not limit herself to the two dimensions plane.<sup>102</sup> Thus, she started exploring what art is with all of her body, putting herself together with the audience in a new and always present condition. In her interview with Marta Rosa in 2019 she specifies what performance art is:

For me, performance is a mental and physical construction that you made at a specific time, in a specific space, in front of an audience, where an energy dialogue is going to happen. This is for me the performance. It is a live form of art and it is also a time-based art: you have to be there to perceive it<sup>103</sup>.

*Rhythm*, was the title of a series of performances during the years 1973 and 1974, where she tested her limits, physically and mentally. In one of them, *Rhythm 0*, she objectified herself. She placed on a table 72 different objects, such as scissors, knives, a feather, a whip, a rose, a condom, a pistol with a bullet, with which anyone from the public could do what he wanted. For 6 hours she surrendered to the people who tore her clothes, pierced her stomach with thorns, one tried to rape her, while someone tried to shoot her.<sup>104</sup> As Abramović states, although the performance showed that the audience is capable of killing, with her art she is interested in bringing out, not violence, but the idea of trust.<sup>105</sup> Danger in her performances is a tool to bring herself and the audience in the present moment every single second. Additionally, she perceives and approaches pain as a secret knowledge and she stresses that many rituals are based on pain in order to come closer to this knowledge. “[...] is like a door. You have to enter through the pain to the other

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<sup>102</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., pp. 32, 38-39.

<sup>103</sup> M. Rosa, *The Aesthetics of Marina Abramović: In Conversation with the Artist*, in “Firenze University Press”, vol. 12, 17 June 2019; pp.100-106, here p.101; <https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/aisthesis/article/view/1014/1012> [last access on 10 February 2022]

<sup>104</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., pp. 52-55.

<sup>105</sup> S. Hattenstone, *Interview, 'I face so much jealousy': Marina Abramović talks friends, enemies and fear*, in “The Guardian”, 22 October 2016; <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/oct/22/marina-abramovic-artist-face-jealousy-simon-hattenstone> [last access on 10 June 2022]

side”<sup>106</sup>. Teaching came to her very soon at 1973, and she has been dedicated to it till today.

In 1975, Abramović met the German artist Ulay, who became her lover and partner for twelve years. They created a number of works and they wrote their own manifesto for the new life on board, *Art Vital*, which was the course of their artistic practice based on the following rules<sup>107</sup>:

- No fixed living places
- Permanent movement
- Direct contact
- Local relation
- Self-selection
- Passing limitations
- Taking risks
- Mobile energy
- No rehearsal
- No predicted end
- No repetition
- Extended vulnerability
- Exposure to chance
- Primary reactions

They lived in a van, traveled around Europe for three years, and presented their works in museums and festivals. One of their famous performances, entitled *Imponderabilia* (1977) was presented at the Galleria Comunale d’Arte Moderna in Bologna, and was interrupted by the police who asked for their documents.<sup>108</sup> In that performance Marina and Ulay were standing naked facing each other in a museum’s

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<sup>106</sup> K. Stiles; M. Abramović; K. Biesenbach; C. Iles, *Marina Abramović*, London; New York : Phaidon, 2008, p.21-22

<sup>107</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., p.68

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73-75

narrow entrance. The idea was “If there were no artists, there would be no museums, so we are living doors”<sup>109</sup>.

Marina and Ulay were performing on the idea of trust and oneness and by balancing the feminine and masculine principles they were working on a third existence referring to it as *Self*<sup>110</sup>. Friends used to call them “Glue”, as they were like one personality, one being.<sup>111</sup> They traveled to Australia, to the Great Victoria Desert where they lived with the Aboriginals for nine months, experiencing the wisdom and the knowledge of this culture.

In the 1980s, Abramović started organizing the “Cleaning the House” workshops in nature, which includes techniques and tools to reset the body and clean the mind.<sup>112</sup> In 1988 and after years of preparation, Marina and Ulay eventually, walked along the Great Wall of China, the only construction that can be seen from the moon.<sup>113</sup> They started from the two opposite sides and met almost in the middle after ninety days. They took a picture and said goodbye to each other both as lovers and as artistic collaborators. This performance, *the Lovers*, was the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one.<sup>114</sup>

In her third period, Abramović returned as a solo artist. She started healing her pain and is ready to communicate with her audience through pure love. Her motive in life is to “never give up” and this makes her a strong warrior.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, she is free of everything and as she is saying “being, is the highest form of existence”<sup>116</sup>. Walking the Great Wall, Abramović experienced the relationship between minerals and the body and she created the *Transitory Objects* series, where the audience interacts with

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<sup>109</sup> [Luisiana Channel],18.07.2017, *Marina Abramović & Ulay Interview: A Living Door of the Museum*, [Video], <https://vimeo.com/225986826>

<sup>110</sup> From the record *Vision #4: World of Mouth*, Crown Point Press, 1980. Accessed at <https://www.ubu.com/sound/vision.html> as cited in J. Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies: A Biography*, Cambridge ; London : The MIT press, 2010, p. 148.

<sup>111</sup> J. Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies: A Biography*, cit., p.123.

<sup>112</sup> MAI, *CLEANING THE HOUSE WORKSHOP*, <https://mai.art/workshops> , [last access on 10 September 2022]

<sup>113</sup> [Sean Kelly Gallery], 12.10.2019, *Spotlight | Marina Abramović: The Lovers*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCb7D9tyGUY>

<sup>114</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., p.142,147

<sup>115</sup> [RubinMuseum],20.12.2018, *Mona Polacca + Marina Abramović: Rites and Rituals*, [Video], [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PiQD0v\\_Mt8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PiQD0v_Mt8)

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.



them.<sup>117</sup> She traveled to Brazil, staying in mines and doing her research.<sup>118</sup> During this period, her work started being widely recognized. More specifically, in 1997 she won the Golden Lion award at the Venice Biennale by scrubbing thousands of bloody cow bones for four days, in reference to the Balkan War.<sup>119</sup> In 2002, with her performance *The House with the Ocean view* she lived in an installation inside the gallery for 12 days.<sup>120</sup> Later, in 2005 she proved how to re-perform, presenting the *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.<sup>121</sup>

In 2010 she performed *The Artist is Present* sitting on a chair for 736 hours, motionless and silent.<sup>122</sup> In this performance, 1.675 people sat in the chair in front of her.<sup>123</sup> On that chair that once only Ulay did sit, in *Nightsea Crossing*, now it was free for everyone to sit and live the experience. “I was there for everyone who was there. A great trust had been given to me - a trust that I didn’t dare abuse, in any way. Hearts were opened to me, and I opened my heart in return, time after time after time [...]”<sup>124</sup>. She analyzes further in her biography:

I don’t know if this is art, I said to myself. I don’t know what this is, or what art is. [...] But this performance went beyond performance. This was life. Could art, should art, be isolated from life? I began to feel more and more strongly that art must be life - it must belong to everybody. I felt, more powerfully than ever, that what I had created had a purpose<sup>125</sup>.

After this performance, she realized her new role to the public and the need to share her method with all. She saw the need in going back to simplicity and teaching

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<sup>117</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., pp.152, 154.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 212-215.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 248, 253, 255-256.

<sup>123</sup> M. Rosa, *The Aesthetics of Marina Abramović: In Conversation with the Artist*, in “Firenze University Press”, vol. 12, 17 June 2019; pp. 100-106, here p.102; <https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/aisthesis/article/view/1014/1012> [last access on 10 February 2022]

<sup>124</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., p.255

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

people to live as themselves again.<sup>126</sup> Thus, the idea was born, to create the Marina Abramović Institution and to provide the Abramović method which is based on “the tools for changing consciousness”<sup>127</sup>.

In one of her interviews she makes the comparison between the *Rhythm 0* and *The Artist is Present* performances. As she says, the difference is the tools that she gave to the public meaning that in one case, you lose the spirit of the public by giving them the ability to be violent and and in the other case, you offer the tools to elevate their spirit.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, *The Artist is Present* made her even more recognizable to the new generation. Most of her works are documented and she also wrote her biography in 2016. Robert Wilson directed *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* in 2011 in the form of a biographical opera, with her as a protagonist.<sup>129</sup> She also made one of her dreams come true, to create a work of Maria Callas, a persona she admired since she was a child.<sup>130</sup>

Till now, she remains innovative, doing things differently and doing things that have never been done before. She experiments in art using different forms but always dealing with suffering, pain and mortality.<sup>131</sup> During the pandemic she collaborated with the WeTransfer platform to communicate the Abramovic Method and with the WePresent to present the *Traces*, an immersive installation, about her Life.<sup>132</sup> From September to December 2023, she is expected to present her new idea in Royal Academy of Art, entitled *Marina Abramović: After Life*, which explores her

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<sup>126</sup> M. Rosa, *The Aesthetics of Marina Abramović: In Conversation with the Artist*, in “Firenze University Press”, vol. 12, 17 June 2019; pp.100-106, here p.104; <https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/aisthesis/article/view/1014/1012> [last access on 10 February 2021]

<sup>127</sup>[TED2015], 03.2015, *An art made of trust, vulnerability and connection*, [Video][https://www.ted.com/talks/marina\\_abramovic\\_an\\_art\\_made\\_of\\_trust\\_vulnerability\\_and\\_connection](https://www.ted.com/talks/marina_abramovic_an_art_made_of_trust_vulnerability_and_connection)

<sup>128</sup> M. Rosa, *The Aesthetics of Marina Abramović*, cit., pp. 100-106, here p. 102; <https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/aisthesis/article/view/1014/1012> [last access on 10 February 2021]

<sup>129</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., p.266

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.282

<sup>131</sup> [PARNASS Kunstmagazin],12.09.2021, *KunstMatt by PARNASS | Marina Abramovic* [Video],<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcQuQZ-7p8o>

<sup>132</sup> T. Dafoe, *Marina Abramović's Latest Immersive Installation Will Take You on a Journey Through Her Life Story*, in “artnet”, 06 August 2021; <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/marina-abramovic-wetransfer-installation-1996351>[last access on 30 February 2022].

perception of the transition between life and death and she will also exhibit her first major UK retrospective.<sup>133</sup>

In 1998, in her conversation with the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, she referred to 21st century art as art without an object:

The object is definitely an obstacle between artists and the audience. Objects have to be removed. Then we can talk about the direct transmission of energy between the artist and the public. But the artist has to be prepared as the public to make this transmission possible. As Duchamp said: ‘the public has to be as creative as the artist’<sup>134</sup>.

According to her, the education of the new generation is of the utmost importance. Children should learn how to get and maintain a state of concentration and meditation, to learn more about their physical and mental capabilities and who they truly are.<sup>135</sup> The tools can be found in ancient eastern knowledge which she herself experienced through her travels and practice. Thus, she characterizes herself as a “bridge going to east to get the knowledge and going to the west to transmit it in form of performance”<sup>136</sup>. She says, “People don’t go to the temples anymore but they go to museums”<sup>137</sup>, so, she uses performance as a tool to create this kind of experience.

She works with repetition, duration and staging. Firstly, time is very important to her as our life becomes shorter and shorter. She aims to bring performance in life, so performance becomes timeless. She explains that there is a point at which time ceased to exist and this is the most important moment of here and now.<sup>138</sup> Performance art is only about the present moment and this is the reason why

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<sup>133</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibition/marina-abramovic> [last access on 10 September 2022].

<sup>134</sup> M. Abramović, T. Stoos, B. Pejić, *Artist body: Performances 1969-1998*, Milano: Charta, 1998, p.42

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>136</sup> K. Stiles; M. Abramović; K. Biesenbach; C. Iles, *Marina Abramović*, cit., p.25

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> M. Abramović, *Student body: workshops 1979-2003, performances 1993-2003*, Milano: Charta, 2003, p. 22.

it is a transformative art. “Here is life energy, molecular, cellular life. You are interconnected to the other life energies around you. Everything is a living unity”<sup>139</sup>. In another interview she adds: “If you escape the presence, your performance is gone. It is always you, the mind, and the body”<sup>140</sup>. On the other hand, she argues that repetition of the same thing over and over again generates enormous power. Old cultures base their entire ritual structure on repetition.<sup>141</sup> Shame is an emotion that she also loves to bring into her work. It is the emotion generated when something is hidden, so, when she let it appear in front of her audience it is like an open door.<sup>142</sup>

For her, performance is a tool that brings her to that present moment. And she is not alone in it. The audience is with her, there is an interaction with them and more importantly, she could not perform without them.<sup>143</sup> From the very beginning she realized that the subject of her work will be the limits of the body and further the mental limits thus, to go beyond consciousness.<sup>144</sup> Risk is the base of her work.<sup>145</sup> She wants to face fear together with the audience and thus, to experience the state of liberation.<sup>146</sup> She explains: “[...] If we choose to do things we are afraid of, we are stepping into ‘new sphere of reality’ in which we confront the uncertainty, which only one can give us opportunity to transform ourselves”<sup>147</sup>.

When she started doing performances, she received the worst critiques, but she never doubted and never thought of doing something else except her art.<sup>148</sup> She worked hard to have this recognition today. She gives the one hundred percent of herself and then allows things to happen. “All I know is that I follow my vision, I follow my heart and do the best as I can, and this is fifty years of my career”<sup>149</sup>. Art is her priority, she believes in her role and that artist should be a servant of society.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, cit., p.50

<sup>140</sup> K. Biesenbach, *M. Abramović: The Artist is Present*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010, p. 211.

<sup>141</sup> M. Abramović, T. Stoos, B. Pejić, *Artist body: Performances 1969-1998*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>143</sup> K. Stiles; M. Abramović; K. Biesenbach; C. Iles, *Marina Abramović*, cit., p. 64.

<sup>144</sup> M. Abramović, T. Stoos, B. Pejić, *Artist body: Performances 1969-1998*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>145</sup> M. Abramović, *Student body: workshops 1979-2003, performances 1993-2003*, cit., p. 31.

<sup>146</sup> K. Biesenbach, *M. Abramović: The Artist is Present*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> K. Stiles; M. Abramović; K. Biesenbach; C. Iles, *Marina Abramović*, cit., p. 30.

<sup>149</sup> [Радіо НВ. Без політики], 19.10.2021, *Marina Abramovic On Her Enemies And Inner Bullshit Marina I Big Interview*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YF6GEQKAItE>

<sup>150</sup> M. Abramović, *Student body: workshops 1979-2003, performances 1993-2003*, cit., p. 44.

Death is part of herself, she works on it in her performances and in her everyday life. As she states in her manifesto: “My biggest dream is to die without fear, consciously and without anger”<sup>151</sup>. This freedom is the most important thing in her life. <sup>152</sup> She continues to create as long as she is feeling enthusiasm, being curious and taking the risk.<sup>153</sup> In addition she stresses that “the process is more important than the result”<sup>154</sup>.

Her favorite quotation is one of Gandhi’s which she now loves to say when she refers to her life: “First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win”<sup>155</sup>.

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<sup>151</sup> M. Rosa, *The Aesthetics of Marina Abramović: In Conversation with the Artist*, in “Firenze University Press”, vol. 12, 17 June 2019; pp.100-106, here p.101; <https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/aisthesis/article/view/1014/1012> [last access on 10 February 2021]

<sup>152</sup>E. Saner, *Marina Abramović: ‘I’m an artist, not a Satanist!’*, in “The Guardian”, 07 October 2020; <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/oct/07/marina-abramovic-im-an-artist-not-a-satanist>

<sup>153</sup> M. Abramović, *Student body: workshops 1979-2003, performances 1993-2003*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>154</sup> M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, cit., p. 44.

<sup>155</sup> [PARNASS Kunstmagazin], 12.09.2021, *KunstMatt by PARNASS | Marina Abramovic* [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcQuQZ-7p8o>

## 2.2. The Abramović Method and Cleaning the House

Performance art, and mainly long-duration performances, often require a particular preparation for the body and mind. Artists need to challenge their limits, to find the state of mind where the body and mind are together, to purify themselves so to as to be ready to create from intuition.<sup>156</sup> Abramović traveled through Europe in a transit van and continued her extensive trips in Thailand, India, Australia, China, Tibet. She collected practices and exercises from ancient eastern society and together with her ideas and her own experiences she created her method which is flexible and adaptable to the different personalities and can be applied in western society.<sup>157</sup> After practicing her method with her students, she realized that it will be useful to all people, from any discipline.<sup>158</sup>

After the workshop she had with Ulay with a group of students in Australia in 1979, she felt that she had something to contribute to her students. She wanted to establish a level of trust with them, to teach her method, let them use parts they want but also motivate them to create based on their own experiences.<sup>159</sup> On the other hand, Cleaning the House workshops helped Abramović to open up, become more vulnerable and stronger and inspired her with new ideas of creation.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore, she argues that teaching is a kind of dialogue and not monologue.<sup>161</sup>

Growing up in the former Yugoslavia, there were always instructions in her life. From when she was a child, her mother used to write her notes to tell her what to do during the day.<sup>162</sup> There are also instructions exist in her method which are rules to follow strictly. Abramović says that in her performances instructions have the function of a ritual and they guide her to the other side of reality.<sup>163</sup> She received a solid education, but to find her own way she had to forget and unlearn things she was

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<sup>156</sup> K. Biesenbach, *M. Abramović: The Artist is Present*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>157</sup> M. Abramović, *Student body: workshops 1979-2003, performances 1993-2003*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>158</sup> MAI, *CLEANING THE HOUSE WORKSHOP*, <https://mai.art/workshops>, [last access on 10 September 2022]

<sup>159</sup> M. Abramović, *Student body: workshops 1979-2003, performances 1993-2003*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>162</sup> M. Abramović, G. Celant, *Marina Abramović: Public Body: Installation and Objects, 1965-2001*, Milano: Charta, 2001, p. 22.

<sup>163</sup> M. Abramović, Antonio Ratti Foundation, *Marina Abramović*, Milano: Charta, 2002, p.72.

taught. This was opposite of the western academic system in which she found lack of discipline, and apathy.<sup>164</sup>

Below are the key lessons of experience that she can relate to her students<sup>165</sup>:

- Lesson No.1: “The worst is the best” (Sufi saying)
- Lesson No.2: “More and more of less and less”
- Lesson No.3: “What you’re doing is not important, what is important is the state of mind in which you are doing it” (Brancusi)
- LessonNo.4: “Don’t be afraid to make mistakes”

Questioned about who are her most valuable teachers, she replies<sup>166</sup>:

- The medicine man of the central Australian desert
- The Dalai Lama
- The poetry of Marina Swevtia
- The work of scientist Nicola Tesla

None of them is an artist which leads to the fact that Abramović was always curious and inspired by life as a whole. Her studio and her institution are not isolated inside buildings but instead are immaterial. There is an interconnection between life and art. In her interview with the curator Anna Daneri, Abramović says that her micro-utopia is to transform everyday life in a meaningful way through consciousness and the transformation of energy.<sup>167</sup> To ritualize every day and bring art into life.<sup>168</sup>

In addition, she maintains that the state of mind of with which someone creates is the most important condition for the production of great art. She often refers to Chinese ancient times when artists would climb to the top of the mountain to be confronted with the Chi’j energy, the condition of oneness. Moreover, Abramović has been inspired by Cennino Cennini’s book which analyzes the

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<sup>164</sup> M. Abramović, *Student Body: Workshops 1979-2003, Performances 1993-2003*, cit., p. 29.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> M. Abramović, Antonio Ratti Foundation, *Marina Abramović*, cit., p. 71.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

abstention an artist needed to follow in the Renaissance, in order to be ready to paint the cupola of a church.

He said three months before starting work, the artist should stop eating meat, two months before starting work, he should stop drinking wine, one month before starting work, restrain from sexual desires. Three weeks before starting work, the artist should put his right arm into plaster, the day he starts work, he should break the plaster, take a brush and be able to make a perfect circle with a free hand<sup>169</sup>.

