



Tania Bruguera

Immigrant Movement International

Implementation Years: 2010 - 2015

Corona, Queens, New York, United States

© Tania Bruguera

Courtesy: the artist

ARTE ÚTIL

An interview with
TANIA BRUGUERA.

By Ernesto Menéndez-Conde

Artists, says French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, are “a dominated fraction of the dominant class.” This place in social struggles would explain artist’s ambivalence towards political and economic power, and the fact that despite “their revolt against those they call the ‘bourgeois’, artists would remain loyal to the bourgeois order.” In her *Immigrant Movement International* (Corona, Queens, 2010), Cuban artist Tania Bruguera seems to take advantage of this position in order to empower people deprived of certain civil rights and frequently subjected to oppressive working conditions.

In this institution, immigrants, mostly illegal ones, have a place for getting certain social recognition, and for receiving services that would help them face the numberless challenges of their everyday life. As part of its program, The *Immigrant Movement International* offers workshops, frequently conducted by artists, languages classes, social events and legal advice to immigrants. It also teaches them how to integrate Contemporary art methodologies as tools for achieving more social recognition.

As art critic John Perrault noticed, The *Immigrant Movement International* is probably the only artwork which takes place in an office, and includes a lot of

bureaucratic affairs. Someone might ask if The *Immigrant Movement International* is actually an artwork. I would say this question probably doesn’t matter that much, or at least it may have very little to add to the identity or the goals of the movement.

Last December I interviewed Bruguera. I wanted to know how the *Immigrant Movement International* works. I also asked her about the notion of “arte útil” (Useful art) which she is currently trying to develop.

Ernesto Menéndez-Conde: In an interview you said that your work at *Immigrant Movement International* has been the happiest time in your professional life, although you haven’t shown any work during a whole year. How would you explain this happiness?

Tania Bruguera: In 2011 I made a lot of drastic decisions; I left my galleries and decided that I would not show my work in museums for quite a long time. Frequently the work of many artists who do social work suffers when they try to show it in art galleries or museums. Part of the conflict arises when trying to please certain institutional canons in the search of an alleged artistic validity, which often violates the social dynamics inherent in the artwork itself. Institutions should have a flexibility that may not even take the architectural shell of the place, but consists of mo-



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ments that form from the dynamics that the institution facilitates.

Why was it the happiest moment of my life? It was something very intense. It involved a lot of management work and I don't like management work; like almost everyone else, but there is something I would like to call aesthetic of ethics, which I consider the most beautiful moment in a work.

EM: What would be this aesthetic of ethics?

TB: It is the idea of putting in ethics all aspects from which you can measure the aesthetic, and seeing the beauty, the transcendental or the emotional, which may be in the ethical experience. Usually people talk about aesthetic experience, but it seems to me we should start talking about ethical beauty when someone does social or politic art. For me it is wonderful to experience this ethical beauty in everyday life, and also to be able to experience things that are intangible or hard to prove to people who are not involved in the project.

EM: Like for instance...

TB: Like for instance, Verónica or Jessi, who came to the project as moms of kids who were attending classical music lessons we taught. They came with embarrassment. These are people who come from rural Mexico. They have no preparation. None of them completed primary school. They have arrived here, and they have faced the need to see themselves. They have had to adopt an image of themselves, which has been imposed on them. They hardly spoke. They did not want to look others in eye. They were embarrassed of existing. A year and a half or two years later, they were transformed into project leaders. For me that's more exciting than going to a Museum and seeing whatever show. And that has been achieved with a work which is beautiful. This is the beauty I am talking about. This is the concept of beauty that I am trying to live, and that makes me feel super happy. I don't care whether the green and the pink colors together are beautiful, and I don't know if this sculpture



looks better in this or that place.

I would also mention the example of Segundo, a young man who was attending the English classes. When an American arrived, he left the place, because he felt he couldn't stay in the same room with an American. First, he didn't know what to do with this. Second, he had an uneasy relationship with Americans because he saw them as people who could expel him. He also had a relationship, let's say of non-communication, since they didn't speak his language. It pleases me to see people who barely know how to speak Spanish, and suddenly they start talking in English. I will give you another example. We found someone who was lost in the judicial, legal and prison system. He was the boyfriend of a young woman who had never come to Immigrant Movement. She was talking with a taxi driver in front of our office, and he told her "They will help you here." We don't have to promote our project. People come to us based on recommendations from other people.

I know the art world barely pays attention to such things. Today's art world is very cynical. I believe the art world must rethink what the function of art is. That's why we are making "arte útil", because is a way of telling people that the questions can no longer be where do you make art, or how you make it. The question is why art is necessary at this point. In these new circumstances we must ask what art is in the 21st Century. Why do we have to make art? When you are in the art world there is a lot of ingratitude. I have been very lucky because many people have been grateful for me, but the art world is a world of ingratitude. It is a world in which many people think they deserve everything, in which there are a lot of pretentious people, there is a lot of falseness, there are many people pretending to be what they are not, at the level of social class, at the level of intelligence, and at the level of production and impact of the artwork. It is a world of a lot of auto-narrative, in which everyone invents a story, and goes on repeating it. Then I see these other people, who seem more real to me. They are very grateful people.

