

V MAGAZINE

V GLOW IN THE DARK!

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THE PAST

SHOCK OF
THE NEW

AND THE SEVEN
DEADLY SINS
OF SPRING

58

SPRING 2009

HIGH VOLTAGE

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NATALIA VODIANOVA
IN DOLCE & GABBANA
AND LUKE GRIMES IN D&G
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
MARIO TESTINO

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CAUGHT IN THE ACT

ARTISTS MARINA ABRAMOVIC AND TERENCE KOH HAVE NEVER SHIED AWAY FROM THE PERSONAL OR THE PERFORMATIVE. HERE, THE MOTHER OF ACTING UP AND THE BAD BOY OF EVERYTHING ELSE TALK ABOUT LIVING INSTALLATIONS, LEIGH BOWERY, AND THE UNDENIABLE POWER OF SHAME

TERENCE KOH Every time I do a performance, I say this is the last performance I'm going to do because it takes so much out of me. I say, I can't do it anymore. You're just exhausted and you're trembling.

MARINA ABRAMOVIC I am going to do performances for the rest of my life. I think it is one of the best things because it's so fragile, because it's so difficult. The performance is nobody's territory. It's still not accepted in any way. That's why it's so vital, that's why it actually never dies. It always comes back in some new form. I really think that even if you say it, you have to do it. I think you're a born performer. There are so many people who are doing bad jobs with performance, and it's terrible. When you can do it the way you're doing it, and it's charismatic, it's a gift. You can't stop.

TK Of course it has to be charismatic. I think you have to touch people. I don't think I really do it to touch myself. It's not some kind of therapeutic, I'm-going-to-do-a-performance-to-get-over-my-anxiety thing. It's a very selfless thing.

MA I don't know about you, but every time I have to do a performance, before, I'm sick. I can't talk. I can't eat. I sit in the bathroom until the last minute. I'm so terrified of the thought that I'm not able to finish it. But the moment I start, all the fear disappears, and I am one hundred percent there. And when you finish, yes, you're exhausted, but at the same time you're like a little child, it's so beautiful. I think what's difficult when I finish is the people coming and wanting to meet you.

TK Yes, but I always disappear. I always have to go to the hotel room. This is really fun, because I've never spoken to any person



Photo assistants Tetsuro Nishimura, Collin LaFleche, Emily Woller Postproduction Primary Photographic Makeup Itsuik (The Wall Group) Hair Thomas Dunkin for Sebastian Pro (The Wall Group)

about these things before. After you give a performance, all these people come to you, and they want to congratulate you, but you're not in that mind. When you're performing, you're out in the zone. I think you're very shy, too, like me.

MA Terribly. You know, one of the reasons I started performances is because I was so shy as a child. Terribly shy. But from shyness you go into this. Because of the shyness you have to do it.

TK Are you sensitive to your surroundings? Of course, you're very sensitive to your surroundings.

MA I can feel all the people and their energy. It is like vampirism of energy. People can suck your energy away and you feel like an empty shell. It's terrible.

TK Do you think you've developed a system, then, not to give them what they want?

MA I know how to protect myself. Can I tell you the simple system how to protect yourself? If you're sitting next to somebody who is really taking your energy—sometimes people take it involuntarily, not consciously—the thing you have to do is close all your fingers in a complete circle. You don't need anyone to see, but the important thing is the tongue needs to touch the top of your mouth. It should not be obvious, but you can do it that way. You close the entire circle of your energy and nobody can get to you. It's fantastic.

TK I need to know this trick, because I'm so terribly sensitive to the outside world.

MA The public is like a dog, they feel when you're insecure, they feel your fear, so you have to be in the zone and then it's fine.

TK I just go into a room for an hour and I usually take a hot

shower. I actually don't even take a shower, I just sit down in the bathtub naked, crawling, and let the hot water come over me.

MA It's necessary. It's the moment. You give everything out. There's nothing else to give. You have to disappear because otherwise it's hurting.

TK This makes me think of Leigh Bowery. He was very, very shy as well. But he had to dress up and make people look at him. And that feeling of people looking at you, it brings shivers to my mind. But what he did is very different from what we do. When he did the thing where he was performing in front of a mirror, he was doing performance art. But when he went to a club, I never considered that a performance. I think of it as a different thing, just like life itself.

MA You know his costumes took six hours because some of them were sewn on him. So he couldn't move, he couldn't sit, he couldn't do anything. He was like a living installation. It's incredible how much discipline he had to have. One thing about Leigh Bowery that I found incredibly impressive is that he was working with shame. He was doing something sometimes so shameful that you'd be ashamed for him. It's very difficult to expose shame. We always want to show the best of ourselves. I remember in a club I went to, Leigh Bowery came in and people stopped talking. There was complete silence. You felt such embarrassment, heavy embarrassment. It was fantastic. It was so touching, and in other ways from normal performances that are touching. This I really think is important. This is strong. Embarrassment and shame. These two feelings, which are not really covered so well in art.

TK Exactly. It has to be beyond touch, beyond feeling. It has to do that twist in your heart.

MA Even if you think every time will be the last, it never is. We have to keep on doing it; there's no way out. That feeling that you get when you do performances is a feeling that is so contagious. I can't see anything better than that moment when you're in it. Before, it's hell. After is difficult. But during is great.

Marina Abramovic and Terence Koh in NYC, December 2008

Photography Matthu Placek
Styling Yuki James

Opposite page: Marina wears
Top and pants **Givenchy by Riccardo Tisci**
Terence wears Cape **Maison Martin Margiela**
Shoes **Givenchy by Riccardo Tisci**

This page: Terence wears
Dress **Givenchy Haute Couture by Riccardo Tisci**
Marina wears Dress vintage **Alberta Ferreti**
Shoes **Givenchy Haute Couture by Riccardo Tisci**
Gloves and earrings her own

"Marina Abramovic: Irresistible" runs through April 30, 2009, at Serge Le Borgne, Paris. A MoMA retrospective of her work will open in 2010. Terence Koh's "Boy by the Sea" runs May 1–June 13, 2009, at Peres Projects, Berlin