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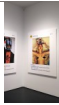
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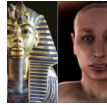
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Ben Davis, Friday, October 24, 2014

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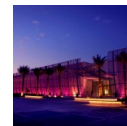


Participants sign up at the opening of Marina Abramović's *Generator* at Sean Kelly
Photo: Patrick McMullen

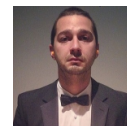
During Marina Abramović's now-famous staring-contest performance at MoMA a few years ago, *The Artist Is Present*, many visitors broke down weeping as they gazed into her eyes. I think this phenomenon was one part authentic catharsis, one part media-generated hysteria, as the whole thing became a scene and people competed against each other to out-feel and out-emote each other. Abramović's new performance project, *Generator*, marks her return to New York after *The Artist Is Present* and is also the first performance-based piece at her longtime gallery, Sean Kelly, since *The House With the Ocean View* of 2002, which made performance art that season's must-have accessory via its cameo on *Sex in the City*. However, somehow I don't think anyone will be breaking down and weeping during *Generator*. Except possibly if they physically smack into each other.

Here is what to expect: You show up, wait in a long line of Abramović fans, sign a waiver, and then—evoking the tense excitement of airport security or the vulnerability of a trip to the gym—leave your keys, phone, and other valuables in a locker, before an Abramović-trained guide equips you with a blindfold and noise-cancelling

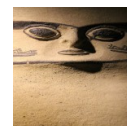
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headphones, and then leads you down a corridor and deposits you in a space. There you stand, amid a crowd of others (no more than a modest 68 at a time!) in a similar state. Occasionally you bump up against another person as you can wander to explore the space. Or you simply stand in blind-and-deaf silence, and let people politely bump and brush against you.



Getting blindfolded before entering Marina Abramović's *Generator* at Sean Kelly
Photo: Patrick McMullen

Personally, I stood in place for a few minutes, then wandered until I found a wall, traced the perimeter several times—confirming that I was, indeed, still in Sean Kelly gallery—navigating gingerly around my fellow gallerygoers three or four times. At length, after I had my fill, I raised my hand and was led out, as per the rules.

I'm not a total hater. The whole thing is amusing, and also somewhat interesting as a communal experience, on a par with exactly what it resembles most: a corporate trust-building exercise. I look forward to Abramović's radical reinvention of the trust fall next!

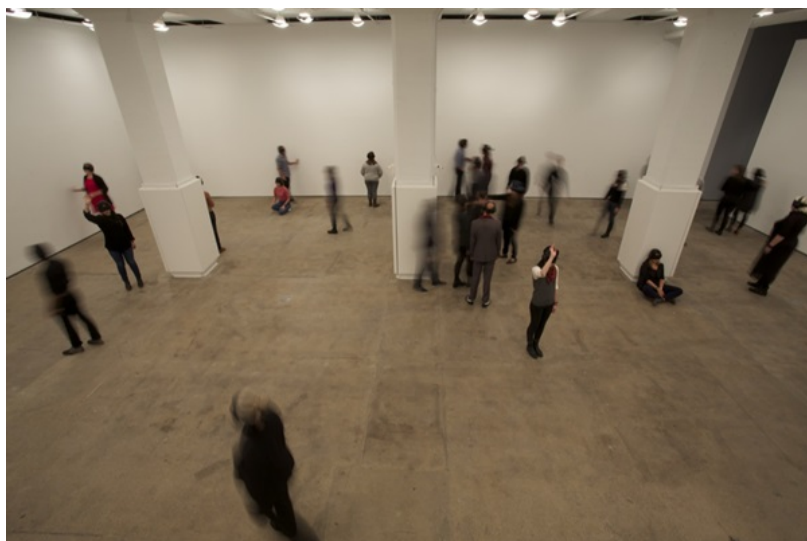


Photo of participants in Marina Abramović's *Generator*, via
<http://generatorskny.tumblr.com/>

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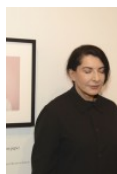
The opening last night felt like a scene, with people lining up well before the official opening to get a shot at joining in this highly regulated party game. Back in 2010, *The Artist Is Present* capitalized on people's narcissism by documenting and posting pics of each of Abramović's staring partners. *Generator* tries for a similar effect via its own dedicated Tumblr. Thus far, however, the output of generatorskny.tumblr.com is about as interesting as you'd expect a Tumblr featuring blurry long shots of people wandering aimlessly around an empty white cube might be.

The press release talks about attaining a Buddhist-ish sense of "full emptiness" and about viewers being "confronted with nothing but themselves and the palpable energy in the room." At the debut, this was a mission definitely not accomplished, for the simple reason that the din of Abramović fans swarming to get in was so loud that you could hear it through the headphones. Perhaps when the hype dies down a little, people will actually be able to get closer to what this is supposed to be about.

Marina Abramović, "Generator," is on view at Sean Kelly, 475 Tenth Avenue, through December 6, 2014.

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