

How To Start A Cultural Movement

Where Art & Culture Meet – *Immigrant Movement*

May 1, 2011 / [Jackson Heights & Corona](#) / [Ethnic & Religious Culture](#) / Queens Buzz. **Continued** / *If needed use the search function on this site to find story introduction.*



The *Immigrant Movement* center was bustling with artists from Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. The artists had been assembled in workshop / discussion groups to discuss the theme which was *How To Make Art Useful*. Each group had about ten or more

people to it and there might have been about five or more groups. I had arrived at the break, long after the sessions had started, but the participating artists seemed to still be fully engaged. In the photo to your left you can see the hustle bustle of the Immigrant Movement center when I first arrived at their doorstep.

I started looking around for someone to talk to about what was going on and eventually met Tania Bruguera. Although she didn't talk much about herself, I did a bit of digging around after my visit to find out a bit more about her.

Tania Bruguera - Immigrant Movement Corona

Tania has become a bit famous over the past five to ten years. Most recently, one of her art performances in Cuba apparently caused a quite a stir in Havana, where the event was the recipient of an official government chastisement. Apparently Tania allowed a number of people in the crowd, one minute of speaker time to say exactly what was on their minds, and themes of freedom, openness and democracy came rolling off their tongues.



Tom Finkelpearl of the Queens Museum Of Art had met Tania within the past couple of years and decided to stay in touch with her because he was interested in the way she approached art. Tania had previously studied and taught at the Art Institute Of Chicago and was also an Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago. Tania is shown in the photo above.

Queens Museum Of Art & Creative Time

So the theme of this year-long experiment is How To Use Art To Create A Cultural Movement. More specifically, the cultural theme is how to begin changing the perception of immigrants in America. Tom explained to me that the work is largely an



improvisational piece as the three collaborators only agreed upon general themes and directions, while leaving the specifics of the creative process and the development of the cultural movement to Tania. Naturally, as I've seen in the two visits I have made to the *Immigrant Movement* center in Corona, Tom and the Queens Museum Of Art staff continue to play supporting roles in the overall development of the theme.

Art & Culture - Can Art Be An Agent Of Change?

Tania arrived here in January and set up shop in Corona which is largely a Latin American section of Queens. Corona is nestled between the neighborhoods of Flushing and Jackson Heights. Tania set up the *Immigrant Movement* offices on the ground floor of a building along Roosevelt Avenue near 108th Street.

Make The Road By Walking - Corona Queens



Between January and April Tania contacted various neighborhood organizations, seeking their participation in the Immigration Movement process. One of those organizations is *Make The Road By Walking*, which is an 8,500 member organization in the NYC metro area. *Make The Road By Walking* [MTRBW] was founded in 1997 with the objective of helping empower the residents in lower income and Latin American communities. MTRBW is headquartered in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn and has offices in the Corona neighborhood of Queens. *Make The Road By Walking* merged with the *Latin American Immigration Center* [LAIC] in 2007. Natalia of *Make The Road By Walking* is shown making buttons and stickers in the photo to your left.

Latin American Immigration Center - LAIC

The *Latin American Immigration Center* was founded in 1991 to help combat crime and poverty in Jackson Heights and Corona in the early 1990's. This organization was founded just prior to the successful decade long police effort by the NYPD [New York City Police Department] and the NYC government to clean up drugs and crime in metro New York. The clean up of drugs and crime around New York included Times Square and the East Village, which was similar in some respects to the sort of police work that also took place in the neighborhoods of Corona and Jackson Heights.

New Immigrant Community Empowerment - NICE

New Immigrant Community Empowerment or N.I.C.E. is another group with which Tania has begun to develop a relationship. NICE or the *New Immigrant Community Empowerment* was founded in 1999 in response to anti-immigrant billboards being posted inside the largely immigrant community of Queens.



NICE is located in Jackson Heights and its mission is to empower immigrants and lower income people through educational programs as well as legal assistance and other bootstrap efforts. The Immigrant Movement has partnered with several other neighborhood and NYC metro groups, but unfortunately I didn't have an opportunity to speak with anyone from these other groups prior to this posting.

