


TO INTERVENE
IN A CITY IS TO
INTERVENE IN THE
WAYS OF BEHAVING
IN THAT PLACE



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**TANIA
BRUGUERA**

Cuba

To intervene in a city is to intervene in the ways of behaving in that place¹

Text by Sarah Kristin Happersberger

Cuban artist Tania Bruguera is known for challenging her audiences. For more than ten years, she has created live situations to investigate people's responses to political incidents, state power and images from the mass media. Not being limited to the symbolic realm, her works prompt museum-goers and passers-by to participate. While she worked mainly in physical spaces when she started her career, Bruguera has increasingly used digital platforms to explore citizenship and civil society.

Power narratives

In June 2008, two mounted policemen used crowd control techniques to keep members of the public in designated areas of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. Having not been informed about the artistic nature of the piece, visitors were forced to decide whether to follow or ignore the officials' instructions. *Tatlin's Whisper #5* stimulated reflections upon the limits of state power, and the duties of a citizen.

For the 2009 Havana Biennial, Bruguera adapted the piece to the political situation in Cuba. Inviting visitors to present their thoughts to the public, the artist provided a rare occasion for free speech in the socialist country. The setting was such that an iconic image of Fidel Castro was recalled: two uniformed guards framed the speaker, and a white dove sat on her shoulder, as in the photograph capturing the political leader during his first speech after the revolution. By re-staging the event from the picture, Bruguera asked her audiences to question the political narrative disseminated by the media, and to share their own vision for the country with the public.

Arte de Conducta

Bruguera's interest in dissolving the border between art and reality does not stand alone in Latin American art history. In the 1970s, Cuban exile artist Ana Mendieta created situations which were not clearly framed as art and therefore provoked reactions by the audience. Posing in her room with her naked body covered in blood, the artist made her friends believe that she had been raped. Unknowingly, the audience participated in a social experiment, a study examining people's behaviour in situations in which the fundamentals of civil society are in danger.

The role of the public corresponds not by chance to Bruguera's works. The artist started her career with re-performances of Mendieta's works, and although she quickly withdrew herself from the stage, she kept on using the audience as material to explore power structures in civil society. With its socio-political concern, Bruguera's 'behavioural art' is also related to the practice of various Latin American artists from a younger generation. In the nineties, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña performed as members of a fictitious tribe to find out how far colonial behavioural patterns are still rooted in Western society,² and only recently, Regina José Galindo built a stage set which asked members of the public to pose either as victim or perpetrator.³ In these works, art serves as a means to trigger reflections on the influence of societal codes on human behaviour, and the role of the individual in society.

Digital citizenship

In the wake of discussions around WikiLeaks and electronic civil disobedience, Bruguera asked what it means to be a citizen in the digital age, and how far technological developments and political events influence our understanding of citizenship. Commissioned by New York-based performance festival Performa, she created the hashtag *#instaCitizen*. In November 2015, festival visitors and online followers were invited to share pictures and stories of self-censorship through the artist's account. The layout of the project fostered the dissolution of traditional concepts of identity and authorship, as everyone used the same tag.

Although a distinctive mark such as her name was the connecting element, the artist's personal experiences did not come to the fore. Sharing her user name and password, she handed the control over to the public – a gesture acknowledging the power, but also the responsibility, of internet users. Though touching upon our daily performance on the World Wide Web, Bruguera's project did not linger on the personal. By asking her audiences to share publicly what they hide from society, the artist encouraged revelations of political taboos and suppressive authorities, not dissimilar to whistle-blowing platforms. Using the 'endless city of the internet'⁴ as a platform, the project made participation from a distance possible, and increased the attention for critical themes. As the project title pointed explicitly towards the citizenship of its users, it remained clear that the internet is not exempt from the rules and power structures of civil society.