EM: How many people participate in the Immigrant Movement?

TB: We have had thousands pass through here and take our courses, and some hundreds have remained with the project as if it was their natural space. Actually the project used to be different, it was directly political. I wanted to make a political party so that immigrants could have access to real political power. And then this had to transform into something else.

EM: Why?

TB: Because first I wanted to do it through art structures, which are what I know. Not that they are the more suitable, but I don't know other structures, and I myself had never been active in any party. I came from groups that are from the art world, and they cannot be directly involved in politics. It is forbidden by law because they don't pay taxes. The only condition they have is that they cannot directly support any candidate. They can do political education, but they cannot say, for instance, "I support Obama." They can do a cultural event, and speak well of Obama but they cannot directly support any candidate.

EM: What would have been the political platform of such party?

TB: First it would rethink what the function of borders is, and what the relationship countries have with border is. I would say it would be a transnational party, a party that does not adhere to a specific country. It would be a party of the immigrants themselves, who are transnationals. Second, I would ask it to recognize people who come from other countries, not only for their hard labor, but for their political, cultural and educational training. Another thing would be having political representation of immigrants, whether documented or undocumented, in political institutions. Namely, to give them direct access to power, and not to a mediated power. Nobody has to represent them, they can talk by themselves, because immigrants know what is happening, and they can defend themselves. These would be some of the principles.



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EM: Don't you feel you are talking for them right now?

TB: The artist does not speak for anyone, the artist imagines things working from other dynamics. The process of lending these dynamics to others is not speaking for others.

On the other hand, to enter the world of activism and politics with credibility and trust is a process that my education as an artist has not taught me. Artistic education is focused too much on the productive processes.

When I had the idea of a political party, I shared it with some immigrants when I was in France and they didn't want to create a party. In Paris I met with several groups of immigrants and they strongly disagreed with the idea because they did not believe in the political system, either because they had suffered the disappointment of being used by all politicians to get elected and then forgotten, or because they come from countries in which there is no democracy, in which power is abused by the alleged parties. Many immigrants, not all, come because they have economic problems. But there is a little division between immigrants who are political refugees and the ones who are economic immigrants. I disagree with this classification because migrants who come for economic reasons are also political. This is a division that also is questionable. They didn't want to make the political party. I talked to immigrants who had their own associations. They joined by being Africans, Algerians, etc. I went to their meetings, and I talked with their leaders. I acted very naively, because I arrived saying "Ah, I have this idea, what do you think?", and I shared it. They knew me a little. I did help them, but I think that entering in to the world of activism and politics, and earning trust and credibility from people is a very long process, which carries a series of sacrifices that my art education had not prepared me for. My artistic education has taught me that as an artist I come and say whatever I want, and I do it. The problem is that political work does not consist of producing something, but rather of building confidence and reliability; it is an educational work. Not generating products but to produce education. So in that sense, they rejected the idea. The idea of the



political party was not for the immigrants. It was from the immigrants to the non-immigrants, it was to give them the opportunity to contribute politically. This is a taboo, because the first thing that is taken away from immigrants is their political power. For me it was very important to understand what I had to do and not to do a work of art.

I had the idea of the party in 2005. From 2005 to 2009 I traveled a lot to Paris and I started having meetings with these people. I was looking for ways to make a party, and it didn't happen. Then in 2010 I was invited to come and do a project. I told them I wanted to do a party and they loved the idea. They thought it was a joke because all the artists made social art as a joke. Many artists do art with serious elements, but they do it as utopic, impossible things, and this gives room for people to take advantage of it, but I wanted to do something real. The important thing was not what I wanted to do as an artist but what those people needed, and then the project changed radically, and it became an educational project. One important element of the art that I am trying to create, is its adaptability to current political and social conditions. For instance, the *Immigrant Movement International* has its own evolution, which is natural and has to be respected. For me, social art is an art that creates micro ecologies that can be a little less fragile than the ones that are managed in some occasions in society.

One important part of the evolution of the *Immigrant Movement International* is the transition to making members of the community the ones who direct and give form to the project, for the immigrants of Queens to be the ones who guide this project. For this, a process of transition was created, which consisted of a school of art and activism, of "artivism", in which a group of people, who are the leaders of the project were taught contemporary art that was socially compromised, in others words, they became familiarized with concepts such as public intervention, institutional critique, the function of the intellectual, *Arte Útil*, etc.

This project started as art, and it will keep taking

advantage of being part of the art world in order to have economic benefits, a space for publishing things which otherwise would cost them money. I want them to understand the strategies, the methodology and art tools in order to reach these goals, and to use them for their own sake. It was rather a suggestion, I wouldn't say it was an imposition. We suggested to them: Would you be interested in talking about this? There were also people who said: "Well, if Tania is an artist, and if this started as an artwork, then what is an artwork?" People wanted to know. In the school of activism that was created to facilitate the transition towards an auto-government in the project, in the art classes, these questions were answered with examples of other socially compromised contemporary art and artwork in public space, community work, and *Arte Útil*.

