

KÜNSTLERHAUS BETHANIEN

P R E S S R E L E A S E

THE UNCOMFORM ART OF HAMLET LAVASTIDA

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THE UNCOMFORTABLE ART OF HAMLET LAVASTIDA

Hamlet Lavastida's inconvenient art is no longer welcome in Cuba
Artist Hamlet Lavastida and writer Katherine Bisquet are returning to Künstlerhaus Bethanien after their expulsion from Cuba on December 6, 2021.
Berlin, 10.12.2021

"Art aims to be an essential part of society. Hamlet Lavastida is a courageous artist who acts within the freedom of art. His works rely on the right to freedom of expression," says Christoph Tannert, Künstlerhaus Bethanien.

Cuban artist Hamlet Lavastida (*1983 in Havana) lived and worked in Havana. He is a member of the 27N group, a movement of independent Cuban artists, writers, thinkers and members of civil society that formed after the unprovoked arrest of rapper Denis Solis González on November 27, 2020. Since then, the collective has been subjected to a constant barrage of arrests, surveillance, harassment and detention.

Hamlet Lavastida's work is dedicated to exploring notions of ideological language in the Cuban context. Themes such as cultural politics, design, public space, archaeology and historiography are addressed using various means such as videos, collages, performances, public interventions and installations. This critical voice aggravates the political regime.

"The situation of art in Cuba is extremely critical. But not only art, the entire cultural system is endangered. By means of legal mechanisms such as Decree 349, Decree 370, or Decree 35, the Communist Party has institutionalised censorship and political repression, extending them to all forms of cultural, civic, and political expression. Today, not only culture and its artists, but every area of civil life is in danger of being reduced to a minimum by the party's police. We have reached a point where even national identity is blurred. In Cuba, there are no historical examples corresponding to the cultural debacle into which the current political regime has led us. Today, Cuba's most prominent citizens and artists are in one of two places: prison or exile," says Hamlet Lavastida.

After his stay as artist-in-residence at Künstlerhaus Bethanien (April 15, 2020-April 15, 2021), he returned to Cuba on June 21, 2021. A few days after his return home, he was arrested and sent to Villa Marista prison in Havana, which is notorious for the detention of political prisoners by the Cuban authorities. Thanks to his Schengen visa and a campaign of support led by Katherine Bisquet, Hamlet Lavastida was released from prison after three months. On September 26, Lavastida and Bisquet were deported to the EU by the Cuban state.

"Art in Cuba is subject to state control. There is a boundary that separates you from confrontation with power, just as there are social parameters that protect or discriminate against you. If you cross those lines - in the past at will, now by decree - or if you don't conform to the social norms accepted by the political class, you cease to be an artist and become a criminal. Artists who are genuinely critical of the regime and take a civic stance and responsibility are imprisoned, exiled or besieged by the state security forces," Katherine Bisquet explains.

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Hamlet Lavastida, artist (b. 1983 in Havana, Cuba), studied at the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes "San Alejandro" (1998-2002), at the Instituto Superior de Arte (2003-2009) and at the Cátedra de Arte de Conducta (2004-2006) in Havana. His exhibitions include: Iconocracia, Artium, Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz (2015); Politics: I don't like it, but it likes me, Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art, Gdansk (2013); Liverpool Biennial. International 10: Touched (2010); Curadores Go Home, Espacio Aglutinador, Havana (2008); Gwangju Biennial (Cátedra Arte de Conducta, 2008). He has also participated in various residency programmes, including: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2020/21); A-I-R Laboratory, Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, Zamek Ujazdowski, Warsaw (2012); Residencia PERRO Aglutinador-Laboratorio, Havana (2008). www.hamletlavastidaobras.blogspot.com

Katherine Bisquet, writer (b. 1992 in Ciudad Nuclear, Cuba), studied literature at the University of Havana. She has published numerous essays, narratives and interviews in various Latin American, Spanish and U.S. media. Bisquet also belongs to the 27N movement. In January 2021, she was imprisoned along with various other well-known intellectuals. In the same year, she received the Antonia Eiriz Fellowship at the Instituto Internacional de Artivismo Hanna Arendt. She is the author of several books of poetry, including *Algo aquí se descompone* (Colección Sur Editores, Havana, 2014) and *Uranio empobrecido* (forthcoming). Her book *El proyecto del siglo* received special commendation at the awards of both the Hermanos Loynaz Prize (2015) and the Pinos Nuevos Prize (2018).

Künstlerhaus Bethanien is an international cultural centre in Berlin. As a studio and workspace for professional artists, a multifaceted project workshop, and a venue for events, it has set itself the goal of promoting contemporary visual art. The Künstlerhaus promotes meetings and exchange between artists from different fields and cultural circles, as well as encounters with an interested public. The main focus of its wide-ranging activities is the International Studio Programme, in which artists from all over the world develop and present projects each year with support from the Künstlerhaus team. www.bethanien.de/kunstlerhaus-bethanien/mission-statement

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