

El Sexto



My 94 year-old great-aunt asks me, “So what finally happened to the young man with the slippery pigs? Have they released him yet?” The answer is the same: No. My great-aunt smiles when she thinks about El Sexto’s performance because performances also exist as mental images; indeed, that’s the best kind of documentation.

The jailing of El Sexto recalls the jailing of Ángel Delgado’s for defecating on an issue of *Granma* during an exhibition back in the 80s; even then, it was already used as sanitary paper in many homes, less as a matter of social critique than a solution to a practical problem.

The relationship between these two events makes me rethink how quickly aesthetic criteria can be used to justify an act of non-solidarity by colleagues in the trade. Time and time again, decade after decade, we hear the same hackneyed arguments... it wasn’t a good piece, the idea was too obvious, he did it to call attention to himself, it wasn’t the right moment, everybody is already familiar with the limits, etc. At times like these, the critics become the police and the police become critics. Aesthetic criticism becomes a weapon of the Revolution. Aesthetic criticism becomes the perfect excuse to refuse to be implicated; the perfect excuse to hide behind a profession that allows us to think we’re better than others, especially whom ever’s in trouble. I don’t think a set of aesthetic criteria exempts those who do nothing when confronted with injustice from responsibility. I can’t accept that an aesthetic criteria is worth more than a person’s life.

I don’t know El Sexto personally but these days I can’t get a video he made of a conversation in Kcho’s studio out of my mind... I don’t know if I should call Kcho, who knows him personally, and who is not only an artist, but a member of the National Assembly. Perhaps, given his position, he might be able to understand not only the differences in aesthetic criteria but also the political implications of censoring art.

Tania Bruguera
January 25, 2015