Then the other side is activism, rather focused in governance, in systems of governance, and in how they can learn to speak and argue. There is a group that took classes about these issues, and they even got paid for attending the classes, which were once per month, for six months. Now they form the transitional council. Namely, we are creating a council that will run the project. I don't know if I will be elected, I don't know it yet. I am there as another candidate, who they can elect or not.

EM: How is your everyday work in the office?

TB: During the first two years I laid a certain basis, an educational basis, the basis with the institution of Queens Museum, the basis of ecology, to me the ecology of the place is very important. It is wrong that I say it, but The *Immigrant Movement* is a place in which you go in and you feel fine, because everyone is respected there. If we have been doing something, and a person arrive, and we leave aside everything we are doing in order to take care of this person, whomsoever this person could be or whether he left prison the day before. Because everyone must be treated with the same respect. The director of the museum is treated the same as someone who just left prison. This kind of ecology, this culture of the place, is al-



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ready established.

The first two years were extremely intensive in both the bureaucratic and administrative aspects. The work not only consisted of organizing an office, but of organizing with whom we wanted to have relationships and with which other organizations we had interest in discussing these issues. It was very bureaucratic and boring work, and it included many emails, many phone calls, and many meetings. In just the first two years we have collaborated with over seventy institutions.

EM: Including museums and art galleries?

TB: Museums, galleries, nonprofit organizations, schools, medical centers, lawyer associations and artist associations. We have maintained a continuous collaboration with all these institutions, over the three years that the project has lasted. The list is posted on the website: <http://immigrant-movement.us/wordpress/partners-and-collaborators/>

If we were to add the individuals with whom we have collaborated, then the list would be longer.

EM: How do museums and art galleries contribute?

TB: Well, the museum which contributes is The Queens Museum. The museum pays the rent of the location and office expenses. One important thing that was initiated last year was the paid scholarship to select one person that works as coordinator of the project and acts as a link between the project and the museum. The first beneficiary was a young woman who had studied social arts in California, since that year the emphasis was on transition, she worked mainly on that, this year we have a new person, who will focus on a new challenge of the project, which is its structuring as a self-managed entity. The Queens Museum have been very respectful and have remained, let's say, as a consulting entity, more than an entity of imposition, namely, they let us be what we are, and a true friendship between the people working at the museum and us has developed. And I actually feel grateful because it is not easy to have an honest, direct and open relationship with an institution.

ON THE LEFT

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Tom Finkerpearl, the director whom I worked with, is someone who aside from being formed as an artist knows very well the trajectory of public art, and had established interest in the museum that went hand in hand with the project.

EM: Initially the project was to last one year, but now it has been extended until 2015.

TB: I always proposed that the project would last till 2015. I always spoke about a long-term artwork. It is important that the institutions that want to work with social art must understand that some projects cannot function within the time frames they have created. Sometimes the support has to be for several years, and then the institutions should have a compromise with the artwork, beyond the production of the event, beyond the gesture of producing an event. In the beginning they could not hear this part because it is an organization that, like many art centers and artistic institutions, is not structured for having a long-term commitment. The longest commitment they had hitherto was with me, for a year or almost two, but usually they do not have such long commitments. Cultural institutions have a sort of attention deficit with regard to long term commitments. They are not structured for having a political, or a long term commitment. My role as an artist was double. On the one hand with the immigrants, and on the other it was a dialogue with institutions. This project generated an institutional critique that was not one of my initial intentions.

EM: The project would supposedly end in 2015?

TB: I hope not. At the end of the first year I was on the phone, talking in Spanish with someone who told me: "I do not want to close this, but I don't know how we will get the money for next year." Then the mothers of the boys who were in the orchestra came and spoke with teachers from each of the workshops. Some approached me in order to ask if it was true that we were going to close. I told them: "Yes, we have this situation". They went and spoke with the leaders and they in turn spoke with the director of the museum, without saying anything to me. They kept the project



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open, which is nice because it is the same structure that we want to maintain now. Now the plan they have is until 2015, and I wish they could continue afterwards. Now that we have the support of the Queens Museum until 2015, the challenge is seeing how to create a structure that could help to support the project, an independent economic structure that allows us to survive after the support ends.

EM: How do you manage to get the money, in addition to the museum?

TB: It's a horror! I applied for all possible scholarships and I did not win any. I think at the time when I was doing this project, the issue of immigration was not sexy.

EM: It was not sexy?

TB: No, no, not at all, much more awareness about the topic is needed, especially in the art world where 90% of us are immigrants but we do not want to identify as such. I remember a curator from MoMA came to see the project and at some point I told her: "Well, like you, who are immigrant, because she wasn't from the United States and came to work at the museum". She was offended in such a way that until today she has not wanted to know anything about me, because for many people an immigrant is an undocumented, uneducated person, who does dirty jobs, jobs nobody wants to do, degrading jobs or people who do something illegal, something wrong, something against the system. In many scholarships for which you apply, whether for artist or not, there are many prejudices toward the immigrant. In the latter, I was competing against people who have been doing this work for ten, fifteen or twenty years, people that have a history and very important achievements. I could not compete with them. In these scholarships it is very important to have a long-term compromise, and to demonstrate that interpersonal and institutional structures have been created, that allow the project to survive long term. I had just started and those scholarships are not given until after three or four years of experience, and when you already have a certain budget.



