

## Untitled (Bogotá, 2009)

A work of art is not a judgment: it is a state of sensitivity. But there is a difference between an art that uses images created by politics and an art that **is** political, that works **from within** politics, that **creates** politics. The research I have been making for my artistic production has been headed to this second way of organizing the function of art.

I am aware of the fluency and even exchangeability between these two types of usage and finality of politics in art, a fluidity that may bring about that one form of implementing politics in art transforms into the other, on the basis of the concept and time of its effectiveness (thus the ephemeral nature of political art).

What I want to achieve with my work is a balance between what is political and what is artistic, a balance where you may wonder whether I use politics to do art but, also, whether I use art to make politics; to station the analysis from its reversible condition. I am interested in standing in the point in which art and politics meet, a meeting that takes place in the dimension they both create in what is emotional, operative and Utopian. I am looking for a balance in which the presence and possibility of perception, from every point of view, is possible and equally effective, where each of the spheres of what is public exchange strategies of communication and rights.

I am interested in appropriating the resources of power to create power, in creating a political situation through art, in inserting myself in the present political moment from a space in the future, practicable at least under certain circumstances and for a given time. I am working on the ways in which art is used in daily political life not only as a mechanism of self-reflection, but as a way to create and set up models of social interaction that may provide new ways to relate with Utopia.

The ephemeral nature of my work is also located in the authorship of the piece, which is disseminated among the participants bringing in several modalities of *delegated authorship*. The negotiation with the audience takes place in terms not only of documentation democratization or having the audience complete the work, but in some cases the work is the audience itself. What is delegated, to create authorship, is the privilege acquired by artists, a privilege society gives them in its class distribution and by the role historically given to Art and artists, a space in which freedom, tolerance and other realities is more easily negotiable.

The purpose of my work is not only to prompt a way of thinking, to create public forums for debate – of ideas that have shown their state of contradiction – but also to offer the chance of working from the usefulness of Art, a usefulness that at times is sketched in the structure of the work, but at others the participating audience must find. The purpose of *Useful Art* is to provide a pragmatic/practical

application of symbolic elements. It is to bring the urinary to the bathroom, with its signature in view.

Although I believe in Art as one of the possible ways through which the social motor can be put into movement, I strongly champion self-sabotage for those working in political art. By self-sabotage I mean a process of delimitation of the project's and the artist's "aura."

I have called this *Behavior Art*, an art working with social behavior as its means of expression, its material, its finality and its documentation: an art as the construction of what is collective by creating a situation that will make the transformation of an audience into a citizen possible. An art contributing to a relationship for these conditions to appear, a meeting point between ethics and desire.

*Untitled (Bogotá, 2009)* forms part of a series: *Untitled* (name of the place, year when the work was made). The series is made up by four works: *Untitled (Havana, 2000)*, *Untitled (Kassel, 2000)*, *Untitled (Bogotá, 2009)* and *Untitled (Gaza, 2009)*.

At the beginning it was not going to be a series. It was a work I made in Havana during the 2000 Biennial. The piece an answer to the topic of the event, "One Closer to the Other," intended to analyze the pretended "closeness" of power to the people and its alleged "vulnerability," while it used the mass media as a means to "approach" and interact with it. On the one hand it was a work on political imaginary, in this case the one existing on Cuba. I am sure that everyone here when hearing the word Cuba first of all thinks in Fidel and the Cuban Revolution, but Cuba is much more complex, as Colombia is more than drugs and violence. As Buck-Morss and Podoroga say, political imaginary is a political landscape more than political logics, a visual field where political actors move and where they are also acted upon; it is a power landscape where political collectivity is found, a visual representation of what is political, thinking in the formation of a national identity through the appropriation of the territory. In this, of course, there is always a problem of legitimization that generates disagreement.

In *Untitled (Havana 2000)*, the tension was in who had the legitimacy on Cuba's image and who did this legitimacy please. Those who came to Cuba for the Biennial, many for the first time, did not see or did not want to see more than the image they themselves had created of Cuba before they arrived, an image they liked and which avoided the reality physically before them. The work is on the meaning of the space satisfying this *a priori* political image. It is also on the meaning of the process of experiencing the need, the pressure, of changing that image. I do not try to say through the piece how the new image should be, that is an individual responsibility, because this is not an act of propaganda but a state of things that acknowledges the transience and fragility of definitions. And this is

not a presentation of my individual opinion on the places, but a presentation of a look on a look.

After this piece, *Untitled (Havana 2000)*, Documenta's curator invited me to make something "like that one, but different." That was when I had to think about the position Cuban artists should have if they entered into the group of "international artists." This transition is complex, because you do not want to impose on yourself the condition of being exotic by bringing only images that are inaccessible for an international audience, images actually concerning us, but in a context in which this concern is not shared from the same experience or with the same urgency and the same consequences, images expected by that new, alien, audience who already has us in a pre-established political imaginary. An imaginary that does not know the context and dynamics and that is too much in a hurry to be concerned by self-reflection or for taking seriously things coming from the political sphere. Art has too long become a sophisticated and approved way of entertainment legitimized in its practical "uselessness", answering an audience pleased with being pleased.

