

Luis Camnitzer, *Portrait of the Artist*, 1991/2011. Fan, thread, and pencil. Installation view. Photo by Dominique Uldry.

Renato Rodrigues da Silva

El Instrumento y Su Obra

On Luis Camnitzer's Conceptualism

Between September 30 and December 4, 2011,¹ the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, staged a retrospective of works by Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer. Considering the local context in which this exhibition took place, Camnitzer's retrospective was an important step towards improving the visibility of artistic contributions from Latin America. Whereas various galleries in the city regularly produce exhibitions of work by contemporary Chinese and Indian artists (among other ethnicities), art by those who come from Latin America does not receive nearly the same attention.

Along with the Belkin Gallery, the Daros Latinamerica Collection in Zurich (which holds the largest collection of Camnitzer's works) organized this exhibition under the curatorship of Hans-Michel Herzog and Katrin Steffen. Together, they reviewed the artist's contribution to contemporary art and presented a selection of the proposals he developed since the mid 1960s, including designs for billboard works. Thus, *Landscape as an Attitude* (1979/2011) and *The Museum Is a School* (2010–11) were both recreated for the exhibition and mounted outside of the gallery, as was the installation *Arbitrary Objects and Their Titles* (1979/2011), which Herzog and Steffen sited in the Walter C. Koerner Library, the main library of the University of British Columbia. This retrospective presented an opportunity to make an assessment of the artist's overall practice. Based on the works shown, therefore, this article will analyze Camnitzer's notions of conceptualism, interdisciplinarity, and history, revealing some persistent issues in a career still in the making.²

Conceptualism

Upon first impression, the exhibition appeared to be a compilation of conceptual artworks, featuring the systematic presence of text, an emphasis

on concept as the works' *raison d'être*, a mixed media experimentation (including drawing, printmaking, and other media), and a focus on institutional matters linked to the expanded field of art. Such characteristics are not uncommon in conceptual art: Joseph Kosuth's *Painting as Idea* (1966), for example, privileged the literary definition of the medium in place of its visual form, which became outmoded for many American and European artists at the time. Initially, these artists asserted the dematerialization of art objects as a strategy to undermine their commercialization, privileging text above their works' material features in a dialectical move intended to supersede the history of art as image. Although many of Camnitzer's works involve text also, under closer scrutiny, his practice does not fit neatly into the history or genre of conceptual art.

In Camnitzer's exhibition, text fulfilled wholly different purposes, exemplified in *Living Room* (1969/2011). In this installation, the artist laid out a living room in words, inscribing the names of architectural elements and furniture in their correlative places, ironically suggesting the presence of functional objects where there are only labels. Because the labels describe the specific forms of objects, viewers could thus read names and imagine their forms concomitantly. In contrast to Kosuth's gesture towards dematerialization, which still belonged to the field of aesthetics, this work breaks down the limits between understanding and imagination, words and things, art and reality—it suggests an alternative to the notion of art as image, not just its reenactment under new principles, as it happened with conceptual art. Thus, instead of turning the image into text for passive reception by the viewer, Camnitzer's words encourage his or her imaginative participation in producing meaning.³

Camnitzer has named his approach to contemporary art "conceptualism," which he defined in opposition to conceptual art. Although the differences between the two movements might sometimes seem subtle, the artist distinguished them clearly, as follows: *During the heyday of conceptualism, while going through all the steps to pin down a message, both a mainstream conceptualist and a periphery conceptualist may have ended*

up with a scribble on a scrap of paper. Both scraps looked the same. But the information left on the scrap of the mainstream artist was, in most cases, about the information and the scrap itself; the information left on the scrap of the periphery artist was more often likely about the artist's surroundings.⁴ According to Camnitzer, the differences between conceptual art and conceptualism indicate the tautological foundation of the former and the contextual of the latter.⁵ He recognized that "mainstream artists" took advantage of a major historical shift in art-making during the 1960s—to introduce text in their proposals—as a way to overcome Minimalism but by still remaining within the modernist canon.⁶ By contrast, the use of text by peripheral conceptualists responded to specific social conditions and emphasized the reality that these artists often worked under adverse discursive, political, and economic circumstances. Against the systemic or endogenous logic of North Americans and Europeans, therefore, peripheral artists stressed the context over the concept of their work.⁷

