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## Havana Biennial, performance and wacky politics

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I'm beginning to post stuff from the blogosphere. Here a paragraph from Art Worl Salon:

*The Havana Biennial has always stood in a category of its own, and as such a cultural anomaly it is always valuable to see what it has to tell us. It is produced with a minuscule budget, and anything done there is done against a powerful background of symbolism and—it feels to me—historical resonance. While other biennials feel like spectacles, Havana feels like a cause. But every time I visit I am left both with contradictory hopefulness, dismay, and disillusionment. Hopefulness because art really feels to have a mission and a purpose there; dismay because what flourishes there does so at the expense of repressive state policies and a yearning of freedom of expression. And disillusionment because Cuban artists, while they appreciate the attention, ultimately their aspirations are to be in Chelsea, while we outsiders crave for the sense of historical mission that they have. So, again, is there something to be learned from the remnants of this revolution?*

I find Pablo Helguera's piece on the Havana Biennial pretty on target. It's not easy to talk about the Cuban issue without sounding either naive or didactic (or both). Tania Bruguera's performance attracted a lot of attention: A week after the event, the Biennial Organizing Committee published this note on *La Jiribilla*, a popular Cuban Website:

*On Sunday March 29 at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, several people outside the cultural sphere, led by a professional "dissident" made by the powerful media group PRISA,<sup>1</sup> took advantage of the performance by artist Tania Bruguera for a provocation against the*

*Cuban Revolution. These individuals, at the service of an anti-Cuban propaganda machine, repeated the worn-out claim of "freedom" and "democracy" as required by their sponsors. They talked or rather acted for the cameras, and the incident became today big news in the Florida media.<sup>2</sup>*

The "dissident" above is Yoani Sánchez, an internationally-known Cuban blogger who runs Generation Y. The trepidation of the organizers over [this section](#) of Bruguera's performance goes to show the wackiness of Cuban institutional politics. What did the conceptual artist think of the performance? When Fabiola Santiago, an art critic from The Miami Herald, [interviewed Bruguera over the phone from Miami](#), she declared: "I'm an artist who tries the impossible. This is my job and that's how I live my life."