



Coco Fusco. Photo: Gene Pittman / Walker Art Center.
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COCO FUSCO DENIED ENTRY INTO CUBA AS CAMPAIGN AGAINST DECREE 349 CONTINUES

On Wednesday, artist, writer, and arts educator Coco Fusco was denied entry into Cuba in what may be the latest move in a crackdown on artistic freedom in the nation. State security officials stopped Fusco after she arrived at José Martí Airport in Havana this morning and told her she had to return to the United States. They did not provide a reason for why she has been barred from entering the country.

Fusco told *Artforum* that she believes her activism prompted the refusal. Fusco has publicly supported the artist-led campaign against the government's new Decree 349 and the criminalization of independent cultural activity in Cuba. "I am not the first or the last intellectual with close ties to Cuba who has been punished in this way for expressing my views and advocating for greater freedom of expression in Cuba," Fusco said. "It has become a sad routine."

The censorship law, which was first passed by President Miguel Díaz-Canel in April 2018, sparked an outcry and has been criticized by artists and arts organizations across the globe. Local cultural producers have organized demonstrations, performances, sit-ins, and talks with state officials to protest the legislation, which was supposed to be enforced starting December 2018. Members of Cuba's culture ministry have since informed the public that parts of the law may be scaled back and that it would clarify how the law would be applied.

Among the artists fighting the decree are Tania Bruguera, Amaury Pacheco, Michel Matos, and Bienal de La Habana organizers Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and Yanelys Nuñez Leyva—they have all been detained by police on multiple occasions for protesting the law. For Fusco, the authorities' attempts to target activists is part of their own intimidation campaign.

"It strikes me as tragic that a government would find it legitimate to harass and threaten its artists and to silence critical debate about its culture in order to impress visitors by creating the false impression that the only art in Cuba is what the state wants to show," Fusco said. "They are counting on favorable coverage from visitors who know little and who will stay on the tour buses and remain inside their art corrals. They also count on the complicity of artists who remain silent in order to be promoted by the state."

She added: "I find it disturbing that it takes beheadings, stoning, and long prison sentences to get most people in the art world to protest censorship and repression of artists. Violence is not reducible to physical aggression. Creativity, imagination, and hope die slow deaths in a country where any expression of dissent is criminalized."

The official state-run Havana Biennial is due to open on April 12. An alternative biennial titled “Bienal Sin 349/Biennial Without 349” was also planned and will take place at the artist-run Museum of Politically Inconvenient Art in Old Havana as well as several undisclosed locations during the first week of the state exhibition. Commenting on the event, artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, one of the organizers, told the *Art Newspaper*, “This is really about inviting artists to stand in solidarity with us.”