

★ The Museum of Modern Love

Heather Rose

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“This is not a story of potential. It is a story of convergence. Such things are rarer than you might think,” explains the mysterious, omniscient narrator of Heather Rose’s *The Museum of Modern Love*. It’s spring 2010, and Marina Abramović is performing *The Artist Is Present*. While Abramović sits center stage drawing others to the altar of art, the narrator explores the lives of a select few who draw near to her, this convergence the tipping point in the making of themselves. A lush tone poem to the life of art and art in life, *The Museum of Modern Love* coruscates with captivating energy.

Among the many witnesses to Abramović’s extreme act of presence are a film composer and his family, an art teacher, a Dutch PhD student, two NPR art critics, Abramović’s agent, the performance’s photographer, and Abramović herself. The narrator dips in and out of these lives, exposing what’s led them to and from this moment. A novel about so much that’s intangible, in its broadest strokes, it’s about middle passages: middle age, career midpoints, and “the abyss of history within the human heart” that becomes devastatingly clear wherever both beginning and end are too far away to grasp.

Holding it all together is Rose’s shattering insight and arresting prose. The narrator’s omniscience affords a level of intimacy and critique that’s seamless and riveting. The quotidian becomes nuanced, layered, and overlapped in a way that’s often suspected in everyday life but rarely unpacked. What’s obscure is exhibited as essential.

Incisive, beautiful, and precise, *The Museum of Modern Love* is a work of art in itself, a treatise on the shared threshold of devastation and beauty, the liminal and the eternal.

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