

Press release

## ***Joy Like Time***

**An exhibition exploring how meaning might be created through the passage of time and deep connection, part of the Sainsbury Centre's new season, *What is the Meaning of Life?***



Marina Abramović, *Red Period Blue Period*, single channel video, 1998. © Marina Abramović.  
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives

**20 June – 15 November 2026**  
**Sainsbury Centre, Norwich**

***Joy Like Time* brings together work by artists Kalliopi Lemos, Marina Abramović and Gillian Wearing to consider how repetition, ritual, and the passage of time shape meaning in human life. Spanning decades of artistic practice, the exhibition reflects on how these internationally acclaimed artists frame time itself as a medium for making and artistic inquiry. Taking their sustained and iterative creative practices as a starting point, *Joy Like Time* asks: If duration marks everything from commutes to lifespans, from harvests to histories, might it hold the key to creating a life full of meaning?**

The exhibition looks to the long-standing artistic practices of Marina Abramović (b.1946), Gillian Wearing (b.1963) and Kalliopi Lemos (b.1951), asking how their work deploys time as a means of thinking, feeling, and making, and foregrounding how individual artworks hold

more than one time at once: the moment of making and the moment of encounter; the culture it was created in and the meaning it attains later.

The exhibition includes two works by Marina Abramović – the first from the mid-70s, and the latter an ongoing work from 1998–2025. *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* (1975) turns repetition into a rigorous practise, the building intensity of works and physical action turning a critical gaze on conventions of beauty, art, and the feminine in society and culture. Elsewhere, images from *Blue Period* and *Red Period*, drawn from her 16-channel installation *Video Portrait Gallery* (1975–2002) and later developed into print works (1998–2025) are on display. The moving image work has been shown at major institutions, including Abramović's 2023 retrospective at the Royal Academy of Arts, these works appear here in a new form as stills. Distinctive for their quantity and how they invite viewers to slow down, encountering one of Abramović's most intimate performances frame-by-frame, they present an archive of stillness and intensity.

In response to the question 'what is the meaning of life?', Marina Abramović says: "Every human being has to discover their own meaning of life."

Gillian Wearing presents her iconic, early photo series, *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say* (1992–1993), in which she asked strangers in London to write anything they want on a piece of A3 paper. Strangers hold handwritten truths in a public space – most are very revelatory. Wearing locates meaning in the everyday and draws out the fragile contract between inner and public life making honesty an event and turning attention into an ethic. On her own placard she writes: "What makes life meaningful apart from connection to other people, is the mystery of it all, and the fact that I want to keep navigating the unknowingness of life with curiosity and creativity."

Responding to the exhibition season's question, Gillian Wearing says: "What's the meaning of life?' reminds me of the question 'What's the meaning of art?' They're both flexible - open to interpretation and defined by whatever meaning you choose to give them (or not give at all). To me what makes life meaningful apart from connection to other people, is the mystery of it all, and the fact that I want to keep navigating the unknowingness of life with curiosity and creativity."

At the heart of the exhibition is a zen garden with work by Kalliopi Lemos. The artist presents her *Ritual Garments* (2020–2022) which she created during the pandemic, a series of painting garments that carry prayers, faiths and rituals across cultures. They are presented for the first time in the UK alongside the moving image work *Something is Brewing in the Pond* (2023), which actualises the *Ritual Garments'* inherent ceremonial performativity while also pointing to the notion of circular time.

In response to the question 'what is the meaning of life?', Kalliopi Lemos says: "Life is a passage / we enter it translucent / we exit it multi coloured / giving and receiving / getting enriched / our purpose to become / and honour its beauty."

Contemplations from all three artists are printed across the exhibition space, elaborating the central proposition of *Joy Like Time*: that meaning is not found once and kept, but made and

remade, revised, rethought, and then shared – through what we sustain, what we mend, and where we place our attention.

Curator John Kenneth Paranada said: "*Joy Like Time* is a meditation on how we turn seconds into meaning. It invites audiences to experience time not as something we measure, but as something we live. In a world facing climate disruption and accelerating social and technological change, it suggests that meaning is crafted through the choices we sustain, and the gestures we repeat across generations."

Director of the Sainsbury Centre, Jago Cooper, said: "*Joy Like Time* invites us to consider how art can provide a time portal through which to compare different aspects of our own lives because artworks themselves exist in a different time. This inspiring exhibition allows us to travel through time in a journey of self-reflection accompanied by some of the most inspiring artists of our age."

