



Press Release: Embargoed until **10am, Thurs 22 May 2025**

## MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ PREMIERES MOST AMBITIOUS WORK OF HER CAREER AT MANCHESTER'S AVIVA STUDIOS

**"IN OUR CULTURE TODAY, WE LABEL ANYTHING  
EROTIC AS PORNOGRAPHY":  
ABRAMOVIĆ REFRAMES DESIRE, RITUAL, AND SPIRITUALITY  
IN *BALKAN EROTIC EPIC***

- *Balkan Erotic Epic* (9-19 October 2025) marks Abramović's largest-scale performance work to date, featuring a cast of over 70 performers.
- Rooted in the artist's Balkan heritage, this bold new work combines dance, song, and ritual to explore desire, spirituality, and our connection to nature.
- Merging elements of performative tradition with sensuality and eroticism, *Balkan Erotic Epic* reflects Abramović's ongoing exploration of the body, sexuality, and the limits of human experience.
- Tickets go on-sale to Factory International members on Thurs 22 May and to general public on Thurs 29 May at [factoryinternational.org](https://factoryinternational.org)

Factory International, the organisation behind Manchester International Festival and the city's landmark cultural space Aviva Studios, will present the world premiere of *Balkan Erotic Epic* - a large-scale new work created by internationally-renowned artist Marina Abramović (9-19 October 2025).

Drawing from the rich heritage of Balkan folklore, this powerful, durational performance fuses dance, song and ritual in an immersive exploration of eroticism, spirituality and cultural tradition. Born in the Balkans and deeply influenced by its spiritual practices, Abramović revisits ancient mythologies and folklore related to the erotic rituals of the region, rediscovering the past and presenting it in a new light.

Brought to life by a cast of over 70 performers - including dancers, musicians and singers - the production unfolds across thirteen visceral scenes, each drawing on rituals, legends and beliefs from the Balkan region. Audiences are invited to navigate the performance freely – with pop-up encounters punctuating the action including intimate performances, feverish dances, and haunting songs.

From 'Fertility Rite', a fevered ritual where bodies writhe against the ground in a desperate call for fertility; to 'Massaging the Breast', where women gesticulate over graves to awaken the earth to 'In Scaring the Gods', where women bare themselves to the sky to banish storms, the work invites audiences to reclaim the body as a site of power, mystery and transformation.

*Balkan Erotic Epic* draws from folklore and ancestral traditions spanning Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Roma and Traveller cultures, focusing on the erotic not as mere provocation, but as a vital spiritual and life force. In many ancient societies, erotic rituals were sacred expressions of connection between the body, the earth, and the cosmos - far removed from modern associations with pornography or taboo.

*"In our culture today, we label anything erotic as pornography", says Marina Abramović. "Balkan Erotic Epic is the most ambitious work in my career. This gives me a chance to go back to my Slavic roots and culture, look back to ancient rituals and deal with sexuality, in relation to the universe and the unanswered questions of our existence. Through this project I would like to show poetry, desperation, pain, hope, suffering, and reflect our own mortality."*

This extraordinary new work marks a major moment in Abramović's celebrated career, and a rare opportunity for UK audiences to experience the full force of her creative vision in an ambitious, immersive performance of unprecedented scale.

**John McGrath**, Artistic Director and Chief Executive, Factory International said: *"It is a real honour to be working with Marina Abramović on the world premiere of Balkan Erotic Epic at Aviva Studios. Marina is one of the most influential artists of our time, connecting with audiences across the globe - from the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury to MoMA in New York. This new performance work offers an unmissable opportunity for audiences to experience the next chapter of her creative life - bold, immersive, and on a scale that's truly unprecedented."*

*Balkan Erotic Epic* has been commissioned by Factory International, Berliner Festspiele, Gran Teatre del Liceu, Park Avenue Armory and WestK. It is produced by Factory International. Following the world premiere in Manchester, Factory International will present *Balkan Erotic Epic* to international co-commissioners, starting in Barcelona in January 2026.

Marina Abramović will be giving an exclusive artist talk celebrating the world premiere of *Balkan Erotic Epic* at Aviva Studios on Saturday 11th October (4-5pm).