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EM: Now you may be in a better position...

TB: Maybe, although we also had to do intense work with other organizations that worked with immigrants for them to accept the artistic project. Many of these organizations do not have much knowledge of contemporary art, and yet some of them did works with contemporary artists with whom they collaborated for their conscientization campaign in non-conventional formats and in a very contemporary art language. Still, with the topic of scholarships and the support requests for the project, I was convinced that there was some kind of censorship, as if there was no will to support that topic.

Now the topic of migration has taken a more relevant political position, even though it hasn't yet managed to create a narrative at the mainstream level that convinces and raises awareness in a great part of the public that still feels indifferent or even repudiates immigrants.

Now I see many more projects by young people on the issue of immigration. But it is not easy because if you apply to an art fellowship, the issue of immigrants is very political and if you apply to one on politics, then the project is very artistic, besides not being sexy. I was traumatized. I had always won scholarships to which I applied. I found that people did not want to support this topic.

The museum tried to bring people with money and the problem was that they never wanted to go to Corona, Queens. They wanted me to go to Manhattan in order to explain the project to them. And I told them no, they had to come in order to see the project and to share the experience with people from the project and feel it. So it's very difficult because you are asking them. The museum thankfully took the responsibility to seek funds and grants. It has applied as a museum, in which there are several projects, including ours.

EM: Do you imagine yourself at any time making a show on Immigrant Movement *International* in a museum?

TB: Not at all. I have not thought about making any show. I believe this is a work that must be experienced and cannot be seen. You have to live it and you see it by living it.

There could be things shown, or actions made. What was made in a workshop or in a music concert can be activated; but I believe that to see it as an artwork it must be lived as a process and given time, it is not about coming any random day and seeing it for 10 minutes and then leaving with your conclusions, one has to actually be involved. You may come today and see one thing and come within a month and see another, or you follow a group and say, "Well, look how it has been changing."

EM: That is, you don't expect to show any document, no video, and no photo.

TB: Nothing. If there were a video, it would be a promotional one for getting money. But that is not a work, nor video art. I will not sell anything from the Immigrant Movement. Once a well-known artist came and said: "What you have to do is sell the sign that says *Immigrant Movement* and to sell I don't know what." We are making some postcards and some pins, which are already used up, because I'm always giving them, and now I have none. We are selling the pins and postcards; but what we earn is rather for the cost of production. This actually would be something, not for showing, but for wearing and people show it by using it. I have no intentions of selling anything, who knows if to keep the project going someday I'll have to. Each person that shows respect for the immigrants is "exposing" the project, it doesn't matter where they are.

EM: Let's assume I am an undocumented immigrant. What expectations would I have or why would I want to go to Immigrant Movement International?

TB: You'd want to go to *Immigrant Movement* because they will respect you and you'll feel respected.

EM: In what sense?



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Tania Bruguera,
Awareness Ribbon for Immigrant Respect
Campaign, 2011.
Metal pins, community meetings, letters
sent to elected officials, media
Photo: Camilo Godoy
© Tania Bruguera
Courtesy of Immigrant Movement
International



TB: You will feel that they respect you because they do not judge you before meeting you, you can make mistakes and you can overcome these mistakes. Many undocumented immigrants have to be perfect, they cannot make the slightest slip up because everything collapses around them. It is a place where you can find opportunities for things that you thought you could never hope for, like for instance, free classical music lessons for your children or you can propose something you want, and is not there in the menu. Many of the things we have, such as a Zumba class in the morning-an exercise class-began because women who were there with the children said: "And you don't have exercise?" I answered them: "No, but if you find ten people who want to come, we can look for discs, DVDs, video, or whatever, and we can have the exercises." And now it is one of the most popular and active groups, there is even someone who lost weight. She was 238 pounds and is now 176. And that is another achievement because we also give nutrition classes. We strive to make each of the topics addressed in the classes offer a holistic view. They came up with the proposed exercises. We said, "Okay; but they will not be exercises alone, there will also be health classes." I mean, we have exercise, nutrition classes, how to treat your children, how to be in the family environment, how to avoid stress. Another thing you find in the *Immigrant Movement* is quality. You find quality service that you could not pay for, like a professor at Cornell University, who is a nutritionist, who teaches nutrition or have a super artist, who presented here in the most important galleries, and comes to give a workshop. That mixed with the people of the community. For example, there is a lady that in her country had been a teacher of children. She is now working with children again. Something she could never do in this country. That's very important to me. I always say we have to be as demanding as possible because they always give immigrants bad service and treat them badly to get more money.

EM: What are the obstacles you've had in your relationship with immigrants?