Crowdfunded activism

The activist stance of the *#instaCitizen* users corresponds to the idea of active citizenship, a political theory which is fundamental for another work by Bruguera. Inspired by the writings of the German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt, the *Instituto de Artivismo de Hannah Arendt (INSTAR)* teaches Cuban nationals how to engage actively with society. In contrast to *Tatlin's Whisper #6*, this piece does not presuppose action, but helps people to acquire the skills relevant for active citizenship. Established through a crowdfunding campaign, a funding opportunity successfully used by the German artist collective Center for Political Beauty for activist projects,⁵ the project already had a large group of supporters before it came to life. Due to the early phase of their commitment to the project, the supporting individuals shared not the common experience of an artwork, but generosity and trust in the artist's concept. Coming from all over the world, they are not necessarily identical with INSTAR's students and teachers. Consequently, the funding model results in the formation of two overlapping communities: supporters and users of the institute, virtual and physical associates.

Online courses for Cubans

As a school conceived for Cubans and based in Havana, INSTAR exemplifies Bruguera's commitment to her home country. Following *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (2000–2005), the institute is the artist's second project dedicated to the education of her fellow citizens. With an open structure of cross-disciplinary workshops, as well as an interest in behavioural codes, the institute shares various characteristics with its predecessor. Fully operative and – according to the artist – needed in Havana, both INSTAR and *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* illustrate Bruguera's concept of Arte Útil. To fulfil the criteria for this art form, works have to be timely and beneficiary to their users, transform their environment and offer opportunities for participation.⁶ Though the concept was coined by Bruguera only in the 2000s, there are earlier examples of useful art. In the way INSTAR argues for a broad definition of art and political action, it relates closely to Joseph Beuys's *Free International University*⁷. However, with its virtual offer, INSTAR reacts also to more recent developments, namely open universities, open source and online courses. Consequently, the experience of the students will differ according to their location, and include physical or virtual encounters, blackboards or emails. Whether resulting interventions will take place on the internet or on Cuban soil remains to be seen.

Citizenship in times of migration

Having reflected on the meaning of citizenship for years, it seems natural that Bruguera engaged with those who are not granted citizen status. Even before the refugee crisis was named as such, the artist developed a long-term project benefitting migrants. Conceived as educational platform, think tank and community space, *Immigrant Movement International* (2010–2015) raised awareness of the need to rethink migration through workshops, events and actions. At its headquarters in Corona, migrants, activists and members of local communities met up to discuss, share knowledge and plan activist campaigns. Though initiated by Bruguera and funded by New York-based arts organisations Creative Time and Queens Museum, *Immigrant Movement International* was situated outside of narrow definitions of

art and run to a large extent by volunteers. As with other community art projects, for example Jochen Gerz's large-scale exhibition *2-3 Straßen*⁸, Bruguera's piece relied heavily on the contributions of its participants and was difficult to perceive without personal involvement. Both projects understood any kind of community-building activity as art, including first-aid courses, women's health and exercise classes, legal consultations and dance lessons. Of crucial importance, however, was the fact that the events were initiated and led by the project's participants – a principle strengthening the sense of community and valuing the individual's ideas. Underlining the significance of a creative approach to life and society, both *Immigrant Movement International* and *2-3 Straßen* can be considered early examples of the increasing number of projects supporting the expression of everyone's creativity, such as the campaign *64 Million Artists* in the UK.⁹

Long-term projects with refugees

With the initiation of a movement, Bruguera responded to the political climate of the time. Emerging in 2010, *Immigrant Movement International* followed the Arab Spring and existed for four years alongside Occupy. Placing itself in the tradition of civic movements, the project claims to represent a large number of people, to have a vision and to transform society.¹⁰ As migration is a global phenomenon, there was no lack of people for whose rights the movement's supporters could fight. Their demands were published in a manifesto, and elected officials were approached through an Immigrant Respect Letter Campaign. While it is difficult to make a general statement about the impact of a five-year project which is constantly in flux, effects might be visible on a more personal level, such as better integration of participating refugees through the improvement of their language skills or self-confidence. The latter is also true for Ahmed Ögüt's *Silent University*, a knowledge-sharing platform by and for refugees funded in 2012. Working with various partners and moving countries on a regular basis, the project's power of transformation can only be measured with a given focus and from a temporal distance. Despite being shaped after models as different as a movement and a university, both Bruguera's and Ögüt's works are exemplary for long-term projects engaging with minorities to bring societal change.