On the other hand, artists who become "international artists" swap their audience. The audience that was secondary – the international one – becomes primary and the audience that was the one with whom the dialogue was held – that in their country of origin – becomes secondary and contemplative. The disconnection some artists begin to experience with their native environment once they are part of the new space of "international" reception adds to this dynamics. This may happen when they move to a new place – which requires negotiation with their belonging to it and, therefore, the right of addressing this new place critically – or working "internationally" from their native places negotiating their local effectiveness.

In my case, when I was making *Untitled (Kassel, 2009)*, I thought that the way in which I could relate with other contexts was by trying to bring not an *image* of Cuba to these places, but an ideological *look* that has been formed and has created its expectations from the political reality as seen in Cuba. The way I could connect was trying to find what part of that reality, which I approached for the first time, met with mine. The work was not on that "new" reality, but on the meeting, the moment of identification between them both, the one I brought and the one I found. I don't think anyone can replace with research, however long, academic and deep, an educational process which takes place in moments one is not aware of being educated, of being undergoing what will become one's training. Research is always conscious and a process of decantation of what is important and what is not for the person doing the research. Research has in it a space for judgment or at least for hypothesis. I do not believe that intellectual knowledge can replace accumulated emotional understanding to make a piece.

Then, the negotiation on who has the right to “talk” on a place, especially if the “comment” comes from a non-local artist, is won in various forms. I will expound some of the many possible, on the basis of my experience:

1. **Importing the work.** There is no process of “translation” here. What does exist is the replacement of materials from one site by those of the other in case the work is “rebuilt” or “adapted” to the site. In these cases, the local history and dynamics implied in the materials are not taken into account and the model of universality is imposed. This is a model local audiences are generally thankful for if the person “importing” the work comes from a space with more power. The result is what is appreciated and the potential contradictions surfacing in the production process of the work are forgiven to the artists. The sensation of satisfaction of the local audience stems from the attention given to the locality by an internationally important artist to whom there is no easy access. Importation is well received and it includes the sensation of privilege. For locals, there is a more comfortable sense of the exotic and of use, because of the mirage of belonging to a universality to which they actually do not belong – from the international point of view and, at times, even from the point of view of the international artists exhibiting their work. The local audience in this case considers itself transformed into an international audience.
2. **Translating the work.** The discussion on the notions of identity, knowledge, accuracy and rights begin here. Not only the result, but the process and methodology of the approach gain importance. This is where legitimacy is located, because the “translation” is an expression of ethical consideration. It is a state of cooperation between cultures that are equally critic and equally in construction. As in every translation, it is unavoidable that something is lost or diminished in the process, some meaning, some ulterior motive. It is a process on similitude, aware of its potential ineffectiveness, but concentrated and satisfied in looking for potential coincidences, in searching for a place in which to start a conversation between both realities. In the translation of a work both realities are taken care of. It is a process of participation from within the locality, because the person who comes brings the experience of his or her own locality and works from it. Local audience becomes trans-local. The international audience is demanded, on the one side, to make an effort to understand both contexts and the resulting meaning and/or, on the other, to think in itself from its own locality (imagining, based on its experience, the dialogue created by the work).
3. **Integrating the work.** This is a more complex process and demands the insertion of the artists in the new site or that they give space and power of meaning to the people in it. It is a process of acceptance which makes the contradictions of power evident. In case international artists, with the intention of being accepted, decide to “integrate” their work, they should

comply with the “regulations” and demands established by the local audience on the issue of belonging. These demands always take into account the time and sacrifice invested. Intensity emerges when artists do not follow the rules established by the locality into which they want to “integrate” their work and the way the local audience construes this gesture. This becomes much more evident when international artists come from a space with lesser power and are faced with the social and political imaginary they have on their native site, which generally is an easier to accept political space. A way of working without having to confront these tensions is to endow the locals with a significant space, but this demands a series of ethical considerations on authorship which are not the most frequent. These are entirely contextual works. Here the audience is always local and most of the times these works are not correctly understood by international audiences since, not having undergone the same insertion process, they try to understand the work presented as made in that site through formal similarities with works they already know. This makes it difficult for international audiences to have access to the work from its specific and local effectiveness, which is generally the *raison d'être* of these art gestures. “Integrated” international artists, transformed into *inter-local* artists, must provide the audience with the same educational process as a local artist who wants to be internationally understood.

4. **Permissible art.** Many times artists coming “from abroad” are permitted to say or do what those “inside” are not allowed (or do not allow themselves) to do. This is a phenomenon that may be positive or negative depending on the intention of the artists with their work and their local consequences.

Of course, all the above functions in very complex ways, interspersing and interweaving among these variations and other possible ones. I have structured these ideas to explain in a clearer way a very much extended phenomenon today in the practice of site specific political art.

I always considered Colombia should be a part of this series, as well as Palestine, because both are places highly defined by the view of “the other,” a view that is almost unalterable and imposed and which is more an answers to the need of “the other” in terms of political usefulness than the reality of the people belonging to the place of which this political imaginary is had.

Tania Bruguera

Note: I would like to clarify that the work presented was entirely funded by me without the support of any local or foreign institutions. The institutions backing this event are not accountable for the opinions expressed or for the actions carried out since they did not agree with the piece, as was expressed that day. Now well, although the work of the institution is to carry out implementation from its point of view, artists are not obliging beings.