

May 11, 2010

On Saturday, May 8 I attended MOMA with the primary intention of seeing the exhibition of artwork by William Kentridge. I very much enjoyed the drawings by Mr. Kentridge, especially the large ones drawn perhaps with black paint on an assembled grid of newspaper or pages from a book. The drawings are so free and loose.

Thoughts about the art of **Marina Abramović**

Originally I was internally dismissive of the art of the “performance artist” also featured at the museum. Observing the artist in the ongoing performance piece was a revelation for me. Here is a description of the work:

In the large atrium space of the museum, perhaps 75 feet square and just as tall (the space is somewhat like a hollowed cube punctured by windows and terraces where people can look down from above). Within this space, centered on the floor is a square bounded by a white line. The space is well lit, with masts in each corner of the square illuminating the square with a clean white photographic light that is not harsh. Within this well-lit square are two chairs. On one chair sits Ms. Abramović. As I remember it, the chair seemed to be a sturdy wooden chair – like something you might find in a classroom. She wears a soft white bathrobe type gown that flows around her feet. These are enclosed within its folds. She sits on a cushion. Ms. Abramović (the artist) will sit in this chair every day for the duration of the exhibition. In the chair opposite, perhaps 15 feet away, is another chair, sans cushion. Here people from the “audience” are invited to take a seat and sit for as long as they wish, often adopting a mirror-like pose to the artist who sat in a fairly demure manner with her arms extended into her lap and the hands resting upon one another. Her knees were together, it seemed. I observed this proceeding for perhaps an hour in total, with the watching divided into two unequal segments.

What amazed me was the creation of a charged space that was contingent upon these two people looking at one another. The intimacy became palpable as a kind of invisible magnetic charge. A kind of freedom was generated as well. This freedom seemed to be the creation of this charged space which could not exist without the sustained presence of these two people. Within the stillness and the intensity something new, some third presence was added. This felt miraculous and seemed to be at the core of what art endeavors.

The individual sitting opposite Ms. Abramović would sit for an unspecified period of time. When the person exited the chair Ms. Abramović would lower her head in a kind of dejection and when the new person, or visitor, would occupy the seat Ms. Abramović would raise her head and look forward into the eyes of the “guest”, as if to announce the beginning of the exchange of energy that would ensue.

This was a kind of binary relationship. As I sat there on the perimeter I became aware of another system of relationships. It seemed as if Ms. Abramović and her opposite partner

formed the nucleus of a town. Along the perimeter were people like myself who would focus their attention on this primary internal relationship for a period of time. This focus by those on the perimeter also created a layer of energy. My gaze would at times wander to other individuals on the perimeter and would form, in some way, a new binary of energy (although at an intensity that was much much lower...). Behind the perimeter was the everyday traffic of the museum. People would look in and pass on. The noise at the edges was random conversation, a kind of cacophony; while as one moved inward the silence began to predominate. The focused energy created a silence and the dispersed energy resulted in the cacophony of sounds. This is natural. There was this charged center, this nucleus, and surrounding this nucleus (or vortex?) was a more unfocused energy drawn in to the potent center. Beyond this, beyond the demarcated perimeter, were the ongoing diffuse movements of people. A kind of galaxy is created, consisting of energy, created by the energy emanating from people... emanating from people.