For Abramović, art is as necessary as breathing.<sup>170</sup> Good works of art come from an inner transformation.<sup>171</sup> The Cleaning the House Workshops have been functioning since the 1980s and were developed by Abramović in order for her students to prepare for long durational performances and generate new artistic ideas. They are held in a specific isolated location in nature for four to six days and participants are involved in exercises and activities that have an inward focus. There are specific instructions and they are asked to refrain from eating or speaking during the workshop thus, to bring themselves to a quiet state. Abstinence is the highest importance in order to learn discipline and control but also for purification in order to transmit the new energy into their work. All electronic devices like phones, laptops, and watches are collected. They are led through a series of long durational exercises to improve individual focus, stamina, concentration and to understand how the body and the mind work.<sup>172</sup> They are kept in uncomfortable situations, in very cold or hot conditions, to break their barriers and increase their willpower.<sup>173</sup>

More specifically, the program involves early morning exercises, running, and cold baths in the river or sea for physical health.<sup>174</sup> One of the most important

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<sup>169</sup> K. Biesenbach, *M. Abramović: The Artist is Present*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>170</sup> M. Abramović, *Student body: workshops 1979-2003, performances 1993-2003*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>172</sup> MAI, *CLEANING THE HOUSE WORKSHOP*, <https://mai.art/workshops>. [last access on 10 September 2022]

<sup>173</sup> K. Biesenbach, *M. Abramović: The Artist is Present*, cit., p. 50.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 56-57.



exercises is drinking water consciously and slowly during the day.<sup>175</sup> Water nourishes all the cells of the body and the slower you drink the more you awaken your senses. Another exercise is writing their name on a piece of paper for one hour with a pen poised continuously on the paper, or counting rice, which are both practices to expand their level of concentration.<sup>176</sup> Walking backward while holding a mirror aims to make them see reality as a reflection. Looking at the primary colors for one hour affects the nervous system and helps to sharpen the perception.<sup>177</sup> Yellow can make you nervous, red brings energy, and blue can make you relax.<sup>178</sup> There are many exercises that separate the senses in order to encourage the participant to observe and understand more deeply the sensory organs and their functions and on the other hand, the repetition of the exercises allows the participant to be detached from the senses and to cultivate more trust. Examples of these, are blindfold exercises around the home, listening to the sounds of nature, smelling objects you like and you don't like in nature, mutual eye gazing between the participants who are strangers to one another, hugging and complaining to a tree.<sup>179</sup> The idea of the workshop is for the artists to change from being extroverts to becoming more introverted.<sup>180</sup> At the end of the workshop, they create their work. As more and more people were interested in participating, Abramović opened the workshop to all for the first time in 2018, in the Cleaning the House workshop that took place in Serifos Island, in Greece.

After the performance *The artist is Present* Abramović saw the need of people to nourish the love within themselves, come together and build a community. As she states: “Art is very social, it has always been done for the others”<sup>181</sup>. In her next works she turns the viewers more and more into performers. In 2012 for her exhibition with transitory objects at PAC, a public space for contemporary and performance art in Milan, for the first time, she used the Abramović Method to

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<sup>175</sup> K. Biesenbach, *M. Abramović: The Artist is Present*, cit., p. 72.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> [PinchukArtCentre], *Marina Abramovic public lecture “Artist Body / Public Body”*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BbYkm9goOE&t=5s>

<sup>179</sup> K. Biesenbach, *M. Abramović: The Artist is Present*, cit., pp. 64, 78, 84, 90, 100.

<sup>180</sup> M. Abramović, *Student body: workshops 1979-2003, performances 1993-2003*, cit., p. 36.

<sup>181</sup> M. Abramović, T. Stoos, B. Pejić, *Artist body: Performances 1969-1998*, cit., p. 404.

prepare the public for their participation.<sup>182</sup> The Method aims to prepare the audience to see long durational performances so visitors have the opportunity to take part and experiment with tools and exercises, taken by the Cleaning the House Workshops. For transitory objects at the PAC exhibition, Marina Abramović together with the artist Lynsey Peisinger and the dancer Rebecca Davis were working with groups, consisting of 25 participants, every two hours. The public, upon entering were asked to leave all their belonging into lockers, to put on white lab coats and noise-canceling headphones. They had warm-up exercises to feel the body and open the senses and then were transitioned to sit, stand, and lie on each of the transitory objects which were embellished with various minerals such as quartz, amethyst, and tourmaline. The rest of the public could watch them with binoculars, able to observe all the details.<sup>183</sup> In later works, as in *Generator* and in *512 Hours*, the public was the only protagonist. It was all about their own experience by practicing the Abramović Method, even though the artist was present for all the action over three working months.<sup>184</sup>

The Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) was founded in 2010 and is home to the Abramović Method. The aim is to preserve the legacy of performance art, thus, preserving her own works but also supporting the young long durational performance artists. Its second function is to prepare the public to see long durational art.<sup>185</sup> The public learns through Abramović's Method to bring themselves into the present moment by being free from any distractions and by connecting with themselves and others.<sup>186</sup> Below is the mission statement: "MAI explores, supports, and presents performance. MAI encourages collaboration between the arts, science, and the humanities. MAI will serve as the legacy of Marina Abramović"<sup>187</sup>. Marina Abramović has dedicated her institution: "To Human Beings"<sup>188</sup>.

A huge but old building in Hudson, outside of New York, was selected to be the home of MAI. Abramović launched a Kickstarter campaign to ask for money for

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<sup>182</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., p. 273.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 271, 273- 274.

<sup>184</sup> M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, cit., p. 48.

<sup>185</sup> Marina Abramović Institute, <https://mai.art/about>

<sup>186</sup> [PinchukArtCentre], *Marina Abramovic public lecture "Artist Body / Public Body"*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BbYkm9goOE&t=5s>

<sup>187</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., p. 281.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

the architectural plans of the building which would be designed by the urban architect, Rem Koolhaas. One important contribution to the promotion of the campaign was the video posted by Lady Gaga while she was practicing the Abramović Method. Even though they gained the money they needed, they realized that the completion of the entire project would cost 31 million dollars.<sup>189</sup> Thanos Argyropoulos, a Greek master of investments and banking and from that time part of MAI team, suggested that they close the building and instead make MAI immaterial. “Don’t come to us—we’ll come to you”<sup>190</sup>, is their motto. This was an opportunity to open up more into the world and share the Method by going wherever institutions call them. So far, they have been visited the following places<sup>191</sup>:

- 2020, AKIS/FLUX, with Akbank Sanat + Sakip Sabanci Musezi, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2018, A Possible Island?, Bangkok Art Biennale, Bangkok, Thailand
- 2017, GENERATOR, Fragile States Pinchuk Art Centre, Kyiv, Ukraine
- 2016, AS ONE with NEON, Athens, Greece
- 2015, TERRA COMUNAL, São Paulo, Brazil

Abramović explains why she created the logo of her institution in red and white colors. According to Chinese mythology, the red color stands for the menstrual blood of the woman and the white color stands for the sperm. In this sense these two colors bring unification as they create the world.<sup>192</sup>

After *The Artist is Present*, Abramović aimed to address the general public, not only the art public. Moreover, her will was always to do immaterial art because of the deep experience she shares with the audience.<sup>193</sup>

In each Abramović Method Workshop, the exercises with the public may vary but the primary task for the participants is to be detached from technology and

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<sup>189</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., pp. 276-279.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>191</sup> Marina Abramović Institute, <https://mai.art/projects>

<sup>192</sup> [PinchukArtCentre], *Marina Abramović public lecture “Artist Body / Public Body”*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BbYkm9goOE&t=5s>

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

offer their time to the process.<sup>194</sup> Abramović makes the comparison with mathematics in the sense that, the amount of time you invest is exactly the amount you take back in experience.<sup>195</sup> She stresses the need for people to slow down and feel themselves beyond the dimension of time. For this reason, she uses repetitive movements in her exercises, such as opening and closing a door for hours without any action. As she explains, the door turns into something else which increases your consciousness. Further, she points out that the eyes are the window of the soul and in mutual gazing exercise, participants can indeed experience the deep connection of all.<sup>196</sup> One of her favorite exercises of the Abramović Method is to divide lentils from rice and count the rice. As she explains, at the beginning the participant decides how much rice he wants to count and works towards his goal until he reaches it. During the process, there is a stage of being angry of putting himself in a condition without meaning. As Abramović says, if he surpasses that stage with his breathing and concentration in presence, then he knows he can bring this willpower and concentration into his life too.<sup>197</sup> Lastly, one of the aims of the Abramović Method is to bring people together so, in her workshops, she encourages the public to gather in a spot or platform and experience the concentration of energy, the power of community.<sup>198</sup>

Abramović argues that to change the world, you need to change consciousness on a personal level. If you are given tools to change yourself then the world can change and these practices are her tools for this purpose. In addition, in all of her performances she always engaged with the public. “I give part of me and they give part of them”<sup>199</sup>. She explains that for someone to understand what performance is they have to make their own journey. “The observer must become a participant,

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<sup>194</sup> M. Abramović, T. Stoos, B. Pejić, *Artist body: Performances 1969-1998*, cit., p.48

<sup>195</sup> [Радио НВ. Без політики], 19.10.2021, *Marina Abramovic On Her Enemies And Inner Bullshit Marina I Big Interview*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YF6GEQKAIfE>

<sup>196</sup> [PinchukArtCentre], *Marina Abramovic public lecture “Artist Body / Public Body”*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BbYkm9goOE&t=5s>

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> [PinchukArtCentre], *Marina Abramovic public lecture “Artist Body / Public Body”*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BbYkm9goOE&t=5s>

that is the only way to have the double experience of being the observer and being the observed”<sup>200</sup>.

In recent years, she is focusing more on the public and the public is the work. “[...] Nobody’s life is changed by somebody else’s experience. I want more from the public. I want them to be involved and to go through changes as I do [...]”<sup>201</sup>. For her, the function of art was always the function of a bridge. A bridge between different people from different social backgrounds, religions, races where a communication can occur. A communication between the physical and spiritual world or simply between two human beings.<sup>202</sup> “[...] There are many people who believe in art as a cure, something that heals. Previously it was something spiritual, and now it’s also physical and mental. I think that work of art really produces an effect on the psyche”<sup>203</sup>.

One of the foundations of the Marina Abramović Method is what she calls “liquid knowledge”. She describes that in long durational pieces when the body and mind are very exhausted a moment comes where pain stops to exist and there is harmony with everything around. This is a moment of liquid knowledge, of clarity, a state of luminosity. Certainly, she explains, preparation of body and mind is required for this kind of understanding.<sup>204</sup> “That knowledge has been very hard for me to win, but I have won it. And the only way to win it is by never, under any circumstances, giving up”<sup>205</sup>.

She also refers to the possibility of energy transmission between the artist and the public. Due to her artistic experience she recognizes that the artist by performing can put aside the ego and step into the field of higher self where the transmission of energy can occur. On the other hand, the public also has the same power.<sup>206</sup> “The

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<sup>200</sup> M. Abramović, G. Celant, *Marina Abramović: Public Body: Installation and Objects*, 1965-2001, cit., p.448

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17

<sup>202</sup> [PinchukArtCentre], *Marina Abramović public lecture “Artist Body / Public Body”*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BbYkm9goOE&t=5s>

<sup>203</sup> M. Abramović, G. Celant, *Marina Abramović: Public Body: Installation and Objects*, 1965-2001, cit., p. 18.

<sup>204</sup> M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, cit., p. 50.

<sup>205</sup> M. Abramović, James Kaplan (Ghostwriter), *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, cit., p. 116.

<sup>206</sup> M. Abramović, T. Stoos, B. Pejić, *Artist body: Performances 1969-1998*, cit., p. 404.

question is how far the audience wants to go”<sup>207</sup>. In a letter to her brother, Velimir, in 1991 Abramović confessed:

I was seeking, trying to get that knowledge from people I respected, but I failed. [...] Now I know why I couldn't succeed. I was asking for the truth of others, but truth has to be realized directly. After all these years, I'm positive that a state of illumination is nothing other than a chemical transformation of the body in which energy is crystalizing. This is the secret entry to cosmic transconsciousness<sup>208</sup>.

### 2.3. Interview with the artist Serena Poletti

The Italian artist Serena Poletti was participating in the Cleaning the House Workshop in Serifos island, in Greece and in the Abramović Method in Oslo, both in Norway in 2018.

Serena Poletti was born in 1986 in Pordenone, Italy. After graduating in Pharmacy, she enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice and she developed her artistic research based on the philosophical and physical nature of the *Void*. She is interested in the representation of what exists but cannot be seen, in Taoism with corresponding to Greek philosophy, and also in modern physics. She was inspired by the phrase “τα πάντα ῥεῖ” which was first utter by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus 535-475 BC in Ephesus, meaning “everything flows” or “everything is changing” and so, you “cannot enter the same river twice because the river changes”. She was also influenced by the Chinese character *mu*, which means “not there”, “not”, “without” which refers to a determined absence. Her work of art is a series of engravings, calligraphies and sculptures. Currently, she enrolled in the Biennium in Painting at Atelier F of the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice. From 2018 till now, Serena Poletti has been participating in exhibitions in Verona, Viareggio, Venice, Milan and Athens.

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<sup>207</sup> M. Abramović, G. Celant, Marina Abramović: *Public Body: Installation and Objects*, 1965-2001, cit., p. 22.

<sup>208</sup> Letter from Marina Abramović to her brother Velimir Abramović, April 1991, written from Brazil, in Marina Abramović: *Artist Body*, cit., p. 416.

Serifos was chosen by Marina Abramović because of the natural beauty, flora and minerals which are ideal elements helping participants to reach a state of peace and inner strength. There were two different workshops taking place, from 27 – 30 August and from 1 - 4 September at Serifos island, in 2018. This was the first time that anyone could participate, not only performance artists.

1. Why did you decide to participate on the Cleaning the House Workshop, in Serifos, that year? Did you have particular expectations?

I wanted to attend the workshop in 2018 because I only learned that year that you could participate. I didn't want to set expectations for myself, but simply was very excited and open to any kind of experience.

2. How did your body respond during the process (no speaking, no eating, repetitive movements, time)?

Initially, I was worried about fasting for 4 days because I had never done it. The first and second day I felt tired in the morning, simply because we had to go down to the beach and walk back up a small path. But we had a lot of free time during the day to rest and boost our energy. In fact, it was recommended that we not read, but we could write and maybe make some notes about the day's experience. Time seemed to slow down and so did my body and perhaps my mind. Calm, but more receptive.

3. Were there particular feelings or intense moments (anger, shame, deep emotions, peace, connection, self-awareness)?

I must say that there were many different moments even during the same day. I felt a lot of connection with the other participants in the workshop, both in the morning when we were doing some stretching and yoga and during the other exercises of the Marina Abramović Method. That happened, especially on the slow walk exercise, when they blindfolded us and we were walking in an irregular way and we could feel the presence of another person and even touch them. I also felt very connected to my consciousness and my surroundings. It gave me a great sense of peace, which was definitely facilitated by the spectacular landscape around me. The mountains with the wild grasses and the sea. On the last day during the last exercise, I was very tired and

felt a bit frustrated because I could not stand the physical effort, but then there was a liberating moment when I cried.

4. Was there a difference in the process when creating your artwork after the workshop or a difference in how you see yourself as an artist?

Definitely this experience gave me a way to be able to better prepare myself for my work as an artist. It showed me how to prepare my mind and body and made me realize how much I can focus and how to concentrate to express what I feel through art. I think it's a kind of training that we should all do, artists and non-artists alike, to be more in tune with ourselves and our surroundings.

5. Are you using some of the tools /exercises of the workshop in your life?

Yes, I occasionally do some exercises on my own, but I find it difficult to get away from a chaotic environment. I would also like to be in the company of someone else to at least do some exercises together that require the participation of several people.

6. For whom would it be useful to have this experience?

For all creative and non-creative people, athletes, teachers, and doctors who simply need to be more in tune with themselves and want to listen to their body and mind to improve their lifestyle.

7. Three words to describe the workshop

Self-awareness, Well-being, Concentration

The Abramović Method in Oslo, Norway 2018

The exhibition, *The Cleaner*, at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in 2018 was the first, large retrospective pattern of Abramović's work in Europe presented at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in November 2018. The Abramović Method was also presented widely to the public from the 27 of February to the 4 of March.

1. What did the Abramović method make you experience regarding yourself?

How much can focus allow you to have strong control over yourself.



2. How would you characterize the communication/connection with the other participants (community energy)?

Definitely sharing something special which is intense whether it's pain or happiness creates a strong bond even between those you don't know. It's something very powerful that I believe can bond you with someone for life.

3. Did the method add or change the way you experienced Abramović art at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter?

In a way, it made me more involved and empathetic to Marina Abramovic's work and allowed me to enter her world, her mind, for a while and understand again what her need was as an artist and as a human being. When we approach a performance work there is, first of all, a visual-aesthetic impact, which can be liked or not, and then we want to understand the reason, the story of that creation. This workshop has allowed us to understand not only the story but further to identify with the artist in the first person.

### Chapter 3: *As One*, MAI and NEON, Artistic Description

#### 3.1. *As One*, MAI and NEON partnership, Vision and Goals

In 2016, Neon and MAI partnered to present the project *As One* in Athens, Greece. The program consisted of the Abramović Method, performance pieces, and a parallel and broad program of lectures, workshops, and participatory events. The founder of Neon, Dimitris Daskalopoulos, has a long-lasting relationship with the artist Marina Abramović, as he is also a collector of her artworks.<sup>209</sup> Since Neon's mission is to bring contemporary art closer to the public, *As One* was inspired by Daskalopoulos's desire to bring the Greek public in contact with performance art. Thus, Neon proposed to the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) to build a partnership together. To that day, *As One* was the largest and most ambitious project dedicated to performance art in Greece and one of the biggest in Europe.<sup>210</sup>

With this collaboration, Neon and MAI aimed on the one hand to support and promote the new generation of Greek performance artists and on the other hand to inspire and educate the Greek public in performance art. Besides this art form brings the two of them together as it is created at the present moment, at the meeting of the audience with the artist. The project lasted for 7 weeks, from 10 March to 24 April 2016 and included 29 artists. It tested the limits of body and mind and accepted the audience's responses for 8 hours a day.<sup>211</sup> *As One* took place at the Benaki Museum at the Pireos St. Annexe and all the performances and the events were free to all.<sup>212</sup> During the two months the Project was running, 150 people collaborated at the Benaki Museum, filling it with their energy. Neon was responsible for the commissioning of the whole project.

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<sup>209</sup> NEON+MAI, *AS ONE – FAQ*, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-FAQ-EN.pdf>

<sup>210</sup> NEON+MAI, *PRESS RELEASE*, 2 March 2016, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR\\_EN.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR_EN.pdf)

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> NEON+MAI, *AS ONE – FAQ*, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-FAQ-EN.pdf>

The project occurred while Neon was in its third year of foundation and Greece was experiencing an economic and social crisis. Marina Abramović stated in one of her interviews: “We started from zero, we didn’t have any idea how it was going to be. We didn’t know if actually there were enough young artists who do performances in Greece”<sup>213</sup>.

On 02.03.2016 a press conference was held by the partners of *As One*.<sup>214</sup> Thanos Argyropoulos, the director of MAI, explained that MAI works to create the conditions that performance can outgrow as a form of contemporary art in the next decade, from the year 2016. He stated that part of MAI’s role was to reanalyze what artistic heritage means, which for them “is an active way of thinking and a set of values with the artist on the top”<sup>215</sup>. In addition, he analyzes the three goals of the *As One* project which are <sup>216</sup>:

- to offer a participatory experience through the Abramović Method which prepares the public for the performance and to offer the experience of a personal ritual within a group ritual where the audience is both an observer and also being observed.
- the collaboration on prototype works, the education of the young artists and the growth of all partners (MAI, Neon, the artists) through their interconnection.
- to build and maintain a community of artists and the public for the development of performance in Greece, essential for the new Greek creation.