Camnitzer's retrospective was so compelling because it highlighted the difference between conceptual art and conceptualism while it made evident the semantic displacements through which the artist used pure forms to address the context of the works, rejecting their self-referential characteristics. That the artist could have bridged the enormous ideological gap between these two productions from within New York—a city where he has lived since the mid 1960s—is an outstanding feat, which, therefore, requires detailed analysis, as his strategy offers one example of the Latin American struggle for artistic emancipation from the international market and the tendency to overvalue apolitical practices and discourses in that milieu.

In Camnitzer's exhibition at the Belkin, *The Journey* (1991) exemplified the differences between conceptual art and conceptualism. The work consists of three knives protruding from the gallery wall into the viewer's space, each knife with a pair of Christmas ornaments hanging from its base. The artist also etched the names "Santa Maria," "Pinta," and "Niña" on the lower part of both sides of the blades, which hang at eye

level. A formalist analysis might posit the work within a post-Minimalist tradition for it presents a series of industrial elements: articulated geometric shapes (in this case, the open curves of the blades resonate with the spheres of the ornaments), sleek metal surfaces, interference in actual space, and, finally, text. In this reading, therefore, *The Journey* does not bear any significant reference to a social context.

Despite this interpretation, it is impossible not to consider the symbolic content of Camnitzer's piece. In fact, the structures resemble three threatening phalli, the ornaments make reference to Christmas, and the text names Christopher Columbus's famous ships, which he first sailed to America in 1492. When read beyond its form, the work puts into conversation the History of Discoveries (i.e., the age of maritime exploration), Columbus's ships (i.e., the expansionist project of Europe), the Americas (i.e., the riches of the continent), and Christianity (i.e., the "sacred" reason behind Spanish exploration), and violence, which the knives threaten. Based on a contextual reading, therefore, *The Journey* critically denounces the male chauvinistic and bloody dominance of the New World, specifying the political powers that founded it—a dominance that shaped the cultural forms that continue to influence our daily routines in the Americas.

The artist's life may explain his interest in politics. After growing up in Uruguay, Camnitzer was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship to study printmaking in New York in 1964. He has remained in the United States ever since, although living emotionally and culturally as an expatriate. This in-between position is analogous to his practice, which does not fit comfortably within any movement or genre but his own. During the initial period he spent in New York, his research was influenced by politics and he took political positions that were familiar to the generation that dreamed about Latin American emancipation after the 1959 Cuban Revolution, supporting the Tupamaros, an urban-guerilla movement that rebelled against military dictatorship in his home country, even though some of their actions had resulted in death.⁸ At the time, Camnitzer decided

to make politics through his art, denying any distance between the two practices.⁹

Despite the artist's well-known engagement with politics, there were not many pieces dealing with this subject in the Belkin retrospective. Regardless, the few included gave eloquent voice to his concerns. *Silence/Repression* (1976)—which displays two sentences: "silence: repression is taking over" and "repression: silence is taking over"—makes allusion to the complicity necessary in the establishment of any system of power, and stops short of accusing the military dictatorship in Uruguay, which made its leaders "disappear" during that time. It is important to mention, however, that the political emphasis of his work has varied from decade to decade. Although it was strong in the 1960s and 1970s, the pressures of the New York market to commercialize discrete art objects influenced Camnitzer, who temporarily abandoned an overtly political approach. In the last two decades, however, the artist has tackled political problems once again, understanding that this engagement differentiated his conceptualist production from conceptual art.