TB: Being Cuban because Cubans are the only group



of immigrants in the United States that not have to go through absolutely none of the horrendous processes horrendous processes by which immigrants from other countries have to go through. Cuba is the only country which has an adjustment act. As you know, after a year and a day, Cubans automatically have all their legal documents. There people against this adjustment. I am not against it, but for extend it to everyone. Another obstacle that I found in the project is that there are differences, racism and classism. Once people have legal documents, very often they start repeating the same abuse same abuses and the same processes by which they themselves had to pass when they had no papers. Many times you find people saying to us: "No, my boss didn't pay me." And the boss is an immigrant, who two years ago didn't have papers. And not only I have found these problems here, but also in Mexico. I went to Mexico to do the project because I was interested the project was international, because this issue is in all countries And beyond that, incidentally, I think is the issue of the century. We must solve the problem of nations. We must solve the problem of national borders. We must solve the problem of national identity. Then I go to Mexico, for instance, and I find that Mexicans who spend a lot of work her, do the same with South Americans who are living there. Those are the types of difficulties that I have found. . They are rather unexpected, because there are things that you already expect. Difficulties of many kinds: cultural, national or economic, for which you are already prepared.

EM: As you are saying, the immigrant is a major world. There are probably immigrants from many different nationalities in the International Immigrant Movement. How do you get all these people to form a community despite linguistic and cultural diversity?

TB: This year we are going to rename the project. It will be called *Immigrant Movement* Corona, and I am going to keep the *Immigrant Movement International*. In the one in Corona, due to the area, the majority of people are Hispanic. The first year there were many problems, because if you do speak another language

how you'll be able to communicate? Now it is easier because many of them have taken English classes.

EM: Illegal immigrants frequently work a lot. They may even work up to 10 or 12 hours per day. At what time they attend to the Immigrant Movement?

TB: That's way we have some weird hours, starting at 8am. We try to accommodate each group to their work schedules. For instance, we have classes during the day, because there are women who cannot go out at night, because they have children, or for whatever reason. They come during the day. We try to do things on Saturdays and Sundays.

EM: There have been immigrants who had been disappointed with the work you do?

TB: I really don't know anyone who have been upset with the treatment we give. A big problem is that everything is for free. For instance, coming from Cuba, for me it is important that education would be for free. Why they should pay for this. And the problem is that sometime people don't appreciate what is free. For instance, in the English class we started with 60 or 70 people, and we always ended up with 18 or 20, because many people cannot stay for three or four months, going two times a week.

EM: Which group, by gender or age are the most active in the Immigrant Movement?

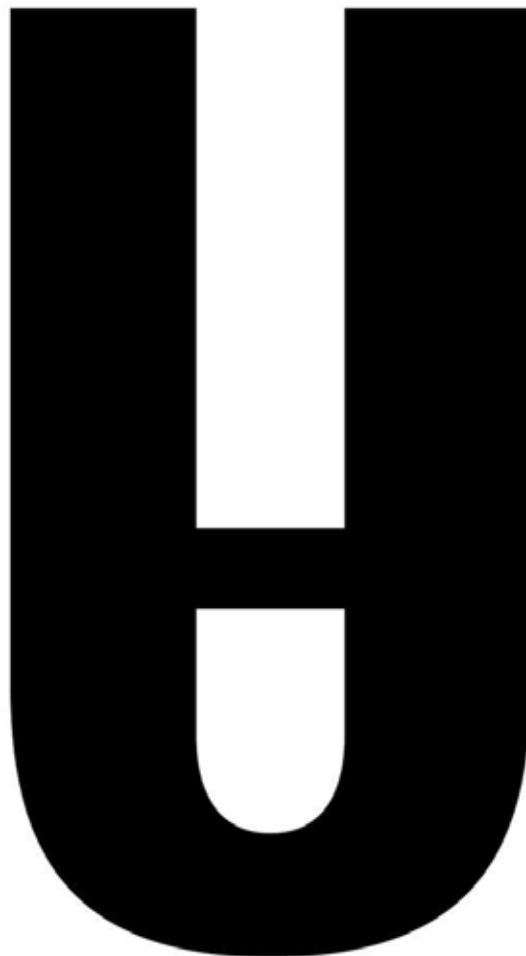
TB: The most active are women. People always think about immigrants as working men, and we have found a population of women there, to whom nobody pays much attention. And that has been very interesting because it is also a political force, an active force. But we have many groups, from children to seniors. Is there a place for painting shown at the galleries or museums in classes you teach at the *Immigrant Movement International*?

EM: Is there a place for art shown at the galleries or museums in classes you teach at the Immigrant Movement International?



**MOVIMIENTO
INMIGRANTE**
INTERNACIONAL

Tania Bruguera,
Logo
Movimiento Inmigrante International,
2012
Courtesy of the artist



Tania Bruguera,
Logo Arte Útil (Useful Art), 2012
Courtesy of the artist



Tania Bruguera, *Arte Útil* (Useful Art) ,
2010, Sculpture installed in bathroom Materials:
Ceramic, water supply tube, flange bolts, silicone caulk,
black paint
Photo: Queens Museum of Art
© Courtesy of Studio Bruguera and
Queens Museum of Art

TB: This is, amazingly and ironically, the least that have been done, but there have been shows, like for instance, by Bulgarian artists, who contacted us, and told us they were immigrants. However, I think it's important for people to surround themselves with certain aesthetic values and get used to the aesthetic and when they miss because they realize they lack it.

EM: Do other artists have been involved in this project?

TB: We have been artists in residence, every once in a while we invite artists to give workshops.

EM: Do you have a library?

