

Research on the Use of Body Materials in Marina Abramović's Performance Art

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Keywords: Marina Abramović; performance art; body

Abstract: *The mother of performance art* Marina Abramović, uses her body as a medium to convey the value of life and the essence of art in a series of performances. Why does she choose to use her body as her creative material, and what kind of bodily consciousness and aesthetic does she express in her works? Throughout her exploration of artistic forms, Abramović has experienced various stages, ultimately revealing insights into bodily aesthetics: human aesthetic activities are completed through the body, and its involvement serves as both a way to attain multidimensional aesthetic experiences and to enhance self-awareness, achieve physical and mental balance, and grasp the true essence of life.

1. Introduction

“Marina Abramović's” performance art has always revolved around the body. In the first phase, she showcased her body in a self-destructive manner, awakening her bodily consciousness and shocking the world with her unconventional actions, which greatly challenged traditional artistic and aesthetic concepts. Performance art became her sole means of free expression, with her body serving as the only medium to showcase her true self. Pain and madness became her only outlets for resisting societal norms; if the body is disciplined by social power, then it must be used to rebel against such discipline. Her experiences of extreme physical pain and constant challenges reflect Abramović's embodiment practices in art. Door Gods New Year prints represent a folk art rich in Chinese customs, drawing nourishment from folk cultural elements to enrich their own artistic language. Artworks created using folk elements often possess a certain affinity, making them more easily accepted by the general populace and enhancing the influence of modern art with a folk style on people's aesthetic perceptions.^[1]

2. Marina Abramović's motivation for using the body as her creative material

2.1 Marina Abramović's psychological consciousness

Marina Abramović's intrinsic motivation to use her body as a medium for artistic creation originates from her psychological consciousness, primarily manifested in three aspects: seeking pleasure in breaking rules amidst repression, craving her father's attention, and being fascinated by risky behavior^[2].

Psychologist Margaret S. Mahler proposed the theory of symbiotic strangulation psychology, which suggests that infants are in a state of complete helplessness from birth to 6 months and require timely responsiveness from the mother to their needs, thus perceiving the mother as an extension of themselves. Symbiosis is necessary when every whim is met, and at this stage, the symbiotic relationship is healthy. However, after 6 months, the mother-child symbiotic relationship gradually begins to differentiate. Successful differentiation is crucial for the child's healthy psychological development. Failure to do so can result in the mother's subjective consciousness excessively intruding, suppressing, or even strangling the child's independent personality. The mother forces the child to view her needs as their own, leading to repeated confrontations as the child desires an independent personality. Each confrontation is accompanied by mutual harm and intense inner conflict. Wu Xieyu's matricide exemplifies an extreme manifestation of symbiotic strangulation, where the mother kills the child psychologically, and the child kills the mother physically. Similarly,

Abramović's mother subjected her to severe intrusion through militaristic management. For example, during Abramović's teenage years, her mother would enter her room every morning to leave a list of tasks, and if Abramović seemed distracted while performing them, she would be punished. Additionally, her mother would leave a gun by her bedside every night while she slept and never turned off her night light. As a child, Abramović was frequently subjected to her mother's physical abuse and was not allowed to leave the house after 10 p.m. until she was 29 years old.

This extreme intrusion behavior highlights Marina Abramović's strong desire for an independent personality and her resistance against her mother. During this phase, Abramović once said "I dream of killing her; I feel like I'm suffocating." Living with her mother for years, she harbored a fear of breaking rules but experienced a sense of pleasure and relief when dreaming of breaking them, longing to break free from the constraints and embrace the vitality of her own life.

Marina Abramović had a performance art idea about her relationship with her mother. In the idea, she would first stand in front of the audience wearing the clothes she usually likes, and then change into the clothes her mother often bought for her. The clothes were embarrassing, shabby shirts that reached to the calves, heavy artificial shoes, and cotton pants with white soles and red spots. After putting on these nasty costumes, she would put the gun to her head in a very suffocating state, and then pull the trigger. In this conception, Marina Abramović finally pulled the trigger with the intention of killing himself, highlighting the psychological state of the child's personality being almost completely suppressed and being strangled due to the excessive intrusion of the mother in the symbiotic strangulation relationship. Marina Abramović also grew up in perennial quarrels and fierce family struggles with her parents. Her parents were divorced and the lack of father's love led to Marina's desire to gain her father's attention through excessive behavior during her teenage years. , which will subconsciously promote her future boldness in behaviorism.