In the Belkin exhibition, *Twin Towers* (2002) and *King of Hearts* (2002) represented two recent pieces that evince his return to political questions. The former comprises two playing cards placed side by side on a plinth, echoing the same vertical positions of the World Trade Center skyscrapers, allegedly destroyed by Osama bin Laden's terrorist organization in 2001. The work alludes to a dangerous game in which the United States has waged a retaliatory war on terrorism, ultimately to become losing battles in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, *King of Hearts* recasts important leaders of Iraq as traditional figures from a card deck. Unexpectedly, Camnitzer also includes himself in the set. He occupies the role of "artist," standing in for the king of hearts in an indistinct profile, unveiling that he, too, is implicated within the current campaign in the country. But how is it possible that the artist sees himself involved in the war waged by the United States? Indeed, it is this gesture of self-criticism that underlies his work's relationship to a larger geopolitical context, in which he takes some moral responsibility for himself.

Interdisciplinarity and Problem-solving

The works discussed so far disclose Camnitzer's awareness of mystifications and distortions operating within the field of art, paying special attention to its political and economic relations. Thus, it is not surprising that instead of concentrating exclusively on earning a living through his artwork he worked as an art teacher at various schools in the greater New York region, specifically at the State University of New York at Old Westbury, where he is Emeritus Faculty today. Significantly, he does not see a separation between the work of an artist and that of a teacher, since "there is no difference between teaching and doing art or writing, . . . I would say that they are all art, [they] just happened in different media."¹⁰ Investigating his ideas on both teaching and writing can, therefore, help to understand his overall practice.

With hindsight, it is possible to see that Camnitzer's work developed artistically more through writing than through finished objects. Around the time he created his first conceptualist work entitled *This Is a Mirror: You Are a Written Sentence* (1966–68), which was presented at the Belkin, he decided that *instead of providing results, [he] would provide processes, which would turn the viewer into a producer instead of a consumer. The boundaries between creation and education would disappear, and the possession of the work would become meaningless since it would take place through reading.*¹¹ Accordingly, this crossing of disciplinary boundaries represented a great departure from traditional art education, which was anchored in the notion of specialization. Based also on the realization that with "the slightest mark on a sheet of paper with a pencil, (one) was irrevocably altering the order of the universe,"¹² the artist created a new pedagogy that could connect the student to society and, eventually, to the world at large.

Camnitzer's interdisciplinary program called for the formulation of an appropriate methodology. In an interview realized in 2009, the artist dismissed the individual importance of the many roles (i.e., "author, artist, essayist, educational theorist, critic, curator, and general thinker") he has had in his career. For him, all these activities

are interconnected as art: *There are some problems that are best resolved in a photograph, there are others that are best resolved in a discussion; others require a letter, because the people are further away, and then you have to think of what is the best form: by mail if it's private, or trying to publish it in a journal if it's not private. That's how all the things you mentioned come together, but the nucleus that organizes it is the other part, which is really what counts. It is critical questioning and the search of alternative orders that defines art in the best sense.*¹³ In this view, art is a non-specialized activity that moves across and draws from various disciplines and procedures. However, Camnitzer's interdisciplinary practices required a new method, and he made all efforts to avoid those idealist formulations that characterized early-twentieth-century art, which considered art as an abstract entity. Thus, he proceeded according to the circumstances, trying to solve the problems at hand, since he knew that each solution involved limited actions, as demonstrated in the examples mentioned above (e.g., photography, discussion, letter, and publication). His much-praised inventiveness, knowledge of the visual arts, and mastery of drawing were only means to formulate specific solutions as distinct modes of address.¹⁴ As the passage above makes clear, the relevant factor in the artist's career was the production of that "critical questioning and the search for alternative orders that defines art in the best sense."

The problem-solving approach to contemporary art was, indeed, already present in his experimentation in the mid 1960s, at least tentatively. Along with artists José Guillermo Castillo and Liliana Porter, he created the New York Graphic Workshop. In time, members of the Workshop abandoned craftsmanship to create multiples through printmaking, activating a strategy of "deskilling."¹⁵ In the Belkin retrospective, *Envelope* (1967) was an example of this period's investigations. Camnitzer responded to recent developments in North American art, establishing an opposition to Minimalism, whose corporate aesthetics he particularly rejected. To reformulate his research, therefore, he began using words, but also placed the political emphasis of his earlier proposals into brackets, defining a practice that was

similar to conceptual art for the time being. After that moment, his experiments became increasingly interdisciplinary, delineating an independent course of action.