Immigrant Movement - Art Events



The first *Immigrant Movement* event took place in early April 2011 when Tania held her first meeting with some of the immigrants in the neighborhood. Their objective in a Sunday session was to come up with one phrase slogans with which to positively portray the

immigrant population in America.

Tania Bruguera is shown in the photo to your left near the back of the Immigration Movement Center. The room was filled with artists from around the NYC metro area, some of whom you can see in the background of the photo.

Here are some of the slogans they came up with:

- Made By American Immigrants
- Everyone Was Once An Immigrant
- You Can't Have Our Labor And Ignore Our Livelihoods
- I Take Care Of Your Children. Don't Mistreat Mine.
- We Are Immigrants, Just Like Your Grandparents
- We Don't Take Your Jobs. We Take The Jobs You Don't Want To Do.
- We Work For You And This Is How You Pay Us.
- Proud To Be An Immigrant
- Today We Walk Together For Change.



I found these slogans to be thought-provoking. In contemplating the immigration issue in America, it occurred to me that Americans likely feel beseiged on all sides. On the one hand large corporations are exporting American jobs to other countries. And on the other hand immigrants are coming from other countries to America seeking to live and work here in pursuit of a better life.

I think having people want to come to our country to live and work is a good thing. It has always been this way - ever since Columbus discovered America. So I don't think the issue is whether to allow or disallow immigration, so much as how to manage the influx of immigrants so that their presence continues to work for America as it has over the past couple of centuries. An unchecked, unmanaged influx of too many people can put strains on a system that is already stretched.



Unfortunately it seems too many politicians and too many media outlets prefer the divisive, sensational, poisonous reporting of the issue in pursuit of their own selfish political or ratings agendas; rather than providing Americans with new information and potential

solutions toward the creation of rational and manageable policies with which to accommodate an ongoing influx of immigrants into this country.

The second event by the *Immigrant Movement* was the first one I personally attended. At this event, as I started to tell you earlier [above], artists from around the NYC metro area had come to talk about how to make art useful. I didn't participate in the discussions as I'd found out about it too late, but I did get a sense of some of the conversations, which were in keeping with the theme, about how to make art meaningful and an agent of change to improve people's lives.

May Day - International Workers Day

By the third event I was beginning to get a sense of the *Immigrant Movement* and some sense of the driving force behind it. Tania had chosen Sunday, May 1st for the next event. May 1st is generally recognized as the International Workers Day.



International Workers Day origins date back over a century to the Chicago Haymarket Riots. The Haymarket Riots were one of the first major modern labor / management upheavals in this country. May Day was seized upon by Communists in the 20th century to promote their ideology, but since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and rise of Chinese capitalism, May Day has been meandering along as a holiday less associated with any specific political ideology, than an association with the concept of workers and human rights.

Subway Workshop - Cultural Movements In Queens



The May Day event was billed as a subway workshop, wherein participants were going to put some of their slogans onto posters, badges and stickers to wear - and then hand out and show the public, while traveling the subway to a rally at Foley Square in Manhattan.

On May 1st I arrived with plenty of time to watch the full process in motion. The participants were busy on all fronts, from the time I arrived until the time we left. A lunch was served, as Tania seems to understand that you can't march on an empty stomach.

The Immigrant Movement - Upcoming Events



The *Immigrant Movement* has a number of events planned for the immediate future, including the presentation of a play on May 8th at the Queens Museum Of Art by one of the local theater groups which has been rehearsing at the *Immigrant Movement* center.

Also on June 5th there's an event entitled *Ghana Think Tank Workshop*. Apparently a network of thinkers from around the globe will be presented with local problems in Corona and Queens, for which they will try to come up with workable solutions. The *Immigrant Movement* will be hosting an event the first Sunday of every month for the rest of 2011.

The Immigrant Movement has a very open venue and encourages interaction and participation. Click this link to obtain the contact information including a website link from this site to the [Immigrant Movement / Movimiento Immigrante](#).

The following is a slide show of the first art event where artists from all around metro NYC converged on making art useful including [Immigrant Movement center in Corona](#). You may use the arrow keys to click through the photos at your own speed.



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Click this link to view a second slide show / photo album of the May Day Rally which started at the [photos of the Immigration Movement of Corona](#).