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## Cuban artist discusses political activism and art; activism

Holly Disch Apr 1, 2016

Students and faculty gathered in Kent State's Center for the Visual Arts to listen to a persistent Cuban free speech advocate, performance, installation and video artist Tania Bruguera, on Friday afternoon.

The lecture focused on her performance "#YoTambienExijo," meaning, "I also demand." This was a performance in which she attempted to put a microphone at Revolution Square in Havana, open to all, without censorship.

The special assistant to Director Christine Havice of the School of Art, Renee Roll, helped coordinate all the events for Bruguera.

"Her fearlessness in putting her opinions out into the world and motivating others to do so is inspirational," Roll said.

Bruguera is the founder of "a hub for civic literacy in Cuba," called the Hannah Arendt Institute of Activism.

Right now, you can go to the kickstarter page and donate to have your name be apart of the institute.

Bruguera posted about a message on the "Yo Tambien Exijo" page on Facebook in May 2015.

"Today I received my license as "reviewer," the "self-employed" category associated with education (pedagogy)," Bruguera wrote in the post. "This license will make it impossible for them to stop the first working session or close the Institute, under the guise of illegality. It has been a good day."

During the lecture Bruguera also briefly explained her “Political Timing Specific.”

To her, being a political activist is an honor, and she isn't so sure she can consider herself one. Her art and involvement in political activism has turned into “art as a gesture, not as a construction of things.”

Examples were shown throughout the lecture of performances that were explained as a language of life. After many occasions, especially a particular assassination, she knew symbolism was not enough.

According to the School of Art's website, Bruguera proposes solutions to sociopolitical problems and has developed several long-term projects, including a school for behavior art. Bruguera likes to complicate what the idea of art is, and can also be considered a conceptual artist.

Professor Susan Umbenhour, a visiting assistant professor of studio art at Oberlin College, Darice Polo a professor of drawing for Kent State's School of Art and Havice helped make this possible for Bruguera to visit.

Bruguera felt Kent State was a good place to come and talk to students because of the history at the school.

“I believe in education, so I actually believe in talking to students and trying to connect with the younger generation,” Bruguera said. “ I want to try and share with them my ideas and how that conversation can grow, especially (when) you have such a specific history that is to me very interesting.”

Amanda Paniagua, an art history graduate student was invited to introduce Bruguera with a strong connection to a long-term project talked about in the lecture, “Migrant People Party.”

“Her work challenges people... we share a similar history,” Paniagua said. “My grandparents migrated here to work in the fields, and only two generations later I am going to graduate with my masters degree.”

Alejandra Fishman, a sophomore fashion merchandising major is from Puerto Rico, and found it was great to see an artist from a similar culture.

“It is always something I jump at the opportunity for, there is a saying that Puerto Rico and Cuba are like birds of a feather, our history is very similar and we have a very close tie for various reasons,” Fishman said. “ Her art speaks volumes for what she does.”

Bruguera feels it is important for Kent State students to know about her political background because of the mainstream media so strongly positioning themselves in the minds of the people.

One activism example talked about was a long-term installation project done in Russia. People walked around and were able to get pictures taken with monkeys, but in the background was a photo of the creator of the KGB (security for the Soviet Union). Only two people refused a picture, showing to Bruguera how quickly history is forgotten.

Bruguera wants Kent State students to remember something important about the life we live.

“Be aware of the role in the present, so you have a better tomorrow.”

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