

# ARTFORUM

500 WORDS

## Tania Bruguera

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Left: **Tania Bruguera**, *Awareness Ribbon for Immigrant Respect Campaign*, 2011. Right: First public reading of the Migrant Manifesto at the United Nations Student Conference on Human Rights, December 2, 2011.

*Tania Bruguera* is an artist whose work explores the role art can play in daily political life. For the past year she has worked with Creative Time and the Queens Museum of Art on her project Immigrant Movement International, which seeks to redefine the immigrant as a global citizen and to stimulate artists to create work that can be actively implemented into social, political, and scientific issues. As part of her project, Bruguera has planned a worldwide open call for artists' actions to take place at 2 PM on December 18th, designated International Migrants Day by the United Nations.

**WHEN DREAMS ARE CAST ASIDE AS IMPOSSIBLE**, when social promises become utopia, when equality is co-opted, this is the point at which my art begins. By creating a parallel universe where daily affairs can unfold differently, my work functions as an exercise in accountability—people are forced to confront the “what if” moment. Behavior is the way through which my work communicates, and facts are my metaphors. Art becomes political when it achieves actual results: Politics are not a subject in my work but the material I use to create. As reality functions as my field of action, I employ art institutions as spaces from which to propose models of civil society—a place of education, where people can allow themselves the room to think and consider a different future. In my work, education is the process of learning how to redirect failure and frustration back into society: Failure is an operative and tactical element that has to be repurposed.

*IM International* began when I was living in Paris in 2005. It was clear to me then (and now) that the ability to move freely between nations is a hallmark of progress; however, it is treated like a special right available only to privileged few. Those in power have degraded human existence by enforcing laws that obstruct the movement of immigrants—laws that run counter to the ideals of an enlightened society. In Paris the outcome of the riots in that year was too intense for me to seclude myself in a purely fictitious dream space where this was not happening. Reality and dreams had to work for each other: Art for me has to be able to implement dreams. It was at this time that I first identified as an immigrant. I felt impotent and realized I had no other resource but art to address this situation; therefore, art had to be useful.

I decided then to create the Party of Migrant People, now *IM International*. Immigrant rights is for the twenty-first century what civil rights was for the twentieth century and what slavery’s abolition was for the nineteenth century—a means of eliminating an obsolete irrationality. For me, political art is working with the consequences: This project explores the way art can be part of the decision-making process in politics and operate in the realm of the political present tense instead of acting as commentator after the fact—as the news does, for instance. A vast majority of artists are immigrants themselves, and artists have a better networking support system than most immigrant groups. Thus on December 18, we are calling

for artists who are not from the place where they live to identify themselves as immigrants and demonstrate with a simple action the need to respect immigrants and defend immigrant rights. People must do what their governments are not doing. My aspiration for this project is to exceed the art context and act as an exercise in civil society. My aspiration is not for everybody to become an artist but that all artists use the powerful tools they have to become responsible citizens. Herein, I am not an author or an artist but an initiator, commencing a project with the hope that it will become common property, and incorporating the creative process to advance the chances that immigration will become a collective, inalienable right.

— *As told to Zachary Cahill*