

## **ART21 *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, Season 7 (2014)**

### **Artist Bios**

#### **Tania Bruguera**

<http://www.art21.org/artists/tania-bruguera>

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Tania Bruguera was born in 1968 in Havana, Cuba. Bruguera, a politically motivated performance artist, 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 multiple institutions as well as many 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 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 sociopolitical problems through the implementation of art, and has developed long-term projects that include a community center and a political party for immigrants, and a school for behavior art. Tania Bruguera lives and works in Queens, New York.

#### **Abraham Cruzvillegas**

<http://www.art21.org/artists/abraham-cruzvillegas>

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Abraham Cruzvillegas was born in Mexico City in 1968. Inspired by the harsh landscape and living conditions of Colonia Ajusco, his childhood neighborhood in Mexico City where houses were built on inhospitable land in *ad hoc* improvisations according to personal needs and economic resources, Cruzvillegas assembles sculptures and installations from found objects and disparate materials. Expanding on the intellectual investigation of his own paradoxical aesthetic concepts of *autoconstrucción* and *autodestrucción*, he likens his works to self-portraits of contradictory elements and explores the effects of improvisation, transformation, and decay on his materials and work. In his experiments with video, performance, personal and family archives, and academic research, he reveals the deep connection between his identity—born of the realities of his family's life in Mexico—and his artistic practice. Abraham Cruzvillegas lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico.

**Leonardo Drew**<http://www.art21.org/artists/leonardo-drew><http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/leonardo-drew>

Leonardo Drew was born in Tallahassee, Florida in 1961, and grew up in a public housing project in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Although often mistaken for accumulations of found objects, his sculptures are instead made of "brand new stuff"—materials such as wood, rusted iron, cotton, paper, mud—that he intentionally subjects to processes of weathering, burning, oxidization, and decay. Whether jutting from a wall or traversing rooms as freestanding installations, his pieces challenge the architecture of the space in which they're shown. Memories of his childhood surroundings—from the housing project where he lived to the adjacent landfill—resurface in the intricate grids and configurations of many of his pieces. Never content with work that comes easily, Drew constantly reaches beyond "what's comfortable" and charts a course of daily investigation, never knowing what the work will be about but letting it find its way, and asking, "What if...." Leonardo Drew lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

**Omer Fast**<http://www.art21.org/artists/omer-fast><http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/omer-fast>

Omer Fast was born in Jerusalem in 1972, and grew up in Israel and New York. His multichannel video installations blur the boundaries between documentary, dramatization, and fantasy, frequently generating viewers' confusion. Fast often anchors his narratives with a conversation between two people—whether subjects recounting their own stories or actors playing roles of interviewer and interviewee. As dialogues escalate in tension, portraits of carefully calibrated identity emerge. Through repetition and reenactment, multiple takes of given scenes build shades of interpretation as a story is told, retold, and mythologized. Stories of origin, trauma, and desire mutate into one another, forming blended genres that confound expectations and disrupt narrative conventions. Projected into space or unfolding simultaneously on multiple screens, the work resonates with characters—whether a drone pilot, worker in the adult film industry, or a wife talking to her husband—who seem to express the elemental complications and disparities of their own identities. Omer Fast lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

**Katharina Grosse**

<http://www.art21.org/artists/katharina-grosse>

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Katharina Grosse was born in 1961 in Freiburg/Breisgau, Germany. Grosse is a painter who often employs electrifying sprayed acrylic colors to create large-scale sculptural environments and smaller wall works. Interested in the shifts of scale between 'imagining big' while being small in relationship to one's surroundings, she explores the dynamic interplay between observing the world and simply being in it. By uniting a fluid perception of landscape with the ordered hierarchy of painting, Grosse treats both architecture and the natural world as an armature for expressive compositions of dreamy abandon, humorous juxtaposition, and futuristic flair. Her projects often suggest complex narratives through the inclusion of everyday objects, psychedelic vistas, and evocative titles. By building up layers of color with an expressive immediacy, she enables her work to become a material record of its own making and, perhaps, an inscription of her thoughts. But, Grosse says, "I am the painting trickster. Don't believe me!" Katharina Grosse lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

**Thomas Hirschhorn**

<http://www.art21.org/artists/thomas-hirschhorn>

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Thomas Hirschhorn was born in 1957 in Bern, Switzerland. Originally trained as a graphic designer, Thomas Hirschhorn shapes public discourse that relates to political discontent, and offers alternative models for thinking and being. Believing that every person has an innate understanding of art, Hirschhorn resists exclusionary and elitist aesthetic criteria—for example, quality—in favor of dynamic principles of energy and coexistence. He creates sprawling installations from mundane materials (packing tape, cardboard, foil) that engage the senses. Using collage as a form of interpretation and critique, Hirschhorn presents intellectual history and philosophical theory much as he does everyday objects and images, and poses questions about aesthetic value, moral responsibility, political agency, consumerism, and media spectacle. He has produced a series of monuments to great philosophers—Spinoza, Bataille, Deleuze, Gramsci—that while physically ephemeral are intended to live on in the collective memory of those who have experienced them. In the process of creating such work, Hirschhorn has enlisted individuals living near the monument sites, paying them to assist him (though not to collaborate, per se, in the artwork). "To me," he says, "it seems much more honest to say coexistence than collaboration." Thomas Hirschhorn lives and works in Paris, France.

