

**TANIA BRUGUERA INTERVIEWED BY LARNE ABSE GOGARTY**

The Cuban artist, based in Havana and New York, asks what is art for? For Bruguera, part of the answer lies in re-evaluating the role of the artist in society while avoiding both political instrumentalism and institutional co-option by turning her own cultural capital into political capital

# CITIZEN ARTIST

**Larne Abse Gogarty:** *What has brought you to London?*

**Tania Bruguera:** I'm here in London for a one-month residency at the South London Gallery, apropos the exhibition 'Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today', which has been curated by Pablo León de la Barra (Reviews AM399). During the residency, the idea is to follow up on the long-term project Immigrant Movement International (IMI), which has had several reiterations including its headquarters in Corona, Queens, beginning in 2011. This has now passed into the community, which is taking care of it and bringing it in the direction they think it should go, which is fantastic. There is also the political party in Mexico, El Partido del Pueblo Migrante, and the campaign 'Dignity has no nationality'.

While in London, we are exploring the similarities and the unique elements of immigration here. Arriving a few days after Brexit allowed us to witness how the discussion around refugees and immigrants is at the centre of the national debates again. I started this project in 2005 and 11 years later we still have the same questions, same answers, same fears – it's quite disheartening. This is just a subject politicians try to win elections with, and then it becomes a background problem as soon as they take office.

*How did the IMI headquarters in Corona move from being something you were actively managing and involved with to becoming a self-sustaining group or institution?*

It has worked because of the group, but also through the support of the Queens Museum. The process of passing the project to the community took around a year and it entailed providing an educational process that included a history of social and public art practice, resources for activism and structures for self-reflection on the project itself. This training also initiated a self-selection process in order to be part of the council, a structure we created for the members of the community to administer and guide the project. The Queens Museum was key. The staff see it as a civic institution, which is something I have advocated for a long time, not because we as artists or art institutions should take over the role of government, or allow government to avoid accountability, but rather because today the question we, in the arts, have to ask ourselves is: 'what is art for?' The answer to that question should reflect the world we live in now and not concepts of perception, image-making and social roles created in the 20th century. There are specific ways by which reality's