Serge Le Borne, the artistic director of MAI, stresses that “the real political people of the time are the artists,”<sup>217</sup> the ones who will help society see itself, what it stands for and what it needs. *As One* for him means MAI and Neon together, and further all the artists and audience together. In another interview, he expresses that in a sense, the name ‘As One’ suggests that society will surpass the difficult moments

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<sup>213</sup> [gioula rapti], *ΕΠΙΟΧΗ ΤΩΝ ΕΙΚΟΝΩΝ - MARINA ABRAMOVIC- AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU-YbkGaVOc&t=1281s>

<sup>214</sup> 2.03.2016, *PRESS CONFERENCE / AS ONE*, [Video], <https://neon.org.gr/en/video/press-conference-as-one/>

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

of crisis only if people are moving forward united, “as one entity”<sup>218</sup>. The artist and close collaborator of MAI, Paula Garcia also states: “Perhaps we are in the middle of a revolution without even knowing it. And performance practice along with artistic development are our weapons”<sup>219</sup>. She stresses the importance of an empowered “body” which outshines any triggers and the power of these empowered “bodies” together, able to bring a better change in society.<sup>220</sup>

Daskalopoulos considers *As One* a great opportunity for the public as it is a participatory exhibition, something that offers a unique experience to each viewer.<sup>221</sup> For her part, Marina Abramović emphasizes the same vision and mission that MAI and Neon share, namely “to work with the broader public, to work in public spaces”<sup>222</sup>. Inspired by the words of the art historian Alexander Dorner, Abramović refers to his argument that the new institution that expresses society and the people has not the type of a museum but rather the type of “a power station, a producer of new energy”<sup>223</sup>. Furthermore, she explains the reason why the *As One* project was made in Greece:

[...]AS ONE means to be together, all of us as one unity, to produce new energy. And in this moment, Athens is the right place, the right time, and the right public for this project. Because art can help in times of struggle, can make a difference in places where there are problems, financial difficulties, cultural and social crises. Art can truly bring people together, open their hearts and change their consciousness, it can do many things. Art cannot give all the answers and cannot change the world. But it can help by changing people’s

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<sup>218</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 1, March 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/edition-en-one.pdf>

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> 2.03.2016, *PRESS CONFERENCE / AS ONE*, [Video], <https://neon.org.gr/en/video/press-conference-as-one/>

<sup>222</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 1, March 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/edition-en-one.pdf>

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

minds. Never has this been more relevant than for Greece, in these trying times[...]<sup>224</sup>.

Initially, 320 applications were sent out to the open calls for participation in the project *As One*.<sup>225</sup> Marina Abramović, Paula Garcia, and Serge Le Borne preselected 50 of them. For the next stage, Paula Garcia and Serge Le Borne arrived in Athens at the beginning of January to meet all the artists and make the final selection of 29 Greek artists. Six of them participated in the project with six long-duration works, performed for eight hours every day from Tuesday to Sunday, for seven weeks.<sup>226</sup> In addition, the project involved 21 performances as interventions, presented by 18 Greek and five international artists and lasting between one and six days each.<sup>227</sup> Two re-performances of Marina Abramović were also presented; *Art must be beautiful*, *Artist must be beautiful* (1975), and *Cleaning the Mirror* (1995). *Cleaning the Mirror* was re-performed for the first time.<sup>228</sup> The artists re-performing were Martha Pasakopoulou, Dimitris Bambilis, Dimitra Billia, Gitsa Konstantoudaki, Elian Roumie, Vasiliki Spaxnou, and Kalliopi Zervoulakou.<sup>229</sup>

The six Greek artists presenting long-duration performances were Yota Argyropoulou, Virginia Mastrogiannaki, Lambros Pigounis, Nancy Stamatopoulou, Thodoris Trampas, and Despina Zacharopoulou.<sup>230</sup> Those artists took part in the “Cleaning the House”, a method designed by Marina Abramović in order to prepare artists for performances. As the artist Lambros Pigounis told me in our interview, participants learned the place of the workshop only when they were on the bus. The workshop took place in January, lasted for four days and was held in a small village in the Corinthian mountains. The Trainers were Lynsey Peisinger and Bill Zhao. In addition, Lampros Pigounis in our online interview explained me that participants

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<sup>224</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 1, March 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/edition-en-one.pdf>

<sup>225</sup> *AS ONE | IN REVIEW NEON + MAI*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/as-one-in-review-en/>

<sup>226</sup> NEON+MAI, *PRESS RELEASE*, 2 March 2016, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR\\_EN.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR_EN.pdf)

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> NEON+MAI, *AS ONE – FAQ*, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-FAQ-EN.pdf>

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

refrained from eating and speaking for three days and underwent all the stages of the process and the exercises, that aimed to leave them in perfect spiritual and physical condition.

### 3.2. Performance Art

The program *As One* also included two lectures by Marina Abramović, open to the public at the Benaki Museum. One lecture was about the history of performance, starting from the 1970s.<sup>231</sup> During this period, artists were exploring the human possibilities of enduring pain by focusing on the material aspect of the body.<sup>232</sup> In the 80's with the appearance of galleries, Abramović states that people lost their interest in performance art, as it is an immaterial art form and cannot be sold. Instead, in the late '80s, the performance art re-emerged, finding a new sense of body awareness in the time of AIDS. As Abramović observes "Now, during economic crisis, we return to performances because material art is an expensive good"<sup>233</sup>.

Even though performance became widely used in the 1970s, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'Futurism' and 'Dada' were the first movements who used characteristics of performance art.<sup>234</sup> Futurists rejected the forms of traditional art, and as they wanted to bring a revolution in the culture, they were organizing performance evenings by combining different art forms. Dada followed these revolutionary ideas and further worked on the concept of connecting art and life while challenging the audience.<sup>235</sup> The same aesthetics characterized the 'Avant-garde movement', explored in the German Bauhaus from 1919. "Stage Workshop" which was taken place in Bauhaus, is a great example that was based in researching

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<sup>231</sup> NEON+MAI, *PRESS RELEASE*, 2 March 2016, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR\\_EN.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR_EN.pdf)

<sup>232</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Lisa S. Wainwright, *performance art*, in "Britannica", <https://www.britannica.com/art/performance-art>

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

and experiencing the relationship between the body, space, and light under the direction of Oskar Schlemmer.<sup>236</sup> Another example of great influence is the ‘Black Mountain College’, which was founded in North Carolina in 1933.<sup>237</sup> People of art built a community where they were living and making art together, giving birth to new ideas. As these ideas grew, the experimental composer John Cage organized an event in 1952, along with other influential artistic figures. They mixed different types of art and affected by Zen philosophy and improvisation they created an event which is considered as the first example of ‘Happenings’ and ‘Fluxus’ activities, where ordinary events come to art.<sup>238</sup>

Another art style that included performance’s characteristics is the ‘Action painting’, which emerged in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>239</sup> The use of this technique allowed artists to see the canvas not only as an object but also as an area to act in. Jackson Pollock is one of the most known painters who used this method and made his actions part of his work.<sup>240</sup> Joseph Beuys pushed the barriers even further regarding what considers art or artwork and started focusing on performances or ‘Actions’.<sup>241</sup> His teachings and his work on ‘social sculptures’ was based on the idea that everything is art and everyone has the potential to be an artist, something that aimed to change the consciousness of people and society. He believed that art can and should transform everyday life.<sup>242</sup> In the 1960s art saw new opportunities with the emergence of media and in 1970s the term ‘performance art’ is general used.<sup>243</sup>

Abramović in her lecture refers to the long duration works as the most intense moments of her life, the moments that have changed her.<sup>244</sup> She states that a

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<sup>236</sup> S.Kulenović, *Performance Art and its Journey to Recognition*, in “Widewalls”, 19 March 2017, <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/performance-art>

<sup>237</sup> Lisa S. Wainwright, *performance art*, in “Britannica”, <https://www.britannica.com/art/performance-art>

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> A. Tikkanen, *Action painting*, in “Britannica”, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Action-painting>

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> A. Greenberger, *Why Joseph Beuys’s Mysterious Art Continues to Inspire—and Incense*, in “Artnews”, 5 January 2021, <https://www.artnews.com/feature/joseph-beuys-who-is-he-why-is-he-important-1234580650/>

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Lisa S. Wainwright, *performance art*, in “Britannica”, <https://www.britannica.com/art/performance-art>

<sup>244</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

performance, which lasts months, “it is not just a performance, it’s life itself”<sup>245</sup>, Long duration works can be found in “science” as in “nature” and as she says the beauty and the importance of it is “how you can shift to what is called ‘the higher self’”<sup>246</sup>. To explain more what performance art is, Abramović gave two workshops with eight participating artists each time in front of the public.<sup>247</sup> The artists presented parts of their work and Marina Abramović was challenging them with ideas in order to go deeper into themselves and experienced the performance to the fullest.

An important talk given during *As One*, is the one by Anna Stavropoulou, a theater specialist and associate professor of the Theater Department at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, accompanied by the film director Olga Spyropoulou, both analyzing the difference between performance and theater<sup>248</sup>. As they said, theatre and performance “does not constitute diametrically opposed poles of any dichotomy; their relationship is not linear”<sup>249</sup>. However, they explain, in theater the actor speaks as an “Other” and his speech and movements are rehearsed. The viewer is separated from the actor, placed in a particular position and he lives the experience through the speech and body of the Other.

On the other hand, they argue that the performance can become “an object that the performer produces, which is consumed by the spectator as a product. It endures as a memory of a presence”<sup>250</sup>. They were referring to the performance *Rhythm 0* by Abramović where she put in a table 72 objects for the spectators and so the spectators became the subject of the performance, the one who composed the narrative. In other cases, the spectator can become an object of viewing by the performer or the audience and even further the whole performance can be an

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<sup>245</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Neon, *MARINA ABRAMOVIC / WORKSHOPS*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/event/marina-abramovic-workshop/>

<sup>248</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>249</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.



example of “communal experience”<sup>251</sup>. Lastly, both interviewees clarify that “the aim of a performance is first and foremost to change the artists themselves, their personal development”<sup>252</sup>. In addition to that, there are also performances that aim to provoke this change also in the audience and in society.

Many other discourses were held by Greek and international people involved in the art field in order to create a dialogue on the variety of aspects of performance art.<sup>253</sup> An interesting talk was given by the Greek National Opera director and the artist Katerina Oikonomou discussing the differences and the similarities between opera and performance practice.<sup>254</sup> The director of the Thessaloniki Contemporary Art Centre gave a workshop regarding the “body” in performance art and had an open conversation with Leda Papakonstantinou, the pioneer Greek performer in Greece. There was also a speech about the limits of the body and a broader workshop about immaterial art forms. Eva Lambara and her teacher, showed how a body of limited mobility can find alternative ways to experience the world.<sup>255</sup>

Very important to the project was the presence of Tehching Hsieh, the pioneer of long durational performance, which gave a speech about his work.<sup>256</sup> In addition many others international performance artists gave open workshops to the publics. Lastly, every day during the project viewers could watch a variety of screenings regarding performance art, short films selected by the the invited speakers, documentaries on the work of Marina Abramović, and pieces that influenced her practice.<sup>257</sup>

The “Mutual Wave Machine”, an interactive neurofeedback experience, was also taken place in the Benaki museum during *As One* project.<sup>258</sup> The machine was designed by the artists and scientists Suzanne Diker and Matthias Oostrick and it was

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<sup>251</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> NEON+MAI, *PRESS RELEASE*, 2 March 2016, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR\\_EN.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR_EN.pdf)

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

inspired by Marina Abramović's "Mutual Gaze" performance.<sup>259</sup> Creators explain about the operation of "Mutual Wave Machine":

Enclosed by an intimate capsule and immersed in an audiovisual environment that responds and reflects their shared brain activity, two visitors can directly experience and manipulate their internal efforts to approach or distance themselves from each other. During the experience, greater brainwave synchronization is reflected in greater vividness and more coherent and recognizable audiovisual patterns, while lack of synchronization strays towards dark audio-visual chaos: a faint ringing in the ears and static in the retinas<sup>260</sup>.

Daskalopoulos in the open interview in the Greek bookshop "Ianos", in 2016, shares the feelings of Marina Abramović regarding *As One*. He explains that the particular project in Greece was of the most organized and completed projects she made in her whole career, her new standard.<sup>261</sup> Abramović also says that this was the first time that MAI has operated without her artistic presence, "but as a mechanize for training artists in the art of performance"<sup>262</sup>. More particular she refers: "The Method has left my side and now belongs to the public"<sup>263</sup>.

### 3.3. The Benaki Museum and architecture

The main building of the Benaki Museum was founded in 1929 by Antonis Benakis and is located in the house of the Benakis family.<sup>264</sup> It is one of the most famous museums in Athens and the first private museum in Greece. Antonis Benakis

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<sup>259</sup> NEON+MAI, *PRESS RELEASE*, 2 March 2016, [https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR\\_EN.pdf](https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NEON-MAI-PR_EN.pdf)

<sup>260</sup> *Co-production: Marina Abramovic Institute (Suzanne Dikker + Matthias Oostrik) – Mutual Wave Machine*, in "TodaysArt", <https://todaysart.org/project/99/>.

<sup>261</sup> [Ianos], *Συναντήσεις Απρόβλεπτες | Δημήτρης Δασκαλόπουλος | IANOS*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bts7swm-Z7Y&t=139s>

<sup>262</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Benaki Museum, *The founder*, [https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com\\_landings&view=founder&lang=en&Itemid=820](https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com_landings&view=founder&lang=en&Itemid=820)

was a collector in Egypt and when he came to Greece to live permanently, he donated his artworks to the Greek state. Due to the increase in exhibitions, collections and activities of the museum, new building facilities and annexes were also created.<sup>265</sup>

The new Benaki Museum building, where the project *As One* took place, is located at 138 Pireos Street. The size of the whole building is 8,200 m<sup>2</sup> and the exhibition halls cover 850 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>266</sup> In the central, there is also an internal courtyard. The refurbishment of the building sponsored by the Minister of Culture and the European Union. The works for the refurbishment started in 2001 and lasted three years and the architects who undertook the implementation of the project is Maria Kokkinou and Andreas Kourkoulas.<sup>267</sup> The architects refer about their vision on this project:

The package of the precious is the main concern in the design of the museum. The spatial structure constitutes the conditions for the wandering of the body and the eye, developing choreography of movement in the new Benaki Museum. The activation of the senses through a metaphoric game literally creates the conditions the building relates to the visitors and the city<sup>268</sup>.

The architects used different materials as their architectural approach was based in “a bipolar concept”<sup>269</sup>. The most characteristic is the red marble that covers the outside part of the building. The outside walls “are closed, monolithic, vertical and smooth”<sup>270</sup>. On the opposite the walls of the atrium “are transparent layers of materials which are absorbent, soft, movable, and changeable in time”<sup>271</sup>. In addition,

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<sup>265</sup> Benaki Museum, *Museum of Greek Culture*,

[https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com\\_buildings&view=building&id=11&Itemid=523&lang=en](https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com_buildings&view=building&id=11&Itemid=523&lang=en)

<sup>266</sup> Benaki Museum, *Pireos 138*,  
[https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com\\_buildings&view=building&id=13&Itemid=524&lang=en](https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com_buildings&view=building&id=13&Itemid=524&lang=en)

<sup>267</sup> Kokkinou – Kourkoulas, Architects and Associates, *Benaki Museum Pireos*,  
<https://www.kokkinoukourkoulas.com/benaki-museum-pireos/>

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

wooden louver panels which cover the facades of the atrium let “diaphragms of light” to come in the internal space while the corridors that are placed between the wooden louvers and the glass walls, give a modern aesthetic to the building and a sense of freedom.<sup>272</sup> A very important characteristic to the design of the building is the ability for the visitor to keep “a maximum visibility” with the outside world. In addition, as the exhibitions that the building hosts are mainly kept for a short period of time, design features are also the flexibility and the easily re-arrangement of the elements in the spaces. During the year many different happenings and events are taking place in the courtyard such as music concerts and conferences. In the ground floor there is also a bookshop and a restaurant open daily.<sup>273</sup>

For the hosting of the *As One* project, those responsible for the design and implementation of all spaces and experiences was the AKA – Apostolou Colakis architects office, in a close collaboration with Neon and MAI.<sup>274</sup> AKA is a design studio “that works across the fields of architecture, interior, exhibition and furniture design”<sup>275</sup>.

Abramović Method took place in the ground floor of the new Benaki Museum. Visitors, free from any kind of distractions, engaged in a series of activities aimed at increasing awareness and connection with the self and the surroundings. The AKA office, worked together with Lynsey Peisinger, the close collaborator of MAI, to create a space of deep relaxation.<sup>276</sup> They designed the path from the welcome area where the breathing and the warm-ups exercises take place till the one unified space. The entire room was painted white while the blood wood prevailed everywhere in the space such as in the floor, the tables, the chairs and the panels.<sup>277</sup> Furnitures and other elements that are used in the Method were constructed by order.

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<sup>272</sup> Kokkinou – Kourkoulas, Architects and Associates, *Benaki Museum Pireos*, <https://www.kokkinoukourkoulas.com/benaki-museum-pireos/>

<sup>273</sup> Benaki Museum, *Pireos* 138, [https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com\\_buildings&view=building&id=13&Itemid=524&lang=en](https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com_buildings&view=building&id=13&Itemid=524&lang=en)

<sup>274</sup> AKA – Apostolou Colakis architects, <http://www.ak-a.gr/information/>

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> AKA- As One, <http://www.ak-a.gr/project/as-one/>

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

As the architects say the “vast” and “shadowless” room gave the feeling of a slowing passing time.<sup>278</sup>

The first floor was a meeting point for particular teams. A large space was divided into three parts, each one designed differently.<sup>279</sup> “A green room” was given to the facilitators for their relaxation and their breaks, a workspace was created for MAI and Neon staff, and a third room was created to host workshops, presentations and projections.<sup>280</sup> The second floor was the area where all the performances took place except for one which was performed in the courtyard. The AKA office together with Paula Garcia, Serge Le Borgne, and each artist, collaborated to create unique performance environments.<sup>281</sup> This is how the general aesthetic of the space was created, which expressed the whole project.

#### 3.4. Personal interviews with the participants, April 2022

##### 3.4.1. Virginia Mastrogiannaki, long durational performance

Virginia Mastrogiannaki lives in Athens, in Greece. She studied at the School of Fine Arts of Rouen, France, and received an International Superior Degree of Plastic Expression. She also acquires two master’s degrees, in Visual and Applied Arts from the School of Fine Arts of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and in Fine Arts from the Athens School of Fine Arts. Her work deals with the concepts of duration, limits and errors and is characterized by constant tests of endurance and tolerance<sup>282</sup>.

Her art and performances have been shown in different cities and museums, in Athens ( at the Alternative Stage of Greek National Opera, the Benaki Museum, the Athens Concert Hall Garden, the National Historical Museum), in Thessaloniki (at the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Goethe Institute Thessaloniki, in many

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<sup>278</sup> AKA- As One, <http://www.ak-a.gr/project/as-one/>

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Mastrogiannaki Virginia, CV, <http://www.virginiamastrogiannaki.com/cv.html>

galleries and in a variety of festivals like the 60th Thessaloniki International Film Festival and the 5th Thessaloniki Biennale) and abroad, for example in Istanbul, in “Akış/Flux”, a collaboration between Sakip Sabanci and the Marina Abramović Institute, in France (at Jakob Gautel, La Petite Fabrique d'Art, Immanence, Galerie du Belay, Galerie Réjane Louin), in Germany (at ZKM, Karlsruhe, the Podewill Contemporary Arts Centre) and further in other galleries and cultural centers in Copenhagen, Limassol, Prague, Tallinn, Stockholm.<sup>283</sup>

In 2016, she participated in the *As One* project with the long durational performance, *Jargon*. For eight to ten hours per day, 39 days and 324 hours, her mind attempts to transform itself into “an analogue machine in order to follow endless temporal change counting each second throughout the duration of the project”<sup>284</sup>. She conceived this idea thinking that a long-durational performance is characterized by duration and time so, she was counting the hour of the action.<sup>285</sup> The artist explains that the title, *Jargon*, addresses the coded speech and is a type of coded human communication. She refers to it as “an ascetic act that nevertheless links her with others through the overlay of time and place”<sup>286</sup>. Her goal was to stay focused and avoid any mistakes that would cause her to lose seconds or the flow. As she says, a deep preparation was needed to get to know how she behaves as a body and how to deal with the difficult moments of the performance. Speaking about the performance she says:

This action attempts to talk about the here and now that concerns not just the person counting but also everyone who is faced with it. [...] There are times when the counting seems to happen mechanically and feel like half my brain is counting and the other half is observing the world around me<sup>287</sup>.

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<sup>283</sup> Mastrogiannaki Virginia, CV, <http://www.virginiamastrogiannaki.com/cv.html>

<sup>284</sup> [NEON], VIRGINIA MASTROGIANNAKI / NEON+MAI / AS ONE, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=af9HDNS06XM&t=30s>

<sup>285</sup> [gioula rapti], 30.01.2017, ΕΠΙΟΧΗ ΤΩΝ ΕΙΚΟΝΩΝ - MARINA ABRAMOVIC - AS ONE, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU-YbkGaVOc&t=1281s>

<sup>286</sup> [NEON], VIRGINIA MASTROGIANNAKI / NEON+MAI / AS ONE, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=af9HDNS06XM&t=30s>

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

And further, she adds: “I truly feel that this aspect of the work constitutes the power of this specific action and makes the presence of the human counting machine approachable and familiar, but at the same time other-worldly and alien”<sup>288</sup>.