In adolescence, due to his fascination with dangerous behaviors, his emotional repression, confusion and lack also led him to choose more expressive forms and emerging performance art and body materials to create.

2.2 Transformation from easel painting to performance art

The art form of easel painting has a long history. In the Netherlands in the 15th century, easel painting began to take shape, and then influenced the Venetian School of Painting. By the 17th century, when the Dutch School of Painting emerged, easel painting entered a period of prosperity. Performance art is an avant-garde artistic performance that emerged after World War II to express ideas. Unlike general performing arts, it does not aim to please the audience, but is provocative on the contrary. Performance artists mainly use their own bodies as the creative medium, using unconventional and impromptu performances to interact with the audience, making art "alive", trying to break through the constraints of the system, exposing the psychological illusions created by traditional art, and showing rebellion and freedom.

The idea that "painting is dead" can be traced back to the invention of the camera in 1839. The famous French interior design artist Paul Delaroche declared: "From today on, painting is dead." Photography technology has brought great influence to painting. The market for traditional realism, especially portraiture, was gradually seized. Today, installation art, video art, etc. seem to have become the catalyst for the demise of easel painting. Changes in artistic concepts have gradually dimmed the light of easel painting, which has relatively weak conceptual qualities.

Dr. Zhao Xing from the School of Arts and Humanities of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts believes that painting is like Tang poetry and Song poetry. Its greatest era has passed, and its future development will not have more fresh vitality. As the "Mother of Performance Art", Marina Abramovic also started studying art and looking for her own way of artistic expression.

Before Marina Abramović became a performance artist, her artistic exploration process was divided into three stages: the adolescent budding stage, the easel painting learning stage, and the performance art exploration stage.

In the first stage, as a teenager, Marina Abramović's favorite artists were Greco and Picasso. As a girl, she felt that there was a certain connection between herself and Greco, and Picasso was also

hers. Idol. During this period her interest in painting led to her desire to develop as an artist.

The second stage is the learning stage of easel painting. 16-year-old Marina Abramovic went to Paris to study and used classical painting techniques to paint some extreme themes. She was attracted by the violence and timeliness of car accidents and looked for some car accident themes. Transferred to painting, but she found it difficult to express the violence of the car accident in the way she wanted through painting. The subjects she exhibited at the Academy Painters' Annual Exhibition were still lifes and landscapes, not car accidents^[3].

The third is the exploration stage of performance art. During this stage, she gradually abandoned easel painting and explored artistic expression forms such as movies and body performances to liberate her own thoughts. In 1970, while preparing for her graduation exhibition, Marina Abramovic saw a student breaking eggs next to a naked woman. This work aroused her interest in performance art.

Performance artist Tomislav Gotovac had a major influence on Abramovich's understanding of performance art. His disdain for easel painting and his understanding of rich art forms helped Abramovich cultivate his passion for form and vividness. Sexual intuition plays a role in promoting the exploration of more forms of artistic expression.

Marina Abramovic uses the "body" as a medium for artistic creation in her performance art works, using her body to experience and comprehend the world, and to express her own artistic opinions and artistic thoughts. Artists explore, learn, and understand the laws of the world, and express their understanding of the world through their own works. Different artists use different art forms and art materials for creation and expression, but Marina Abramović chose performance art as the art form and the body as the material for creation.

3. The use of body materials in the "Rhythm" series of works

3.1 The emergence of body art

As early as the 1970s, many artists around the world were already using the body as a medium, an emotive and disturbing practice that had deeper roots in the 20th century. It goes back to the ridiculous Fluxus of the 20th century, the noisy incidental art of the late 1950s in America by Alan Kaplow and others; ^[4] and even further back, to the angry art of the First World War in the 1920s. Dada; Los Angeles artist Chris Bo and others also made themselves victims in their work "Penetration". For example, "Nude" is one of Yves Klein's most controversial works. Klein used female models as "moving brushes" to create his paintings. During a live monotonous symphony that lasted 20 minutes for each note, he directed the female models to smear his "International Klein Blue" on a large area of their naked bodies, and then rolled them on a large piece of paper. Audiences can enjoy the entire performance while enjoying blue cocktails.

These concepts have a certain influence and impact on Abramovich. In Abramovich's view, the body is neither a physical body in which the soul resides, but a fusion of human sensory perception, cognitive emotions, etc. dimensions and actively participate in the interaction of the world. As the subject of human emotional cognition, the body obtains emotional resonance and compensation from certain elements in performance art performances, deepens its understanding of its meaning, and subtly affects its own cognition and behavior through memory. Performance art starts from the body and rises to the spiritual level. It is a dual construction of the spirit and the body. It is not just an object or body, but the vehicle for one's existence.