*Ends.*

For more information please contact:

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## **LISTINGS:**

### **PERFORMANCE**

#### **Marina Abramović: Balkan Erotic Epic**

9-19 October 2025 (Press Night: 14th October 2015)

Aviva Studios, Home of Factory International

Water Street, Manchester, M3 4JQ

### **TALK**

#### **Marina Abramović: Artist Talk**

Saturday 11 October, 4-5pm

Aviva Studios, Home of Factory International

Water Street, Manchester, M3 4JQ

An exclusive artist talk celebrating the world premiere of *Balkan Erotic Epic* at Aviva Studios

## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Since the beginning of her career in Belgrade during the early 1970s, Marina Abramović has pioneered performance as a visual art form. She created some of the most important early works in this practice, including *Rhythm 0* (1974), in which she offered herself as an object of experimentation for the audience, as well as *Rhythm 5* (1974), where she lay in the centre of a burning five-point star to the point of losing consciousness. These performances married concept with physicality, endurance with empathy, complicity with loss of control, passivity with danger. They pushed the boundaries of self-discovery, both of herself and her audience. They also marked her first engagements with time, stillness, energy, pain, and the resulting heightened consciousness generated by long durational performance.

In 2012, she founded the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), a non-profit foundation for performance art, that focuses on performance, long durational works, and the use of the 'Abramović Method'. MAI is a platform

for immaterial and long durational work to create new possibilities for collaboration among thinkers of all fields.

Abramović was one of the first performance artists to become formally accepted by the institutional museum world with major solo shows taking place throughout Europe and the US over a period of more than 25 years. In 2024, Marina opened her first solo exhibition in China, Transforming Energy, at the Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai. In 2023, Abramović was the first female artist to host a major solo exhibition in the Main Galleries of the Royal Academy of Arts in London. This show will tour throughout Europe and Asia through 2026. Her first European retrospective 'The Cleaner' was presented at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden in 2017, followed by presentations at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen, Denmark, Henie Onstad, Sandvika, Norway (2017), Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany (2018), Centre of Contemporary Art, Torun (2019), and concluding at the Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, Serbia (2019). In 2010, Abramovic had her first major U.S. retrospective and simultaneously performed for over 700 hours in "The Artist is Present" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In 1997, Abramovic was awarded the Golden Lion Award for Best Artist for her performance Balkan Baroque at the Venice Biennale. In 2006, Abramovic received the U.S. Art Critics Association Award for Best Exhibition of Time Based Art for her performance Seven Easy Pieces at the Guggenheim in New York City. In 2008, Abramovic received the Austrian Decoration of Honor for Science and Art in Vienna. In 2011, she was awarded Honorary Royal Academician status by The Royal Academy in London. In 2013, Abramovic was awarded the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres Officer for her work in Bolero, Paris and in 2022, she was promoted to Ordre des Arts et des Lettres Commander. In 2014, Abramovic was named one of The 100 Most Influential People by TIME Magazine. In 2021, Abramovic was awarded the Princess de Asturias Award for the Arts, in Spain and the Golden Medal for Merits from the Republic of Serbia. In 2023 she was awarded the Sonning Prize from the University of Copenhagen, and officially received the award in 2024.

## **ABOUT FACTORY INTERNATIONAL**

Factory International is the organisation behind Manchester International Festival and the city's landmark cultural space, Aviva Studios.

Factory International commissions, produces and presents a year-round programme of original creative work and special events at Aviva Studios, online, and internationally through its network of co-commissioners and partners. It also stages the city-wide Manchester International Festival (MIF) every other year.

MIF is one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, the festival invites world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds to create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work in venues and spaces across Greater Manchester. Previous artists include, Björk, Jeremy Deller, Akram Khan, Yayoi Kusama, David Lynch, Wayne McGregor, Steve McQueen, Yoko Ono, Maxine Peake, Skepta, and The xx.

Factory International plays an important role in the lives of Greater Manchester residents, bringing jobs, skills, training and creative opportunities. Through the Factory Academy, Factory International is training the creative workforce of the future, while its pioneering creative engagement and artist development programmes create year-round opportunities for local people to get involved, from participating in flagship commissions to shaping the organisation through involvement in its public forums.

Aviva Studios was designed by the world-leading practice Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), with Ellen van Loon as lead architect – their first major public building in the UK. Its development was led by Manchester City Council, with backing from HM Government and National Lottery funding from Arts Council England.

