

## ART & DESIGN

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### Politics as Performance, an Evolving Art



Librado Romero/The New York Times

Jason Gaspar, left, demonstrating food preparation with homegrown vegetables at *Immigrant Movement International* headquarters.

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Artists have always blurred the lines among art, life and politics. Joseph Beuys planted thousands of trees as ecological sculpture. Gordon Matta-Clark stockpiled useless slivers of Manhattan real estate to illustrate the absurdity of property ownership. The tradition continues in the work of the Cuban-born artist [Tania Bruguera](#), who has created the equivalent of a full-time performance piece called the Immigrant Movement International in Corona, Queens.

Conceived as a gesture of solidarity with people living illegally in countries not their own, the movement has headquarters in a storefront on Roosevelt Avenue. There, free and seven days a week, a tiny staff and a roster of volunteers, many of them artists, offer a program of practical assistance and consciousness-raising activities to neighborhood residents, many of whom are new arrivals from Ecuador and Mexico.

Services include legal advice and computer instruction, but there are also reading lessons that double as introductions to art history, with an emphasis on the difficult lives of artists in the past; health classes that incorporate meditation and tai chi, linking an isolated Latin American population to the borough's Asian cultures; and theater workshops that function as safe places to work out stress, reimagine reality and rehearse political interventions.

One goal of the Immigrant Movement International, defined in a collectively written manifesto, is to bring the cause of civil rights for immigrants into the public sphere. How to do so effectively is the question. And this is the focus of a series of community meetings, the first of which I sat in on last week.

It was evident from the discussion that the merging of life and art that Ms. Bruguera envisions is still an evolving concept here. Some people wanted straightforward protest marches; others mulled subtler forms of mass demonstration learned from, among other sources, [Occupy Wall Street](#), with its roots in street theater. What was clear was that everyone — about 50 people — understood the basic politics-as-performance idea and were ready to go with it.

When Ms. Bruguera first set up the project in Corona in 2011, with financing from Creative Time and the [Queens Museum of Art](#), skeptics assumed that it was an artist's ego trip and that she wouldn't stay. A year and a half later, and with most of the money gone, the work is still in progress, and Ms. Bruguera is still there, living over the storefront.

Is it art? Tired question, to which nearly half a century of history responds: yes. For sure, it's art I'll be following this summer. Both before and after the Chelsea galleries close for vacation, a lot will be happening in community meetings in Corona, as more ideas for election-year actions are sketched out, then firmed up and filled in, like paintings. How often do you get to see art conceived, refined and finished as you look?

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