

## PARTING SHOT

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



A pedestrian strolls along the path near the West End Mooring Basin.

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

## ODDITY

*In Castro's Cuba, some pigs more equal than others*

Jailing of street artist has Orwellian feel

By ANDREA RODRIGUEZ  
Associated Press

HAVANA — The Cuban street artist known as El Sexto was freed this week after spending 10 months behind bars for attempting to set free in a public park two pigs painted with the names of the country's highest leaders.

International human rights groups called his case a vivid demonstration of how Cuba's harsh limits on free expression remain in full force despite its economic opening and detente with the United States.

Maldonado, 33, was arrested a week after the declaration of detente last year as he drove toward Havana's Central Park in a rented car with two pigs covered with green paint and the names Fidel and Raul in red, in mockery of Cuba's revolutionary leader Fidel Castro and his brother who has led the country since 2008.

## Untouchables

Until recently, Maldonado's case had drawn less attention than that of expatriate Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, who was briefly arrested and had her passport confiscated after she tried to convene a free speech forum in Cuba's Plaza of the Revolution shortly after Dec. 17. Bruguera has since had her passport returned and left Cuba.

But in recent months, Amnesty International and other human rights group began calling for Maldonado's release and describing his case as a test of Cuba's openness to dissent.

His detention showed that "there are some topics and themes that journalists and writers know they can't touch," said Elizardo Sanchez, head of Cuba's non-governmental Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation.

Maldonado told The Associated Press that he had been held without charge since Dec. 25 "simply because I made fun of the highest leaders of this revolution."



Desmond Boylan/AP Photo

Danilo Maldonado, better known as El Sexto, stands at the entrance of his home after being released from jail, in Havana, Cuba, Tuesday. Maldonado was freed after 10 months behind bars for attempting to release two pigs painted with the names of Raul and Fidel Castro, the country's current president and former leader.

## Swift and harsh condemnation

Cuba has been gradually loosening central control of the economy and allowing slightly more open discourse in state-run media and an art world that requires state approval for everything from gallery and theater space to permission to import materials.

The country's leaders remain sacrosanct however, and attempts at political organization or questioning of the country's single-party system are met with swift and harsh condemnation.

While never formally charged, Maldonado was accused of the crime of disrespect toward government officials, a violation that can bring a 1- to 3-year sentence under Cuban law.

"We are very happy to learn that in the end he is being freed," said Robin Guittard, Caribbean campaigner for Amnesty Inter-



Desmond Boylan/AP Photo

Maria Victoria Machado stands in her living room, wearing a T-shirt featuring a stencil image of her son Danilo Maldonado, better known as El Sexto, in Havana, Cuba.

national. "He's just an artist who tried to do an art show, to use his legitimate right to freedom of expression. That

should never lead people to be sent to prison. That's a very cold reminder of what's the situation of freedom of

expression today in Cuba."

## Creative dissent

In April, Maldonado re-

ceived the Vaclav Havel International Prize for Creative Dissent from the New York-based Human Rights Foundation.

"A government that doesn't let itself be criticized starts to lose credibility," said Maldonado's mother, Maria Victoria Machado.

Dressed in grey shorts, sneakers and a T-shirt, Maldonado munched a sandwich Tuesday afternoon as relatives, well-wishers and reporters began to fill his home.

"I want to now connect with the people that supported me," he said, telling the AP that he planned to request a visa for the United States and travel to Miami "to be close to people who think like I do, people in exile, who had to leave."

He said he planned to recover his strength and energy and return to Cuba after six months.