In *Envelope*, Camnitzer aimed at solving a specific problem. He repeated a single drawing several times, but each time titled it differently. The drawing depicts a receding, box-like space in accordance with the laws of perspective: it is indeed the simplest embodiment of this procedure, and has been used to regulate representational figures in painting since the Renaissance.¹⁶ Because the drawing remains constant, the artist actually investigates the semantic variations of each utterance, almost as if he were learning to use a word by experimenting with its meanings. Whether the titles are self-reflexive (grid, painting, screen) or empirical (box, room, roof, tunnel), they all reiterate the use of perspective. Thus, the specific problem at hand was to define the semantic variations that this visual procedure could produce or allow. As he was scrutinizing the relationship between the image and its designations, however, he noticed that the drawing might also represent an envelope, which is flat by definition. In naming the work after this object, the artist deconstructs perspective, revealing that its symbolic power to represent depth is not intrinsic, but depends on defined discursive conditions.

During the 1970s, Camnitzer further developed this empirical method, creating a series of fifty boxes that contain visual, material, and linguistic elements. Without presenting any explicit political concerns, these works continue the artist's interest in finding specific solutions to particular problems. In one such box, *Woman Looking At* (1974), a photograph shows a woman looking downward, presumably scrutinizing something that is not represented within the image. A list of the possible objects located within her gaze ("an apple, an accident though the window, her drying fingernails, a pornographic magazine, an embroidered pillow, a screaming crowd, a grease spot on a checkered tablecloth, a telephone ringing, and Eisenstein's face for approval") accompanies the photo. The woman's facial expression offers the only clue as to what she might be looking at. However, any attempts to determine

the unrepresented object among the list of options only produce subjective variations on the image, which are all unverifiable. Therefore, Camnitzer's *Woman Looking At* is rather skeptical, considering that "knowledge must always be in question and that inquiry must be a process of doubting."¹⁷

Despite this work, one should not make a hasty conclusion. Whereas classical thought based action on knowledge (which means that without understanding the world, one could not consistently act in society),¹⁸ the box series shows that, for Camnitzer, skepticism does not necessarily imply inactivity. In *El Instrumento y Su Obra* (1976), for example, a pencil creates a line that literally ties up the frame and traverses the restricted space of the box. In this instance, the artist formulated the following question: What can be done with a pencil? His response was straightforward, but was also based on the use of an actual rope to represent the line, as a way of overemphasizing the material characteristics of the artistic elements—and this response is reiterated in the title, which translates into English as "the tool and its work."¹⁹ As a result, this box unveils a materialistic view on art practice, which is inherently political.

Camnitzer formulated this perspective clearly: *my relations with materials and tools were also important because I regarded the pencil as a colleague and not as a slave. I learned to communicate with things that I used in a more horizontal way and that, in turn, filled me in on politics.*²⁰ This declaration seems contradictory when one considers the self-contained features of *El Instrumento y Su Obra*, but ultimately his proposals should be understood as resulting from a constant "expansion" towards new practices and disciplines,²¹ an expansion that is political by nature, even if unconsciously promoted by the artist. In this sense, although he had put politics into brackets during this period, the box series would later prove to support his renewed interest in this approach to contemporary art.

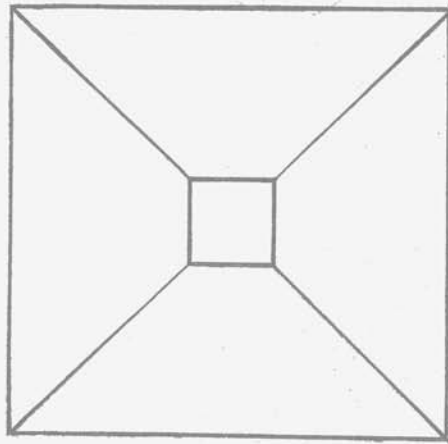
In the mid 1970s, Camnitzer began investigating the institutional characteristics of artwork. Many projects shown within the Belkin exhibition featured the artist's written signature, alluding to that quantum of indivisible expressivity that inevitably testifies to the authenticity and originality of a work. Contrary to standard measures

