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THE DEVIL IN MARINA ABRAMOVIC

The famous provocateur is fed up with MoMA and the state of her love life.

Interview by ANDREW GOLDMAN

Watching the new documentary about you, "The Artist Is Present," got me curious about the economics of performance art. In 2010, you did a show at the Museum of Modern Art, where you sat for 700 hours, staring at visitors. It was seen by as many as 750,000 people, and during that time the museum collected millions in receipts. Did you get a cut of the door, like a musician? I got so little I don't even want to tell. I was paid an honorarium of exactly \$100,000. It covered one year of my work, plus how much I pay for assistants and office rent.

That seems low. I made an enormous installation out of the project, which took me one and a half years and some of my own money. They should have this major piece, but they completely ran over me.

Before you got your MoMA show, you wrote an e-mail to Glenn Lowry, the museum's director, saying: "It was so nice of you to come to dinner last night. You look in good shape and totally sexy." Is there any career calculus in sending an e-mail like that? You're like Rupert Murdoch! Who sent this e-mail? I don't remember that I said this.

It was in a biography about you by James Westcott, your former assistant. Good writer, worst assistant. He filed all the files upside down. Glenn Lowry is really one of the best-looking directors, because he takes care of himself. It's true! I mean, look at the other ones. They are all overweight. I didn't get that show because I said that Glenn Lowry is sexy. I think it was much more about the quality of the work.

I wouldn't have suspected otherwise, although you have been described as extremely seductive to men and women alike. Oh, God. And I am alone as you could be. I am plenty lonely in hotel rooms.

You grew up in the former Yugoslavia, where your parents were high-ranking military officers during Tito's regime. Your mother initially encouraged your art studies. Did she come to regret that? She could not take it. I always sent my mother all these huge books



I made. When my mother died, I was cleaning her cupboard, and these big books were only 20 pages long. She edited out, maybe burned, every single photograph where I'm naked.

It's hard to believe that while you were making some of your most provocative work, like "Thomas Lips," in which you carved a pentagram into your belly with a razor, you were living at home and had a curfew. I was 29, but I had to be home by 10 in the evening.

Or what? My mother will beat me up. There was this one piece where I almost died lying in the burning star. My hair was burning; I was burned everywhere. In the morning, my grandmother was in the kitchen making breakfast. She saw me and thought she saw the pure devil and threw everything on the floor and ran away.

Not long after you and your lover and collaborator, Ulay, broke up in 1988, you got a breast enlargement, which some found to be anathema to the feminist tradition of performance art. I don't care. You know, I was 40 years old. I heard that Ulay made pregnant his 25-year-old translator. I was desperate. I felt fat, ugly and unwanted, and this made a huge difference in my life. Why not use technology if you can, if it can build your spirit? And I'm not feminist, by the way. I am just an artist.

You've made detailed plans for your funeral, with a coffin each in Belgrade, Amsterdam and New York. The mourners will have no idea which city's coffin houses the body. Why go through the trouble? I was friends with Susan Sontag the last four years of her life. She had this amazing charisma and so much energy, but she had a sad little funeral in Père Lachaise in Paris. It was rainy. It was all wrong. And I was thinking, God, she loved life so much. Like the Sufis say, "Life is a dream, and death is waking up." I went to the lawyer immediately and made this statement of having three Marinas.

All the mourners will be required to wear bright colors. Can you really dictate a dress code for a funeral? This whole thing is my life. I don't see why not. ♦

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTIAN OTH