# Marina Abramović premieres Balkan Erotic Epic, redefining ritual and sexuality on a grand scale



Marina Abramović, an iconic figure in contemporary performance art, is set to unveil her most ambitious project yet, “Balkan Erotic Epic,” at Aviva Studios in Manchester this October. This new work promises to deepen her ongoing exploration of sexuality and ritual, framed within the context of her Balkan heritage. With a cast of 70 performers, including dancers, musicians, and singers, the production is structured across 13 scenes, each re-enacting ancient rituals that celebrate the erotic.

Abramović's interpretation of eroticism, she claims, serves as a counterpoint to contemporary attitudes that often conflate such themes with pornography. “In our culture today, we label anything erotic as pornography,” she noted, positioning her work as a reclamation of this vital aspect of human experience. The production will feature provocative scenes such as “Scaring the Gods," where village women bare themselves to the heavens in a historical rain-making ritual, and “Fertility Rite,” which showcases bodies entwined in an intense plea for fertility.

Throughout her career, Abramović has often used her own body to challenge societal norms and provoke strong reactions from audiences. Her past works, including her notorious installation “Imponderabilia,” involved strategic placements of nude bodies that forced viewers to confront their discomfort regarding nudity and sexuality. As she stated in an interview, the British, in particular, exhibit a “puritan sensibility” regarding such topics. This emphasis on confronting awkwardness and societal taboos reflects her broader artistic ethos.

The director of Factory International, John McGrath, expressed his excitement about hosting this premiere, highlighting the unprecedented scale and immersive nature of the performance. Audiences can expect to engage with the work dynamically, experiencing “pop-up encounters” featuring intimate performances and fervent dances. This innovative approach promises to make the performance an engaging exploration of eroticism not just as taboo, but as a fundamental spiritual force.

This performance draws from a rich tapestry of folklore and ancestral traditions across the Balkans, encompassing a diverse range of cultures, including Roma and Traveller communities. By weaving these elements together, Abramović seeks to redefine eroticism, positing it as a vital and life-affirming energy rather than something to shy away from. This historical context enriches the narrative of each scene, differentiating it from the often individualized portrayals of eroticism found in contemporary media.

Abramović is no stranger to examining the intersection of sexuality and agriculture; in earlier exhibitions, she has incorporated video installations that delved into Balkan fertility rites. These works have portrayed the body as a canvas of expression, where sexuality plays a crucial role in cultural rituals meant to ensure prosperity and connection to the earth.

After its premiere in Manchester, “Balkan Erotic Epic” is set to tour major cities including Barcelona, Berlin, New York, and Hong Kong, allowing global audiences the opportunity to engage with Abramović’s powerful reinterpretation of ancient practices. As she revisits her Slavic roots, the artist invites viewers to not just witness but actively participate in a cultural conversation about eroticism, spirituality, and the human experience itself.

With her unwavering commitment to exploring the boundaries of performance and audience interaction, Marina Abramović is poised to challenge perceptions yet again, encouraging a thoughtful reconsideration of what it means to embrace the erotic dimension of being human.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/22/manchester-to-host-world-premiere-of-marina-abramovics-balkan-erotic-epic), [[2]](https://factoryinternational.org/whats-on/marina-abramovic/)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/22/manchester-to-host-world-premiere-of-marina-abramovics-balkan-erotic-epic)
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* Paragraph 5: [[5]](https://culturalpolicyjournal.wordpress.com/past-issues/issue-no-6/balkan-epic/)
* Paragraph 6: [[3]](https://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2007/01/11/34316.html), [[4]](https://artmap.com/seankelly/exhibition/marina-abramovic-2005)
* Paragraph 7: [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marina_Abramovi%C4%87)
* Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/22/manchester-to-host-world-premiere-of-marina-abramovics-balkan-erotic-epic), [[2]](https://factoryinternational.org/whats-on/marina-abramovic/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/22/manchester-to-host-world-premiere-of-marina-abramovics-balkan-erotic-epic> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://factoryinternational.org/whats-on/marina-abramovic/> - Factory International announces the world premiere of Marina Abramović's 'Balkan Erotic Epic' at Aviva Studios in Manchester in Autumn 2025. The performance explores eroticism, spirituality, and ritual, blending art forms such as performance, dance, and traditional Balkan throat singing. Abramović reflects on her Balkan heritage and the ancient rituals that have influenced her work, aiming to present a new understanding of eroticism rooted in Balkan mythology.
3. <https://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2007/01/11/34316.html> - In her second solo show at La Fábrica Galería in Spain, Marina Abramović presents 'Balkan Erotic Epic,' a video installation based on her research into Balkan popular culture and its use of eroticism. The exhibition features videos like 'Balkan Erotic Epic: Marina Abramović Massaging Breasts, 2005' and 'Balkan Erotic Epic: Woman with Skull, 2005,' exploring how eroticism was employed in Balkan fertility and agricultural rites.
4. <https://artmap.com/seankelly/exhibition/marina-abramovic-2005> - At Sean Kelly Gallery in New York, Marina Abramović showcases 'Balkan Erotic Epic,' a series of video projections examining the role of sexuality and the human body in Balkan pagan traditions. The exhibition includes reenactments of ancient rituals, such as women lifting their skirts to scare away rain, highlighting the cultural significance of eroticism in addressing everyday issues.
5. <https://culturalpolicyjournal.wordpress.com/past-issues/issue-no-6/balkan-epic/> - An analysis of Marina Abramović's 'Balkan Erotic Epic' discusses how the artist stages rituals and traditional practices to explore Balkan eroticism and sexuality. The work aims to present authentic eroticism by revisiting ancient rituals and challenging contemporary perceptions of eroticism, emphasizing its cultural and spiritual significance.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marina_Abramovi%C4%87> - Marina Abramović is a Serbian performance artist known for her exploration of body art, endurance art, and the relationship between performer and audience. Her work often involves pushing the physical and mental limits of the body, with notable pieces like 'Rhythm 0' and 'Balkan Baroque.' She is considered a pioneer in performance art and has been active for over four decades.
7. <https://pirellihangarbicocca.org/en/exhibition/marina-abramovic-balkan-epic/> - At Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan, Marina Abramović presents 'Balkan Epic,' an exhibition featuring video installations and performances created between 1997 and 2005. The works include 'Balkan Baroque,' which won the Golden Lion at the 1997 Venice Biennale, and 'The Hero,' a tribute to her father. The exhibition delves into themes of body, sex, and death in Balkan popular culture.