Their geographic scope – *International Immigration Movement* acted in its second year in Mexico, *Silent University* had its base in the UK, Sweden, Germany and Greece – signals the decreasing focus of art projects on one location, thus making visible that public art is no longer limited to a city, but spread all over the globe.

World citizenship

In *The Francis Effect*, Bruguera addressed the need to rethink citizenship from a global perspective. By means of a letter campaign, she asked the pope in his function as head of Vatican state to grant citizenship to all refugees of the world, thereby discreetly pointing towards his promise as a religious leader. Audiences could support the artist's project by signing a postcard or an online petition. Though approaching the topic of citizenship from a slightly more utopian angle, *The Francis Effect* reveals a key feature of Bruguera's practice: the understanding of art as a proposal for a better world, and the necessity of making this proposal reality, however absurd it seems at first sight.

Liv Little, editor of *gal-dem*, in conversation with Tania Bruguera: mapping art, the personal and the public

Tania Bruguera's induction into the world of art and politics was a product of her surroundings, as, from the age of just 12, she witnessed the performative nature of political propaganda within Cuba. Whilst her foray into the art world didn't instantly occur, her formative years provided the perfect breeding ground for a critical mind which would lead to her working later as a political artist. Bruguera's work in the public realm has been used as a springboard for conversations which were, at best, tentatively whispered within Cuba. In 2009 in Havana, she provided a platform for the public to voice their concerns on the confines of liberty – an event which the Biennial organising committee called an 'anti-cultural event of shameful opportunism that offends Cuban artists and foreigners'. Bruguera's work has continued to be so impactful that, in 2015, it led to her incarceration, an experience which she has transformed into energy to create. She is the sort of person that you feel wiser having spoken to,

and over the course of our hour-long conversation, the life, art and political lessons which she had to share provided those golden nuggets of wisdom which should be passed on to generations to come. We discussed the personal side of what she creates, her process, inspiration and the reflexive and ever-changing nature of the public-facing questions she addresses.

Liv: How has growing up in Cuba's political system influenced your art?

Tania: Living in a socialist country where so many things were happening. Once I had taken for granted a lot of social benefits, I was completely terrified when I saw that in other countries people had to pay for studying and all these things that I had taken a little bit for granted. ...It has shaped my work because there was the reality Cuba was selling to the world, the narrative Cuba was selling to the world, which was coming out of some truth ...I think the process is something that really influenced me as an artist because I understood that in that process, the narrative was altered.

At what age did you start to interrogate the relationship between the narrative and the truth?

Twelve years old. And I'll tell you why. Because of my father, I travelled around the world. Until 12 years old, I was living in the world of the propaganda about Cuba, so I would say everything is fantastic. Cuba in a way was this mythical place for me that I belonged to but I had never lived in. So it was kind of a utopic place. But what I was hearing were all the benefits and all the good things, because I was in an environment that was selling the country to other people. Of course, I was very young so I couldn't see any backdoor negotiations or anything. And then at 12 years old, my parents divorced and I got to live in Cuba full time and that was a big shock, because I came thinking, "OK great, I've come to this marvellous place," and then I started seeing that what was being said was not being done, and the reason for doing something was not the reason for leaving something. So I think I saw these contradictions and I think that has shaped a lot of my work. Understanding the lived experience and the

constructed narrative is maybe one of the reasons I am so allergic to narrative and why I'm so interested in the real direct experience and the idea of truth.

At that age, were you thinking of ways in which you could interrogate that or was that something that came later on?