*Joy Like Time* is curated by John Kenneth Paranada, Curator of Art and Climate Change at the Sainsbury Centre.

Head of Exhibitions at the Sainsbury Centre, Tania Moore, said "I'm delighted to be able to present the work of three incredibly important artists for our audiences, encouraging us to think in new ways about how we might find meaning through connecting with ourselves and others."

Looking at the careers of three internationally acclaimed artists through the lens of duration and iteration, the exhibition is part of the Sainsbury Centre's latest series of innovative exhibitions exploring the fundamental question, *What is the Meaning of Life?*. The season also includes the exhibitions *Living by the Rule: Contemporary meets Medieval* and *Play Power*, launching 16 May, and two new commissions: *Life in the Multiverse: Libby Heaney*, a participatory digital installation using quantum computing; and *CATKINS FOREVER: Ruth Ewan*, which sees the artist working with people to unearth their personal stories relating to plants and trees.

Launching concurrently with *Joy Like Time*, *Tree of Life* by Seyi Adelekun (20 June 2026 – 30 May 2027) will be presented in the Sainsbury Centre's East End Gallery across this season and the next. Woven from hand-dyed sisal rope, the tactile and immersive installation invites visitors to move in and around the tree's central hollow trunk. Drawing on multiple traditions, the tree emerges as a universal symbol of the interconnectedness of all life, personal growth, the cyclical nature of existence and acts as a bridge between physical and spiritual realms. In *Tree of Life*, Adelekun honours the significance of trees as anchors of cultural memory, planetary health and ecological balance between the earthly and the divine. The work holds space for reflection, remembrance and reconnection with the forces that sustain life.

This exhibition season, *What is the Meaning of Life?*, explores how art can help us uncover what it means to be human, from how we structure our lives to how play and games can reinforce or subvert our societal expectations, to finding meaning through creativity or after

loss. Art encompasses the broad spectrum of human experience allowing us to explore meaning from across time and space.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES FOR MEDIA USE CAN BE DOWNLOADED HERE

#### **For more information, interviews and images:**

Kate Wolstenholme

PR and Media Officer at the Sainsbury Centre

k.wolstenholme@uea.ac.uk

01603 592470

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#### **Exhibition details**

*Joy Like Time*

20 June – 15 November 2026

Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia,  
Norfolk Road,  
Norwich NR4 7TJ

The Sainsbury Centre continues its innovative series of investigative exhibitions in 2026 with a new programme that examines the fundamental questions of human existence, from rule-making, to time and play.

Concurrent exhibitions and interventions ask *What is the Meaning of Life?*, featuring:

- *Living by the Rule: Contemporary meets Medieval*, 16 May – 4 October 2026
- *Play Power*, 16 May – 4 October 2026
- *Joy Like Time*, 20 June – 15 November 2026
- *Life in the Multiverse: Libby Heaney*, 16 May – 4 October 2026
- *Catkins Forever: Plant Stories*, 20 June – 15 November 2026
- *Tree of Life*, 20 June 2026 – 30 May 2027

#### **Opening times**

Tuesday – Friday 9am–6pm (exhibitions open 9.30am)

Saturday – Sunday 10am–5pm

Closed Mondays, including bank holidays

#### **Entry**

Tickets operate on a *Pay If and What You Want* basis, so you can choose the price from free through to full membership. A Universal Ticket grants access to the permanent collection, Lower and Mezzanine Galleries, and Sculpture Park.

**The Sainsbury Centre** is a world-class art museum with a unique perspective on how art can foster cultural dialogue and exchange. Following a radical relaunch in 2023 the Sainsbury Centre formally recognises the living life force of art, enabling people to build relationships across an arts landscape.

The art of the Sainsbury Centre can help reframe and answer the most important questions people have in their lives. It is not a museum to only learn more about artists, cultures or movements like Francis Bacon, the Tang Dynasty or Modernism, it is a place of experience, where collections are animate, and visitors are emotionally connected.

One of the first museums in the world to display art from all around the globe and from all time periods equally and collectively, Sir Robert and Lady Lisa Sainsbury created one of the most sought after yet non-conformist art collections. In 1973 they donated their collection, which transcended traditional barriers between art, architecture, archaeology and anthropology, to the University of East Anglia, and created an entirely new type of museum. Housed in Sir Norman Foster's revolutionary first ever public building, the space aimed for an interactive relationship between people, object and landscape, where art was placed within an open yet intimate 'living area'.

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