**Elliott Hundley**<http://www.art21.org/artists/elliott-hundley><http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/elliott-hundley>

Elliott Hundley was born in 1975 in Greensboro, North Carolina. Hundley draws inspiration for his paintings from diverse sources, but especially from his Southern heritage, steeped in family history. Many of his works also contain references to Greek tragedy and classical mythology, and to Japanese woodblock prints. He also stages improvisational photo shoots to generate imagery for his multi-panel tableaus, casting friends and family in roles from antiquity and various other sources. With these and other images anchored by thousands of pins to bulletin-board-like surfaces, his shallow reliefs form a palimpsest that teems with humble materials such as cut-up magazines, string, plastic, gold leaf, and other ephemera. He frequently recycles leftover scraps from one work to the next and uses images of completed paintings as substructures for new projects, creating continuity between old and new. Elliott Hundley lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

**Graciela Iturbide**<http://www.art21.org/artists/graciela-iturbide><http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/graciela-iturbide>

Graciela Iturbide was born in 1942 in Mexico City. For Iturbide, the camera is just a pretext for knowing the world. Her interest, she says, lies in what her eyes see and what her heart feels—what moves her and touches her. Although she has produced studies of landscapes and culture in India, Italy, and the United States, her principal concern has been the exploration and investigation of Mexico—her own cultural environment—through black-and-white photographs of landscapes and their inhabitants, abstract compositions, and self-portraits. Her images of Mexico's indigenous people—the Zapotec, Mixtec, and Seri—are poignant studies of lives within the bounds of traditional ways of life, now confronted by the contemporary world. Turning the camera on herself, Iturbide reveals the influence of her mentor Manuel Álvarez Bravo in self-portraits that transform her quotidian self and play with formal innovation and attention to detail. She has also documented cholo culture in the White Fence barrio of East Los Angeles and migrants at the San Diego/Tijuana border, illuminating the bleak realities of her subjects' search for the American Dream. Graciela Iturbide lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico.

**Joan Jonas**

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Joan Jonas was born in 1936 in New York. A pioneer of performance and video art, Jonas works in video, installation, sculpture, and drawing, often collaborating with musicians and dancers to realize improvisational works that are equally at home in the museum gallery and on the theatrical stage. Drawing on mythic stories from various cultures, Jonas invests texts from the past with the politics of the present. By wearing masks in some works, and drawing while performing on stage in others, she disrupts the conventions of theatrical storytelling to emphasize potent symbols and critical self-awareness. From masquerading in disguise before the camera to turning mirrors on the audience, she turns doubling and reflection into metaphors for the tenuous divide between subjective and objective vision, and the loss of fixed identities. Joan Jonas lives and works in New York and Nova Scotia, Canada.

**Wolfgang Laib**

<http://www.art21.org/artists/wolfgang-laib>

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Wolfgang Laib was born in 1950 in Metzingen, Germany. Inspired by the teachings of the ancient Taoist philosopher Laozi, by the modern artist Brancusi, and the legacy of formative life experiences with his family in Germany and India, Laib creates sculptures that seem to connect that past and present, the ephemeral and the eternal. Working with perishable organic materials (pollen, milk, wood, and rice) as well as durable ones that include granite, marble, and brass, he grounds his work by his choice of forms—squares, ziggurats, and ships, among others. His painstaking collection of pollen from the wildflowers and bushes that grow in the fields near his home is integral to the process of creating work in which pollen is his medium. This he has done each year over the course of three decades. Laib's attention to human scale, duration of time, and his choice of materials give his work the power to transport us to expected realms of memory, sensory pleasure, and contemplation. Wolfgang Laib lives and works in Hochdorf, Germany and Tamil Nadu, India.

**Trevor Paglen**<http://www.art21.org/artists/trevor-paglen><http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/trevor-paglen>

Trevor Paglen was born in 1974 in Camp Springs, Maryland. Trained as a geographer and photographer, Paglen makes the invisible visible by documenting the American surveillance state of the 21st century. From his vantage points at various public locations he photographs distant military facilities, capturing extreme telephoto images of stealth drones. Turning his vision to the night sky, he traces the paths of information-gathering satellites. In his series of Mylar satellites, Paglen applies advanced engineering to the creation of non-functional objects, stripping technology of its intended purpose and hoping to launch his own time capsule of photographs into geostationary orbit. Tracing the ways in which the convergence of aesthetics, industrial design, and politics influence how we see and understand the world, he shows us images of the American West, originally photographed for military use and now considered examples of classic photography. In images that go beyond straightforward journalistic documentation, Paglen gives voice to shifting ideas of the landscape of the American West, humankind's place in the cosmos, and the surveillance state. Trevor Paglen lives and works in New York.

**Arlene Shechet**<http://www.art21.org/artists/arlene-shechet><http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/arlene-shechet>

Arlene Shechet was born in 1951 in New York City. Fascinated by the way things are made, Shechet likens her studio to both farm and factory. Employing an experimental approach to ceramic sculpture, she tests the limits of gravity, color, and texture by pushing against the boundary of classical techniques, sometimes fusing her kiln-fired creations with complex plinths formed of wood, steel, and concrete. By incorporating casts of firebricks and porcelain slip molds into her sculptures (revealing the tools of industry), she reflects on and investigates the tradition of decorative arts. Various sensual, humorous, and elegant, her clay-based vessels evoke the tension between control and chaos, beauty and ugliness, perfection and imperfection. Considering herself an installation artist who happens to make objects, Shechet focuses intently on ensuring that the display, sight lines, and relationships of the objects in her exhibitions change with every view while maintaining formal equilibrium. Arlene Shechet lives and works in New York and Woodstock, New York.