

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Hundreds Demand Cuban Government to Free Detained Artist

Cuban artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, who was arrested last Sunday while on his way to an anti-censorship protest, could face between two and five years in prison.

[Valentina Di Liscia](#) March 5, 2020



Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara's performance "The Flag Belongs to Everyone" (courtesy of Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara)

Hundreds of artists and intellectuals have signed a petition demanding that the Cuban government release Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, who was arrested last Sunday while on his

way to an anti-censorship protest organized by the local LGBTQ community. The artist and activist could face between two and five years in prison.

“This attack is not only against Otero Alcántara, but against all of the artistic and intellectual community, and against Cuban civil society in its totality,” reads the petition, started by artist and writer Coco Fusco and signed by nearly 900 cultural figures so far, including Cuban artist Tania Bruguera.

“It’s an offensive that feeds itself on fomenting fear in order to win the complicity and silence of all Cubans.”

Currently in custody at Villa Grande, Otero Alcántara is scheduled to appear in court for an “abbreviated trial process,” according to the nonprofit organization PEN America, which condemned his detention in a press release published yesterday.

“The charges against Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara are the most disturbing iteration yet of the Cuban government’s ongoing attempts to terrorize him into silence,” said Julie Trébault, Director of the Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) at PEN America. “The baseless charges leveled against Luis Manuel and sheer lack of due process he has received are part and parcel of the Cuban authorities’ ongoing efforts to muzzle dissent, intimidate artists, and restrict freedom of expression. We call on the Cuban government to drop all the charges against Otero Alcántara and to cease the harassment and censorship of independent artists, writers, and thinkers.”

**Read the petition in Spanish [here](#) or in English below, translation courtesy of the author.**

Declaration of artists, editors, activists, journalists, arts and literature professionals, and intellectuals of Cuban and other nationalities.

The artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara awaits judgment detained in the prison of Valle Grande in Havana. Over the last three years, Otero Alcántara has been arbitrarily detained more than 20 times; his only offense has been his art.

Since Decree 349 was approved, in April of 2018, the Cuban government has exercised censorship over artists that it considers “inconvenient” with total impunity. Threats, interrogations, and imprisonments have become perversely quotidian. Luis Manuel has suffered an intense defamation and harassment campaign by the Cuban police with the aims of stifling his creative spirit, exhausting him as an artist and as a person until extinguishing his art. But Luis Manuel has not given up, he works every day with more strength than the last.

We want to make it known that the most recent accusation of property damage is an invention of the state so that it can treat Otero Alcántara like a common criminal, this evinces that the government itself knows that its previous accusations of disrespect and insult of patriotic symbols are weak. This attack is not only against Otero Alcántara, but against all of the artistic and intellectual community, and against Cuban civil society in its totality. It’s an offensive that feeds itself on fomenting fear in order to win the complicity and silence of all Cubans.

That’s why today we are breaking the silence, we can no longer be accomplices of the abduction of an entire country, of a republic that undermines the most fundamental rights of its citizens. Because each word said or silenced by us will have its weight to forge or break the bars that are now being built around Luis Manuel. We refuse to cooperate with political and judicial repression. We refuse to testify against Otero Alcántara as a person, as a citizen of civic conscience, or as an artist.

The persecution of Otero Alcántara affects all of us as artists, as Cubans, and as human beings who love liberty! With all and for the good of all, we demand today the immediate liberation of Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara.

Free Luisma!