



NEWS:

The Films of Their Lives

Daniel Libeskind and Marina Abramović have a surprisingly personal discussion about their favorite movies with author and film scholar Antonio Monda.

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Starchitect Daniel Libeskind. Omnipresent performance artist Marina Abramović. Two big personalities. On stage, together, talking about movies. What could go right?

A lot, it turns out.

On Thursday, Abramović and Libeskind met at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York for "Films of My Life," part of the ongoing Le Conversazioni program hosted and moderated by author and film scholar Antonio Monda. For more than an hour, Abramović and Libeskind presented clips from four films apiece. After each, the artist who selected the work explained the choice, and then the other offered impressions. (Neither knew which films the other had selected ahead of time.)



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From left: Daniel Libeskind, Marina Abramović, and Antonio Monda at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York.

The sold-out event was billed as a forum for two "visionaries" to "speak about the movies that have influenced their work," which sounded like a recipe for self-aggrandizement. These two outsized figures could have easily made esoteric connections between the films and their own projects, and most people would have left satisfied. But Libeskind and Abramović confounded expectations. They said very little—if anything—about how such-and-such a movie influenced this design or that performance piece. Instead, they spoke on a personal level, describing the emotional affect of each film and their appreciation for the filmmakers.

"I think there's something in common in the three films that have been picked so far," Monda said after Abramović presented Sergei Parajanov's *The Color of Pomegranates* (1968), Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968), and Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996). "And that's a strong spiritual element."

Abramović agreed, and ran with the sentiment.

"To me, anything you do, it's not just about the film, it's about any other piece of art or work of architecture or music or book—it's about how to access the human spirit," she said. "And if you can't do that, the work is empty." (Alain Resnais's 1961 film, *Last Year at Marienbad*, rounded out her list.)

There was a similar underlying justification behind the films Libeskind chose, epitomized by Jafar Panahi and Mirtaba Mirtahmasb's *This Is Not a Film* (2011).

The documentary follows Panahi, an Iranian filmmaker forced to make a movie surreptitiously on iPhones because of a government-imposed 20-year ban on him making movies. (The ban, and a six-year jail sentence, were a response to his past work.) He smuggled the finished project out of Iran on a USB drive hidden in a cake.

When Libeskind discussed the film, he said he was drawn into the documentary by its exploration of the "pathos of what happens when you don't have freedom."

"It raises the question, to me, of freedom, of liberty, and of art," he said, "the question of how do we exercise our freedoms that we often take for granted." The other titles on his list were Paolo Sorrentino's *Le conseguenze dell'amore* (2004), Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1960), and Alfred Hitchcock's *North By Northwest* (1959).

Over the course of the evening, Abramović and Libeskind returned again and again to the interior impact of these films on them as artists rather than an explicit discussion of the impact on their oeuvres. It may sound like a minor distinction, but coming from two giants in their fields, it made for a surprisingly intimate conversation.

Keywords: [Daniel Libeskind](#); [Marina Abramović](#); [Antonio Monda](#); [Morgan Library](#)