Below is my personal interview with the artist. She replied to my questions in a written form via email, in Greek and I made the translation into English.

#### Interview

1. How would you describe the various reactions of the Greek audience during your performance, what did their presence give you?

The presence of visitors is vital to any performance project. Performance is the predominant visual medium for simultaneous exchange, sharing of experiences, and immediate response. Visitors' reactions to my performance varied depending on the time and attention that each of them gave. There were people watching, gathering, and feeding into the work. Just as there were people who seemed to feel satisfaction in disturbing the artist's concentration, confusing the “pacing” and altering the flow of the work. The presence of the visitors gave me strength each time, regardless of their presence and intent.

2. Approximate public characteristics (age, sex)

Mixed audience. Average age 35-40 years old. The fact that admission was free seems to have encouraged visitors to come to the exhibition repeatedly, even daily.

3. What did the whole experience give you, in three words?

- Knowledge
  - Perception (of the elasticity of my boundaries, but also a keen emotional awareness of my surroundings during exposure, in and out of hours)
  - Understanding of the importance of communicating the concept to visitors.
- The fact that the counting was about current time and my insistence on being

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<sup>288</sup> [NEON], VIRGINIA MASTROGIANNAKI / NEON+MAI / AS ONE, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=af9HDNS06XM&t=30s>

as precise as possible made the performance a means of a shared experiential experience, that of the passage of time.

4. How would you describe your cooperation and organization with (1) Neon - MAI, (2) the Benaki Museum and the (3) other performers?

- (1) Excellent.
- (2) Excellent, on a human and personal level, six years later it is always very touching when we meet with the Museum employees we met back then.
- (3) Excellent also. With some people, partnerships and even friendships were born.

5. Do you have any observation, comment, something that could be done better, for the next such collaborations?

With regard to long performances such as this, I believe that dietary care should be taken seriously in relation to people exposed to such durations. For those of us who were in a physical exposure condition for seven weeks, for eight or ten hours a day, it was very difficult after a point to take care of a relatively balanced diet (purchase, preparation, regularity) which increasingly intensified our physical fatigue.

6. What has this experience given you in terms of how you have moved forward artistically?

I feel that this work is one of the milestones in my artistic career, as it was my first contact with long-form performance. I learned so much. Already during the project, I realized that I was experiencing a very rich emotional range and understood how acute my emotional perception was. It also became even clearer to me the importance not only of preparation in terms of physical and psychological condition, but also the need to imagine and create the appropriate “tools” necessary each time for the development of each idea.

7. How do you think the performing arts in Greece have evolved since *As One*? Are you satisfied with the efforts that have been made or would you suggest something different for it to evolve more?



Considering that the remuneration for the artistic work is a given and an acquired state- a fact that often seems to be negotiated, the recording of such a work is of great importance, as it is a “living” and ephemeral medium. A big discussion that unfortunately is rarely opened and even more rarely happens, is the insurance of the artist. We are discussing an artistic practice that has the body as its medium and we almost never discuss the integrity and safety of the body itself. I think that is at least naive, if not hypocritical.

8. What would you say is the need of the Greek public for art today?

To come back to art again.

9. What was your feeling in the last minutes before the end of the project, when the audience was timing with you?

I was surprised and moved to an extreme degree.

10. What is created between, the artist, the audience, and the “work” and where can this dynamic lead?

If I may use the term, I would talk about the “activation” of the artistic idea through the presence of visitors. The dynamic relationship that develops between the two poles (visitors-artists) is capable of leading to the elasticity of endurance and limits not only of the artist as an ephemeral transmitter, but also of the visitor as a present receiver of the artistic proposal.

#### 3.4.2. Yiannis Pappas, performance intervention

Yiannis Pappas is a visual and performance artist. He studied at the Athens School of Fine Arts and then, at the Berlin University of Arts (UdK) and he is a graduate of the scientific and artistic postgraduate program Space Strategies at the Berlin Academy of Arts KhB Weißensee with a focus on Anthropology and Performance Art.<sup>289</sup> He lives in Berlin and works internationally. His works have

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<sup>289</sup> V.Vaggenou, Γιάννης Παππάς: Ένα σώμα μπορεί να γίνει φορέας συλλογικής-ατομικής μνήμης και εν δυνάμει συντελεστής ιστορικών μετασχηματισμών, in “culturenow.gr”, 17 November 2021; <https://www.culturenow.gr/giannis-pappas-ena-soma-mporei-na-ginei-foreas-syllogikis-atomikis->

been shown in Europe (at the Venice Biennale of Architecture 2018, the Athens Biennale 2016, the 7th Berlin Biennale, the Central St. Martins UK 2016, the Gorki Theater Berlin 2015, the HAU Theater Berlin 2012) in Asia (at the Bangkok Biennale 2020, the Osaka Interface Exhibition, Japan 2019, the Bangkok Art Biennale 2018), in the Middle East (at the Darb 1718 Contemporary Art and Cultural Center Cairo 2015, the Ha'Riviera Gallery Bat-Yam, Israel 2014), in South and North America (at the Performance Art Festival of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia 2018, the FIVC Festival, Chile 2016, the Codec Festival, Mexico 2015).<sup>290</sup>

Growing up in Patmos, a Greek island which it's known as the site where the Book of Revelation was written, Pappas was affected by the history and the culture and further, many of his artworks are connected to religion. "I work a lot with the sacred, the holy and the mysterious to create a poetic but abstract language using opposing dynamics [...]"<sup>291</sup>. In 2013 he made a trip to the Great Lavra Monastery, on the Mount Athos peninsula in Greece and for five weeks, he observed and interviewed residents, in daily life to learn about the ascetic lives of the monks. This research was the basis of *Spatial Ataraxia*, his Master's thesis, which inspired him in a number of works and exhibitions, as the *Control'til End* (2014), an installation of photos and drawings that opened at the Santa Maria Church in Bolzano, Italy.<sup>292</sup>

As he says, Marina Abramović was a catalyst to his interest regarding the long duration performances and points out the trust and support he received from MAI and the artist herself, to develop his art through this medium.<sup>293</sup> His important performance, *Telephus*, was presented in 2018 at the Bangkok Biennale "Beyond Bliss" for the Live Exhibition *A Possible Island?* curated by the MAI at the Bangkok

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[mnimis-kai-en-dynamei-syntelestis-istorikon-metasximatismos/?fbclid=IwAR1AWSRxC6G2RQa2RluB6ghrYvGMiuXNtFrSqGH7fcodJL0F1Y2Sfs0f28s](https://www.culturenow.gr/giannis-pappas-ena-soma-mporei-na-ginei-foreas-syllogikis-atomikis-mnimis-kai-en-dynamei-syntelestis-istorikon-metasximatismos/?fbclid=IwAR1AWSRxC6G2RQa2RluB6ghrYvGMiuXNtFrSqGH7fcodJL0F1Y2Sfs0f28s)

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> A. Alleyne, *Yiannis Pappas: Selected by WePresent* guest curator Marina Abramović, in "WePresent" 16 March 2021; <https://wepresent.wetransfer.com/stories/yiannis-pappas-selected-by-marina-abramovic>

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> V. Vaggenou, *Γιάννης Παππάς: Ένα σώμα μπορεί να γίνει φορέας συλλογικής-ατομικής μνήμης και εν δυνάμει συντελεστής ιστορικών μετασχηματισμών*, in "culturenow.gr", 17 November 2021; <https://www.culturenow.gr/giannis-pappas-ena-soma-mporei-na-ginei-foreas-syllogikis-atomikis-mnimis-kai-en-dynamei-syntelestis-istorikon-metasximatismos/?fbclid=IwAR1AWSRxC6G2RQa2RluB6ghrYvGMiuXNtFrSqGH7fcodJL0F1Y2Sfs0f28s>

Art and Culture Centre. The performance was 175 hours long, where he wrapped his body parts in plaster to create an imposing pile of casts, as a commentary on “personal and collective asphyxia”<sup>294</sup>. In addition, Marina Abramović selected his work as one of the five most prominent in contemporary performance art, and curated its presentation in WePresent 2021, in Another Magazine Autumn/Winter issue 2021 and in Sky Arts TV UK 2020.<sup>295</sup>

He perceives the body as a means of communication and solidarity, which can be transformed “into a tool of knowledge”<sup>296</sup>. He also adds, “The limitations of the body are the starting point from which the performing body begins to work. It is its attempt to expose, impose and perhaps overcome the limits with which it interacts”<sup>297</sup>.

Yiannis Pappas participated in the *As One* project, with the performance *A Key* for 34 hours, over the course of four days. He used a key to break through the walls of four successive cells. As he refers, he wanted to bring in the surface “the physical freedom of the self within an enclosed space” and also to play with the symbolism of the door which “either closes you off or sets you free”<sup>298</sup>. Due to the refugee crisis in Greece at that period and the setting of the performance itself, the artist expressed the feeling that during the progress of the performance the notion of refugees came very intensely to the fore.<sup>299</sup> He hopes his work to act as a wake-up call but also he leaves room for concepts “that will subjectively activate recipients to develop ideas both autonomously and collectively”<sup>300</sup>.

Below is my personal interview with the artist Yannis Pappas that I received in written via email.

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> [NEON], *YIANNIS PAPPAS / NEON + MAI / AS ONE*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suJByZK2UxQ>

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> V.Vaggenou, *Γιάννης Παππάς: Ένα σώμα μπορεί να γίνει φορέας συλλογικής-ατομικής μνήμης και εν δυνάμει συντελεστής ιστορικών μετασχηματισμών*, in “culturenow.gr”, 17 November 2021; <https://www.culturenow.gr/giannis-pappas-ena-soma-mporei-na-ginei-foreas-sylogikis-atomikis-mnimis-kai-en-dynamei-syntelestis-istorikon-metasximatismou/?fbclid=IwAR1AWSRxC6G2RQa2RluB6ghrYvGMiuXNtFrSqGH7fcodJL0F1Y2Sfs0f28s>

## Interview

1. What was your feeling about the Greek public at all stages of your performance, what did their presence give you?

The Greek audience is familiar with the performing arts, it's in their DNA, we could say. Drama and comedy are expressed in everyday life in all forms. There may be a hesitation on anything modern in Greek society, but the public does not reject the opportunity to take part in it, and it is important! I also think it is a strict public and that is what makes it special, people will judge, express themselves and ultimately communicate/or not, with the work and the artist/s. Its presence at *As One* was as vibrant as the exhibition itself, it gave me so much energy (and emotion) to continue my long hours of work and get it done.

2. Approximate public characteristics (age, sex)

I think there was a real diversity of people, all ages, sexes, social classes, as it was free for everyone!

3. What did the whole experience give you, in three words?

Experience that became knowledge and knowledge that created inspiration.

4. How would you describe your cooperation and organization with Neon - MAI, the Benaki Museum and the other performers?

Completely helpful and professional, with the mutual trust that developed over the two months. Since then, friendships and collaborations have been established between us (the artists) and continue to grow.

5. Do you have any observation, comment, or something that could be done better, for the next such collaborations?

I hope that partnerships like that of Neon and MAI will continue to lead the way in such ventures of immaterial art, and be examples of proper organization and presentation of non-ordinary exhibitions.

6. How did the subsequent collaborations with MAI and Marina Abramović come about? (What do you think was the key to your success that led to the continuation of your collaboration?)

Mainly it is the dedication of our common interest, i.e. that of ephemeral art, its evolution, and the trust that has been built through collaborations based purely on performance art and its research. For example, we are now working on a new project of presenting performance art, overturning some spatio-temporal frameworks of impression and audience participation. It is an experiment that will be presented in Amsterdam in the winter of 2022.

7. How do you think the performing arts in Greece have evolved since *As One*? Are you satisfied with the efforts that have been made or would you suggest something different to evolve more?

I think it inspired the artistic scene and gave a momentum. The medium of performance art clearly existed in Greece, with notable examples of artists, but this exhibition managed to be communicated on a wide scale and not only in the marginalized and underground expression of art. Besides, the institutes in question supported the completion of one of the largest projects dedicated to performance art that has taken place in Europe to date.

8. What would you say is the need of the Greek public for art today? What can the performing art offer them?

Greek society has been treated as a wild child for the last decade, both by the supposedly “adult European” countries, but also by its own politicians. Education is ailing with teachers without pedagogical awareness and methodologies as well as with politicians whose concern is to keep these children obedient. The answer to your question is for governments to be interested in culture first, for art to become a tool through schools, and in the everyday life of the citizen. Unfortunately, we are becoming examples to be avoided in terms of protecting and preserving monuments in principle, [cf. Case of cement on the Parthenon with Minister of Culture L. Mendoni (Libération 2.5.21)] or with the removal of certain art courses in schools by the Minister of Education N. Kerameos. It will take some time to keep up with the “artistic now” but I believe that the performing arts can directly convey reactions and

ideas about everything that is happening. It is time to communicate all art forms and not just painting.

9. What made you choose to stay in Berlin, what does it offer you as an artist?

I chose Berlin originally for my studies, I was drawn to the diversity of everyday life in this city, the easy access to nature despite it being constantly a construction site metropolis, (and perhaps, when I meet people randomly I like to hear the question “What medium do you use in your art?”, rather than the standard reaction in Greece “A! You're a painter!”, after being asked what I do).

### 3.4.3. Lambros Pigounis, long durational performance

Lambros Pigounis, is one of the six artists who participated with a long duration performance in the *As One* project. He specializes in the field of contemporary classical and electroacoustic composition and his main artistic activities are Sound Art works and physical sound art performances as well as collaborations with musicians, directors and choreographers.<sup>301</sup> He has appeared in a variety of concerts and festivals such as the Laban's Dance Festivals (UK), the Greenwich and Docklands International Festival (UK), the Northern Exposure of Contemporary Dance and the Video Festival (UK), the Mercat de les Flors (SP), the International Platform of Arts (PT), the DAL NIENTE 3 Projects (UK), the Synch Festival (GR), the Athens Digital Art Festival (GR), the Moving Silence Festival (DE), the Athens and Epidaurus Festival, Das internationale Festival Tanz im August (DE), Hebbel Am Ufer (DE), Ibsen Festival (NO) and further, in numerous concerts and broadcasts around the world. In addition, he teaches at the SAE Athens Institute of Technology, an Educational Network about creative media and is a visiting artist at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Lambros Pigounis, *bio*, <https://lambrospigounis.com/bio/>

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

His Long Durational Sound Art Performance, was presented in 2016 at the Benaki Museum for the *As One* project, called *Micropolitics of Noise*.<sup>303</sup> He refers to this performance as multi-layers and experimental work through which he wanted to make a social-political statement about the enormous influence that the concepts of frequency, vibration and energy in sound have on our lives on physical and psychological levels. The main reason for this approach was a publication in the international press:

International newspapers reported that the air force of country “I” used sonic bombs, also known as “sonic booms” against country “P”. Such a sonic boom emits a high-intensity low frequency and is the result of low airplane flights traveling faster than the speed of sound. Victims of the above attack likened the effect to a wall of air pressure barrier created by a massive explosion. They also reported ear pains, nosebleeds, panic attacks, insomnia, hypertension, and all were left with an internal shock. Despite complaints from both countries, the government that carried out the attack said that sound bombs are preferable to real ones! (The Guardian, Chris McGeal, 2005)<sup>304</sup>.

In his performance in *As One*, his body was exposed to subsonic vibrational forces, triggered by the presence of people around him. For seven weeks, 39 days and 324 hours, he explains, the body unconsciously experienced three kinds of fear and the included reactions: fight, flight, and freeze.<sup>305</sup>

During the performance, visitors entered a completely quiet space, which contradicted the work’s description, that had been shown on the entrance to the room, of entering a violent sound environment.<sup>306</sup> People were invited to step onto the platform and become visible to the cameras, since the presence of a single human body triggered the extremely low-spectrum (<45 Hz) initial sound event to start. The

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<sup>303</sup> Lambros Pigounis, *bio*, <https://lambrospigounis.com/bio/>

<sup>304</sup> G.Matsinos ,N.Boumparis, K.Paparrigopoulos, *4ο Συνέδριο Ακουστικής Οικολογίας “Ηχος, Θόρυβος, Περιβάλλον” Πρακτικά*, in “Ελληνική Εταιρεία Ακουστικής Οικολογίας”,2018, pp.13-415 here pp270-271 [http://econoiseconf.aegean.gr/uploads/Econoiseconf\\_Proceedings.pdf](http://econoiseconf.aegean.gr/uploads/Econoiseconf_Proceedings.pdf)

<sup>305</sup> [NEON], *LAMPROS PIGOUNIS / NEON + MAI / AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zX26srTy3I&t=27s>

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

sound and vibration were more intense as the density and number of individuals were increased. The sound energy was transmitted in all directions, vibrating the platform material. As the artist refers, abstract sensations that could take over the body were anxiety and pressure, but without the person experiencing them being able to perceive the cause or source of the occurrence.<sup>307</sup>

There was a questionnaire that participants could fill in after their participation for the further research and analysis by the performer. Also, during the performance Labros Pigounis used the wall of the room as a personal and psychological diary to record thoughts and feelings. Some phrases are presented below<sup>308</sup>:

“There is nothing to see here, you only need to experience”

“Listen ↔ feel ↔ connect ↔ energy”

“It is in your eyes, it comes well before consciousness”

“But what is it that scares you the most? Silence; thank you for that we can try again”

My interview with Lampros Pigounis was done via Zoom in Greek and after our discussion, I translated the answers into English.

## Interview

### 1. What made you choose the particular concept of performance?

I definitely wanted to do a sound project because I am a composer and I am interested in how sound affects the body. In addition, during that period I was doing my research on the politics and ethics of sound and how extreme sound is used as a non-lethal political weapon. More generally, I am attracted to the concept of a scapegoat that exists in every myth and tragedy and in my performance, I wanted the “other”, the audience to cause me to do something without them knowing. The roles

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<sup>307</sup> [NEON], *LAMPROS PIGOUNIS / NEON + MAI / AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zX26srTy3I&t=27s>

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.



become blurred and eventually you don't know who the scapegoat is, the audience or me.

2. How would you describe your experience with the audience (how easily they participated in the performance, how long they stayed, how did their participation evolve over the 7 weeks)?

It ended up being a love hate relationship. My relationship with the audience was changing because I was changing and participants were an irreversible part of the performance. There were six, seven people who came every day for seven hours. It was like a sanctuary for them. Very important also was the fact that many people would leave me letters with deep and touching comments. On the other hand, there was one person who due to naivety, put essential oil in the water where I was dipping my head every time I felt overheated, so I had to call the poison control center that day. Also, during the period of my performances, some minor vandalism occurred in the space.

3. Approximate public characteristics (age, sex)

All ages, from 15 to 60, and the vast majority were women

4. Some public reactions during their stay

There were some people who had been sitting for at least half an hour and broke into tears. It was a meditation, a shamanic experience for them. It is a success of the body and mind when we break into tears without anything happening. The best way to describe it is the feeling when you meet the deepest black sea of your personal grief which has a positive face. You are as alone as you were before you were born, and you don't need anything else.

5. What was the difficulty of the performance?

From the beginning, there were a lot of questions about this particular performance from the team of MAI and Marina Abramović too. They were nervous because they couldn't understand what would happen and how the body would react.

During the performance my body repeated some patterns. I was conscious of these, I understood my body's reaction and then I trusted myself and the work. During the first hour of the performance, the pressure rose by 15% and there were stressful

moments in my breast. Later my body reacted by excreting substances to make me sleep, but over time I recovered. The same pattern was repeated one more time. By the fifth hour, I was approaching a brain slow motion with the abandonment of intentions and during the seventh hour, I was in a state of sociological immobilization where my senses were weakened and my mind was numb.

6. How did you manage the difficult moments during the performance?

By recalling the high frequencies corresponding to all the senses. For smell, I used lavender, for hearing I was listening to the clock indicators, for vision I had painted some dots on the wall, in red, yellow, and green and for taste I was putting some drops of lemon in my mouth. I also had a very specific schedule, for sleeping, eating, and meditating.

7. What did the whole experience give you, in three words?

The phrase describing my experience is this: Time has stopped. Everything has become one, I am dust and space is an abyss.