Factory International is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.  
[factoryinternational.org](http://factoryinternational.org)

## **ABOUT ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND**

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. Our vision, set out in our strategy Let's Create, is that by 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. Between 2023 and 2026 we will have invested over £467 million of public money from Government, alongside an estimated £250 million each year from The National Lottery, to help ensure that people in every part of the country have access to culture and creativity in the places where they live. Until Autumn 2025, the National Lottery is celebrating its 30th anniversary of supporting good causes in the United Kingdom: since the first draw was held in 1994, it has raised £49 billion and awarded more than 690,000 individual grants.

[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

## **ABOUT THE CO-COMMISSIONING PARTNERS:**

### **Berliner Festspiele**

The Berliner Festspiele organizes a range of festivals and art exhibitions, concerts, dance and theatre performances, readings, lectures, debates and much more throughout the year. Berliner Festspiele are made of many histories. One of them begins on 5 September 1951, when the first Berliner Festwochen, as they were originally called, opened at the Schiller-Theater. Since 2002 the Berliner Festspiele have been a cultural institution belonging to the German Federal Government. Together with their two “siblings”, the Berlinale and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, they make up the organisation Kulturveranstaltungen des Bundes in Berlin GmbH.

The events which are organised by Berliner Festspiele are presented at a range of locations across Berlin but are concentrated primarily at their own two venues: the Gropius Bau and the Haus der Berliner Festspiele. Since 2023, the Berliner Festspiele's Performing Arts Season has been presenting a range of outstanding international dance, theatre and performance productions at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele and Gropius Bau during the autumn and winter months. Some of the works shown are co-produced by the Berliner Festspiele or specially produced in Berlin.

### **Gran Teatre del Liceu**

The Gran Teatre del Liceu is one of Barcelona's most iconic cultural institutions and one of the leading opera houses in Europe. Founded in 1847 on La Rambla, it has become a prominent venue for lyrical and performing arts, offering a programme that combines major titles from the operatic repertoire with new contemporary productions. The Liceu is committed to artistic excellence, featuring world-renowned voices, and collaborates with national and international theatres, co-producing high-level productions that help promote opera worldwide.

In addition to its stage activity, the Liceu plays an important educational and social role. Its Educational Service offers programmes for children, young people, and teachers, including educational concerts, workshops, and school activities aimed at bringing music closer to younger generations. At the same time, it promotes social inclusion initiatives that seek to break down barriers to cultural access and encourage participation from groups at risk of exclusion. With this dual artistic and social vocation, the Liceu reaffirms its commitment to culture as a tool for transformation, accessibility, and social cohesion.

### **Park Avenue Armory –**

Part palace, part industrial shed, Park Avenue Armory supports unconventional works in the performing and visual arts that cannot be fully realized in a traditional proscenium theater, concert hall, or white wall gallery. With its soaring 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall—reminiscent of 19th-century European train stations—and an array of exuberant period rooms, the Armory provides a platform for artists to push the boundaries of their practice, collaborate across disciplines, and create new work in dialogue with the historic building. Across its grand and intimate spaces, the Armory enables a diverse range of artists to create, students to explore, and audiences to experience epic, adventurous, relevant work that cannot be done elsewhere in New York.

In addition, the Armory also has a year-round Artists-in-Residence program, providing space and support for artists to create new work and expand their practices. The Armory's creativity-based arts education programs provide access to the arts to thousands of students from underserved New York City public schools, engaging them with the institution's artistic programming and outside-the-box creative processes.

The Armory is undergoing a multi-phase renovation and restoration of its historic building led by architects Herzog & de Meuron, with Platt Byard Dovell White as Executive Architects.

### **The Performing Arts Division of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority**

The Performing Arts Division of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (Performing Arts Division) strives to establish WestK as a focal point for vibrant arts performances in Asia and beyond. Led by the vision of amplifying Hong Kong's creative potential and transcending boundaries in the performing arts, the Performing Arts Division curates an exciting and innovative annual programme that spans across dance, music, theatre and Chinese opera in a range of artistic styles and traditions, presented through major arts and music festivals, as well as new, original commissions by local and international artists.

WestK provides a growing portfolio of world-class performing arts venues, including the Xiqu Centre and Freespace opened in 2019, and the WestK Performing Arts Centre under