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# U.S. Leaders Are Calling for the Release of Cuban Artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, Who Has Been Detained for Months Without Trial

Concern is growing over Alcántara, who launched a hunger strike in protest of his imprisonment.

**Taylor Dafoe**, February 18, 2022



Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara in September 2019. Courtesy of the artist's Instagram.

North American leaders and artists are calling on the Cuban government to release artist and activist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, who has been detained for months without the prospect of a trial and is currently waging a hunger strike.

Alcántara, a leading figure of Cuba's San Isidro protest movement and one of *Time's* 100 Most Influential People in 2021, was arrested on his way to a Havana demonstration in July 2021 before being transferred, without a court hearing, to a maximum-security prison in Guanajay.

He has yet to receive a trial in the seven months since that incident, despite a Cuban law requiring prisoners be released after six months of detention, and his request to await a hearing at home has been denied.

Earlier this year, the artist-activist began starving himself in protest, and now the status of his health is a concerning mystery.

"There is little news about Luis, and what has emerged is not good at all," fellow artist Coco Fusco, who has been in close contact with Alcántara's family, told Artnet News. "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."

**coco fusco**  
@cocofusco1960

Recibimos tantas solicitudes para firmar la declaración "Deja vivir a Luis, mándalo a casa" que hicimos en una petición en línea. Para añadir su nombre, vaya a este sitio web:

change.org  
Can you spare a minute to help this campaign?  
Deja vivir a Luis, mándalo a casa/Let Luis Live, Send Him Home

5:30 PM · Feb 10, 2022

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This month, Fusco, along with activists Armando Chaguaceda, Yaxys Cires Dib, and Eloy Viera, published an open letter calling attention to Alcántara’s plight and urging foreign diplomats, European Parliament members, religious leaders, and others to demand the artist’s immediate release. The letter was turned into a petition on [Change.org](#) last week.

“Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara is a hostage of a government that acts with impunity,” the petition reads. “The only way to prevent his death is for the international community to unite with one voice and demand that Otero Alcántara be treated in accordance with international human rights standards. We must demand that the Cuban government send Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara home.”


“Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara has dedicated his life and his art to the Cuban people,” the petition concludes. “He should not have to sacrifice his life. The Cuban government cannot be allowed to rob him of his life.”



 **Secretary Antony Blinken**  @SecBlinken   
United States government official

Seven months after peacefully standing up for human rights and fundamental freedoms, [@LMOAlcantara](#) awaits a trial that never seems to come. His family fears for his life as his health declines--we call on the Cuban government to release Luis and all those unjustly detained.

9:37 AM · Feb 16, 2022 

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An outspoken voice for artistic freedom in Cuba, Alcántara has been arrested numerous times under Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel’s regime. This instance has garnered particular attention abroad, as Alcántara’s situation has come to symbolize that of hundreds of other Cubans who remain in prison or in judicial proceedings for their part in the July 2021 demonstrations.

This week, 20 such protestors—including five under the age of 18—were convicted on charges of sedition in the province of Holguín and handed down lengthy prison sentences, many for up to 20 years.

Several high-powered figures in the Biden administration have recently voiced their own support for Alcántara.

“Seven months after peacefully standing up for human rights and fundamental freedoms, [Alcántara] awaits a trial that never seems to come,” U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken tweeted this week. “His family fears for his life as his health declines—we call on the Cuban government to release Luis and all those unjustly detained.”

“Despite the efforts of the Cuban regime to silence him, [Alcántara] continues his peaceful stance for freedom of expression in Cuba,” said Brian A. Nichols, a U.S. ambassador for Latin America, in a post of his own. “The world must raise its voice and stand with him until he is released.”