of an artist's value, in *Signature by the Inch* (1971), Camnitzer quantifies the commercial worth of his signature in terms of its measured length. Dividing the work into pieces, he then made *Fragments of a Signature to Be Sold by Centimeters* (1972), later joining the original and its copy in *Copy* (1972), and, finally, creating a watermarked object (a kind of personalized loaf of bread) known as *Signature to Be Sold by the Slice and by Weight* (1971–73) and *Signature by the Slice* (1971/2007). In these works, the artist's signature is presented in order to denounce the commercial mystifications of the market—but this gesture does not reveal all sides of the problem since Camnitzer understands this series in a more complex fashion, suggesting that his works are similar to stock-market shares, through which everyone (including himself) places a bet based on "speculation."²²

In addition, proposals such as *Added Value* (1979) and *Original Wall Painting* (1972/2010) deconstruct other sources of value within the market. In the former, Camnitzer asked various Colombian artists to touch a glove, declaring, "as in all things of the art market, the value of the glove will increase due to the contact with the artist's hands."²³ Thus, the final price of the work resulted from their own "touch," the artists'. In the latter work, he examines labour, comparing the price of one section of a wall painted by a housepainter with another painted by him. To proceed with this comparison, the installation exhibited two invoices: whereas the labour market defined the value of the first section, the cost of the second was arbitrarily increased by more than one hundred times, due to the fact that it was done by the artist's hand. Ironically, the first wall presented a better finishing, since it resulted from professional work—and the institutional setting of the Belkin gallery underscored the semantic variations of this word.²⁴

History

Camnitzer's keen understanding of the economic games played within the field of art reflects an engagement with the art market. Indeed, given the variations of his practice over five decades, the

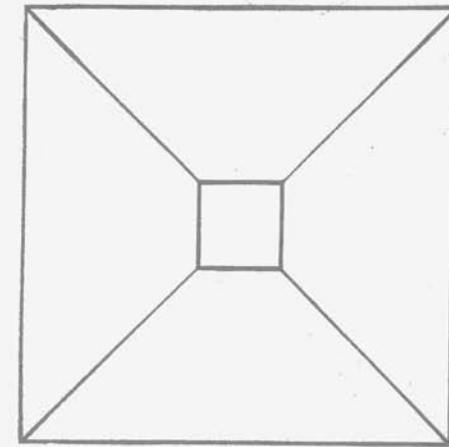


PAINTING

a.p.

Luis Camnitzer

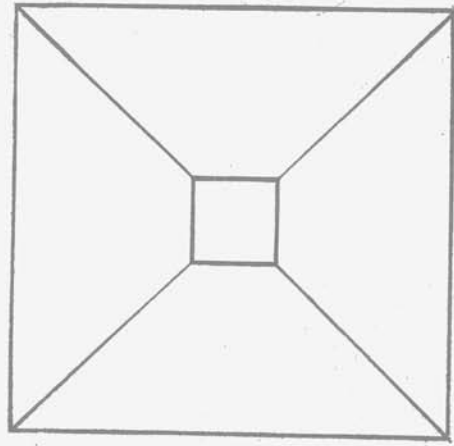
70-73. Luis Camnitzer, Envelope, 1967.
Series of ten etchings with rubber stamp
ink on paper. 41 x 34.5 cm. Courtesy of
Alexander Gray Associates, New York.



WINDOW

a.p.

Luis Camnitzer

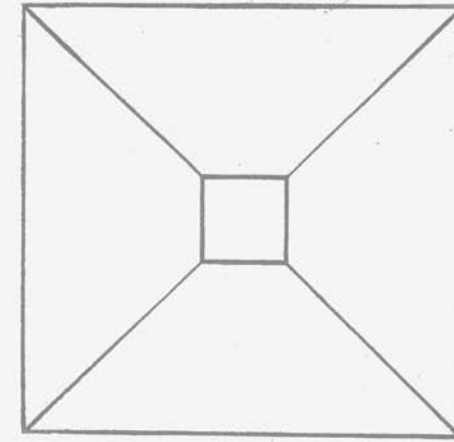


BOX

a.p.