TB: We have a library. We have art books, and all kinds of books. We want to make a directory in which people could search for books that are translated from English into Spanish so children could read the same book with their mothers. Because another thing that happens is that many children do not speak Spanish and the parents do not speak English. We are open to all kinds of projects.

EM: Now let's talk a little about what you call *Arte Útil* (Useful Art). The term presupposes that there is some art ...

TB: that is useless, yes, everyone says the same.

EM: What would that useless art?

TB: When we say useful art, of course we do not mean that there is an art that is useless. I think all art is useful because all art takes you to a certain thought process that is helpful. However, what I call useful art is not an art to think, but to act. It is an art that is not to look, that is, making art a work tool, instead of having a relationship, let's say, more passive with art. You go to MoMA and art is not for touching it, not for learning a methodology or a tactic or a technique that you can then use on the street or in your own life. Art is for, let's say, go to that place, and dissociate from reality. I think the sale also could be useful; but when I speak

of useful art I'm talking about an art that confronts reality, and exist in reality, but not an art that evades reality. The *arte útil* is a tool more than anything. And how you can use this tool? How can you convey that methodology for people to take it and use it? I think I'm doing a favor to the art because there are many people who say that contemporary art has nothing to do with them. I think a good thing of *arte útil* is that people feel connected to the practice of contemporary art from a different perspective. Not from historical perspective; but from the perspective of "how can this serve me?" *Arte útil* means to create new ways of relating to contemporary art.

When you get to the museum you see a painting that has nothing to do with what you want to do with your life and you know you'll never buy that painting. Sometimes you will not even be able to buy the poster because it costs like \$ 15 and you have no money. Then *arte útil* creates other bridges to interconnect your everyday experience and what art can provide you.

EM: What you call *arte útil* is a critique of galleries and museums?

TB: Yes, yes it is.

EM: Could not the gallery become a space for what you call *arte útil*? For example, Mexican artist Pablo Helguera recently made a show at the Kent Gallery. He transformed the space into a bookstore. Proceeds from the exhibition will be invested in a reading program for immigrants.

TB: That's a good way to use the gallery. I thought it was a great way to activate a space, removing the original functionality that was. What happened was that in order to make this proposal, I had to say: "This is my territory, this is your territory."

EM: What is your territory?

TB: The territory of public art, say, the public space. I think it's important that people become aware of how



certain spaces are used. The spaces of the galleries are being used in a very specific manner, which sometimes is unfair to the artists themselves. There are galleries that do not even pay to artists. That is, it is a space where there is much injustice. Let them review their own from their own space.

EM: You said that in *arte útil* there is no failure. What do you mean by this?

TB: I worry that am wrong, perhaps it could be a highly personal vision, but I think Contemporary art many times stops at the moment when things do not work and become dysfunctional, inconsistent, and impossible and its almost an ode to failure and impossibility. It's like saying "things are not going to be different, this is what you get, and this is my world." *Arte útil* does not venerate failure. I'm not saying that failure is not useful, because there are many things either in art or out of art that are result of a failure, a mistake or an accident. What I'm saying is that *arte útil* doesn't have this fascination with the improbable and the impossible, and what goes wrong; it has no mystification of this moment of failure, but understand that if that moment comes it is because you have to begin again. For example, you cannot do *arte útil* and say, "Oh, the problem is not resolved, what a pity, but look how beautiful was the picture of that process." No, because you're getting into people's lives, you're getting into something that goes beyond art. And then there are other commitments. And I believe that contemporary art stops in a "it could not be; how bad I feel or see what is happening." *Arte útil* says, "we already know all that, now what are we going to do about that. How to deploy this knowledge, how it will change reality. "Instead of saying, "Look what the world would be if it would be different," *arte útil* says "experience yourself now, in this place, how the world would be if it were like this."

EM: My other problem with the term, is the aesthetic dimension, which in my opinion, also has utility in art. Which place occupies that aesthetic, contemplative or visual aspect in your notion of *arte útil*?

TB: Like I said, aesthetics as usually seen in a non-participatory contemporary art, possess a mental utility. I think the difference is that I mean a practical use. "I'm here, I'm imagining the world, look how interesting is what this crazy guy did, look how weird is what they are doing here on the street, look at that woman, who has been sitting there for six hours."