That came later on. I think I was extremely confused at 12 and it was also this idea of understanding for the first time that, in Cuba, there were different classes, something that nobody ever talked about. It was that everyone's the same, equality, no racism, no classism, no profiting, and then I realised that was also a lie because I was able to go to school with different people...and I started seeing social classes for people struggling, racism, discrimination against women. It was better than other places, but that was another thing that happened to me later on. Seeing something that you don't want to talk about...was another thing that has influenced my work. I think in a way, all of these [experiences] have made me take away mediation in my art. So a lot of people are like "why is this art?". It is art but it's an art that is unframed. It's unmediated because I have this kind of distrust towards this mediation and I see how they have worked in the narrative of a country as a way to hide other things.

Following on from that, when did you begin to use performance art as a way to negotiate this space?

I live in a country that is extremely performative and, also, art is completely embedded in people's lives as a normal thing, such as deciding to go to a concert... it's an everyday experience which is great. But at the same time, we live in an extremely politically performative place, especially when Fidel [Castro] was in power... He was a great performer and I think politicians in Cuba understand very well how to deal with narrative but also meanings.

Was there a specific moment or period when you decided to move past traditional art and towards performance?

Yes there was. I remember it very clearly... I was a student, and in 1985 to maybe 1991, there was a big movement in Cuba called 'The Generation of the Eighties' by historians. This was a group of young artists who were in their 20s, who actually took over the art world in Cuba and started performances and actions. Again, one thing that makes my work different from other performance traditions is that, in Cuba, performance is a gesture mostly. It's a socio-political gesture. This is what I saw as a model.... For example, when Rauschenberg came to Cuba and gave a lecture at the National Museum, one artist dressed himself as an Indian and sat next to him through the whole conference. This is not a performance like in American or UK tradition where you can see a more constructed world, it was more of a gesture, an annotated reference that will be linked to an event. That's the tradition I come from.

There's something about art which just allows a lot more people to engage with quite complicated, public-facing issues, something which isn't always possible in academic spaces.

[Academia] is a very safe way to deal with unresolved matters or very sensitive matters for people. I think this is why we need to protect art so much. Also, it is either a way to deal with very complicated issues that people might not have processed yet or don't even know they have. But also it is another way to understand what your role in society is. It helps with thinking, "how can I create community?". I feel the work environment, especially the more conformational, bureaucratic environment, is extremely inhuman and extremely stripped of any sense in a way other than creating this product or achieving this goal that is very disconnected from yourself.

How much does your position as a woman influence the political issues which you engage with?

Cuba is an extremely misogynistic place, especially in the arts, but also everywhere. I had the first encounter with [misogyny] when I

first performed out of Cuba.... While in Cuba it's very hard to be a woman artist, once you do your work, people don't expect you to do one specific kind of art, there is no expectation that you will do flowers or a domestic scene. There is no expectation because, in part of the generation before me, there were women who actually took on the same subjects that men would take, so I think that was paved for me. When I went outside of Cuba, I was extremely disturbed by the fact that anything I personally did was a comment on women... of course, feminism is part of that struggle, but I didn't want to take that as a specific niche, I wanted to position myself, even as a political attitude, on the same level of every man.

How does your feminist praxis manifest itself in the way you work?

Everyone working in my studio is either a woman or queer; this is my way to be feminist – giving access and power to people who are discriminated against. That's my feminist part but I don't think my work itself is feminist, as subject of the work. I felt very quickly, maybe it's because I'm so aware of power dynamics, I had two different niches, one is the Cuban niche and one is the female....

Would you say that identities, whether public or personal, are constantly in flux?

I'm a performer and we like to perform identities. We like to perform as an everyday life situation, so I felt I hit a wall when I realised that in other places, identity was such a fixed construct and not something you can go in and out of. I guess I understand that we are women so they want to see us as women, and there are things that are of course inevitable, but the fact that they are present doesn't mean that they're the only thing that defines you.... People have to understand this temporary positioning in identities. First, it's never a betraying of the identity, even people in our groups will be like, "oh my God, you betrayed us," but they're strategic, tactical actions. But also, I feel like we are many things, so it really drove me nuts when I first came to the United States, because I was like, "what is this?". I decided to not perform any more... I felt that no matter what I did, it was going to be taken as a feminist thing. I have no problem with that and I feel like I'm trying really hard to push the feminist agenda but it's not the subject of the work....

