

## STARE-OFF WITH MARINA ABRAMOVIC

*Nancy Popp participated in the recent Abramovic retrospective at MoMA this last summer. She lasted 17 minutes in an intense moment with the famous Abramovic. Popp writes about her experience as a stream-of-consciousness essay written in 17 minutes:*



**I**t's easier to gaze into a face than into a blank page. In the reflection of another's image we can always find some affirmation of ourselves. But the simplicity of looking directly into an other is something we don't allow ourselves. It's too intense, too intimate.

We do it with pets or babies, sometimes with our lovers — rarely elsewhere. Sitting and gazing under the auspices of a renowned cultural institution, with thousands of watts of hot klieg lights, cameras and observers is a fetishization. The point seems to be to pay attention ... to attention. Yours and someone else's — who happens to be an expert on the practice of paying attention to herself. So is this narcissism? Not necessarily; I don't know if I can explain why it is not. There's suffering in it, a deep quiet kind. I know this kind of suffering. It's not showy or melodramatic but it is arresting; the kind of suffering that arises from intense physical exertion, mental exertion, forcing yourself to be in it, unflinching. It pushes you through to another place where the suffering doesn't quite disappear but it no longer matters. It can look like narcissism. The huge portraits at the exhibition entrance look more like narcissism to me. But to sit, every day, spend three months of your waking life in the same damn chair — that's glorifying suffering. How deep a gift of time, of energy. I doubt I would do it. When I sat, it felt both longer and shorter than it was. Performance-time is strange like that; it's elastic and unpredictable. The internal clocks don't function.

I've had discussions about problems inherent in the piece — the institutionalization of ephemera (of all art, really), the cult of celebrity, the glorification of "experience." Watching the light flicker, the attention focus down to a dense field, simple and compelling. Lengthened attention spans are rarer and rarer. So why the framework of art, the museum, the cameras and audience? The problem of the institution, and mortality, preservation, and commodification raises its ugly head; it can't really be vanquished. Who records the history and remembers? Each one who sits remembers differently; each consciousness who sits observes, exchanges, also interprets, remembers and is recognized. This surprised me most — the strange sense of recognition ... ☺

*Nancy Popp is a Los Angeles-based artist working in performance, video, drawing and photography. [www.nancypopp.com](http://www.nancypopp.com)*

