

**ART21 ART IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SEASON 7 PREMIERES  
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2014 ON PBS**

**Interview with Executive Producer/Curator Susan Sollins**

***Q: Which comes first — the themes of the season or the selection of the artists?***

Sollins: The selection of the artists always comes first. The loose themes (which become the titles for each episode) become apparent only after the artists have been selected. This season, it was only during the edit process that the themes became fully apparent.

As the curatorial process progresses, we strive to ensure that each program, and the season as a whole, represents a diverse range of artists and ideas. We also think about curating a show for television, which is a very different proposition than curating for an exhibition in a gallery or museum. The combinations of artists shown in each one hour program, and in the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* series overall, result in highly unusual and surprising juxtapositions — one of the most interesting aspects of creating — or viewing — this series.

***Q: How did you select the twelve artists who are profiled this season?***

Sollins: As you can imagine, it is difficult and unusual to curate for a project that will be experienced via a time-based medium — television — rather than within a physically-experienced, three dimensional exhibition space. Apart from that, the major challenge is to select artists whose work is iconic and unique. My hope is that we have consistently selected artists who are innovators rather than followers, and that we continue to do so in the future.

We have a wonderful magnetic wall in our office, and we keep an ongoing and changing list of artists there who are making exciting work. Some of these are artists I've wanted to work with for a long time, who may not have fit well into past seasons. Others had recent projects that were so compelling that we absolutely wanted to work with them this season. Thomas Hirschhorn's Gramsci Monument, for example, provided an opportunity to document the making and impact of this work, made in collaboration with residents of a public housing complex in the Bronx. Joan Jonas, a pioneer of video and performance art, was on our list for a long time and we were finally able to work with her this season. (While we were completing the editing on her segment, we were delighted to learn that she was selected to represent the United States at the 2015 Venice Biennale). And, after following Arlene Shechet's work for many years, she became the first artist we have featured who works with ceramics.

***Q: Besides the themes in the titles of the episodes, are there other connections you see in the work and ideas of this season's artists?***

Sollins: The themes are intentionally broad and open to interpretation so that there is room for play and thinking both curatorially and as a viewer. Sub-themes and sub-groupings always emerge as we work on the final segments and on the configuration of each hour. This season I was surprised that the influence of family history and ethics

emerged so strongly. Less surprising, because we deliberately selected artists working on large projects with groups of engaged non-artists, was the emergence of socially engaged art as a major thread.

Hirschhorn's Gramsci Monument engaged residents of a large public housing project, some of whom participated as paid workers, while others attended daily activities including lectures, radio broadcasts, music performances, art workshops, and philosophy discussions. We filmed Tania Bruguera primarily at her Immigrant Movement International project in Queens, a community center she created to practice *arte util* to empower immigrants, offering a wide variety of practical and cultural programs including legal services, music lessons, English instruction, exercise classes, childcare and art-making. Abraham Cruzvillegas's segment reveals how he creates sculptures from found materials, a practice he calls *auto-construccion*, while drones and surveillance issues appear in works by both Omer Fast and Trevor Paglen

***Q: How does this group differ from those of past seasons?***

Sollins: Each group of artists is different but this season we featured three artists per hour instead of four, thus allowing us to present their work and their thoughts in greater depth. The series has always represented the diverse world we live in by presenting artists of many backgrounds and histories, and many forms of art making. While there have been many artists from Latin America and the Caribbean in the series over the years, this season is perhaps unique in that three of the twelve artists included — Bruguera, Cruzvillegas, and Iturbide — come from that part of the world.

***Q: Do you think the series has appeal to those who are not immersed in the art world?***

Sollins: Absolutely, yes! Art is about ideas and experiences that resonate with all kinds of people, and people from time immemorial have made art for themselves and their communities. Elliot Hundley points out in his segment that anyone who has ever put an image on the door of a refrigerator knows what it feels like to make a collage, and discusses how his childhood experience of making Halloween costumes with his mother taught him to love the process of making things. Certainly the huge crowds that throng museums and public art events demonstrate the appeal of art to a general public, and I think that people in general want to know how things are made and how artists think. In Wolfgang Laib's segment, we see crowds visiting his pollen installation at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and I feel sure that those people, as well as others who did not have that primary experience, would like to know the thinking and processes behind it.

***Q: How has the series evolved over the past seven seasons?***

Sollins: A lot has changed since we first started filming 15 years ago. At first, the series was a gamble and ART21 was a novice organization. In order to create the first season for broadcast in 2001, we shot on film and tape. Today, the series is almost exclusively digital, though because we want to represent the works of art accurately, we spend a huge amount of time perfecting the production values to showcase the art as faithfully as possible. Over the years, we've experimented with different introductions to the programs but, as the series grew, it became clear to us that the artists' own words are the best introduction

***Q: How has the art world changed since the series began?***

Sollins: The art world is far larger now, both in terms of audience and venues, and far more international than it was in 1997/1998 when ART21 was conceived as an organization with the series *Art in the Twenty-First Century* at its core. *Art in the Twenty-First Century* aimed to make contemporary art radically accessible by giving direct access to artists via a democratic medium, television, and — of course now, the internet. And I think that ART21 succeeded far beyond its initial goals as we now reach millions of people around the world. Last year alone, there were over 3,200 ART21 public screenings in 49 states and 54 countries. The ART21 series is also distributed in countries as varied as Israel, New Zealand, Japan, and throughout Europe and Latin America.

***Q: What do you hope that viewers will take away from watching the series?***

Sollins: I believe that the artists in our series are role models for creative thinking, and that viewers will intuit that and be inspired by their many ways of thinking and making art. I also believe that viewers, from young children to adults, can be inspired to believe in their own creative capacities and to solve problems in new ways. Most of all, I hope that a young person somewhere will find these programs on TV or online, in a classroom or library, and will say “Oh, maybe that’s me!”