8. How would you describe your cooperation and organization with Neon - MAI, the Benaki Museum, and the other performers?

It was the most well-organized work I have ever participated in Greece. Daskolopoulos is a successful businessman and has great respect for artists. Marina Abramović has tremendous energy, she is very self-disciplined with her time and the work, and she can make you love her. Paula Garcia and Serge Le Borgne know their work extremely well and have a lot of experience. They can immediately understand what you want and they are present to help you directly or prevent you from doing something that is not helpful for you or the performance. MAI keeps in touch with the artists they are interested in, and when they come to Greece for new projects they always send invitations. There has been a very positive impact with other artists as well. We were in close contact afterwards, and in communication about new proposals.

9. Do you have any observation, comment, something that could be done better, as guidance for the next such collaborations?

It was the most organized work I have ever been involved in. Neon has a great reputation, it's the most decent environment to work in these days.

10. What has this experience given you in terms of how you have progressed artistically and personally?

It changed my life. There is Life before this performance and after it. It turned my academic research and understanding of sound 180 degrees and inspired me for other works. The whole world is frequency, vibration, energy, as Tesla said. A group of deaf people from Athens came to the performance and my interaction with them in the work was one of the most moving moments of my life. They helped me rediscover the work, as they said it was a project exactly for them. With the help of the artist, Urania Anastasiadou, I started talking about sound and giving lectures at schools and conferences for the deaf community. In general, it was such an experiential and existential experience that it made me a little wiser.

11. How did your body recover after the performance, how long did it take?

It took about 6 months for my body to recover. I had displaced vertebrae and abnormal serotonin and adrenaline in the body. I did physiotherapy for some period of time and also, after the performance, I went to the sea every day as water is the element that absorbs the vibrations.

12. How would you characterize the Cleaning the House Workshop?

An experience that you can never forget.

#### 3.4.4. Elli Leventaki, facilitator

Elli Leventaki is an art historian, a curator, and a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Theory and History of Art in the Athens School of Fine Arts. She is currently a curator at the Biennale of Western Balkans, while simultaneously collaborating with independent art programs and art spaces as a freelance curator. In

2016, she was working as a facilitator to the Abramović Method in the *As One* project.<sup>309</sup>

Below is my personal interview with Elli Leventaki that took place via Zoom.

## Interview

1. Why did you register as a facilitator and what kind of interview you had to pass?

There was an open call for working on this project, and some friends suggested it to me. I applied because I wanted to get a job and also, I wanted to work for Abramović, whose work I had studied for years. There were three rounds of interviews run by the people of MAI, in the first one, hundreds of people came so we were interviewed ten people at a time, and in the second interview, without knowing it beforehand, we were being tested for our soft skills through the exercises of the Abramović Method.

2. What was the training preparation to become a facilitator?

The training lasted three days and took place in a central building in Athens. We practiced the Abramović method, through a variety of exercises and we did stretching and breathing exercises. Our trainers from MAI, Lynsey Peisinger, Paula Garcia, and Bill Zhao, explained to us in more detail the Marina Abramović's philosophy and approach to the long durational performance through the tool of self-concentration. Furthermore, they suggested that we replace coffee with tea and have a light diet during the project in order to be more open and aware of our interaction and experience with the public. Thus, it was also for us a holistic process where the body did a detox.

3. Description of facilitators and the working hours

We were 70 facilitators, and there were about 25 people on each shift. We worked 9 hours with an hour break or 6 hours, for 5 days a week. I could say the match was

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<sup>309</sup> Elli Leventaki, in "BoWB", <https://bowb.org/team-member/elli-leventaki/>

one facilitator for three participants. The facilitators came from a wide range of studies and work backgrounds. Some were from theoretical studies, others were actors, dancers, or yoga teachers. Our age range also varied from 20 to 60 and this wide age range provided a great balance to the team but also made the public feel more comfortable.

#### 4. Approximate characteristics of participants

Those interested to participate had to be aged fifteen years of age or older to enter in the Abramović Method. Apart from this limit, there was a great diversity. During the last two weekends of the project, thousands of people were waiting in queues to enter, which was much commented as something unprecedented for a museum in Greece! There were also groups of Abramović fans coming, who travel around the world each time to see her projects and follow her Method.

#### 5. Description of the Method in the space

The space was a rectangle. At the entrance people left all their belongings. In the first three rooms participants could have stretching and breathing exercises done with the facilitator. Passing those rooms, lead to the main hall where they would put on headsets to block out the sound. All the exercises were run there at the same time; separating rice from lentils, mutual gazing, slow motion walking, beds where you could relax, walking with eyes closed. Participants could stay as long as they wanted and chose which exercises to follow. Before their exit they went to a room to take off their headsets and do some breathing exercises. We, as facilitators were distinguished as we were dressed only in black and we weren't wearing headsets. We were responsible for maintaining the flow and the balance in the room.

#### 6. How would you characterize the participants in terms of obedience to the rules (silence, rules of the exercises)? What was their average length of stay?

There was complete silence, we never heard the phone ring for example and even a random gesture from someone would be strange to the space. Very important for this was also that participants were wearing the headsets that blocked out any sound from outside, the person could only feel his heartbeats and his breath. The average stay was around 3 hours. There were of course, some who came and went straight away without trying any exercise. On the other hand, there were people who were sitting

there all day, and people who were coming back repeatedly during the two months of the project.

7. Was there any exercise from the method that participants showed the most interest in or stayed the longest?

People were looking for different things and exercises depending on their needs. Some people stayed three hours to separate the rice from lentils. Others were dedicating many hours in the exercise where the eyes and ears were closed and where they could use only the touch to explore each other. We saw people hugging, kissing, others dancing or just sitting on the floor and meditating. The mutual gaze exercise attracted the most people, as it was very famous at that time, after the performance in the MOMA. Very often people would cry there and sometimes you could see them laughing.

8. Did Marina Abramović appear in the method? How would you characterize her manner?

Marina Abramović came to the method only a few times, mainly to participate in the mutual gaze exercise. She realized that her presence there was made people gather around her and this was affecting the flow in the area. As she told us, even though she wanted to come again, she preferred to stop her visits and let the method flow better. She was friendly, smiling, and kind. Most of all, I was impressed by her calmness.

9. How did this participation and interaction affect you?

The experience was much more experiential than I expected. I created strong bonds with the other people I was working with, and with some we are still very good friends. I believe that this closeness between the facilitators was built through the process of working. As our trainers suggested to us, “You have to look at each other”. We were responsible for creating the plan and schedule based on which we would work every day and thus, we created a sense of mutual help and sensitivity. We had also created our own ritual, every morning before starting work we made a circle holding hands, as we set out our intentions for the day. My participation in *As One* was also very important to my career as a few months later after the project ended, I got a permanent job at a museum in Athens where I worked for three years.

10. Are there any exercises/techniques of the method that you use in your daily life?

I do some exercises to relax my facial muscles, such as in the ears or between the eyebrows, which I learned from our trainers.

11. Do you have any comments to make regarding the organization of Neon, MAI and the Benaki museum, things that could be improved?

It was very well organized. Daskalopoulos gave us Easter bonuses, even if it wasn't required. People from MAI are very experienced, very well organized, and have a clear plan of what they need and what they want from the work. The Benaki museum also gave us a large room, just for the facilitators, where we could change clothes or spend time during our breaks, which was very helpful.

12. What effect did the method have on the public?

I think everyone who came to the Abramović Method had his own unique experience. The change was evident after their participation, they came with a kind of tension from the outside and they left relaxed.

#### 3.4.5. Dimitra Billia, facilitator and a participant in re-performance

Dimitra Billia is an architect and musician, working at the intersection of design, applied media, and performance practices. In addition, she designs and leads workshops for adults and youth in the fields of 3D printing, digital sound, and open-source interactivity platforms. In 2016, she worked as a facilitator at the Abramović Method in the *As One* project and she also re-performed the “Art must be beautiful, Artist must be beautiful (1975)”.<sup>310</sup>

Dimitra Billia responded to my personal questions in writing via email.

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<sup>310</sup> Dimitra Billia, in “START”, <https://www.startgreece.net/fellows/dimitra-billia>

## Interview

1. From your perspective as a facilitator, what influence did the method have on the public?

The audience that participated in the Abramović method had many different reactions to it, but in general, the method affected each participant on three levels:

- on the level of non-verbal communication, which took place through looks, movement in the space, and observation of how the other participants and facilitators in the space moved and performed the exercises of the method
- at the level of physical contact between facilitator and participant, which took place when e.g. a facilitator took a participant by the hand to guide him/her through the exercises, or e.g. when a facilitator made a participant sit down to perform an exercise and let him/her continue on his/her own by gently touching him/her on the shoulders for a few seconds before leaving him/her, etc.
- on an internal dialogue level, such as by wearing the sound-blocking headphones, you were able to hear your thoughts, your inner voice, without distractions.

Of course, in all of the above, there is a common denominator: the neutral and minimalist configuration of the space is an artistic choice, which in my opinion is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the modern environment and lifestyle, where the world is full of stimuli, largely visual. The speed of perception of the messages of the environment is very fast, as is the speed at which humans move through the modern environment. In contrast, entering the Abramović method, you enter a space without unnecessary visual and sound stimuli, where you are invited to listen to yourself, others, and the environment in general and understand how you want to move through it. Our role as facilitators in the method was to create a climate of trust and relaxation within the single space where the method takes place and through preparing the audience in the rooms preceding the single space through specific exercises. As can be understood, the audience reactions were multiple and layered.



2. How were you chosen for the reperformance *Art must be beautiful, Artist must be beautiful*? What was its duration? How did the audience react?

During the training for our participation in the exhibition as facilitators, we were subjected to a series of exercises, similar and some identical to the exercises of the method. These exercises in my opinion had elements of performance and simply because I myself had participated as a performer in the past, I “brought” elements of performance to the way I followed the exercises. Our trainer, who was present and guiding us through the exercises, made a proposal for re-performance to me and 4 or 5 other facilitators after the training was completed. It was the first time we heard about the re-performance, not knowing that some of us would be selected for it earlier.

My participation in the re-performance of the project was 2 hours long, consecutively. During its duration, I was dressed in white, sitting on a chair and holding a comb with which I combed my hair and repeated in my voice “Art must be beautiful, Artist must be beautiful”. The audience stood across from me and watched me from a distance. People passed by and didn't come close, but there were also people I felt connected to during the reperformance. In reality, however, I didn't really notice the movements of the audience, as I was absorbed in the process of performing and the content (symbolic and otherwise) of the words and gestures I was repeating, and my inner voice of course.

3. How did you feel about doing Abramović's reperformance, how did you approach it to make it your own?

On the one hand, I was happy and honored to be chosen for this re-performance and at the same time, I felt a responsibility, that of standing up for the work itself, for our instructor who chose me, for my colleagues, and for the audience in general. The work speaks about art and beauty, using hair as a symbol, which from antiquity to the present day has reflected a healthy and beautiful appearance. The repetition of the words “Art must be beautiful, Artist must be beautiful” by the performer has, in my opinion, a meditative dimension, it reminds me of the mantras of Eastern religions, as well as of monks praying with rosaries. The performer enters into a meditative

state in which he/she externalizes (repeats aloud) this discourse around beauty and art, tying its content to the movement of combing hair, the symbol of beauty.

4. Why do you think *Art must be beautiful, Artist must be beautiful* (1975) is contemporary and is being reperformed nowadays? What meaning did you give it in 2016?

I think that this particular work was and will be timeless, as it expresses the fundamental need of man, and by extension of the artist, to be liked, to feel accepted as a being, and through his work.

#### 3.4.6. Interview with the public

The participants/visitors responded to my questionnaire online via email except for one with whom I had a video call via Zoom.

1. Name, Age, Place of residence, Field of Studies /field of Work in 2016 (Non-mandatory)

- Alexia Grammenidou, 20 years old, Thessaloniki, Student of Fine Arts, Department of Visual and Applied Arts, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
- Myrto Grammenidou, 22 years old, Patra, Medical Student
- Elena, 26 years old, Athens, Student
- Anonymous, 26 years old, Athens, Student of Drama school
- Michalis, 27 years old, Athens, PhD candidate in science

2. What was your reason for attending *As One*, at the Benaki Museum in 2016?

**Alexia:** I was curious to see Abramović's work and learn a bit more about performance art. My sister was also very keen to see this project so, we arranged to travel to Athens to attend this event together.

**Myrto:** My sister suggested it to me

**Elena:** For Marina Abramović

**Anonymous:** Initially, I was curious and I wanted to see Marina Abramović in person since I went to the interview she gave. I love the feeling she leaves you with. As a performer myself, I'm interested in performance art so it was a good opportunity to get to know other works. Also, I knew the performer Elena Antoniou, who was participating and I wanted to see her performance.

**Michalis:** I participated by chance, I didn't know Abramović. I was following the Benaki museum and its activities, and since it was free and interactive I decided to attend.

3. Did you repeat your visit to the museum during AS ONE which lasted 7 weeks? Do you remember which period you visited, from 10.3.2016 - 24.4.2016? How long did you stay?

**Alexia:** Only for one visit, the day before the closing on 23.4.2016 and we stayed in the museum for about 5 hours.

**Myrto:** I was there for one day, on 23.4.2016 and we stayed for a long time, around 5 hours.

**Elena:** No, I visited once, in the first days of the opening and I stayed for 3-4 hours.

**Anonymous:** I visited the museum twice. 4-5 hours at least the second time.

**Michalis:** I visited *As One* a second time because I was amazed by my first visiting. I even invited other friends to attend, since I had shared my experiences many times and had piqued everyone's curiosity.

4. (1) What is your relationship with art (2) Did you know the concept of performing art (3) Were you familiar with the work and method of Marina Abramović?

**Alexia:** At that time, I was studying Fine Arts, focusing mainly on painting, through various media. Art is an essential part of my life and my way of expression. I knew what performance art is, through my own research in the field of art, but also through seminars and lectures organized by my university. Abramović's work was known to me since I was younger and later, I was reacquainted with her method and work through my professors and my studies.

**Myrto:** Art fascinates me. When I was a child, I participated in an artistic workshop for many years. I knew what performance art was but I didn't know Abramović. I researched her work and method when my sister suggested this event to me and I was intrigued.

**Elena:** Art is one of my interests. I knew what performance art is and also I knew well Abramović's work and Method.

**Anonymous:** Well, I'm an actor and performer, so it was the perfect opportunity to see new works and to attend constructive discussions and workshops. I knew little about Abramović, mostly I got to know her work there.

**Michalis:** I am a self-taught musician. As a definition, I did not know exactly what performance is, but by my own deductions I understood what it could mean more or less. I didn't know Abramović

5. Had you previously attended performing art, and performing art in a museum environment?

**Alexia:** Yes. I have attended a performance organized by the performers VestandPage(founders and directors of the Venice International Performance Art Week) with students of my department, and many others presented outdoors or in specific venues. I have never visited performance art in the context of a museum.

**Myrto:** I have attended performing arts, but never in the context of a museum.

**Elena:** Yes. Not in a museum.

**Anonymous:** I have attended productions and performances in the past that took place in a museum context, but mostly abroad.

**Michalis:** Yes, I've been in some performances before in Self-managed Theater Empros, in Street Outdoors Festival, and in Chimeres Space in Greece. None of them were in a museum environment.

6. Was there a performance that impressed you the most? (If so which ones and why?)

**Alexia:** Lambros Pigounis's performance *the Micropolitics of Sound*, was the one I was impressed by the most. Inside the room where it was performed, there was a vibration as if it was coming from the earth, the air, and from everywhere around. This sense was also very intense in my body.

Another performance that attracted me is *One Person at a Time* by Yota Argyropoulou. There were two identical rooms, one where the performer was staying and the other which the visitor entered, one in a time. I didn't enter as I preferred to observe both the performer and the participator. They couldn't touch each other as there was the glass separating them, but at the same time they could get very close because of it. There was a sense that they were on earth for the first time, experiencing each other with intense presence and curiosity.

**Myrto:** I was drawn to the performance *Portrait of the Unknown Man* by the two dancers, Yannis Adoniou and Stavros Apostolatos, by the way they were moving their bodies, interacting with each other, and connecting through their bodies. In general, dance is a beautiful art that expresses me and magnetizes me deeply.

**Elena:** The visitor participation in Abramovic's Method and how visitors become performers and spectators at the same time. This was the only project I remember, while I have seen other performers I can't recall specific ones.

**Anonymous:** The ones that were interactive were very interesting to me. Elena Antoniou's work, *An Eight-Hour Journey*, was very physically difficult and interesting. She was using a predetermined path, a route defined by a white line running throughout the spaces of the Benaki museum. I also liked the performance *One Person at a Time*. This work put the visitor in parallel action with the performer. I remember the performance by Marianna Kavallieratos, entitled *Skin*, where there was a huge amount of clothes in one corner and she was constantly changing, one piece after the other. This was a great work that inspired me for the creation of my new project!

**Michalis:** The performance *the Micropolitics of Sound*. The connection with music on the one hand and with the sciences on the other. I was fascinated by the equations and symbols on the walls, the artist's black clothes, the intensity of the vibration, and how it acted on my body. I sat for hours both times.

7. Did you feel any kind of connection between the performer and you when in real time and place the artist was using his/her body as a means of expression?

**Alexia:** There was the feeling of calm and silence, and the fact that performers paid so much attention to everything, even the little things, made me alert and eager to enter their world by increasing my awareness and observation. Even though, the performers were putting themselves in a particular situation and role, they were completely themselves in the action. I felt a connection with the performer Lampros Pigounis and the world he was in for so many weeks. I recognized his struggle in his body and face and I asked him how long he had been there and how he felt.

**Myrto:** Through the performance *Portrait of the Unknown Man*, I was feeling a connection with the performers mainly through the gaze and the passion in their faces that accompanied the movement and the body.

**Elena:** I had a general sense of openness, but I cannot recall specific moments with the performers.

**Anonymous:** In the uncomfortable moment of the empty room *One Person at a Time*, I entered the process of imitating the performer because I felt uncomfortable entering her space even though we were separated by glass. Eva Lampara's work was a punch in the stomach. It showed the inner strength of the human being to overcome obstacles, even of a body with “limited” mobility.

**Michalis:** I was attracted to the way the artist, Lambros Pigounis, was in his space. I felt an identification and admiration for him. As if I had made an idol of him.

8. Did you feel any kind of connection/energy between other visitors and you?

**Alexia:** As we were all silently coexisting and participating in some way, it felt like we were sharing something. I could recognize the willingness of the people who were there. The willingness to feel, to express, to act, to play. That human willingness is what makes life beautiful.

**Myrto:** I felt a very lively, spontaneous energy in the space and I also felt a connection with some of the visitors with whom I participated in the experiential parts of the exhibition, in the Abramović method, especially those with whom I maintained eye contact.

**Elena:** I felt an intense intimacy with the space, with others, with myself through the silence and the sensual observation of the moments in my participation in the Abramović Method.

**Anonymous:** There are always moments of commonality between the spectators. When you have two strangers sitting and looking at each other it's awkward in itself and it's interesting how they handle it along the way.

**Michalis:** In the Abramović Method, in the mutual gazing exercise, I unwittingly made the girl I was looking at cry and run out of the room. Later, I found her outside and she told me that no one had ever looked at her so intensely before. She also said that it was like I was looking into her soul, and it scared her. I felt that deep energy between us, but when she left crying I felt very bad.

9. How did you feel in the space where almost 26 artists were in action according to the condition they had set, in a real space and place, in your presence?

**Alexia:** I felt the vitality of life, something colorful. When you are in front of a man in an activity rather than in front of an object you can't but be influenced mentally. Even though sometimes I was feeling something pretentious in the performances, which doesn't fit with my aesthetic in art, during my visit I was alert, observant, and magnetized.

**Myrto:** I felt comfortable, many times alert and I was attracted to some performers with wonder and admiration and sometimes with emotion. There were moments of awkwardness when there was a direct connection with other visitors.

**Elena:** Relaxation

**Anonymous:** Awkward, full of stimuli, alertness from some actions, and wondering about the performer Marianna Kavallieratos and her performance with lots of clothes. Sometimes, also, I felt indifferent and other times relaxed.

