



Artes Mundi 5 profile: Tania Bruguera

by Our Correspondent, Western Mail **Nov 23 2012**

In the final of our series of profiles on the Artes Mundi 5 shortlisted artists, the prize's artistic director Ben Borthwick reveals how Tania Bruguera is taking her work outside galleries

POLITICS is at the centre of Tania Bruguera's artistic practice that was shaped as she grew up in Cuba during the '80s and '90s.

Her work is usually performance based and has consistently striven to make art that can be applied to everyday political life by creating a public forum to debate ideas and instigate change.

This exploration has followed a trajectory that began by using her own body as the site of her artworks, often exploring the position of the individual in relation to the state.

She now works with the 'body politic', exploring the mechanisms of state politics and how they impact on the individual.

Of the seven artists shortlisted for the Artes Mundi Prize, Bruguera makes the clearest statement about her view of the place of art in society. After careful consideration, she felt the galleries at National Museum Cardiff were not the right place for presenting her work.

The next step was to develop projects that would forge more direct contact with her desired audience – immigrants for whom the museum is a remote symbol of a history that does not represent their experience.

Her contribution to Artes Mundi consists of a number of different projects – workshops, a poster campaign and a moral contract the museum's visitors are asked to sign.

These projects have been grouped together as the Immigrant Respect Campaign that, in turn, relates to her long-term project Immigrant Movement International (IMI).

IMI was formed in 2010 as an artist-initiated sociopolitical movement that is scheduled to run until 2015. Based in a building in Queens, New York, its key slogan is 'everyone is an immigrant'. IMI aims to explore who is defined as an immigrant and how they are represented, provide services like language and literacy training, information about political rights and legal issues, and what it means to be a citizen of the world beyond nationality.

Bruguera shares an ambition with fellow Artes Mundi candidate Apolonija Sustersic which is that by initiating a long-term project in close dialogue with a community, at a certain point her role will become obsolete as the community assume full responsibility for the project and make it their own.

The first manifestation of the Immigrant Respect Campaign was a projection covering the façade of National Museum Cardiff on the opening night of Artes Mundi 5. The campaign's emblem – ribbons similar to those for HIV or breast cancer awareness – were emblazoned across the front of the museum along with her motto 'Dignity has no nationality'.

On entering the museum, visitors were asked to sign a Moral Commitment Contract to respect and promote immigrants' rights. Posters bearing the ribbon then began appearing throughout Cardiff city centre – through fly posting, community groups and members of the public.

The Immigrant Respect Campaign has levels of concentric activity that range from the general public's interaction in the above elements, to a small group she is working with throughout the exhibition period. Following a workshop at the museum with young immigrants from the Riverside and Grangetown areas of Cardiff on the theme of Immigrant Superheroes, Bruguera has continued to work with these 10 to 16 year olds every weekend.

The young people are introduced to the ways that artists interrogate the reality that others often take for granted, and how an artist like Bruguera maps that approach onto politics.

The workshops give the participants an opportunity to draw from their own experiences, form their own opinions, and explore ways to represent themselves. The objective is to empower participants by honing in on a single issue that they feel strongly about which they will then take to the Senedd and present to a group of Assembly Members on November 27, under the sponsorship of former MP Julie Morgan AM who has long been an advocate of immigrant rights.

The following day the group will make a presentation at the Artes Mundi conference about the proposal to the AMs and conclusions that have been drawn from the process.

A positive experience for each participant is a crucial part of this project, but the bourgeois aspiration of 'personal growth' is not sufficient for Bruguera. Her goal is for an art practice that is genuinely integrated into daily life, so much so that art can be the catalyst for progressive politics.

The aim of this art project is to effect legislation to broaden immigrant rights. If the project fails in that ambition then it will trigger reflection on the content of the proposal, but also on the limitations of powers devolved to the Assembly by Westminster, and ultimately the limitations of democratic process to represent the views and interests of its constituents.

If it succeeds then Bruguera will have demonstrated through the most unorthodox channels how artistic and political representation can be brought into alignment to create a better, more radical, future.

The Artes Mundi 5 exhibition is at National Museum Cardiff until January 13. The winner of the £40,000 prize will be revealed on November 29. For full details visit www.artesmundi.org

Read more: Wales Online
<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/showbiz-and-lifestyle/arts-in-wales/2012/11/23/artes-mundi-5-profile-tania-bruguera-91466-32288460/#ixzz2DM2b4XG3>