To what degree do you think art is able to bring about social change in the public sphere?

There is one thing that worries me a lot, which is the expectation people have of change through art. I've been a big advocate about art as an instrument of change, especially social change, and I have been saying this over and over, I can change society. I know it is true, I have seen it, I have experienced it, I have created artworks that have done it, but I think we need to understand the limitations and possibilities of art as a tool for such things. I think the options are almost infinite because art can really be very specific. So art has an opportunity that policy doesn't have, which is that you can talk one on one.... And for art, every audience member is the most important person in the world, so it is focusing on one, which is something very powerful and hard to do. But I think in the end, you can change things in society. One of the limitations is that a lot of artists think that art can change the world or society with one specific action and that's it.

Would you say then, that change must occur from within and also outside of the 'system'?

I think art can change society in several ways. First, with a combination of gestures. If you do only one gesture, then that's OK because we're surrounded by so much competition, so much attention.... It has to be a consecutive accumulation of gestures through different times or very intense experience. The other thing is sustainability, and this is one thing that a lot of institutions don't understand, especially in the UK, where they really want art to be instrumentalised. They need to understand that I can change things through time because you cannot work within the timing of the art world which is 20 minutes, 45 minutes, an hour, maybe a month, on a sustainable creation of an environment. I always say that this kind of art can only be successful or realise its potential when it is able to create an alternative ecosystem. You cannot do it in ten minutes or in two weeks; you have to enter the logic of the temporality of society. A day is like a nanosecond in the big scope of life and society. I think this is very important, but then understanding the limitations and not pretending that because art is trying to change society and intervene in difficult moments, it will soon be good.

How do these processes feed into one another?

I think art can be a pilot in a way, it can have an attitude where you do things and you try them in a very safe way. That's another thing, because people think it's art, they think there's no consequence. But I think if something works, they should take it on. This is why I advocate so much for art as a tool, as kind of a try-out, a social experimentation on how to have a different society. If things work, why not take over this criticism – I don't think that is hard with art as a tool for change. Usually when you start doing this, you're criticising institutions, you're not saying everything is wrong because it's God's will, you have to go and deconstruct some institutions. I feel like one of the biggest challenges is that institutions do not want to have self-criticism, they're not willing to understand that art can be a social powerful tool to look at themselves as well. The art world itself has been taken over by collectors and galleries. There is a struggle between the serious museum institutions who are really doing research on what art is, and how to deal with the audiences, and this other big force in the art world that is money substituting knowledge, art history and serious research.

How do you decide which political issues or topics are significant enough or important enough to you or those around you to want to explore?

I think something that people need to understand better, whether they're critics or the public, is what is research for an artist and what is the work? I realised the difference when I did a project in Corona in Queens, which is still going. I withdrew myself from the project but we keep going and collaborating. When you start doing art that has a bigger audience, an audience that is really literal in terms of art...it's very important that people understand what is research and what is the work. This happened when I was living with all these immigrants. I had to do this first of all because I was living on the minimum wage so I had no money to live anywhere else.

What are the biggest tensions within your work then?

In my work, there are three levels of tensions, one which is the kind of political statement I'm trying to do with the work. The other one is the history linkage or anchorage and the idea of the personal. What is the knowledge that this project can produce? In this project [*Immigrant Movement International*]... I realised this when more intensely this idea of Arte Útil came in as a way. This is the kind of art that goes along in a very natural way... and then the idea of what is art comes later... I think that's what Arte Útil is trying to do. It's trying to make you do something, or experience something, or understand that you have the capability even if you don't have the training to do something, and then you are showing the references after you have the experience.

So it's a process in which the experience brings you to the history of the experience, and not vice versa. One thing that I feel is very powerful about Arte Útil and this kind of art and experience is that in general when people see art, they are scared. Everybody thinks they will not be able to do it, even us when we see some things. I think it is a very powerful experience, doing something that you never thought you could do. Forget the product, forget the result, forget the actual object that comes out of it. Think about what you feel. This has really impacted these women [participants of *Immigrant Movement International*], right now they're trying to run for office for one of the council boards in their neighbourhood. And this, I think, is only because they spent years trying things they would never be able to do and it is OK to do it and understand you can grow up.