**Michalis:** I was curious, I wanted to see it all, understand it and identify with it wherever possible.

10. Three words to describe your experience

**Alexia:** Curiosity, Vitality (being alive including the joy and the difficulties), moments of connection

**Myrto:** Intense, Vitality, Honest

**Elena:** Relief, Simplicity, Contact

**Anonymous:** Interest, Energy, Passion, Reflection, Grateful for what already exists

**Michalis:** Awe, euphoria, mystery



11. (1) Have you attended the Abramović Method that took place in the museum during the project, (2) and seminars/ lectures that also took place there?

**Alexia:** Yes, I have followed the Abramović Method and I enjoyed 2 particular exercises:

The mutual gaze, and the exercise where the participants were blindfolded and with the guidance of the facilitators walked around a room and interacted with one another through touch. In both exercises, I was interested in the way of meeting the others. I was slowing down, coming more and more into the present moment, and being conscious. It was a realization that we are all so different and unique, from the way we touch or see, to how much we want to interact. There was an extraordinary quietness and calmness in this room, qualities that were derived primarily from the facilitators. I can say that it was like a ritual. (2) No

**Myrto:** Yes, I followed her method and it was very experiential. (2) No

**Elena:** Yes, I participated in the Abramović Method and I went to a lecture for a while.

**Anonymous:** Yes. The Marina Abramović Method is very clever. There was a prevailing relaxation in her exercises and from the way they reacted on you, you can get a sense of the work she has done. I have been to Abramović's workshop and speech and I was impressed by her personality, energy, aura and thinking.

**Michalis:** Yes, I have attended the Abramović Method two times. (2) No

Tokomburu is the name of the team that is behind the lens documenting the whole project in the Benaki Museum. In an interview in which they were asked about their experience and impression they replied:

The most characteristic element of this exhibition, for those of us documenting it, are the thousands of visitors, hundreds of whom pass in front of our lens every day asking "sorry", others believe for a few minutes that we are part of the performance they are watching, some pose slightly kissy-faced and some

discreetly avoid us. Still others suspect that there is something in common between them and the performers doing the performances<sup>311</sup>.

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<sup>311</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

## Chapter 4: The Art of Life and the raising of Consciousness

### 4.1. *As One* - Evaluation, Analysis and Testimonials

Eleni Kountouri, Neon Director, states that, the first month of *As One* project was “a revelation for everyone”<sup>312</sup>. For the visitors, for those who worked for it, for those who conceived it and organized it.

Never before Athens seen a program dedicated to performance with so many artists, so many visitors and so much energy. Some have called it the event of the year, many were impressed, others came and left troubled. What is certain is that *As One*, the performances, the Abramović Method, the lectures and talks made an impression, be it positive or negative – they spoke to the hearts of the public, where they were accepted or rejected<sup>313</sup>.

Below are written the statistics after the compilation of the project<sup>314</sup>:

- 320 applications submitted from which 29 artists were selected by the NEON+MAI teams
- 2,680 hours of performance
- 2 months of 150 people collaborating at the Benaki Museum, filling it with their energy
- Almost 50,000 visitors – predominantly young people – filled with enthusiasm to absorb new experiences
- Around 9,500 visitors inspired to describe their experiences and impressions in the *AS ONE* visitor’s book

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<sup>312</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project *As One*, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> *AS ONE* | IN REVIEW NEON + MAI, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/as-one-in-review-en/>

- 26 talks and 16 workshops – including sessions about the history of performance art and its relation to other art forms – led by the 29 participating artists
- 10 in-depth articles in publications including The New York Times, Bloomberg, CNN Style, NZZ, Am Sonntag, Forbes.com, Art Monthly, ArtNet, ArtInfo, Wallpaper\* online, Calvert Journal.
- In Greece, *As One* was featured in more than 600 newspaper, magazine and online articles.

Marina Abramović says, that even from the opening 3000 people attended *As One* and as the days passed “a new community”<sup>315</sup> was being built. A community of artists and the general public. She also refers to the connection she feels with the Greeks and their culture, recognizing in them a sense of drama, pride and dignity. “the Greek public, when they realize that something is real, open their hearts. Although they did not have much experience in performance art, the Greek audience is very open, ready to accept, to understand, to learn”<sup>316</sup>.

On his part, Daskalopoulos says “I believe in people, in their liveliness, their skills, their desire to change this place and move forward [...]”<sup>317</sup>. His great dream was to see queues outside cultural events and his dream came true in that project. More than that, visitors spent hours on their visit and many of them returned. He understood that *As One* was a revelatory experience for many of the visitors.

I see them all leave the Benaki Museum as if they have a little light inside them, lit a little brighter. And it’s not the kind of light that goes out as soon as they go back to their normal lives<sup>318</sup>.

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<sup>315</sup> [gioula rapti], *ΕΠΙΟΧΗ ΤΩΝ ΕΙΚΟΝΩΝ - MARINA ABRAMOVIC- AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU-YbkGaVOc&t=1281s>

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project *As One*, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

One of the most important parts of the project was for the young artists to show their work, to become more visible in the art scene, as Daskalopoulos says. Abramović states that “culture is the oxygen of society”<sup>319</sup>. “I wanted to highlight the value of Greek artists and the Greek culture”<sup>320</sup>. Moreover, the artists lived their own unique experiences which challenged even the way they see themselves.

Thanassis Akokkalidis sat for four days, 34 hours on the highest point of the building, opposite the Benaki Museum. His aim was to face his fear of heights and at the same time to bring the public face to face with their own fears. “Even though my fear of height could very easily take control of me, there were moments when I felt complete freedom”<sup>321</sup>. Yota Argyropoulou set up two mirrored rooms, divided by a glass wall, and sat in one of them for 39 days, 324 hours. As she states, she came into personal contact with over 1000 visitors, developing “an experience without words”.<sup>322</sup> “What surpassed my expectations was the sheer number of visitors who entered the room and the depth of the connection, people willing to experiment and try things to engage with new experiences”<sup>323</sup>.

Dimitris Chimonas in a period of three days, celebrated his “birthday” 3000 times. People joined his “birthday party”, sang, brought him cards, and gifts, and some who also had their birthday, blew out the candles with him. “I understood the majesty of time and felt in awe of life”<sup>324</sup>. The most intense moment, he says, was when an elderly man spoke to him about “the years that had passed him by, his lost childhood”<sup>325</sup> as the artist sang continuously. “From then on, every time I blew out a candle it wasn’t the same”<sup>326</sup>. Christina Vasileiou who danced for three days, 26 hours, experienced the space and herself as one. “My thought became my motion I

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<sup>319</sup> [gioula rapti], *EΠΟΧΗ ΤΩΝ ΕΙΚΟΝΩΝ - MARINA ABRAMOVIC- AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU-YbkGaVOc&t=1281s>

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> [NEON], *THANASSIS AKOKKALIDIS / NEON + MAI / AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0r5Q8ltMqQ&list=PLv5XCP04bNWHjqaMXy2BbXXict3QWBTe8&index=4>

<sup>322</sup> [NEON], *YOTA ARGYROPOULOU / NEON + MAI / AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmngwJbBqck&list=PLv5XCP04bNWHjqaMXy2BbXXict3QWBTe8&index=8>

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> [NEON], *DIMITRIS CHIMONAS / NEON + MAI / AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LiJxGxQQ5M&list=PLv5XCP04bNWHjqaMXy2BbXXict3QWBTe8&index=12>

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

felt that the thought is also bodily and it moves with us and that all the thoughts are temporary, even the heaviest”<sup>327</sup>.

A different kind of performance presented by Thomas Diafas who would start a discussion with the public with the phrase “this is inhuman”<sup>328</sup>. It was amusing, he comments, the fact that the audience expected him to answer their questions about life. The most interesting question he received is presented below with the subsequent dialogue<sup>329</sup>:

- Why is this considered a performance and why are you considered a performer?
- Because it is taking place in a museum.
- Yes, but this could happen anywhere.
- Performance no?

Thomas Diafas recognizes in the public the human need to feel and express themselves. “There was no way for them to think of life without all the things that they cannot handle”<sup>330</sup>. Yiannis Karounis, plays and bounces on a ball in his performance. The ball for him represents the planets and the whole universe. He emphasizes that the public was what motivated him and led him to stay on the ball so many hours. “It was like they were telling me: ‘Great, don’t fall, because with you all our dreams stay in balance’”<sup>331</sup>. Also, Lampros Pigounis remarks in our interview that there is the life before his performance in *As One*, and a different one after it.

Marina Abramović explains that the artist needs to go deep into himself and find what he wants to tell the others. To transform the pain into something higher. “The artist cannot be too personal; the result should be universal so everybody is able to see his own self in the work.”. And she adds “The difficulty for the artist is from

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<sup>327</sup> [NEON], *CHRISTINA VASILEIOU / NEON + MAI / AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjYM8vmPNUU&list=PLv5XCP04bNWHjqaMXy2BbXXict3QWBTe8&index=14>

<sup>328</sup> [NEON], *THOMAS DIAFAS / NEON + MAI / AS ONE*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11VxO2Uuj7s&list=PLv5XCP04bNWHjqaMXy2BbXXict3QWBTe8&index=18>

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> [NEON], *GIANNIS KAROUNIS / NEON + MAI / AS ONE*, [Video], [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m58q\\_uEeiW8&list=PLv5XCP04bNWHjqaMXy2BbXXict3QWBTe8&index=21](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m58q_uEeiW8&list=PLv5XCP04bNWHjqaMXy2BbXXict3QWBTe8&index=21)

subjective to become objective”. She believes that “the new community of people who experience the same thing can happen”. The experience of “purity”, “simplicity”, “togetherness”, “humanity”.

In accordance with this and as part of *As One*, Abramović shared a communal moment open to the public. On 31 March 2016, in the courtyard of the museum, the public, artists, workers, and the organizers of the project, came together holding hands, for seven minutes in silence.<sup>332</sup> “Seven minutes in total silence. The silence of the silence”<sup>333</sup>, as Abramović refers to it. On the one hand, people chose to be present in this communal meeting, for their own reasons and on the other hand, *As One* was preparing them for this experience with workshops, screenings, talks, the Method, the performances. “In the end, it was a cathartic experience for many people because they were really changing. You can’t change without doing it, there’s no book to read on it, all that matters is doing it”<sup>334</sup>.

Marina Abramović wants, through her work and teaching to give inspiration to people to find and do their own things that they love. Her quotes in life are to never give up and to follow intuition. “Every human being is a universe. Everyone has the same power as everybody else, but you have to develop this power and to believe in it”<sup>335</sup>. By entering her method and the long durational exercises is to “find your own charisma and understand that you do not need anybody, that you are the best teacher of yourself”<sup>336</sup>, as she says.

## 4.2. Interviews, the Art in people and in Greek Society

### 4.2.1. Demosthenenes Davvetas, Professor and Artist

Because of my interest in further analyzing the connection between art and life I had the honor to meet and have an interview with Professor Demosthenenes

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<sup>332</sup> [NEON], *MARINA ABRAMOVIC / COMMUNAL MOMENT*, [Video], <https://neon.org.gr/en/video/marina-abramovic-communal-moment-en/>

<sup>333</sup> M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, cit., p. 46

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., p.47

<sup>335</sup> [gioula rapti], *ΕΠΙΟΧΗ ΤΩΝ ΕΙΚΟΝΩΝ - MARINA ABRAMOVIC- AS ONE*, [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU-YbkGaVOc&t=1281s>

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

Davvetas. Davvetas was born in Athens and is a professor of IESA (International Studies in History and Business of Art and Culture) in Paris where he gives masterclasses on Poetry and Modern Art. He also gives lectures and seminars at many Schools of Art and Universities in Greece and abroad.<sup>337</sup>

In addition, he is a poet, writer, a painter and performer. He has written articles and essays for Liberation, Figaro, Art in America, Beaux-Arts magazine and other publications since 1982, and he has also participated in the creation of catalogues and monographs of major museum artists. Some of the books he has published are *Marina Abramović, the Artist is Present*, *Joseph Beuys*, *La sagesse modern*, *Sounds of the Universe*, *Infidelity of the Stars*. On 30 May 2022, he gave a performance with the dancer Sara Mastrofina, titled *cho – graphia* at the Spazio Taverna gallery in Rome. Due to his love and admiration for the arts and also to his own personality, he met, collaborated with, and became friends with some of the most renowned artists such as Andy Warhol, Marina Abramović, Miquel Barceló, Georg Baselitz, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Joseph Beuys, Alighiero Boetti, James Brown, Gilbert & George.<sup>338</sup> Joseph Beuys was his mentor, his teacher, his friend and his spiritual father.

Davvetas for some years in the past was in a romantic relationship with Marina Abramović. He characterizes her as a person with two personalities, “very warm and lovely and on the other hand, unpredictable and strong”. As he told me in our interview:

Everything she does has a strategy. She had two goals in life, to become a pioneer in her work and rich. She was saying ‘I will make performance art mainstream’. She reached her goal and still continues to work but now her goal is to die consciously, without fear. Abramović admired Beuys, she wanted to know everything about the man who first said: ‘Everybody is an artist’. She herself is a teacher because she wants to practice, to increase her consciousness in life, together with the others. She does not teach but initiates like a priestess. She wants to transcend the boundaries of art and to bring art into the lives of all

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<sup>337</sup>Davvetas Demosthenes, *CURRICULUM VITAE*, <https://www.demosthenesdavvetas.com/curriculum-vitae/>

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.



people. Beuys and Abramović are similar in the sense that both gave emphasis to the creator – the artist that every human is. The public participated directly in Beuys' work without any rules. On the contrary, Abramović put rules, made a method and gave style.

Demosthenenes Davvetas clarifies in our interview the differences between figurative, performance and abstract art.

Figurative art is the imitation in Plato aesthetics, the reproduction of something that already exists. Performative in arts is the artistic imitation, as in the mountain of St. Nicholas by Cezanne, where the viewer sees not the landscape but the interior of the mountain. The artist attempts to have an experiential relationship with the work. In abstract art there is a subtraction of every virtual element, the artist keeps only what is needed, creating an inner reality, a fantasy or a form.

He states that “performance art is about intervening in people's daily lives”. Having participated in performances himself he explains that during performing “there is no ego, the ego is one with the public. The ego is surrendered to the public through the “body” and the public receives energy from the “outside” to the “inside”.

Davettas gave a sequence of performances called “Boxing Writing” and under the title *Vie Violente Violence* (Life Violin Violence). As a boxer himself he boxed with professionals, some of them were even boxing champions, three – round matches inside museums with violin accompaniment. He has given these performances in Paris, Marseille, Strasbourg, in Rome under the guidance of Danilo Eccher and now he plans to do it also in Greece. In the end, he or his opponent was reading poetry. “Life is a poetry, boxing is a writing of bodies and the performance was a presentation of life with symbolic as well as actual meanings”. As regards public participation in arts, particular in Greece, he says:

Art is not only a visual experience, it is an inner experience. The museum itself should be an artwork, a sculpture thus, for the public to participate more. The museums should call more artists regularly to interact and communicate their empiricism with the world. Further, art should be a practice in schools so, students have the chance to enter a form of artistic experience.

Below he gives the example of practicing arts in the university in Paris, where he teaches.

One week during the year is dedicated to artistic creation and there are no classes. Professors who are active in any form of art, and depending on the students' need and willingness, create a variety of workshops such as theater, cinema, music, video, performance. Students participate, interact and create, and this week is an unforgettable one for them.

Davvetas maintains that art is the foundation of direct democracy. He comments, "Beuys's aim was to bring and practice direct democracy through his art. As Abramović does with her Method". Abramović was inspired by Beuys's ideas, that "the artist is also a shaman and should develop his physical as well as his mental body, in order to have a spiritual connection with the audience and his own work"<sup>339</sup>. Davvetas adds, "Through eyes there is an energy that moves everything. Through the eyes you see the soul and Marina looked into people's eyes to make them understand, connect and express their soul".

He expresses his anguish about death but that anguish makes him active and creative. Art for him means "healing, vision, dream, beauty, immortality". "When I'm involved in art I forget all fear". His passion for life is that which inspires him to be active and curious. "I will dance and get drunk on life; and if I sometimes get tired of the drunkenness on life, I will get drunk on art" he says, inspired by Charles Baudelaire. Lastly, he adds "It is important for people to learn to ask, and

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<sup>339</sup>[BeuysTV] *Marina Abramović on Joseph Beuys*, [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5yFKIVFsMI>

have a strong will; to have enthusiasm, which comes from the Greek word “entheos”, and means God within”.

#### 4.2.2. Aemilia Papaphilippou, Visual artist

A renowned artist whose artistic interest is in the relationship between the artist, the work, and the public, is Aemilia Papaphilippou. She graduated from the Athens Graduate School of Fine Arts in Athens and she completed postgraduate studies in video Art at New York University where she acquired a Teaching Fellowship.<sup>340</sup> In 1991, she represented Greece in 21st São Paulo Biennale with the work *Chess Game*, an interactive installation among the spectators/players. The spectators who chose to “play” had to coordinate their movements, (so as not to fall into the black squares of engine oil) since the position of one depended upon the position and movement of the other.<sup>341</sup>

A symbol that inspired her from the beginning in her artistic creation, is the handshake. By making a string of handshakes, she found the symbol of the twisting and the interweaving of opposites.<sup>342</sup> This led her to the Moebius band, introduced by the mathematician Moebius, which symbolizes “that both sides are in reality one unified surface”<sup>343</sup>. In 2014, she developed the first visual intervention of contemporary art in the Ancient Agora of Athens, with the support of Neon. It was the first commission of its program City Project titled *Palmic Fields*. In the summer of 2021, she created the interactive installation/performance *Sacred Tales/COVID-19*, commissioned by the Athens Epidaurus Festival, at the Little theatre of Ancient Epidaurus in the Argolis prefecture of the Peloponnese. *Sacred Tales* is a literary text written by Aelius Aristides who was an orator, lived around 180 AD. The author claimed to have recorded the dreams he had received from Asclepius, the god of medicine.

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<sup>340</sup> Aemilia Papaphilippou, *CURRICULUM VITAE*, <https://aemiliapapaphilippou.com/cv-gr.html>

<sup>341</sup> Aemilia Papaphilippou, *Chess Game or Playing in the fields of Time there is no winning ever, 1991*, <https://aemiliapapaphilippou.com/works-08.html>

<sup>342</sup> Aemilia Papaphilippou, *Handshake, 1992*, <https://aemiliapapaphilippou.com/works-10.html>

<sup>343</sup> Aemilia Papaphilippou, *Moebius band, 1992*, <https://aemiliapapaphilippou.com/works-11.html#>

The installation of Papafilippou was a reminder of how interconnected we are and how, despite our constant efforts to impose the opposite, humanity is one. Visitors were invited to follow the threads that connect the points of the archaeological site with the environment, and to chart their own route between the obstacles. Further, they were invited to participate electronically, through the electronic platform available.

The artist, as a mnemonic gift to the visitors offered Moebius ribbons which bring forth the analogy and homology of the structure of yarn, of DNA, the same as a handshake. “After all, you can't shake hands with yourself”<sup>344</sup>. Also, it takes two to create a DNA. Reconsidering the connection between architecture and Nature she also refers:

Although our ephemeral existence loses its form and experiences the end, Nature's constant rebirth teaches us that Infinitude, which cannot be grasped but has no end, Exist. Even if we cannot capture it. Even if it is human destiny to oscillate between the opposites of Life and Death. For Existence these constitute an everlasting Continuum<sup>345</sup>.

Regarding the process of creation, she comments: “It was a project that every moment was generating itself. I feel that I just helped it materialize. It also gave birth to me on another level”<sup>346</sup>.

