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Media Contacts:

Voleine Amilcar, 415.978.2700 ext. 116; vamilcar@ybca.org

Lainya Magana, 347.395.4155; lainya@aopublic.com

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Presents

Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder

**An Unprecedented Collaboration with World-Renowned Cuban
Political Artist Tania Bruguera**



*Tania Bruguera reading from Hannah Arendt's book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* during the opening session of the Hannah Arendt*

Friday, June 16, 2017 through Sunday, October 29, 2017
Opening Night Party: Friday, June 16, 2017, 7 pm
Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission Street, San Francisco CA 94103

SAN FRANCISCO - (April 26, 2017) [Yerba Buena Center for the Arts \(YBCA\)](#) presents [Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder](#) a survey of long-term artworks by the political artist Tania Bruguera. For more than 30 years Bruguera has worked at the intersection of activism and performance art to address structures of power, devise new utopian models of authority, and create alternative structures that aim to transform and redistribute power. This has resulted in art projects that take the form of social movements, newspapers, and schools—and even Bruguera’s own provocative self-nomination for the 2018 Cuban presidential election. Organized by YBCA and curated by **Lucía Sanromán**, director of visual arts, and **Susie Kantor**, curatorial associate, *Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder* will present together for the first time Bruguera’s long-term projects initiated between 1985 and 2017 that have sought to transform the emotional and symbolic affect of art into political effectiveness.

Says Sanromán: “Tania’s projects often begin by pushing the art institution to perform its civic role, asking it to turn its resources toward resolving stubborn social problems, and through this, to enable its audiences’ paths toward engagement—and eventually to challenge their political habits.”

Bruguera adds: “The threat of the Trump presidency puts basic assumptions about the identity of this country at risk, and has made the political role of art even more urgent. The exhibition at YBCA will offer a space where art’s role as a provocation and as a witness will be exercised. This is more relevant than ever, as art allows us to say and do what cannot be said or done under systems of repression and violence.”

Bruguera divides her performance practice into **short-term actions**—single events and political gestures—and **long-term projects**. Short-term actions are characterized by her incisive appropriation of images, iconic events, and propaganda of power, which she then restructures as disruptive gestures with the aim to shock individual subjects into action. The long-term projects go beyond representation to create democratic institutions and platforms—for instance a dissident art school or an alternative immigrant organization and political party—that imagine other, more inclusive political futures. Working closely with YBCA, Bruguera will “update” these projects in a manner that responds to the current political climate and builds on the core concepts that permeate her work: for instance “artivism,” a term that conflates “art” and “activism” to suggest that art can change our political habits, and *arte de conducta*, or behavior art.

The exhibition traces the evolution and practice of these concepts, beginning with **Homenaje a Ana Mendieta (Tribute to Ana Mendieta, 1985–96)**, where Bruguera re-performed many of Mendieta’s works in order to re-locate her in the Cuban cultural and artistic imaginary. The presentation continues with **Memoria de la Postguerra I, II, and III (Memory of the Postwar I, II, and III, 1993/1994/2003)**, in which Bruguera created an independent newspaper as a work of art in collaboration with contemporary artists and critics living in Cuba and abroad. **Immigrant Movement International (2010–ongoing)** is an artist-initiated sociopolitical

movement that has created a community center for immigrants, and ***The Francis Effect (2014–ongoing)*** is a political campaign asking Pope Francis to extend Vatican City citizenship to undocumented people throughout the world. At YBCA Bruguera will update *Immigrant Movement International* with the launch of ***The Party of Migrant People’s Assembly***, a series of conversations with immigrant rights organizations in the Bay Area and internationally, with the aim of finding concrete solutions in these extremely divisive times. Additional highlights will include ***#YoTambienExijo (loosely translated as “I also demand,” 2014–ongoing)***, a civil platform that peacefully promotes civil, political, economic, and cultural rights in Cuba.

Central to the exhibition is the question of how to present social and participatory processes in the display context of an art gallery. Continuing Bruguera’s concept of the “updating” of long-term, socially engaged performances, the exhibition organizes the newly commissioned project ***Escuela de Arte Útil (School of Useful Art) (2017)*** a fully functioning school held inside YBCA’s galleries. Based on the model of her earlier ***Cátedra Arte de Conducta (Behavior Art School)***, which took place at her home in Havana from 2003 through 2009, Bruguera has designed a new curriculum for YBCA and the Bay Area that uses the concept of “*arte útil*” (which roughly translates as “useful art,” but goes further, suggesting art as a tool or device) to address the challenges facing artists today, and to explore how art can be an instrument for social and political change. Throughout the eight-week duration of the school, students will meet three times a week to learn about the concept of *arte útil* from influential practitioners and theorists, including **Jeanne van Heeswijk, Alistair Hudson, Rick Lowe, Ted Purves, Strike Debt Collective, WochenKlausur**, and **Bruguera** herself, who will be in residency for the duration of the school. This immersive public art project will be divided into lectures and workshops, and will end with an exhibition of *arte útil* projects generated by the students.