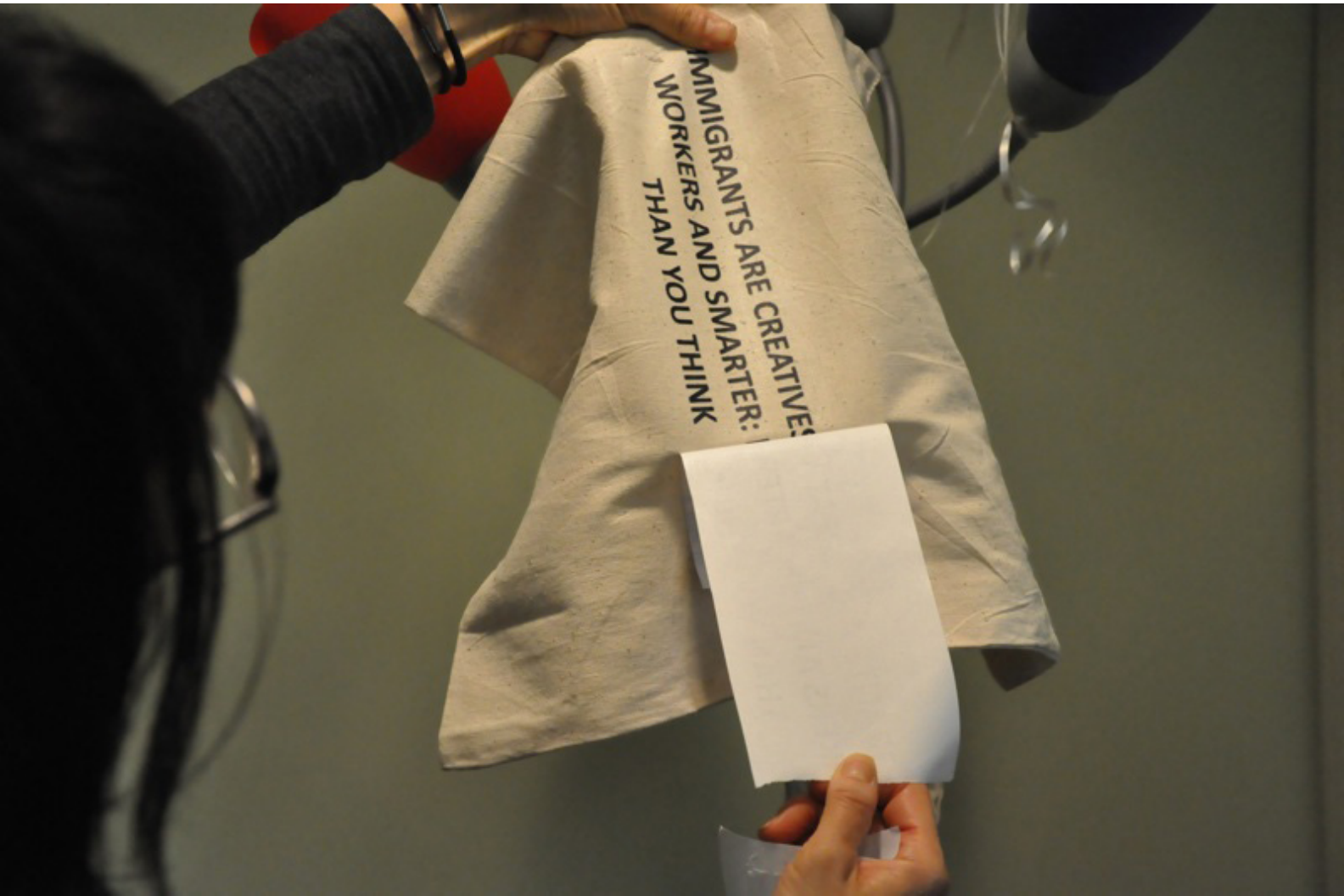
Arte útil consists of many different practices and not in a single type of practice. That's why the show about *arte útil* we did at the Guggenheim Museum has ten rooms and each of them contained a working methodology. Many people have accused us that it has no aesthetic and is nothing more than solve a problem. Not so. There is, for example, certain kind of art, like the art of service, which is an art that solves problems; but it solves problems by supporting the system, by perpetuating it, and adjusting something here and there. The useful art seeks to subvert the system. It tries to say, "this is wrong, let's do it different." What I do want to make clear that I say one thing but this is much more complex, I do not want to sound reductionist. And there's the ethical aspect that I mentioned you earlier.

EM: An exhibition at the Guggenheim? *Arte útil* in a museum? Would not it be a contradiction at least from your point of view?

TB: Yeah, that's a contradiction, I know. I think that more than a contradiction it was a tactical mine. I have been talking about this for ten years. I have taught courses on the subject in Italy, Cuba, and in other places. The first activity we did in Immigrant Movement was a panel discussion about *arte útil*, in 2011, but I felt that the conversation had to have a different seriousness to that of a little girl that brought together four cats to do some practices, because besides these four cats usually are not famous artists. They are not Brooke Shields, nor galleries or people, who are museums' favorites. I mean, we're talking from total alternativity. So I said, what we have to do is put this in a museum to create different things. First, create a discussion that is more amplified. Second, give legitimacy to the discussion. Third, to give com-



The Museum of Arte Útil at the Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven.



Tania Bruguera
Immigrant Movement International
Implementation Years: 2010 - 2015
Corona, Queens, New York, United States
© Tania Bruguera
Courtesy: the artist



plexity to the discussion and fourth to give a timeline to it. We chose from 1800 to 2013 as the basis for the study and we found about two hundred examples of *arte útil*. Having the endorsement of a museum, with even two people helping with the historiography of the discussion is important. I proposed the name “arte útil” and then I found the artist Eduardo Acosta had made a manifesto of “arte útil.” Then I met Italian artist Pino Poggi, who had done it four years earlier in Italy. Thus, three people in three different countries in three different working conditions with three different works, years apart from each other, have reached the same conclusion about what is *arte útil*. That seems the best justification for saying that this is the correct name for what we are presenting, and what we’re talking about.