I also had the honor to meet the artist, Aemilia Papaphilippou, and the production manager/creative assistant, Elena Ntosa. The center of the discussion was Papaphilippou's latest work at the Little theatre of Ancient Epidaurus and today's art that aims to expand consciousness and participation. As they told me, the big

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<sup>344</sup> A.Papaphilippou, *Από τη γη της Επιδαύρου και όχι μόνο* in “Η Εφημερίδα των Συντακτών”, 17 January 2022; [https://www.efsyn.gr/tehneseikastika/327968\\_apo-ti-gi-tis-epidayroy-kai-ohi-mono](https://www.efsyn.gr/tehneseikastika/327968_apo-ti-gi-tis-epidayroy-kai-ohi-mono)

<sup>345</sup> The catalogue of the visual art installation by Emilia Papaphilippou, *Ιεροί λόγοι / COVID-19 / SACRED TALES / COVID-19* (Μικρό Θέατρο Αρχαίας Επιδαύρου/ Little Theater of Ancient Epidaurus 13.8 – 5.9.2021), pp. 5- 95 here p. 14; Athens Epidaurus Festival, 2021, <https://aemiliapapaphilippou.com/logoi.html>

<sup>346</sup> A.Papaphilippou, *Από τη γη της Επιδαύρου και όχι μόνο* in “Η Εφημερίδα των Συντακτών”, 17 January 2022; [https://www.efsyn.gr/tehneseikastika/327968\\_apo-ti-gi-tis-epidayroy-kai-ohi-mono](https://www.efsyn.gr/tehneseikastika/327968_apo-ti-gi-tis-epidayroy-kai-ohi-mono)

surprise for them regarding the installation *Sacred Tales/COVID- 19* was the participation and the involvement of the local community. Elena Ntosa refers:

The man who appears not to have been educated in art, often is guilty or embarrassed to accept it. But these people understood the installation better than the theorist who came with a potion ready. Locals were experiencing the place, sitting there for hours and observing the theatre's significance with the sun's circulation.

The most intense and artistic moment for Elena Ntosa was during the installation of the work at the level of plexus. The technicians who were there for the heavy work were also involved in embroidering the threads that connected the points of the archaeological site with the environment. “With some basic instructions from the artist but mainly in silence, we embroidered in synchronicity, we all had the same rhythm and the same pace” Elena Ntosa refers. Moreover, Aemilia Papaphilippou adds that technicians recognized the freedom they had in the work; that they were part of the creation and had to the opportunity to express their deep emotions. It was important for them as an experience relating to themselves but also to the place they live in.

The artist also analyzes the concept of the network, which she uses in all her works:

The network expresses the meaning of coherence and oneness. Human civilization is based on new weaving, on exchange, in order to move forward. On the other hand, I believe that the element of originality and of difference is very important. The Greeks were searching for the Truth, not the superior power, in accordance with Greek philosophy. The literal meaning of the Greek word ἀλήθεια is “the state of not being hidden”. It is the opposite of lethe, which literally means “oblivion”, “forgetfulness”, or “concealment”. So the question is, “what are you being asked to remember”?

In addition, she says about the dynamic of art in our lives:

We are called upon to renegotiate the concept of democracy and we are shaping it with everything that happens, politically and artistically. I consider art to be a technology of thought and a strategy of evolution. Through art we think collectively as we think through mathematics. The creator is everywhere, it is necessary for us to think creatively to find solutions in our life. We are taught to think linearly and not analogically, but a transcendence and a certain amount of risk is required if we are to “play” freely and truly in life.

Emilia Papafilippou was driven to become an artist as she was searching for freedom and creative expression. “Although I was interested in many different fields, I realized that an artist has the greatest degree of freedom”.

She points out that Greece devalues art. As she says, Greece is a small country and still needs to realize that the culture is something we produce and is influential. “Despite Greece’s past and the importance of the classical ruins, we consider them inactive and merely symbolic facts”. On the other hand, she adds that organizations are doing a lot of work, giving grants to young Greek artists for research and projects and this creates a new environment for development. In addition, the artist emphasizes that partnerships are very important, such as the one between Neon and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. This partnership was created for the display of Louise Bourgeois’s monumental sculpture *Maman* (1999), at the SNFCC’s in Athens, for a seven-month period with free entry to the public.<sup>347</sup> Most of Neon’s projects are the result of collaboration with others and she points out that “these collaborations inaugurate a culture that is evolving and Daskalopoulos’s contribution in this development is of great importance and significance”.

Lastly, she comments: “Freedom requires mutual respect. If this convention exists between all the participants (artists, curators, organizations etc.), then great things can happen”.

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<sup>347</sup> Neon, *LOUISE BOURGEOIS / MAMAN, NEON + Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre*, <https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/maman-louise-bourgeois/>

#### 4.2.3. The Art of Life - Naya Karnava, Yoga Teacher

Marina Abramović, *As One*, and all the interviewees refer to the art that opens its boundaries and makes the audience part of the piece. The public interacts with art and understands that it is not about the narrow perspective of the artist but about each creator/man and their creation/ life. For this reason, I would finally like to mention my Yoga Teacher Naya Karnava, and the discussion that we had together about her Teaching on the Art of Life.

Karnava, from an early age, was interested in observing people and their lives and soon realized that everyone is responsible for their own life according to their perception and action. When she was younger she wanted to get involved in theater in order to experience a variety of characters and life possibilities. Instead, she practiced photography, interested in capturing portraits and showing the essence of man's soul. In addition, by reading Greek philosophy and foreign literature she was connecting in a familiar and known "world". Her life changed when she experienced a state of hyper consciousness while under anesthesia during a surgery. From that point in her life, she began reading sacred books, trying to put her experience into words. She could only say "I experienced divine consciousness".

Even though she was led to yoga to cure her physical body, she further discovered that man, through raising awareness, can indeed experience oneness and the connection with the Universe. She was inspired and educated by the writings of Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda and Pythagoras.<sup>348</sup> Throughout the years of teaching, she created her own system, Yoga Science, a practical method for raising consciousness. The method involves practicing with the body and mind as well as inner working with the ego. It combines four yoga systems from India, but is based on Greek thinking, with elements from Pythagoras.<sup>349</sup> She has been teaching her method for 21 years and has conducted two trainings for Yoga Science teachers.

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<sup>348</sup> Yoga Science, *Teachers*, [https://yogascience.gr/?page\\_id=144](https://yogascience.gr/?page_id=144)

<sup>349</sup> Yoga Science, *Yoga Science System*, [https://yogascience.gr/?page\\_id=376](https://yogascience.gr/?page_id=376)

In the second training program in 2017, five of the participating students were artists, whose desire was to broaden the artistic work and their own awareness. The artists are Eirini Apsychou, Alexia Grammenidou, Alkisti Panagiotopoulou, Freideriki Papastavropoulou, and Marsy Syreggela. With their Teacher's encouragement, they formed an art group with the will to create and exhibit from a higher level of consciousness. Later on, Naya Karnava became the inspirer of the art exhibition *You are the eyes through which creation knows itself* which was held in Delphi, Greece, 22 - 26 June by the Art Team of Yoga Science.<sup>350</sup>In 2022 the members founded the organization "Yoga Science and Art of Life" which promotes art and culture and the Yoga Science Teaching, which is about the Art of Life itself. Naya Karnava explains the stages in the spiritual awakening:

Firstly, the aspirants need to have the will to learn and to comprehend the divine consciousness. They ask the questions: where they come from, why they come and where they go, they wonder about the root cause of their life. The second is to put theory into practice; to embody what they understand, which means the understanding is so integrated into the being, that manifests as cellular knowledge, and to live through this understanding.

Further, she explains the student's awakening through the Teaching:

The student wants to transform himself, inspired by the Teacher and works on his ego besides him. As the mind gets more detached from the ego, it lets the spirit shine. Previously covered by the mind, it now materializes in his body. The individual then acts with his body and mind enlightened and his creation is equivalent to his state of consciousness.

Finding this spirit and truth within himself, the student is connected to the causal body, the spiritual body which is the knowledge of being the cause of his life. The spiritual body cannot die, and this realization removes the fear of death. The individual plays and creates for the joy of creation in every moment.

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<sup>350</sup> Yoga Science, *Art Exhibition*, [https://yogascience.gr/?page\\_id=2633](https://yogascience.gr/?page_id=2633)



The person, focused on the moment of creation, is free from the attachment to the outcome.

Naya Karnava, explains that if the artist creates through the state of the Self and not from the ego, whatever his work is, it absorbs his high frequency which is transmitted also to the viewers. This is true for all people/creators in everything that they give birth to, in their lives. “Besides, the sum of our creations is the life that we exhibit every day”.

She finds inspiration in silence and by maintaining herself in a high frequency. There she can perceive great possibilities, which can be implemented with conscious practice in everyday life. “Through the tools, you learn to manifest and create what you envision. The great benefit however is, not only the creation per se, but further the liberation from the ego”. Furthermore, she adds: “Although we live on the planet where duality is a phenomenon, man has the ability, if he wants, to find and live the unification between the spiritual and material life where beauty exists”.

For her, Art is the totality of Life. Since she was a child, she saw art in the “falling snow, the music, the birds singing, the light that gave substance to things, the way her mother cooked”.

Art correspondingly is also the hail that was destroying the crops, or the earthquake, in which I could see the power of the earth which has energy and wants to be released. It's another language of life that contained God. In other words, art is the enthusiasm for life, the God within me that exists outside of me too.

Lastly, she adds: “When we transform Knowledge into reality, into the art of living in everyday life, the radiance of a new world will appear”. Besides, “In Silence We Are One”.

In parallel with this, the basic element of Abramović's performances is spirituality and even her Method has been called "a platform for the changing of consciousness". She has said that for her, inner freedom is the most important thing.<sup>351</sup> "We are the prisoners of ourselves"<sup>352</sup>, she argues, but further she points out that we can change the decisions we once made that no longer serve us. In her lecture at *As One* Abramović explains:

For me, deserts were important. I was thinking that Jesus Christ went to the desert, Mohammed went to the desert, Buddha went to the desert. They all went to the desert as nothing and returned as something. There must be something in the desert. Precisely because there is nothing there, you are confronted with your own mind. And the mind is our greatest friend and our greatest enemy at the same time. It's easy to control the body, but it's very difficult to control the mind. Performance is about the balance of mind and body<sup>353</sup>.

#### 4.3. *As One* – Today

The partnership between MAI and Neon was a major success, and is still remembered six years after, because it brought together all the different elements for the creation of an intergraded project. The presence of Abramović was a catalyst for the reputation of the project but also performance art as an art form in itself, was what the Greek public needed. Abramović states that the public wants to be inspired and to participate, and this was of great importance in Greece during the hard times of economic, social and humanitarian crisis.<sup>354</sup> Besides, in difficult times it can be better recognized that performance art functions as a tool for direct democracy, as Beuys supported. Marina Abramović says:

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<sup>351</sup> M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, cit., p.42

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 2, April 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AS-ONE-NEWSPAPER-ISSUE-2-ENG.pdf>

<sup>354</sup> *AS ONE*, Special Edition for the Project As One, Issue 1, March 2016, <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/edition-en-one.pdf>

I always say to myself – it’s so easy to criticize the way things are – and on a personal level, what can we do to change or help? I can only change things with my art. And if I can create an environment where people can change consciousness, even in the smallest way, with an awareness of themselves, that awareness can enable them to change worlds. Because political change comes from self-awareness. There’s this great phrase and it goes ‘if you change yourself, you can change thousands’<sup>355</sup>.

Also, Elina Kountouri had said about collaboration: “This is how art and creativity can create a platform for socio-political change”<sup>356</sup>.

Greece is a small country and as mentioned, tends to underestimate art and culture. Six years have passed since *As One* took place in Athens and Greece must now act in the face of new economic, political and social uncertainty. The coronavirus crisis comes on top of escalating climate, geopolitical and other crises but this situation can also be seen as a force for radical change both individually and collectively. As Abramović states, this is the time to understand how nature and human contact is important<sup>357</sup>. She also adds, “I love uncertainty as I think about the present time as the only actual reality that we have. The only thing that is certain is now”<sup>358</sup>.

In both personal and shared difficult times, people have the opportunity to learn important life lessons, change perspective and redefine their goals and needs. After 2016, due to social and economic changes, the Greek public is more educated, conscious and prepared to participate in all forms of life. There is a connection between what art expresses today and what people want to express, since art is another form of language. People generally seek to connect to nature, themselves and

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<sup>355</sup> G. Banks, *Performance Artist Marina Abramovic on Selfies, Her Method Work and Artistic Legacy*, in “Forbes”, 30 March 2016; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/gracebanks/2016/03/30/marina-abramovic-the-public-want-to-take-selfies-but-my-work-is-beyond-me-its-my-legacy-now/>

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> E. Dinsdale, *Marina Abramović speaks on surviving heartbreak as she debuts her new opera*, in “Dazed”, 2 September 2020 ; <https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/50314/1/marina-abramovic-7-deaths-of-maria-callas-surviving-heartbreak-death-opera>

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

the others. The need of community is growing and as Abramović argues, long durational performance art can indeed bring people together.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović. The Cleaner*, cit., p.50

## Conclusion

*As One*, the collaboration between MAI and Neon in 2016, was a living laboratory of art for seven weeks which is still remembered for its great value and impact. It was the first time that a major event dedicated to Performance and immaterial Art, has been presented in Athens. Both organizations, MAI and Neon are pioneers and innovative but their common goal is to reach and inspire the general public. Their great vision is to bring a change in arts and to create new pillars for raising awareness both for individuals and the society.

First of all, *As One*, gave to the Greek artists and public the opportunity to meet in a common place and to experience the freedom of expression and participation. Moreover, it was an opportunity for all the participants to learn and live the experience of long durational performance art, the art that makes man break his barriers, to reconnect with his own self and also with others. The artists declared that their participation in *As One* was a cornerstone in their personal and artistic development. Some of them, like Yannis Pappas, developed their next works precisely in long durational performance art and remained individually in collaboration with MAI.

*As One* was also a different project for Marina Abramović, as it was the first time that MAI had operated as a mechanism for training artists in the art of performance. Daskalopoulos was the commissioner of the whole project and his contribution to the implementation of the particular program was exemplary. In addition, Neon has demonstrated its mastery of organization and management, and has recorded and provided much of the material and events on its website. Neon continues to take on and support major projects that promote art in Greece and also it promotes and supports Greek artists abroad. In addition, most of the projects that the organization undertakes are based exactly on the philosophy and dynamics of collaborations and partnerships, something Daskalopoulos deeply supports and openly proposes to the others.

Certainly, the Greek audience was not trained in long durational performance art and Abramović is an artist about whom much has been written, both positive and

negative. However, Abramović has dedicated her life to art, being as necessary to her as breathing. The audience is always part of her work, as Abramović wants to experience with them the transformative effects that performance can have. Through the collaboration of MAI and Neon in Athens, performance art and Abramović Method were presented in a deeply educational and experimental way. An extended program of events, 27 performances, and the Abramović Method, running for 7 weeks, shaped the integrated project with the great advantage that it was free and open to the public.

The excellence of the project as shown by the general research was based first of all on the important personalities Marina Abramović and Dimitris Daskalopoulos. The former considers a very active, experienced and inspiring artist, especially to the young generation, and the latter is a successful and honored businessman and friend of the arts. Their respective institutions MAI and Neon have demonstrated through their operation, their determination to serve people by bringing art closer to them and society. As all the events in *As One* were free to the public, people were more open and curious to take part. The project was realized under the best facilities in the Benaki Museum and all the artists and facilitators emphasized in our interviews the excellent organization of the project and their overall satisfaction with the work.

Another element that brought value to the project, was Marina Abramović's motivational speeches to audiences of all ages whether they were artists or not. Her fearlessness and love in life attracted many people to want to see her and listen to her. People that visited the Benaki Museum one time during the project wanted to visit it again. In overall, the fact that the two innovative international institutions collaborated under a common goal, a good strategic plan and under the guidance of knowledgeable and determined people, gave the project the great results.

Finally, we need to take into consideration that *As One* occurred in the capital of Greece in a period of social and economic crisis. This project came at the right time and space to empower people and bring them together.

As the title *As One* suggests, the project referred to everyone who was there, having an individual experience, but also to the whole community that shaped the

communal experience with their presence. After all, it was an event that increased the artistic and inner willpower and showcased the power of community; even in a period of crisis. Finally, *As One*, is a great example of the impact a project can have, when initiators, organizations, artists, and the public come together and merge their forces for a common purpose, to connect art with life.

## Illustrations



Figure 1: Painting in her studio, Belgrade, 1969  
Source, Walk Through Walls A Memoir by Marina Abramović



Figure 2: Marina Abramović, Joseph Beuys and Blažević, the director of the SKC, 1974  
Source, Walk Through Walls A Memoir by Marina Abramović



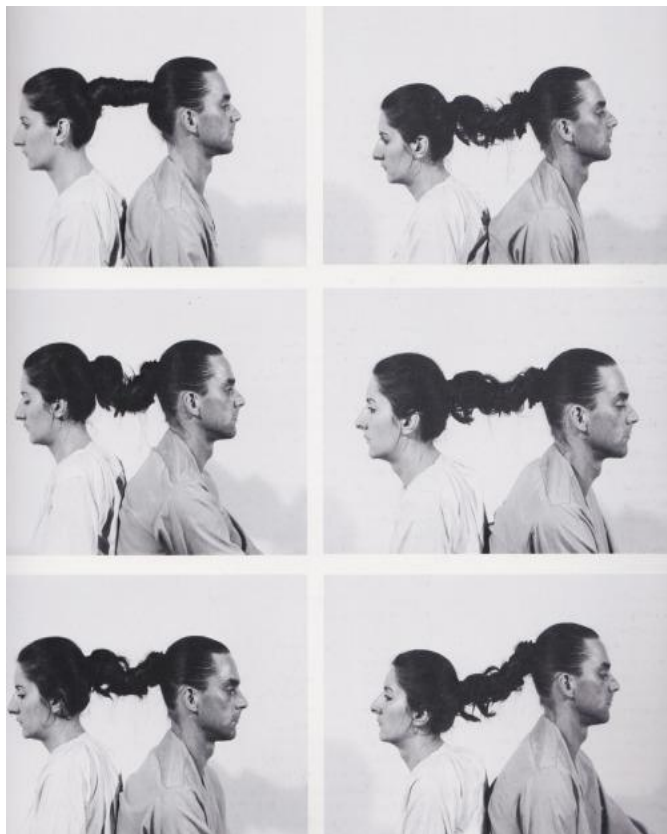
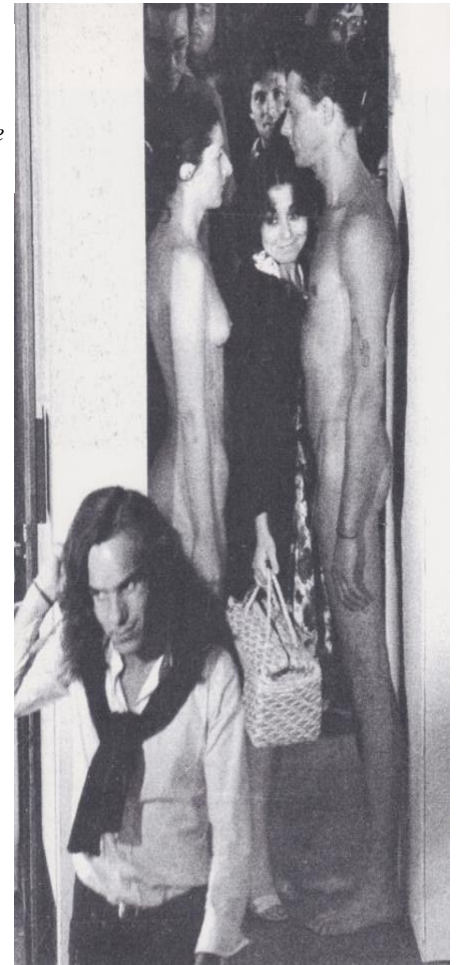
Figure 3: Rhythm 0 (performance, 6 hours), Studio Morra, Naples, 1974  
Source, Walk Through Walls A Memoir by Marina Abramović





*Figure 4: With Ulay in the Citroën van, 1977-1978.  
Photograph: courtesy of Marina Abramović Archives ©  
Marina Abramović and Ulay. DACS 2016*

*Figure 5: Imponderabilia  
(with Ulay), 1977  
Performance 90Min.  
Galleria Comunale D'Arte  
Moderna, Bologna*



*Figure 6: Relation in Time (with  
Ulay), 1977  
Photographic Documentation  
Of a Performance  
17 hours.  
Studio G7, Bologna  
In a given space.  
First part.  
Without public.  
We are sitting back to back,  
tied together by our hair  
not moving.*



*Figure 7: The Lovers, Great Wall Walk by Marina Abramovic/Ulay, 1988*  
 Source, <http://www.kindvall.net/marina-abramoviculay/>



*Figure 8: The handshake that marked the end of their personal and professional relationship, 1988*  
 Source, Walk Through Walls A Memoir by Marina Abramović



*Figure 9: Transitory Objects*  
 Black Dragon, 1994,  
 quartz crystal, stone  
 Stones include: rose quartz; blue quartz; clay quartz; green quartz; hematite; snowflake obsidian; clear quartz; smoked quartz; sodalite; chrysocolla and amethyst quartz, dimensions vary, edition of 21 with 4 APs



