

Tania Bruguera

with Metrópolis

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Tania Bruguera is only interested in an art that can question power structures, an art falling within daily life. Considered one of the Cuban artists with more prestige today, an international figure in the art of performance and the creator of the so-called *Behavioral Art*, Tania's always controversial works invite to political reflection. *Metropolis* devotes its space tonight to Tania Bruguera's work and thinking. In an exclusive interview she admits that the moment to go from creation to active politics has arrived.

I.

What in visual arts is now called multiculturalism was for a long time touristic exoticism in which “we have an Asian, we have a Cuban” and you suddenly became a symbol of an entire group of people and this was not the purpose of your work. I believe that finally – more or less finally – I have been set in categories in which I do not feel as uncomfortable as, for example, performance. I belong to the group of artists who, internationally, are trying to question the way to keep performance alive throughout time, how to preserve it.

II.

I have reached a point in which I reject the word “performance”, in part because it is a word in English, so I have to reject it politically. Second, because it comes from a tradition that is not mine, that is not that of artists in Cuba, not that of Latin American artists or East European artists, whose tradition of action is different and has other constructions. And also because I am interested in things other than the word performance, which today is more closely linked to theater than to action.

III.

I created the expression *Arte de Conducta* (Behavioral Art) so people who saw my work would adapt before they did, so they would say: “Perhaps I do not know all she will do, because this is not a performance.” People cannot arrive saying “I know everything.” Also, if they are going to link me with something they do not know, they should give a thought to what they know, that is, what social, day by day behavior is.

IV.

Nobody in my family is an artist. That is, this was a rather new thing for me, sort of fascinating, but I do believe that the fact of my father being a politician and I with so many contradictions with him in a political level – arguing, or rather being unable to argue specifically about some things I did not agree with or I considered uncomfortable or did not understand – I think this contributed to my interest in a type of work precisely focused on questioning.

V.

Means have never been the most important issue, but how I can create and how I can leave the institution behind although being in the institution. My work had always had that tension of how to be inside and outside of something.

VI.

That feeling of not being interested in something as art if it is not going to serve some purpose I think finds an answer in the environment from which I emerged, in the society from which I emerged, a society in which, although socialist realism had no place because Russian influence was not formal or aesthetic, but of meaning, there was a large general debate on the topic of what art was for and for whom was art made.

VII.

The case of the piece I made, *Tribute to Ana Mendieta*, is a good example of how I made the transposition of individual to collective. Why? Because I started from a very individual motivation: I liked her work. She was alive, I thought I would meet her, they gave me the news of her death and I was left like... and what do I do now?... as with the hope that I would meet her and then make my piece. But what happened? That in the Cuban context everything you do is political. Although you may have decided to make a non-political thing, it is a political position. And then, of course, when I began to talk about a person who had emigrated, who had left Cuba – although she had wanted to have relations with Cuba – she was the symbol of many things in a moment in which in Cuba artists were leaving the country.

VIII.

As to the materials: what I am interested in is the emotion some materials can unleash, that is, the energy they contain, but not energy per se, that is, not a magnetic energy, but the social energy you may give rise to. That is: what can happen to you when you see a flag entirely made of human hair. What do you think, what may it create in you.

In the case of *Exile*, this was a piece I made with an African fetish and I took the streets and it became a procession. This is what that material gave rise to. I am much more interested in the memory people may have with some material and the action it can create.

IX.

In the United States it has been much more difficult, because it is a place against which I have a big load of feeling. During my entire life I was told this was the enemy, that they were the bad guys, that this was wrong, so I had to deconstruct in my head much more than if I go to a place like Colombia, like Spain, where my emotional relationship with the place may be a little cooler, a little more academic I could even say.

The first works that perhaps have to do with the United States, or with a capitalist society, or with not being in Cuba, have been like, for example, the one I made under a contract with a Peruvian artist named Jota Castro. We pledged before a judge that the first to die would donate his or her body to the other one for a performance and, of course, at the same time, this work is a comment on body art. It is as if saying that we had reached the total limit, there is no one else. Perhaps for me it was a statement too, an assertion of my relationship with body art.

X.

I am not interested in representing what is political. I am not interested in taking a picture of a president and putting a moustache on him. It just doesn't interest me. Nor putting a critical text to it. I am not interested in representing politics. I am interested in creating political moments. By that I mean a moment in which what you think about what is banned and what is not banned, what you think is morally accepted in society and what is not accepted, is activated.

Because I am interested in people coming to see my work not as simple spectators who come to see what you will offer, but civic people, people who can exhibit their position.

I very much like this idea of doing away with authorship, shared authorship or non-authorship. Of course, this is a myth, because, after all, our name is very clearly seen, right? But I do like very much the idea that there is a group of artists who lend themselves to have their work destroyed, to be stolen elements of their work, to have the topics of their work put into question.

XI.

I do not believe this is a controversial reaction. With my work what I try is to make people become aware of the fact that their actions have a political value, that there is the chance that something may happen with that, that they have in their hands the power to change things.

XII.

Self-sabotage – that is the title of the piece I made in Venice – is a work that precisely questions the attitude of some artists or the way political art is dealt with. What I was claiming in that work was precisely that artists could carry their work to its logical conclusion, not only posing the problem but taking it further, trying to look for a solution and being implied in it to its logical conclusion. Also, well, the title says it: *Self-sabotage*. As you were saying, perhaps I did something I shouldn't have done, for my career and for myself, but I cannot think in what I have accumulated. That would turn me into a capitalist artist in that sense. Mentally, I have accumulated something. When I do a piece, it is always here, now. There is no before or after.

XIII.

I am open, precisely because of the tradition of performance, of everything that happens, to the work. In fact, what I do today is to present a situation, to build a moment in which the elements for something to spark off are present. But it may happen or it may not : it depends on the audience.

XIV.

I have to come in and out of being an artist. I am not an artist 24 hours a day (although I am, I have to change the way I think a little). And since I am always into politics and I am increasingly taking it to an actual level, because I am interested in making realistic art. Well, I will soon stop being an artist, we can say, because I am starting an “artistic” project which will be the founding of a political party for immigrants and then, well, I say: of course, I will continue being an artist, but I am going to play a little with the idea of being in both fields, in that of actual politics and in that of representation.