

## **Carlos Garaicoa on The Crown Jewels**

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**Q: Las Joyas de la Corona (the Crown Jewels) is a very strong political statement dealing with buildings of repression found throughout the world, including Cuba. What was it like to show this work in France, right after showing it for the first time in Havana during the 10<sup>th</sup> Biennial?**

A: I think that a grand tour is the best thing that can happen to any work of art: to be seen within different contexts, by different audiences, and from different perspectives. In the case of the exhibition in Cuba, *The Crown Jewels* was inserted into its natural context, deconstructing a context weighed down by a heated political history, where talking about repression and torture is perceived as an attack against the foundations of the political structure of the country and the Cuban Revolution. There is the risk of not surviving the act of criticizing and exposing the weakness of these foundations. In Cuba, the spectators’ first response towards a work like this is: How did you manage to do it? Did they give you any trouble? How come you are not in jail?! All perfectly obvious within a context where open criticism of the state, especially coming from a state institution, is the least expected. On the other hand, this context greatly impoverishes the work’s impact and breadth of meaning by turning it in a petty scandal and local problem, and raising suspicions of opportunism. Showing *The Crown Jewels* in Italy and then in France basically implies projecting and multiplying its meanings, and a re-dimensioning of seemingly local issues into a more global perspective.

*The Crown Jewels* was conceived thinking of its possible impact on two audiences: those living under contradictory political systems--where human rights are more obviously suppressed--, and those in system that claim to have solved such contradictions, as in the case of Europe. The question always remains whether the more “civilized” societies have really done away with all the coercion, torture and misery inflicted by state mechanisms upon human beings. Many of my pieces pose this very question. Without lecturing or moralizing, my work strives to highlight the urgency of our most pressing concern: the need for humanizing our societies. From this point of view the piece is effective because it scolds some, teaches others a lesson and puts others on the defensive. It is not meant as an act of moral constraint, but merely as proof of our *un-civilization*.