

## Art, not politics led to dissident artist Tania Bruguera's Herb Alpert award

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Every year, the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts honors five midcareer artists with generous grants. This year, artist Tania Bruguera -- who has been unable to leave Cuba after having her passport confiscated -- is one of them. (Hector S. Martinez / Herb Alpert Award in the Arts)

Artist Tania Bruguera, composer Julia Wolfe and three others chosen for Herb Alpert awards

Five artists to receive Herb Alpert awards, but Cuban Tania Bruguera won't be at ceremony

For the first time in the 20-year-history of the [Herb Alpert Award in the Arts](#), a winner won't be able to attend the presentation ceremony for political reasons.

Dissident artist Tania Bruguera, one of five artists to receive an unrestricted grant of \$75,000 from the Herb Alpert Foundation, had her passport revoked by the Cuban government and is unable to leave the country.



Also a winner: composer Julia Wolfe, who last week was also awarded the Pulitzer Prize for "Anthracite Fields," a work that channeled the difficult labor of Pennsylvania coal miners. (Herb Alpert Award in the Arts)

The foundation annually honors a midcareer artist in each of five areas — dance, theater, music, visual arts and film or video. Bruguera is this year's visual arts winner. Los Angeles video artist Sharon Lockhart, composer Julia Wolfe, playwright and performer Taylor Mac, and choreographer Maria Hassabi are the foundation's other grant recipients. All will be honored at a luncheon in Santa Monica on Friday.

"The winners represent a kind of adventurousness," says awards director Irene Borger. "One of the questions I ask of the jury is, 'What makes you curious? What's interesting? ... And for whom will the prize make a difference?'"

Bruguera, an artist known for her challenging works of performance art, which explore everything from the immigrant condition to the nature of police control tactics, was detained in Cuba on multiple occasions early this year after attempting to stage a performance about freedom of expression in Havana's Revolution Square. The Cuban authorities are still determining whether to file criminal charges against her.

At Friday's luncheon, Christine Y. Kim, a curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, who served on the jury for the awards, will read a letter that Bruguera has sent especially for the occasion.

"The Alpert Award could not come at a better moment," reads the statement, which was provided to The Times in advance of the ceremony. "The Cuban government does not like my artworks because I'm proposing that our relationship with politics is one where the script is not written for us, but is something we create with responsibility and honesty out of the desire to engage in our political destiny."



Los Angeles artist Sharon Lockhart was also a Herb Alpert Award recipient. She is known for her meditative (practically photographic) films that explore a variety of topics, from movement to labor to youth. (Herb Alpert Award in the Arts)

"Each time I think of what I could be doing during the time I'll be there, I'm able to leave my current situation, I'm able to project a creative moment, I'm able to dream again," she adds, "and for that I want to thank the Alpert, for what it has already done for me as an artist."

Borger says that in choosing Bruguera, the foundation was not trying to make a political statement. It was meant to simply honor an artist who is exploring interesting ideas in her work. Bruguera, in fact, had been a nominee in the past.

Notes culled by Borger from the jury's deliberations describe the reasoning behind the award:

*"The jury was impressed by the complexity, longevity, conceptual rigor and urgency of Tania Bruguera's work, as well by her strong*

*formal clarity and ongoing contribution to international conversations on freedom of speech and illegal immigration. We appreciate the risks she takes and her commitment to resisting market pressures in order to seek an ethics of what art can do."*

Other recipients include some equally notable figures.

Wolfe, for example, [won the Pulitzer Prize](#) last week for her composition "Anthracite Fields," inspired by the deadly work of coal miners. It is a work that figured prominently on Times classical music critic Mark Swed's list of the [best classical moments of 2014](#): "an unforgettably haunting, harrowing evocation of the plight of Pennsylvania's coal miners."

Tania Bruguera on her art, her detentions and what happens next

Likewise, there is Lockhart, whose meditative film and photographic installations offer close studies of topics ranging from movement to manual labor. Her work has been shown in museums all over the world, including Vienna's Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, New York's Whitney Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In 2012, her film inspired by Israeli choreographer and textile artist Noa Eshkol was shown at the [L.A. County Museum of Art](#).

Other winners include the New York-based Hassabi, whose languid and eerie time-freezing performance pieces were on view at the [Hammer Museum](#) early this spring, as well as Mac, a stage actor whose vulnerable, gender-bending works also offer social critique. His star turn in "Good Person of Szechwan" at the Foundry in New

York made Times theater critic Charles McNulty's list of "[Best of 2013.](#)"

As part of the award, all of the artists will participate in a one-week residency at the California Institute of the Arts, which administers the prize. Previous winners include esteemed art world figures such as photographer and conceptual artist Carrie Mae Weems, video artist Christian Marclay and playwright Suzan-Lori Parks.

Read more about the winners and the selection process at the [Alpert awards website.](#)

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