

US CALL TO RELEASE CUBAN ARTIST LUIS MANUEL OTERO ALCÁNTARA GROWS LOUDER



Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara in 2019. Photo courtesy Otero Alcántara.

Activists and officials in the United States are intensifying pressure on the Cuban government to release artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, a member of the activist San Isidro Movement (MSI) who has been detained since July with no trial slated, and who is currently waging a hunger strike, *Artnet News* reports. Otero Alcántara is

said to be being held at Guanajay, a maximum-security prison roughly 35 miles southwest of Havana, having been sent there without receiving a hearing after being snatched by authorities while on his way to one of the historic demonstrations that roiled Havana last summer. Cuban law states that a person cannot be detained for more than six months without receiving a trial.

“There is little news about Luis, and what has emerged is not good at all,” fellow artist Coco Fusco, who remains in communication with Otero Alcántara’s family, told *Artnet*. “A few days ago, a prisoner at Guanajay who is near where he is being held called his wife to say that Luis was still on a hunger strike, that he was extremely weak and could barely speak. I imagine that he may lose consciousness soon. That was the last information made public about his condition.”

Otero Alcántara, who in July was named one of *Time*’s Most Influential People of 2021, had already been forcibly hospitalized in Havana last May more than

a week after a hunger strike, which he reportedly undertook on April 26 to protest the government's seizure or destruction of several of his artworks earlier in the month.

Fusco and activists Armando Chaguaceda, Yaxys Cires Dib, and Eloy Viera earlier this month penned an open letter pleading with European and US officials to take up Otero Alcántara's cause; the missive has since spurred a Change.org campaign. US officials publicly demanding Otero Alcántara's release include Secretary of State Anthony Blinken; U.S. ambassador for Latin America Brian A. Nichols; and Jessica Stern, special envoy for LGBTQI+ rights for the State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

“In a weak state, [Otero Alcántara] continues to wait for a trial date, sitting in the maximum security prison of Guanajay in horrendous conditions. The international community must hold the Cuban regime accountable and demand the release of all those unjustly detained,” tweeted Stern.