

# AFFIRMATION OF THE CURATORIAL CLASS

The Seventh Havana Biennial  
(Séptima Bienal de la Habana)  
Havana, Cuba

November 14, 2000-January 5, 2001

## GREGORY SHOLETTE

One memorable exception to the politically evasive tone of events was a performance and installation by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera. The potency of her dissension did not become apparent however until the next morning. In the meantime we made a visit to Katia Varela, the technical director for the Museum of Decorative Arts. Varela offered more evidence of the convoluted bond joining the U.S. with Cuba. It seems that Cuban art institutions, like their North American counterparts, are not only struggling with a lack of capital but are coping in almost identical ways. One example is the need to increase cash revenue through the expansion of retail sales in museums. However, despite similarities, the funding gap facing Cuban arts is not the result of a hostile legislature—indeed Cuba's spending on culture is proportionally far greater than U.S. arts funding. Rather, it stems from a depressed economy made miserable in large part by the same provincial lawmakers that block arts funding in the U.S. It remains an added irony that while the Bienal de la Habana was taking place, some 90 miles to the north the Florida Republican Party,

head. It was programmed with a five-minute loop of archived footage showing Fidel Castro doing what appeared to be everyday, "non-political" activities including playing basketball and swimming, attending his wedding or receiving reporters in his pajamas with his young son. A few shots show him making speeches while being hugged by other Cubans. One key shot presented Fidel opening his shirt to the camera and revealing his bare chest, unburdened by a bulletproof vest. No doubt much of this imagery was familiar to viewers of Cuba's two broadcasting stations, but Bruguera had also stationed within the space four und clothed men ages 19 to 75. Therefore, what was experienced by hundreds of visitors during the opening day of the Biennial within the barely illuminated space was first the near-choking smell of sugarcane followed by the naked men carrying out what the artist described as "small, quotidian gestures such as bending or wiping the mouth." However, later it was learned that the installation would only be accessible minus the "live" elements (TV and men). Shortly after the foreign art tourists left the island, the exhibition was closed. I am not aware of any official explanation offered for this occurrence.



Installation view of untitled installation/performance by Tania Bruguera (2000).