EM: And your own work before Immigrant International, do you consider it useful art?

TB: I’ve done some *arte útil*, for example, the school of Havana, the school of *arte-conducta* (Art-behavior) to me is school of *arte útil*. It had a utility, though it was more political than helpful. So, it was more about politics, but it was helpful.

EM: It occurred to me that El susurro de Tatlin No. 6 (Tatlin’s Whisper No. 6), you presented at the XI Bienial of Havana, is another example of “arte útil”

TB: Why it would be useful for you?

EM: Well because it created, even temporarily, a public space for the free expression of ideas and that, in Cuba, is something useful.

TB: Yes, because this is the other part of *arte útil*. The useful art is not only providing a solution but also using art tools to create these kind of things.

EM: Let me get back now to Immigrants Movement. You decided you were going to live with immigrants ...

TB: Yes, but this has been overvalued in a manner that has become a problem.

EM: Why?

TB: Because in the first year many people judged me for it in a very critical and strong manner.

EM: What they told you?

TB: A lot of people think I’m a rich woman who decided to with four poor people in a poor neighborhood in order to have fun. Sure, I did not understand, I was quite upset, but I did not understand. Of course, now I see there are, for instance, tours for rich people. For example, I saw that had recently someone opened as a resort for rich people where they could live as if they were poor. But in my case it was not like this. I was paid the minimum that a person pays \$ 7. 25 per hour-by far fewer hours than I was working; because they had to pay me less than full time to not have all the commitments that come with having a full time job. To me it was not enough money to live in New York. On one hand I had no money. All the money I made teaching at the school in Chicago and was a good salary, I spent it in the Cátedra de art de conducta (department of behavioral art). So I ended up with debts. I had no money. And I also really interested to experience. When I spoke to the reporter from the New York Times, who was the first one misrepresenting everything, I told him about this, but he took the part that interested him that was “she has the experience of living with the poor.” He forgot the other part of that I had no money. To me it interested me to understand a bit the daily experience of poverty, because, even without money, I am privileged immigrant since I have a number of contacts in the city, I have a group of people who support me. If I stay without home tomorrow, I know I can stay at some friends’ houses. I have the ability to access certain jobs that pay well. I mean, I had all these possibilities. I did not take them, and I did not want to use them by my own choice; but the poor do not always have these possibilities and is very different. And for me it was important to understand those things that are not spoken. There is a not spoken language, which is the language is what you feel, that is the material with which I needed to work for that project. Even today I



Tania Bruguera
View of International Migrants Day Parade, December 18, 2011.
Courtesy of the artist and the Queens Museum of Art, New York.

cannot afford what they charge for rent here in New York. Even today I'm still have troubles to pay rent.

EM: If you organize a show on Immigrant Movement, would not it be a way to also promote the movement?

TB: I do not know, look, now I have a very good position because ultimately the project will pass to the community. Now I negotiated with the museum and the community and they will do Immigrant Movement Corona and I'll take care of making the Immigrant Movement International. What does it mean? It means that now I have more possibility of flexibility. For example, I realized that I was very attached when an incident happened with some Cubans who were arrested in the Bahamas. I wanted to do something. I even started to talk to a student of mine to see if we could something between the two of us. And she told me "yes, you use Immigrant Movement," but I felt I could not use it because it was not mine, but of the community. I felt it was not ethically right to use the name of a project that does not belong to me and they put them in a compromise that would be more of a personal initiative. Then I said, "This I have to solve it." How I solved it? I'll keep the Immigrant Movement International, which will be a bit more of texts, will do more gestures, and will do more proposals.

EM: Which gestures the International Immigrant Movement will make?

TB: Yes, it will be more about to propose possible solutions, although all of them would be difficult, and although we might not achieve them. It's going to propose more political solutions. Get more into politics. And since I'll do it in a more independent manner, without being tied to any institution, I will feel more free to make political inquiries.

EM: That international movement was also in Mexico?

TB: Well, there had to be closed because there was no money. Now in Amsterdam a young man also wanted to do it, and he wanted me to go, and I said, "no. You do it your way, as you want it, I have nothing to do

with it." Immigrant Movement is a movement open to everyone, for everyone to do what they want.

EM: Are there chances of partnership or alliances with other movements, say sexual minorities, environmentalists, ethnic, etcetera?

TB: Absolutely. In fact, we had a class on transsexuals, with videos, which were very good. What happens is that the teacher is doing really well and is barely in New York. But, yes, we have made many alliances. What happens is that as I said, the project cannot be political. And then I think Corona Immigrant Movement is bound for making these kinds of things, which I what to do with Immigrant Movement International.

EM: If an artist or an institution want to collaborate with Immigrant Movement or with *Arte útil*, how they should do?

TB: I think with Immigrant Movement is easy because all you have to do is to write an email to people@immigrantmovement.us is enough. And *Arte útil*, you have to go to the website and propose a project that you think is a form of *arte útil* and if we decide that project have the requirements we include it in the file.

EM: I guess you've made many friends in the Immigrant Movement ...

TB: I always say that when people really make social art there is not public or artist, but friends. One really becomes friends with people. I have made friends that I know I'll have for the rest of my life.