*Figure 10: The House with the Ocean View (performance, 12 days), New York, 2002*  
 Source, Walk Through Walls A Memoir by Marina Abramović



*Figure 11: Installation view of Marina Abramović's performance The Artist is Present at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, 2010. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery*



*Figure 12: Marina Abramović performing Joseph Beuys How to explain Pictures to a dead Hare (1965) at the Solomon R.Guggenheim Museum on November 13, 2015. Photograph by Kathryn Carr © Walk The Solomon R.Guggenheim Foundation, New York*





Figure 13: *Cleaning the House*, walking for 10 hours after 4 days without food or talk, student workshop, Académie des Beaux- Arts, Paris, 1995  
Source, Walk Through Walls A Memoir by Marina Abramović



Figure 11: *Cleaning the House*, Complaining exercise, Atlas de Ulla, Spain, 2002  
Source, M. Abramović: The Artist is Present



Figure 15: *Cleaning the House*, Greece, 2016, photo by Tokomboru



Figure 16: Audience and a perplexed participant inside the double glass room of actress Yiota Argyropoulou, the setting of her six-week-long performance "A person at a time". Part of AS ONE at the Benaki Museum, Athens, 2016. Photo © Natalia Tsoukalas



Figure 17: Visual artist Thodoris Trambas performing "Pangaea", his six-week-long performance at the courtyard of the Benaki Museum. Part of AS ONE, 2016. Photo © Natalia Tsoukalas



Figure 18: composer and sound artist Lambros Pigounis performing "Micropolitics of Noise" in a sound installation designed by him. Part of AS ONE at the Benaki Museum, Athens, 2016. Photo © Natalia Tsoukalas



Figure 19: Yiannis Papas exits his glass prison of four days and his performance "A Key - Εκεί" comes to its end. Part of AS ONE at the Benaki Museum in Athens, 2016. Photo © Natalia Tsoukalas





*Figure 20: Mutual Wave Machine, As On, 2016, photo by Natalia Tsoukalas*



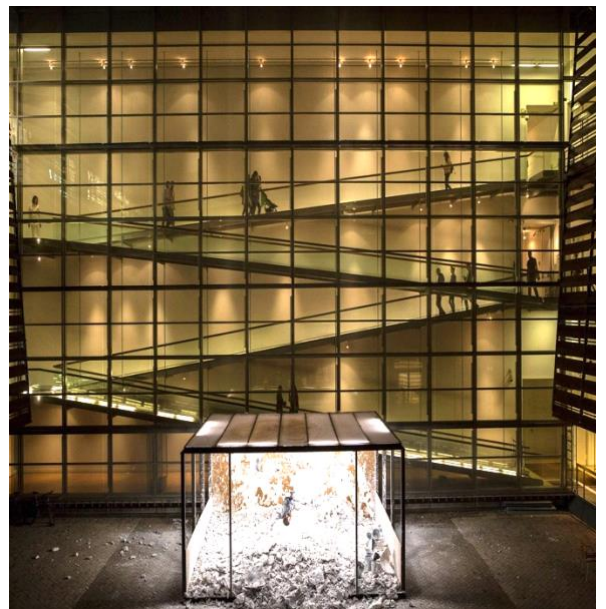
*Figure 21: AS ONE, The Abramović Method, Benaki Museum, 10 March- 24 April 2016, Photo © Panos Kokkinias*



*Figure 22: A group photo of artists participating in AS ONE. Photo © Natalia Tsoukalas*



*Figure 23: Portrait of Marina Abramović and Dimitris Daskalopoulos. Photo by Marco Anelli © 2016*



*Figure 24: As One, Benaki Museum, Photo by Panos Kokkinias*



## VIDEO, AS ONE + MAI, PERFORMANCES

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cfaw3qAXfyQ>



*Figure 25: Abramović Institute, Benaki Museum, Athens, 2016. Photo by Panos Kokkinias*



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## Appendix

*As One* filmed by Tokomburu and Production made by Inkas Film Productions

The following texts are short summaries of all the performances that took place in *As One*, and extracted exactly as are presented on the Neon website. They are added here as additional material for the reader.

Performance Interventions: <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/AS-ONE-performance-interventions-for-web-EN.pdf>

Long Durational Performances: <https://neon.org.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/AS-ONE-long-durational-performances-for-web-EN.pdf>

### **Rafael Abdala (1981), Goiana, Brazil Jessica Goes (1977), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil *Protovoulía* | Performance Intervention**

*Protovoulía* is a call to action. Inviting the “self” to become as many as we are. An adventure through the otherness in a multitudinal order. Rafael Abdala and Jessica Goes come together to enable a creative process through collaboration, opening spaces for other artists to join in on-site. Performers, igniters, with a desire to wander through the otherness. Art through life, in a shared momentum of images and actions. Once the project is over, *Protovoulía* does not come. Traces and trails in our bodies (of everyone involved) will entice us all to seek further collaborative and multiple experiences between art and life.

### **Yannis Adoniou, dance artist (1968), Athens, Greece, Stavros Apostolatos, dance artist (1975), Chania, Greece, *Portrait of the Unknown Man* | Performance Intervention**

Taking movement as their tool, Yannis Adoniou and Stavros Apostolatos flirt with the idea of disappearance. The two performers seek to dissolve their forms — taking as their mainsprings walking, standing and immobility, leaps, collapses and micro-movements — to the point where they disappear completely from view. As their

forms retreat, various everyday objects remain in the space to remind us of their prior existence. While they never touch, the two bodies remain connected, in visual contact, mutually dependent, and seeking — over the course of eight hours — their own private reality beyond the abilities of the body. The work is not rehearsed; the movements are created each time out of nothing, instinctually, in the split second of each moment.

**Thanassis Akokkalidis, actor and dance artist (1975), Athens, Greece, *Don't Look Down* | Performance Intervention**

Thought and the imagination are affected every day by acquired fears that distort our perspectives on life. Thanassis Akokkalidis faces his fears and sets them apart from his phobias, adopting a different reality for his mind. Sat on the highest point of the building opposite the Benaki Museum, he is brought face to face with his biggest fear. While his fear of heights may seize control of his mind and body, it also opens up a new, more lucid outlook on the city.

**Elena Antoniou, dance artist, (1980), Limassol, Cyprus, *An Eight-Hour Journey* | Performance Intervention**

In this relentless exploration of human limits, Elena Antoniou makes a journey through space that is linked conceptually to the journeys undertaken by millions of people across the globe in our day and age, who are risking their lives in the search of a new start. A route delineated by a twenty-centimetre-wide white line that runs throughout the spaces of the Benaki Museum forms the predetermined path followed by the artist for eight hours. Moments of exhaustion, failure, repetition, movement, deconstruction, silence, immobility, great pause, waiting, action and emotion provide her with the time and space she needs to experience this internal journey with no final destination.

**Yota Argyropoulou, actress Athens, Greece, *One Person at a Time* | Long Durational Performance**

Two identical rooms offer a place to explore two sides of a “mirror” — what is real and what is a construct. Yota Argyropoulou enters into a fictional world of emotional experience and invites visitors to follow her into action and inaction, detachment and connection. For eight hours each day and for seven weeks, one room will be her own truth, where time is suspended, a place of privacy “shattered” by the arrival of the real: the visitor in the other room. The glass between them isolates but at the same time invites communication, intimacy, and moments of genuine connection.

**Spyros Charalampopoulos, visual artist (1985), Kalavryta, Greece, *I Justify My Existence* | Performance Intervention**

Loneliness and repetition, wild nature and tranquillity thread through the work of Spyros Charalampopoulos. Physical labour struggles with nature. The environment, both as a concept and as a material, has an effect on the loneliness people feel, provoking violent actions and a need for connection. For eight hours, the artist will labour over hunks of wood, battling to sculpt them with human-made tools, to bring them down to his scale, to reshape them. The movements and sounds made may be repetitive, but the dimensions and forms of the sculptures are in constant flux.

**Dimitris Chimonas, performance artist, (1993), Larnaca, Cyprus, *Birthday* | Performance Intervention**

An excited young boy spends all day helping his mother prepare for his birthday party. When the time comes, he falls asleep and misses his moment. This boy, now grown, sits before you and behind a cake set with many candles. He sings “happy birthday” to himself, over and again, endlessly. Compulsive repetition creates the opportunity for a new outcome. This universal song, perhaps the best known in the world, becomes a personal elegy to a lost innocence.

**Amanda Coogan, performer (1971), Dublin, Ireland | Performance Intervention**

Amanda Coogan will be performing a newly commissioned work for two days as part of AS ONE. The as yet untitled piece is currently in development.

**Thomas Diafas, writer and performer (1987), Thessaloniki, Greece, *Dance With Me* | Performance Intervention**

Thomas Diafas engages visitors in a metaphorical verbal “dance” of speech, expression and creation. Sat in a chair, the artist opens each conversation with visitors using the phrase “That is inhumane”. Jumbled words, responses, emotions — all are set down on paper, to be decoded later, transmuted into a structured work, transformed into poems, texts, songs that give meaning and form to ideas and thought.

**Serafita Grigoriadou, actress (1972), Thessaloniki, Greece, *The Never-Ending Song* | Performance Intervention**

Touching upon issues of immigration and emigration, Serafita Grigoriadou presents a work that references the voice and memory — that is, the voice as a special facet of the soul that is impressed in our memory. Emigration, which has left its indelible mark on Greek history and our collective childhood memories, is transformed into a traditional song, a common motif in her work. The artist traverses the space, repeating her song over and over for eight hours each day, changing positions and levels to transport her voice and her soul’s memories throughout the Benaki Museum, with moments of intensity and silence, with whispers and melodies.

**Maria Herranz, actress Bern, Switzerland, *Medea: Impulse & Ear* | Performance Intervention**

In this piece, the viewer and actress will engage in a symbiotic relationship that will result in the actress’ impulsive selection of a tract of text from Seneca’s *Medea*. Chairs will be both secured to the floor and freely situated in such a way as to be most conducive to a natural engagement between the actress and the viewer. As, over the course of the day, *Medea*’s various monologues are repeated in everchanging scenarios, the nature of *Medea*’s tragedy, the actress’ interpretation and the exchange

between actress and viewer will likely greatly morph, as will the depth of one of Medea's subtler plights: to be a stranger in a strange land.

**Giannis Karounis, dance artist, (1971), Laconia, Greece, *Orbital* | Performance Intervention**

A body and a ball on an orbit delineated by the constant, tortured attempts of one person to find their balance. For eight hours, Giannis Karounis will bring his body into a mutually dependent relationship with a ball — another body, another being that he will try to understand and fall in step with, on which he will balance in order to come closer to his true self and his own self-actualisation. The ball is his polar opposite, his mirror, his other self: the essential element that leads to balance through antithesis.

**Marianna Kavallieratos, dance artist (1969), Athens, Greece, *Skin* | Performance Intervention**

Marianna Kavallieratos asks questions about the nature of appearances, masquerade and transformation in this work that concerns itself with the daily rituals that constantly change the outward aspect of our bodies. Surrounded by a pile of clothes, the artist dresses and undresses herself constantly, transforming herself over and over again for eight hours, changing and reshaping herself to become a doll that tries on different characters and silent roles. She is seeking her “skin”, the real thing beneath all these attempts — intentional or otherwise — to distort our own selves that lead to a loss of identity and an acceptance of appearances.

**Virginia Mastrogiannaki, visual artist (1978), Athens, Greece, *Jargon* | Long Durational Performance**

A human clock measures time as it passes, as it tests the limits of body and mind. Virginia Mastrogiannaki renders her own body an analogue machine, a tool for calculating time, the hours we work, the time of the space in which she finds herself. Her mind battles to remain focused on every minute, eight hours a day, for seven

weeks. This is an ascetic act that nevertheless links her with others through the overlay of time and place. The inability of the mind to follow the passage of time means mistakes are unavoidable, but notes taken on paper restore the spirit to the task at hand.

**Alexandros Michail, performer, (1980), Thessaloniki, Greece, *The eternal fire which lights them up inside and makes them glow* | Performance Intervention**

Paraphrasing a line from Dante's *Inferno* for his title, Alexandros Michail seeks meaning through a physically exhausting and spiritually demanding activity that is repetitious and, in itself, devoid of meaning. Free will, the search for root cause and for purpose, the achievement of progress — all are set against the futility of fruitless physical work. Labouring under the weight of time itself, the artist transfers tonnes of sand for eight hours using a punctured, leaking sack — an endless battle to understand an object in constant flux, his own self and, through himself, the world around him. His actions also transform the landscape around him, leaving traces of sand wherever he passes. A somatic exploration of the idea that labour and the need for meaning is the friction point of contact between humankind and the world.

**Kira O'Reilly, visual artist (1967), Ireland, *I came to the sea and I was scared. My heart is broken* | Performance Intervention**

Words of a fisherman who found the bodies of young refugees on the beaches of Greece flood this work by Kira O'Reilly, that speaks of loss, decay and despair. Words carried away by the sea to become inarticulate sounds, nonsense. The artist uses materials that spoil and decompose, such as copper that reacts with salt and water to become green — verdigris. The first version of this work was performed here in Athens last year at BIOS (as part of *Love Letter to a (Post)-Europe*, curated by Lisa Alexander), performed by Vassiliki Dimou, then by Kira O'Reilly at the Dublin Live Art Festival in November 2015; it now returns again to Athens.

**Katerina Oikonomou, soprano (1981), Poros, Greece, *And There Was Voice* | Performance Intervention**

Classical music training, opera and aesthetics face deconstruction and denudation in this work by Katerina Oikonomou, who uses her voice to discover the limits of body and spirit. For eight hours, she will produce sounds — classical arias, contemporary songs, voices, screams — that reveal her inner self and the very limits of her vocal chords. Through these sounds, she will overturn and deconstruct the classical aesthetic, the decorum, beauty and stereotypes of the opera form, using her voice as a raw material for the creation of a new sound, stripped back, from scratch.

**Nikolaos, performer (1986), Athens, Greece, *Look at the Pain in the eyes, and the Pain Passes* | Performance Intervention**

This work by Nikolaos attempts to give manifest physicality to mental distress, and seeks ways to overcome it. The lack of freedom and prevailing enchainment of humankind today is only intensified by greater societal acceptance of the status quo, which brings, by extension, even greater societal constraints. The artist makes this lack of freedom literal, appearing bound, and hanging by a rope. This constriction of the body allows for the liberation of the mind, revealing a path to freedom through self-control, meditation, and a belief in the power of thought.

**Anastasia Papatheodorou, actress, director and performer, (1976), Athens, Greece, *A Woman in a State of Truth* | Performance Intervention**

An impromptu contemporary “poem” is created by Anastasia Papatheodorou as she wonders about the lightness with which the human brain endures and accepts the most tragic and demeaning events of our times as presented through the media, while maintaining a detachment that is open to the act of forgetting. The artist walks the fine dividing line between information and experience, and sets off down the path of self-awareness. Over the course of eight hours, she acts as a nomad, taking in the sounds, music, and moving image of a projection showing moments taken from the natural world, large-scale events, and the minutiae of daily life; she responds to these



stimuli with her body and voice, with poems, songs and prayers. A journey of self-exile into a vulnerability of an emotional, physical and conceptual nature.

**Yiannis Pappas, visual artist, (1978), Patmos, Greece, *A Key* | Performance Intervention**

This work tackles the issue of confinement as a form of personal, political, economic and religious conflict, and as a state of social exclusion and exploitation. The title *A Key* is a homophone of the Greek word “εκει” (pronounced “ekí” — meaning “there”) and, as such, encapsulates both a fixation on making an escape, and an act of coercion into a state of subjugation. Yiannis Pappas will focus on self-imposed states of bodily museum-confinement for eight hours each day. Making his way through a sequence of “cells”, his only tool for escape is a key, which he uses to break through the walls. A lack of imagination — that is, a spiritual limitation — is offset by repetitious action and an insistence on escape. The final confinement cell opens only when a visitor takes the key from his hands and slips it into the lock.

**PASHIAS, visual artist (1988), Nicosia, Cyprus, *Diagrama (Training for Performance #6)* | Performance Intervention**

Centred on the body as a vehicle for the energy, skill, aesthetic ideals and ability seen in the world of sport and physical training, PASHIAS explores here the concept of contest. With an eye on completing a specific task, the body is brought in touch with the parameters of its own self, with its material and social dimensions. The artist will create a sporting ring — an arena set apart from the civic body — where the body, alone, trains for an upcoming competition in an attempt to push beyond its physical limits, and where the act of training to achieve the greatest possible performance is, in the end, equal to the contest itself.

**Lampros Pigounis, composer and sound artist, (1976), Athens, Greece, *Micropolitics of Noise* | Long Durational Performance**

Lambros Pigounis, composer and sound artist (1976), Athens, Greece  
Driven by his research in acoustic ecology in relation to the human body, Lambros Pigounis is attempting to give physical form to the micropolitics of sound-signaling threats and to demonstrate the ways in which noise can be used as a form of violence that also shapes the soundscape of the future. He creates a long-durational situation in which his body is exposed to subsonic vibrational forces, triggered by the presence of people around him. Left in a state of constant threat for seven weeks, the body unconsciously experiences three kinds of fear-induced reactions: fight — flight — freeze.

**Nancy Stamatopoulou, dancer and performance maker (1976), Thessaloniki, Greece, *White Cave* | Long Durational Performance**

In this allegory of Plato's Cave, Nancy Stamatopoulou directs her own "spiritual confinement" within a reality composed of everyday objects. For eight hours each day over the course of seven weeks, the artist remains within the narrow limits set by the sights of a camera lens, confined inside her own personal "cave" and the shadowy re-enactment of a personal truth. Time passes slowly, like the movement of a turtle. Actions are repetitious, like a punishment. Reality feels remote, the possibility of escape imperceptible.

**Thodoris Trampas, visual artist (1991), Devonport, Australia, *Pagaia* | Long Durational Performance**

Nature and creation, division and composition. Thodoris Trampas delineates a process of union through destruction, and the need for reconciliation with the other side. In an enclosed space, six metres by seven, for seven weeks and eight hours each day, the body is set against the material world — a large piece of rock — in order to create its replica in plaster. This copying, this repetition, is a way of experiencing the existence of nature from scratch. Smashing the rock differentiates the copy from the

original, and the resulting fragments accumulate and change the mass of the and change the mass of the material — transform it, give it new form.

**Evgenia Tsanana, visual artist (1964), Thessaloniki, Greece, *Office for Public Unburdening* | Performance Intervention**

Emotional relief in times of crisis — this is what's on offer in this work by Evgenia Tsanana, that springs from the acknowledgment that pain is eased when shared with others. The artist will create a participatory work, an office where visitors can relieve whatever is burdening them by describing their own nightmares. These nightmares are written down in pencil on paper, then wiped out with erasers. The rubbings left behind are then saved and stored. On the final day, the artist will walk down to Piraeus and throw the rubbings into the sea, before returning to close the Museum, both literally and figuratively. Through the repetition of the nightmare documentation and transformation process over the course of six days, the Office for Public Unburdening seeks to symbolically reduce the burden of collective misery brought on by the crisis that is weighing Greece down in a joint intervention undertaken with visitors that is founded upon mutual trust.

**Christina Vasileiou, dance artist (1978), Bucharest, Romania, *bd / n / sl* | Performance Intervention**

Sound and the body, action and effect define this work by Christina Vasileiou. An eight-hour experiment exploring the body's reaction to constant, relentless sound. The artist freely submits to the biddings of the aural incitation channelled into her ears. She becomes isolated within the constant flow of music and sounds that are her only stimuli in the space, without engaging in interaction of any kind — not with objects, a set, or the public. And the body reacts in the only way it knows how: with movement, with dance. It becomes a temple in motion, filled with intensity and suspension, disjunction and pain.

**Despina Zacharopoulou, visual artist (1982), Tripoli, Greece, *Corner Time* |  
|Long Durational Performance**

This performance explores the mental spaces that open up during control exchange in human relationships. Over the course of seven weeks, for eight hours per day, the artist will “host” the audience in an enclosed space and perform a set of actions combining methods and goals drawn from practices of meditation, discipline and restriction. The goal of this piece is to create potent, experimental situations of control exchange while playing with the multiple functions of the gaze: a mechanism for introspection, surveillance, recognition and communication.