Escuela de Arte Útil is organized by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, in collaboration with California College of the Arts, the San Francisco Art Institute, the University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco State University, Asociación de Arte Útil (Alessandra Saviotti and Gemma Medina Estupinan), and the YBCA Fellows program. Classes will take place in the galleries and are open to the public during open gallery hours.

Marking **Sanromán’s** curatorial debut at YBCA, this landmark presentation is just one of five exhibitions YBCA is featuring between 2017 and 2019 as part of its **Changing the Ratio** initiative. In 2014, it was estimated that less than 15 percent of US museum and gallery exhibitions were dedicated to women artists. YBCA aspires to change this narrative by devoting its main galleries to retrospective exhibitions of some of the most important women artists of our time. Bruguera joins a roster of change-makers that includes pioneering feminist artist Lynn Hershman Leeson, whose retrospective *Civic Radar* opened in February to critical acclaim and is on view through May 21, 2017. Following Bruguera’s exhibition, YBCA will present a retrospective of the Bay Area collective Futurefarmers, with additional presentations to be announced.

After its global debut at YBCA, ***Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder*** will be presented in Latin America and Europe. A catalogue produced by YBCA will be published in conjunction with the exhibition, and will be available through DAP.

Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder is supported, in part, by the Alvarez Family Foundation and The Growlery. YBCA Exhibitions 16–17 are made possible in part by Mike Wilkins and Sheila Duignan, Meridee Moore and Kevin King, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and The Creative

Ventures Council. Engagement and Education Programs in 16–17 are made possible in part by Institute of Museum and Library Services, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, The Bernard Osher Foundation, Wells Fargo Foundation, The Kimball Foundation, and The Sato Foundation. Free First Tuesdays underwritten by Directors Forum Members.

Ticket information

[Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder](#) will be on view

Friday, June 16, 2017 through Sunday, October 29, 2017.

Gallery admission: \$10; seniors, teachers, and students: \$8; YBCA members: FREE

Escuela de Arté Util classes: FREE with gallery admission

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

701 Mission Street, San Francisco CA 94103 415.978.2787

About Tania Bruguera

Tania Bruguera (b. 1968, Havana, Cuba) explores the relationship between art, activism, and social change in works that examine the social effects of political and economic power. By creating proposals and aesthetic models for others to use and adapt, she defines herself as an initiator rather than an author, and often collaborates with institutions and individuals so that the full realization of her artwork occurs when others adopt and perpetuate it. She expands the definition and range of performance art, sometimes performing solo but more often staging participatory events and interactions that build on her own observations, experiences, and interpretations of the politics of repression and control. Bruguera has explored both the promise and the failings of the Cuban Revolution in performances that provoke viewers to consider the political realities masked by government propaganda and mass-media interpretation. Advancing the concept of *Arte Útil* (literally useful art; art as a benefit and a tool), she proposes solutions to socio-political problems through the implementation of art, and has developed such long-term projects as a community center and political party for immigrants, and a school for behavior art.

About the Curators

Lucía Sanromán joined YBCA as director of visual arts in October 2015. Over the course of her career, she has curated groundbreaking exhibitions throughout the United States, Mexico, and Latin America. Prior to joining YBCA, Sanromán was a sought-after independent curator working in the United States and Mexico. Recent projects include *Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge*, a collaboration with Philadelphia Mural Arts and Cohabitation Strategies,. In 2014 she was co-curator of SITE Santa Fe's signature biennial *SITELines.2014: Unsettled Landscapes*. That same year, she presented *Citizen Culture: Art and Architecture Shape Policy* at the Santa Monica Museum of Art and the retrospective exhibition *inSite: Cuatro ensayos de lo público, sobre otro escenario* at Proyecto Siqueiros: La Tallera, Cuernavaca, Mexico. Sanromán was an associate curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego from 2006 to 2011.

Susie Kantor is the curatorial associate, visual arts, at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. She holds an MA in art history with a focus on 17th-century Dutch painting from New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, and a BA in art history and political science from Wellesley College. Her curatorial projects include *Won Ju Lim:*

Raycraft Is Dead, *Kevin Cooley: Golden Prospects*, and *Work in Progress: Investigations South of Market*, and she served as the in-house curator for the traveling exhibition *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*. Prior to YBCA, she held positions at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, and at Richard L. Feigen & Co., New York.

About Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) is one of the nation's most innovative contemporary arts centers. Founded in 1993, YBCA's mission is to generate culture that moves people. Through powerful art experiences, thoughtful and provocative content, and deep opportunities for participation, YBCA is committed to creating an inclusive culture that awakens personal and societal transformation. YBCA presents a wide variety of programming year-round, including performing arts, visual arts, film/video, and civic engagement. For tickets and information, call 415.978.ARTS (2787). For more information, visit ybca.org.

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