As someone who speaks out on important issues in the public, what are some of the biggest lessons you've learned and what advice would you offer to others?

One of the biggest lessons I had in my artistic life is the understanding about not becoming what you criticise, because there are very many traps on the way and the traps are mostly seductive traps. This is why I always talk about sabotaging your own success, and the way

I have done it is through education. That's why I tried to transform all my cultural capital into political capital and to understand when I need more or less capital, when it's good to retire from the scene.

Another thing I have learned is to understand when you have a product as an artist, and when you are an instrument of empowerment and possibility.... Artists doing this kind of work need to understand that maybe they have to position themselves in the very background. This is something also institutions need to understand. Many times there is a tension because of the artist's understanding that they need to be in the background as a kind of facilitator for a social situation to happen. And then there is tension because institutions who have paid for it want to bring that artist to the forefront, ignoring all the tension and the ethical dilemmas that they can create.... Most of the work I'm doing this year, I'm not coming with my name. I'm coming with the name *Immigrant Movement International* as a way to depersonalise for many reasons.

The other thing is to understand how not to be co-opted, because it's very easy to be co-opted. I'm not talking about money and going up in the food chain. Co-opted in the sense of being too happy with your own work. I met with a very famous artist and was amazed at his attitude. He called himself a political artist and I was like, "what is going on?". And yes, of course, he's super wealthy but he surrounds himself with people who only say, "you are amazing". I think it's important to make sure that you are confronted with your critics, people who don't like the work, and try not only to have the resignation to deal with them but also pursue them. If they say something, something is not right because they're reacting that way.

Footnotes

- ¹ *Tania Bruguera (2007) 'When Behaviour Becomes Form'. Parachute Contemporary Art La Habana 125 (January), 62-70*
- ² *The Year of the White Bear was performed in various museums all over the world between 1992 and 1993.*
- ³ *Rescue was realised in the framework of Documenta 14, Kassel, 2017*
- ⁴ *Olivia Laing (2016) The Lonely City. Edinburgh: Canongate, 219*
- ⁵ *For their project The Dead are Coming (2015), Center for Political Beauty acquired €55,400 via crowdfunding. See www.indiegogo.com/projects/die-toten-kommen#/ [Accessed 30/09/2017]*
- ⁶ *Bruguera has written and spoken extensively about Arte Útil. For an introduction see Tania Bruguera (2012) 'Reflexiones sobre el Arte Útil', in ARTE ACTUAL: Lecturas para un espectador inquieto, Madrid: CA2M, 194-197. The criteria for Arte Útil were formulated by Tania Bruguera and curators at the Queens Museum, New York, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and Grizedale Arts, Coniston. For the history of the notion, the criteria and other useful art projects see www.arte-util.org [Accessed 31/09/2017]*
- ⁷ *Claire Bishops discusses both works as examples for pedagogical art projects. See Claire Bishop (2012) Artificial Hells. Participatory arts and the politics of spectatorship. London: Verso, 242-250*
- ⁸ *In 2010, Gerz invited people from all over the world to live rent-free for one year in different cities in the Ruhr district. Participants were asked to build a community by initiating activities and to regularly document their experiences in a book. See www.en.2-3strassen.eu [Accessed 30/09/2017]*
- ⁹ *Founded in 2014, 64 Million Artists promotes everyday creativity through weekly email challenges, online courses and activities realised with partners and communities. See www.64millionartists.com [Accessed 30/09/2017]*
- ¹⁰ *See the mission statement on the project website, www.immigrant-movement.us/wordpress/mission-statement [Accessed 30/09/2017]*

Sarah Happersberger

Sarah Happersberger, MA, is assistant curator at Liverpool Biennial. Prior to joining the Biennial, she worked with Arnolfini, Bristol, and ZKM | Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, where she coordinated major exhibitions, performances and projects in the public realm. She also worked with Ruhrtriennale Festival of the Arts and has contributed to various publications about performance, socially engaged art and public art.



