Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara
November 5 - December 13, 2026
Foreign & Domestic, 24 Rutgers Street, New York
opening Thursday, November 5, 6-8pm

Foreign & Domestic is honored to announce Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara's solo exhibition *Tocar el cielo*. The exhibition features a series of oil pastel and graphite drawings made in Cuba's Guanajay prison, where Otero Alcántara served time as a political prisoner, between 2021 and 2026. Following nearly five years of imprisonment, Otero Alcántara arrived in the United States in July 2026, forced into exile. This is the artist's first exhibition in New York, and the first gallery exhibition of his prison drawings.

Before his incarceration, Otero Alcántara worked primarily through performance, sculpture, installation, and public intervention. His performances provoke established orders of power, freedom, politics, and representation in Cuba, achieving maximum visibility in public spaces and on social media. His methods, fundamentally collaborative, typically involve free movement of the body, and the amplification of voice, both singular and collective.

Pressed into silence and invisibility in a maximum-security prison, and sharing a confined space with violent offenders, Otero Alcántara presented his captors with an ultimatum: to let him die, or to let him draw, and live. The sheer quantity of works - in the thousands - attests to a relentless practice of drawing that occupied most waking moments for the duration of the artist's sentence.

A breath is drawn. Deprived of its public space, the performance turns inward, a sudden inhale into the confines of the mind. Otero Alcántara registers the energies of caged bodies and restless souls. His cell transforms into a swimming pool, with swans, a lounge chair, or a Christmas tree. An abyssal architecture of floating platforms, ropes and stairs. Portraits of friends, family and lovers living free outside the walls, inside the heart. The realities of life for inmates inside Guanajay: pain, fear, hunger, boredom, sex, violence, longing, the beauty of birds passing through the cages, humor, even. An extended series of clownish avatars portray shifting moods. Pastiches of famous paintings with erotically charged scenes. Small drawings on the backs of juice cartons and cigarette packets; larger works composed on paper sheets collaged into a grid. Richly calligraphic pages in blue ballpoint.

Then, an equally sudden exhale. The artist and the drawings are released into the world. Art as evidence. Drawing as performance. Silence and its odor. Can art draw breath, change the world and touch the sky?

"The work I made in prison is not something I could just throw away like a wet wipe. It's a commitment I have to the experiences of people who have no voice. It's my commitment to things that no one hears, to the person who stays inside, hoping that their story can be heard. It's a political commitment," *Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, interviewed by Coco Fusco in Artforum (July 2026)*

about the artist

Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara was arrested on July 11, 2021, as he was preparing to join the demonstrations taking place across Cuba. He was subsequently sentenced to five years in prison on charges of "contempt," "public disorder," and "insulting national symbols."

This sentence was the culmination of a pattern of state harassment of the artist, including up to 50 arrests, defamation, violation of privacy, a month-long incarceration in a hospital, and police beatings. Among other incidents, Otero Alcántara has been persecuted for organizing Havana's (unofficial) #00 Biennial (2018), and flouting Decree 349, also passed in 2018, which requires that artistic activity be authorized in advance by the Cuban Ministry of Culture. Otero Alcántara is a co-founder of the San Isidro Movement, an interdisciplinary group defending freedom of expression in Cuba. He was named a Time Most Influential Person in 2021 for his activism and received the inaugural Prince Claus Impact Award in 2022.

about the performance

Alongside this exhibition, Otero Alcántara will present a new participatory performance titled ***A los seres que no pude despedir con un beso. Ibae bayen tonu***. Combining the Spanish phrase for "To those beings to whom I could not bid farewell with a kiss" with a Yoruba phrase used to honor and bless the deceased in Cuba's syncretic Santería religion. The performance will last for 9 days, echoing Santería's traditional period of observing the dead.

Members of the Cuban diaspora are invited to participate by reciting the title phrase and naming loved ones they could not accompany in their final days because of imprisonment, exile, political violence, or travel and migration restrictions. These separations are compounded by restrictions on leaving or reentering Cuba, immigration rules that can jeopardize a return to one's country of residence, and the threat of persecution on the island. A los seres que no pude despedir con un beso expands on a voicemail Otero Alcántara recorded in prison, naming loved ones who died during his incarceration. Rooted in the experiences of Cuba and its diaspora, the work transforms the grief of an impossible farewell into a collective act of mourning, memory and resistance. The performance will be recorded.

Participants are invited to reverse a time on www.foreigndomestic.io