

"Not you": how they prevented Tania Bruguera from entering the Museo de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Museum of La Habana)



(Col. Kenia Morales, who supervises the case against Tania Bruguera, dressed in a Ministry of the Interior uniform)

Master painter, Tomas Sanchez Requeiro had made a special invitation to Cuban artist Tania Bruguera to the opening of his exhibition at the National Fine Arts Museum in La Habana, Cuba. This was part of the programming for the XII Havana Biennial.

Tania received the special invitation while she was doing her performance in her home (Tejadillo 214, La Habana Vieja), which had been turned for those days into the *International Institute for Activism "Hannah Arendt"*.

The invitation was very welcomed by Tania and valued as a sign of solidarity which revealed the ethical character of Master Tomas Sánchez, coherent with his values and principles, a behavior that has accompanied the artist all his life.

Many years of friendship and common projects unite Master Tomas Sánchez with Tania Bruguera, as she herself has written in an essay on artistic practice *Arte de Conducta* (Behaviour Art):

"My first work after having graduated from ISA (superior Art Institute in La Habana), in the summer of 1992 was the ecological foundation that Tomas Sánchez was creating—specifically in its most utopic (and to me most beautiful) which was to attempt to change the life of a group of people through art."

Since his arrival in Cuba Master Tomas Sánchez had let the Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, that Tania was his special guest and she should be allowed to enter the Museum without problems.

While Tania was preparing to go to the opening of the exhibition, the Cuban artist Reyner Chino Novo was at her house and headed to the exhibition. On their way to the Museum (only a block and a half away from her house) they met the artists Levi Orta and Nuria Güell.

A few feet from the entrance, before going up the stairs, Tania was intercepted by two women (that never identified themselves) who told her she could not enter the Museum. At Tania's question as to what were their motives, they answered that the Museum reserved the Right of Admission.

The whole conversation can be heard in the following link:

<https://soundcloud.com/yotambienexijo/razonesmuseo> In it can be heard as Tania claims her rights as a Museum user and Cuban citizen, to whom the entrance to a public institution cannot be denied. At that moment there were many people entering the Museum and none were asked for their invitation; entrance was open.

The National Fine Arts Museum is not a private institution: it is a public branch of the Culture Ministry, open to all Cuban citizens so they may enjoy it freely.

Another of the arguments being expressed by those people (supposedly part of Museum staff), was that "Tania was creating problems for the Havana Biennial". She responded by saying that she had not left her home since May 20 and that she was not part of the exhibition circle of the Havana Biennial.

After being prohibited from entering Tania asked to speak to a supervisor. However, after continuing to prohibit her entry and while seeing that all assistants were being let in without invitation, Tania insisted to be let in but she was stopped with the phrase: "Not You" She had to remain outside that is supposed to be a National Museum.

Curators, artists, a Director from an American museum, and a foreign collector living in Cuba, passed right by her: all were aware of her situation. Many opted to enter the Museum and ignore what was going on. Others were appalled by what was happening. Some, simulated to be helping but never followed through. During the full hour that Tania was waiting for an answer from a supervisor, the original group was joined by curator Magaly Espinosa, curator and critic Gerardo Mosquera, German artist Gregor Schneider (who was alerting all the passersby of what was happening) as well as Cuban artist Sandra Ceballos, who directly demanded Tania be granted access to the Museum.

After an hour of not having been heard, Tania decided to go home. Afterwards she was informed that Master Tomás Sanchez had spoken with the Culture Minister, and he told her that they had gone out to allow her to come in, but she was already gone! This answer by the Minister of Culture was counter intuitive since Tania was waiting for an hour outside the Museum and she lives a block and a half away so they could have easily been found in a matter of minutes.

Couple hours later to *Tejadillo 24* several persons began arriving who were invited to the closing of her performance, among them Cuban artists. There were also some gallery owners, foreigners and other artists, as well as other people in the art world.

That Saturday night was a great opportunity to evaluate the true character of those getting close and support that Tania has received in the last few months. Artists that have supported her from the beginning; others that have maintained a position of solidarity with their galleries, but behind their backs are supporting arguments put forth by State Security; creative types that promised to return for the closing if the performance, but at the last minute forget while attending the "brunch " that the Spanish Ambassador hosted at that same time.

This has been a Biennial that has clearly evidenced the true interests of those artists that have opted to not support a position that promotes an end to censorship, and the opportunity for everyone to express themselves freely, overwhelmed by the thought of new exhibits, and especially, for new market opportunities. But the saddest and most threatening is not the lack of support for an artist. It is the veiled (or explicit) complicity with the violation of elemental human rights of expression; the lack of consciousness of the necessity of Cuban citizens to have a framework that can defend them from an omnipresent police State. It is the explicit opportunism of many that, without the least decorum, take advantage of the lack of Rule of Law that guarantees peaceful coexistence and creative diversity in XXI century Cuba.

Thank you again, Master Tomás Sanchez, and his assistant, who gave ample proof of decorum. And here is, our Apostle of our Independence, guiding and making us feel once again when he says: "When there are many men without decorum, there are many men that have the decorum within them for many men. Those are the ones that rebel, with terrible force, against those that rob the peoples their liberty, which is to rob men of their decorum. In those men, go many men there goes an entire people, there goes human dignity.

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Información adicional / Additional information:

MANIFIESTO DE LOS DERECHOS DEL ARTISTA (leída en la ONU) // ARTIST'S RIGHTS MANIFEST (read at UN):

http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/files/2012_-_onu_-_esp.pdf

CARTA ABIERTA A LOS JEFES DE ESTADO // OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENTS:

<http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/711-1-Blog+2014+overview.htm>