

FRESHCREAM

at the centre of the imaginary line that might be traced between the work of Ana Mendieta and Marina Abramović. She toys restlessly with the idea that individual stories should be understood within the context of social and historical experience. This approach, however, is not the result of a deliberate scheme to devise an essential pattern or formula. On the contrary, Bruguera weaves a dense and intricate fabric out of apparently disconnected issues, from women's topics to immigration, from religious to political questions, from cultural displacement to personal memory. These open up into a project both intellectual and quotidian that engages the viewer in a constant exchange of signifying possibilities.

Bruguera has been increasingly singled out in biennials and international exhibitions as one of the most promising artists to emerge from Havana during the last decade. An interdisciplinary artist working primarily with performance, video and installation, she first stood out among international artists in 1997 with *The Burden of Guilt*, a poignant performance from *The Memory of the Postwar* series that was realized in conjunction with the 6th Havana Biennial. Kneeling with her back to a large Cuban flag made from the hair of Cubans living on the island (*Statistic*, 1996), and wearing a shield constructed from a lamb's carcass, Bruguera ritually rolled dirt mixed with salt water into small balls, which she consumed over a period of hours. The piece refers to a legend about Cuba's indigenous Indians: since they could not realistically fight back against the conquering Spaniards, they decided to eat dirt, until they died, as an act of resistance. The popular contemporary Cuban saying *comer tierra* (eating dirt), meaning to have a hard time, derived from this. The piece, like most of Bruguera's performances, not only embodies the historical experience of Cuban people, it also takes on a less obvious social, religious and political undertone that exudes the bitterness of their ongoing experience, as well as the hopefulness of their unbroken spirit.

Despite these cultural references, however, Bruguera's work transcends specific time and place to signify the human condition in general. In a more recent performance *Body of Silence* (1998), the artist was placed in a meat-lined box and watched by the audience through a small opening. The performer, naked, was seated in a corner writing 'corrections' into an official history book. Trapped by her own fear of the consequences – as Bruguera puts it – she tries to lick the writing away in an attempt at self-censorship, finally tearing out the pages and eating them. As in other less dramatic pieces, she fuses the personal with the collective through ritual and repetition, highlighting submission as an act of social survival. Octavio Zaya

Tania Bruguera Born Havana, Cuba, 1968 Lives

and works in Havana. Selected Solo Exhibitions: 1986 'Marilyn is Alive', Galeria Leopoldo Romañach, Academia de Artes Plásticas San Alejandro, Havana. 1992 'Ana Mendieta', Sala Polivalente, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana. 1993 'Memoria de la postguerra', Galeria Plaza Vieja, Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales, Havana. 1995 'Sonando' (with Fernando Rodriguez), Gasworks, London. 1996 'Lágrimas de tránsito', Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wilfredo Lam, Havana. 1997 'Anima', The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. 1999 Vera van Laer Gallery, Amberes, Belgium; 'Lo que me corresponde', Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Fundación Colloquia, Guatemala. Selected Group Exhibitions: 1994 5th Havana Biennial. 1995 'New Art from Cuba', Whitechapel Art Gallery, London. 1996 XXIII São Paulo Biennial. 1997 6th Havana Biennial; 2nd Johannesburg Biennale; Troisième Manifestation Internationale Vidéo et Art Electronique de Champs Libres, Montreal. 1998 'The Garden of Forking Paths', Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen, and tour; 'Art in Freedom', Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam; 'Obsesiones', Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wilfredo Lam, Havana. 1999 SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico; 'Happening', Stedelijk Museum van Actuele Kunst, Ghent; 'Cuba – Maps of Desire', Kunsthalle, Vienna. Selected Bibliography: 1995 Gerardo Mosquera, 'Tania Bruguera: Reanimating Ana Mendieta', *Pollster*, Winter. 1997 Valerie Cassal, 'School of the Art Institute of Chicago', *1990s Art from Cuba: A National Residency and Exhibition Programme*, New York: Art in General; Eugenio Valdes Figueroa, 'Art in Cuba', *Flash Art*, January–February; Lou Cariozo, 'Cuban Performance Artist on a Mission of Cultural Healing', *Chicago Tribune*, 20 March. 1998 Johannes Birringer, 'Art in America (The Dream)', trans. Imma Sarrías-Zgonc, *Performance Research*, 1: 3, London and New York: Routledge; RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art Live since 1960*, London: Thames and Hudson, and New York: Harry N. Abrams; Nora Maada Ileana González, 'Obsesiones', *Revista Arte Cubano*, 1, Evdilos Arrada,

*Statistic*, 1996, human hair, yarn, textile, 366 x 152.5 cm