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# The Performances of Tania Bruguera

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Freedom of Speech at the Havana Biennial, 2009

Cuban performance artist Tania Bruguera's art practice shows no boundaries in order to express controversial issues. Her pieces, centered around politics, personal freedoms, and the Cuban revolution provoke discomfort and debate, and often utilize an unknowing audience.

We've compiled a list of Bruguera five performances that define her as an artist, highlighting the artist's fearless – to the point of reckless – demonstrations.

This article from [Art in America](#) – about her mini-retrospective Neuberger Museum of Art discusses different performances. Another neat link is located [here](#) – an interview between Bruguera and Marina Abramovic.

## #5. Crowd Control in Force at Tate Modern, 2008

Two mounted police on horseback use police academy techniques to physically control the audience inside the Tate Modern in Britain. The piece, which herded visitors into Turbine Hall, depended on the audience's innocence of the fact that they were part of a piece of artwork. Bruguera states that it is important that her work receive the kind of reaction from her audience that they would have in real life, therefore working in a way so that people are unsuspecting of her pieces as artwork in order to make them feel as live events instead of representations. Clip of this piece, as well as an interview of the artist, can be found [here](#).



The Burden of Guilt at the Havana Biennial, 1997

#### **#4. “Freedom of Speech” at the Havana Biennial, 2009**

The artist invited individuals (including awarded blogger Yoani Sanchez) to a podium before a yellow curtain, to say whatever they wanted for the duration of one minute. A white dove was placed on the shoulder of the speakers to mimic Fidel Castro’s 1959 speech. “Freedom” and “democracy” were among the topics tackled by volunteers, causing the Cuban government to denounce the performance as “an anti-cultural event of shameful opportunism that offends Cuban artists and foreigners who came to offer their work and solidarity”.

#### **#3. The Burden of Guilt at the Havana Biennial, 1997**

Standing before a self-woven Cuban flag made of human hair, Bruguera appeared wearing only a skinned lamb carcass, ritualistically mixing and ingesting dirt and salt water for several hours. This piece was based on the story of a collective suicide of indigenous peoples under Spanish occupation in colonial Cuba, who ate large quantities of dirt until they died.

#### **#2. Performance at the Facultad de Bellas Artes at the Universidad Nacional (National University of Colombia), 2009**

Three figures representing a right-wing paramilitary fighter, a left-wing guerrilla, and a refugee displaced by the long-running conflict in Columbia all spoke simultaneously into a microphone as a waitress offered a tray of cocaine to spectators for consumption. The police were called to interfere. According to University officials, the artist was denied access to carry a weapon and use cocaine, but ignored their disapproval. Though the use of hard drugs within a performance may seem like a cheap trick to gain interest and press, the artist expressed disdain at the way her artistic intent was overshadowed by morally and lawfully driven negative attention.



Self Sabotage at La Biennale di Venezia, 2009

#### **#1. “Self Sabotage”, Biennale di Venezia, 2009**

Bruguera sat at a table reading a speech on the “idea of survival”, stopping from time to time to hold a gun to her head to play a real-life game of Russian Roulette. The gun was, according to the artist, truly loaded. The artist was finally stopped by audience members and fellow artists. A transcript of her speech, as well as an interview about the performance can be found [here](#).