

## At the Havana Bienal, concepts like political correctness and radical chic got all shook up

by Robin Cembalest



[...All the artists are aware that what you can show abroad is different from what you can show at home, where censorship—and, consequently, self-censorship—remain looming problems. How—and how far—you can push the envelope is always in question. Tania Bruguera, a Cuban artist who has a flourishing international career, knew this when she assembled an installation for a dark, dank space in La Cabaña, which used to be a military prison. On the floor she spread sugar cane, which soon began to emit a rotting smell. Overhead, she

installed a television monitor, which played a loop of familiar moments from Castro's life. If the tape seemed subversive, it's because the man himself evokes so much emotion—as does the specter of watching him get older, and older, and older. . . . ]

But that's not, ostensibly, what caused the problem. On the Bienal's opening weekend, Bruguera staged a performance in the installation. As visitors turned away from the monitor and their eyes adjusted to the obscurity, they saw four nude men making a series of repetitive gestures: rubbing themselves, wiping themselves, etc. Bruguera's intention was to stage the piece once, but because many people were left outside, she decided to repeat it a few days later. That morning, however, she received a call telling her not to. The military authorities in charge of La Cabaña had objected to the male nudity.