



Tania Bruguera
Portraits: A Sound Installation
(first evolution), 2005–06
Wall text and sound
Dimensions variable
Stills from a video of the performance
at Instituto Cervantes, New York,
May 13, 2005
Courtesy Avenol Franco

This piece is a sound portrait of several political figures who have had an impact on world events. In order to “picture” [each of] them, I selected one of their speeches. The choice was based either on the importance of the speech itself, or the access to recorded data.

— Tania Bruguera²¹

Portraits: A Sound Installation, 2005–06, grew out of Tania Bruguera’s ongoing interest in the ways speeches affect audiences. Raised in post-Revolutionary Cuba, where Fidel Castro’s dramatic, persuasive rhetoric captivated the population at large, Bruguera was sensitized from childhood to the power of speech as a political tool. *Autobiografía* (*Autobiography*), a slightly earlier piece, explored the impact of political slogans on listeners (not illustrated). During the Eighth Havana Biennial in 2003, she installed it at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. On a stage she constructed, empty but for a microphone and speakers, bodiless voices blared political epithets associated with Castro and the Revolution.²² These included: “Revolucionario hasta el fin” (Revolution until the End), “!Escogeremos siempre el sacrificio!” (We Will Always Choose Sacrifice), and “Libertad o muerte” (Liberty or Death). Approaching the microphone, one became increasingly aware of the power Castro projected through slogans that resounded at a decibel level high enough to make the stage vibrate.

In May 2005, when it was still a work in progress, *Portraits* was performed in the open-air garden at the Instituto Cervantes, New York, as a unique “concert soirée” (opposite).²³ Bruguera had begun *Portraits* by listening to recordings of speeches by such world-famous figures as Winston Churchill, the Dalai Lama, Albert Einstein, Adolf Hitler, Barbara Jordan, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Pope Paul VI, Yitzhak Rabin, Ronald Reagan, and Eleanor Roosevelt. She recorded excerpts of these onto a CD and then used a computer



Above

Tania Bruguera

Portraits: A Sound Installation

(detail), 2005–06

Wall text and sound

Dimensions variable

Installation view, Kunsthalle Wien,
Austria, 2006

Courtesy of the artist

Opposite

María Magdalena Campos-Pons

When I Am Not Here / Estoy Allá, 1997

Triptych

Polaroid Polacolor Pro 20 × 24 photographs

Ea. 24 × 20 inches (61 × 50.8 cm)

Courtesy Peg Alston / Peg Alston Fine Arts,
New York