

Weekend **FINE ARTS LEISURE**

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ART IN REVIEW

Tania Bruguera

'La Isla en Peso'

LiebmanMagnan
552 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through Nov. 17

This small second-floor Chelsea gallery has an unusually adventurous exhibition schedule. This month it brings the first United States one-person show of the young Cuban performance artist Tania Bruguera, who made a much-noticed contribution to last year's Havana Biennial.

The video installation here, titled "La Isla en Peso" or "Island Burden," begins with a blacked-out gallery filled with a taped cacophony of animal voices. At the end of a narrow passageway a faint glow can be gradually seen, emanating from a second room illuminated by eight video screens along the walls that carry fuzzy black-and-white images.

Some are of the artist's face, contorted in various ways: her eyes rolled back, her tongue extended, her hand inserted in her mouth. In each case, she has been filmed in slow motion so that she seems to be submerged in liquid or suspended in space. Periodically, the image of her face is replaced by lines of enigmatic text in Spanish that refer to water, animals, memories and entrapment.

The words are taken from a long, hallucinatory account of a day of life in Cuba written in the 1940's by the poet Virgilio Piñera. It's a jagged, tormented, first-person vision of a tropical Eden that is both hellish and redemptive, a place one is desperate to escape from yet resists leaving until "night closes over poetry, and forms blur."

Ms. Bruguera is one of a new generation of Cuban artists who have chosen to stay on the island rather than emigrate as many older colleagues did. The often violently conflicted feelings produced by staying come through in images that can be read in different ways: Is she swimming or drowning in the video? Are the animals on the voice-over being led to safety or to slaughter?

Whatever the answer, her decision to explore her home terrain, physical and psychic, from the inside is surely part of what gives her art its intensity.

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