

Commencement Speech  
Introductory Remarks by  
Professor Rachel Weiss  
School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
150 Anniversary  
Monday, May 16, 2016  
Auditorium Theater

It's a pleasure to introduce Tania Bruguera, an alum of SAIC who embodies much of what is so special about this school. It's particularly a pleasure to introduce her, since Tania and I have known each other for about 25 years. In that time, I've seen her grow from a student with an exceptional intuition about her own voice as an artist, into an artist with an extraordinary commitment to the meaning and power of art.

Tania gets around, having shown her work through solo exhibitions and in museums around the world, from the U.S. and Latin America to Africa, Asia and Europe. She has also been recognized as one of the 100 Leading Global Thinkers by Foreign Policy magazine and as a Yale World Fellow, and is also the first artist-in-residence in the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

This list gives us a sense of how and where her work has reverberated – not only across the global art world, but also in public policy and urban planning, in movements for human rights and equity, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century rethinking of the relation between culture and social justice and dignity.

But beyond listing her many accomplishments, I want to make a couple of points about her work, and the way she goes about making it.

Tania came of age during a time of intense social transition, in which many of the givens in Cuban society were thrown into doubt. The existential question about how to make what you do in the world matter presented itself with renewed urgency, and I see that as the starting point for Tania's work over the years.

Images of her work can be quite arresting, but that can be misleading since the depth of the work happens over long periods of time, and what gets captured in any particular moment is not where the heart of the work lies. Instead, her process is one of open questions.

It seems to me that she starts with an intuition, or even just an image, and then through a process of trial and error – sometimes many years-long – slowly comes to an understanding about what to do with that. That process – watching for what happens, looking for who might be hailed by a work, reflecting on how things change as a result of it – is a commitment not only to expression, but to exchange.

It's a process in which she doesn't know what will happen or what the work will, finally, consist of or mean, until that emerges in the process of the work playing out. That means that it's a process that requires the courage not to know, and to have faith in the people who become part of

it. It's a process that has the courage to take risks, not for their own sake but because that helps her discover things she doesn't already know.

All of you who are graduating today are embarking on your professional lives at a time of upheaval. In that, you share with Tania, you have mutuality. The thing about her work is that she's not willing to settle for the easy answers about how to live with, and within, that turmoil, but rather uses her work, as an artist, to resume dialog with that complexity every day. I'm so please to present to you Tania Bruguera.