3.2 Abramović's practical use of body materials

In "Rhythm 10", she spread a thick piece of white paper on the ground and designed a stage effect with two recorders and various forms of knives on it. Marina knelt on the ground, turned on the tape recorder, spread the fingers of her left hand and placed them on the paper. She pricks the gap between her fingers with a knife, and the tip of the knife jumps on her fingertips. Occasionally she pricks her finger by mistake and she makes a sound of pain. This sound strengthens the rhythm of the entire performance. Every time she made a mistake, she would change the knife until she had used up all

10 knives. Later, "Rhythm 10" was re-performed at the Contemporary Art Exhibition in Rome. In the second performance, she increased the difficulty and changed the number of knives from ten to twenty. She lost more blood. In this performance art, time uses an alternative way to record the performance subject itself and its behavior by creating a "being-there" space instead of the default standard, becoming a new ruler for recording time, and at the same time looking at its own transcendence^[5].

In "Rhythm 5", Abramovich first built a huge wooden five-pointed star structure on the ground in the courtyard of the Student Cultural Center, with enough space for a person to lie in the middle. She sprinkled the trough with sawdust, doused it with gasoline, and lit it on fire. In this way she exaggerates her self-sacrificing duty to her country, taking on the heroism of her parents and the myth of Yugoslavia. She cut off the short-lasting things on her body - her hair and nails, which symbolize evolution and rebirth. Through this performance, she felt a new kind of joy.

Everyone sees communism in the pentagram, but Abramovich sees in it a variety of religious and mathematical associations from Mesopotamia to the Pythagoreans to early Christianity of archetypal symbols and supernatural powers. For Abramovich, Rhythm 5 was a path to personal limit rather than political liberation. A group of people watched her circle around the five-pointed star several times, making crucifixion-like movements from time to time. Then she cut off her fingernails, messed up her long hair with scissors, and threw everything she cut into the fire. She jumped over the flames and lay on the open space in the middle of the five-pointed star, with her head, hands and feet spread out, pointing at the five corners of the five-pointed star - hence the "5" in the work.

In "Rhythm 0", Abramovich presents the female body in front of the audience, becoming the passive party in the performance, and the audience becomes the active party doing whatever they want with the artist's body. The body, as a tool of silence, is distanced and silenced and is once again emphasized through the actions of the audience. Abramović uses the body as a tool to emphasize the continuous reduction process of the female body from being a symbol of personal identity and the basis of personal existence to the only remaining physical existence.

3.3 Physical pain, psychological shame, and endurance

Body awareness is closely linked to personal awareness, and body performances with strong personal color are the pursuit of self-recognition. During the performance, the perception of physical pain, the transcendence of embodied pain, and the release of mental pain integrate meaning into the work, deepening the understanding of self-pursuit and self-worth. During the performance, Abramovich released his sense of oppression through crazy behaviors and gained physical and spiritual freedom. She said: "Physical pain is like the door to the secret. Only when you know how to control the pain, the door to the secret will be opened for you."⁴ The understanding of "pain" constitutes his body attitude important part. She has been pursuing pain, and he says that "happiness" means not making any changes, and that "something valuable does not come from happiness, but from real suffering. Pain is the key to understanding, suffering means to Place oneself in different states of consciousness...Performance art means confronting pain, confronting fear: the fear of pain and the fear of death."

Pain is the bridge between body and mind. By experiencing physical pain and the pleasure of exploring the limits of the body, Abramovich realized the freedom of body and mind. In this process, pain plays the role of imagination, allowing Abramović to transcend pain and enter the space he constructs from imagination. She said: "When I whipped mine, blood was flying everywhere. At first the pain was excruciating, and then it went away. The pain was like I was walking through one side of a wall and coming out the other side."

4. Conclusion

Marina Abramovic's performance art always revolves around the body. In the first stage, she displayed her body in a masochistic way. It was her awakening of body consciousness that caused her behavior to have a shocking effect, which challenged traditional art concepts and aesthetics. The concept had a huge impact. Performance art became her only way to express herself freely, her body became her only medium to express herself, and pain and madness became her only outlet to resist

discipline. Since the body is disciplined by social power, the body must be used to resist this discipline. The experience and constant challenge of physical extreme pain reflect Abramović's embodied practice of art.

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