Liv Little

Liv Little is a curator, audio producer, filmmaker and the editor-in-chief of gal-dem, a fledgling media empire run exclusively by women of colour. She is now working as a digital executive at the BBC, and is a contributing editor for Elle UK. Born and raised in South East London, Little has written for The Guardian, Wonderland Magazine and gal-dem on a range of topics – from women seeking asylum in the UK, to interviews with women breaking down barriers in politics and the arts. She also works in TV and has just finished developing her first scripted comedy pilot. Little founded gal-dem, which operates as an online and print magazine as well as putting on talks, events and workshops, in 2015. It aims to empower and support the creative work of young women of colour through breaking down tired stereotypes and thrusting their work and thoughts into mainstream discussion in a whitewashed media environment.



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Tania Bruguera

Tania Bruguera was born in Havana, Cuba in 1968 and currently lives and works between Havana and New York. She studied at Escuela de Arte San Alejandro and the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has taken part in the Havana Biennial, São Paulo Biennial, Venice Biennale, documenta, Istanbul Biennial, Shanghai Biennial and Gwangju Biennial. Solo exhibitions of her work have been staged at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Havana, Neuberger Museum of Art in New York, Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven; Centre Pompidou in Paris; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco and MoMA, New York.

Growing up in Cuba in the 1970s, Tania Bruguera was educated to believe in the possibility of a Utopia, a faith that faltered as she became aware of the contradictions within Communist Cuban propaganda. Over the past 20 years, Bruguera has become renowned for creating art that confronts major political concerns, particularly censorship.

Her art often questions the nature of power structures, behaviours and values: subjects that have gained a wider relevance in contemporary life. Bruguera has consistently argued for art's role as a useful agent for change – utilising the museum as an active forum for public debate. Her provocative works, which champion freedom of expression, have repeatedly resulted in her being detained and interrogated by Cuban authorities.

Tania's new work at Tate Modern, the Hyundai Commission for the Turbine Hall, opens September 2018.



Claire Doherty (Editor)

Claire Doherty is an arts director, producer and writer.

Previously, Claire Doherty was Director at Arnolfini (2017-19) and was the founding Director of Situations. Over the past decade, Situations emerged as one of the UK's most innovative and pioneering arts producers, commissioning and producing temporary and long-term public arts projects, creating public art strategies and visions for city-wide initiatives and leading publishing and research initiatives to improve the conditions for, and skills to produce, new forms of public art worldwide. Claire has developed an international reputation as a leading thinker in new approaches to public art policy and planning, and is dedicated to engaging those for whom the arts might have seemed irrelevant or inaccessible through transformative art and cultural experiences; advocating for the social value of the arts, and finding ways to catalyse positive change in specific places.

Claire was awarded a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Award for outstanding cultural entrepreneurs, 2009, and appointed MBE for Services to the Arts in the New Year's Honours List 2016.

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Where Strangers Meet

An international collection of essays on arts in the public realm.

The urbanist Richard Sennett has written that ‘the public realm can simply be defined as a place where strangers meet’. As the number of us living in cities rises, the pressures on the shared spaces of a city will increase; the places in which our future relationships to one another are negotiated. This is particularly resonant for the British Council, an international organisation that brings people together from different cultures, countries and continents through arts, education, science and the English language. Building on its multifocal work in cities, the British Council commissioned a collection of essays to explore different perspectives on how artistic and cultural experiences affect individual and collective participation and action in the public realm.

For 80 years the British Council has worked in cities in over 100 countries worldwide. The British Council is now responding through research and programmes to the changing urban dynamics affecting citizens and institutions globally, including the impact of globalisation and technological and political change. Work in cities also forms part of our response to some of the world’s current challenges including migration and security. This collection is intended to strengthen our global offer to collaborators and audiences by demonstrating how the power of the arts and creative exchange can be harnessed to make cities more open, dynamic, inclusive and fit for the future.

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