Luis Camnitzer 67

70-73. Luis Camnitzer, Envelope, 1967.
Series of ten etchings with rubber stamp
ink on paper. 41 x 34.5 cm. Courtesy of
Alexander Gray Associates, New York.



ENVELOPE

a.p.

Luis Camnitzer 67

artist's work indicates, to differing degrees, the influence of New York's commercial art world on his career. Exhibiting at both Paula Cooper and Marian Goodman galleries conversely attests to the influence he has had on it. Although the artist did not sell any of the work that he exhibited at these galleries, he felt a certain promotional pressure by showing there. He explains: "at the same time I criticized the system I also wanted to be rich and famous, and that doesn't work very well."²⁵ Despite such internal conflicts, Camnitzer's art reveals an acknowledgement of the economic forces of the art market—such as those that promote the production and the selling of discrete objects—and an attempt to neutralize such forces.

From the 1980s onwards, he slowly but resolutely reintroduced politics into his work. Besides the box series, his experiments focusing on the observer's act of reading, institutional matters, and the processes that designate economic value, have, in reality, prepared the foundation for his more recent and openly political pieces.²⁶ Through a problem-solving approach, the artist has realized a fundamental element of his practice—the direct involvement of the observer. In the installation *Arbitrary Objects and Their Titles*, he arbitrarily combined twenty small objects with twenty titles, which were written down on small pieces of paper, eschewing any correlative order, so that the visitors could make their own interpretative trajectories. Defined by his attempt to bring the act of reading to the centre of the work without any pamphlet or description as guides, this work gives the viewer the ability to co-construct the work's meaning along with the artist.

Such an emphasis on readership—instead of writing—is also political. Nonetheless, despite the artist's best efforts to politicize his work, he soon noticed that his output had entered into the art historical canon through a misreading and, consequently, his practice had been downgraded, as it came to be understood as derivative of conceptual art.²⁷ In the Belkin retrospective, the work *Compass* (2003) criticized the axiological reasoning that supports the canon, distilling an irony against the arbitrary separation between North American and European art on the one hand, and that of the remainder of the world on the other. Based on the

structure of metaphor, the artist switches the terms of two oppositions (i.e., East versus West, and Worst versus Best), changing the objective system of the compass, to introduce the word "Best" in the place of "West." Now, if the West is equated with the Best, the East—and the rest of the world, for that matter—is consequently identified with the Worst, and these identifications criticize the double standard at work in the predominant evaluation of so-called peripheral art.

To correct the misinterpretation of his artistic efforts, Camnitzer frequently took on various roles, including curator, art historian, and critic. Although he has written critical texts throughout his career, this activity became particularly intense during the last decade or so in order to create a conceptual framework for the reception of his works, which should be read in accordance with its inherent political parameters. Indeed, Camnitzer's writing and curatorial practices provided other opportunities for his application of the problem-solving methodology. Along with other scholars and curators, he first formulated the distinction between conceptual art and conceptualism, as already discussed. And, through the exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, staged at the Queens Museum, New York, in 1999,²⁸ consisting of conceptualist productions from all over the world, this distinction was definitively established for the record and for further scholarship.

The distinction between conceptual art and conceptualism, however, disclosed two other misunderstandings. In fact, both misunderstandings inform the artistic canon and should be deconstructed, otherwise the politicization of Camnitzer's art production might get lost. In the first place, current scholarship suggests a false opposition between a highly concentrated artistic activity in the United States and Europe, which favours formalist and self-referential approaches to art, and the dispersion of practices on the outskirts. In the last analysis, however, this false opposition was anchored in a more fundamental distortion, which is articulated between those countries that have art history on the one hand, and those from the periphery that, supposedly, do not have any on the other. To deconstruct the

"order versus chaos" and the "history versus non-history" oppositions, the artist wrote a book on conceptualism, formulating alternative parameters.

In *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*, Camnitzer used the good-humoured metaphors of *salpicón* (medley) and *compota* (sweetmeats) to replace the linear perspective of the canon that disseminates the idea of a neat, art-historical teleology in which events flow one after the other in one direction. Thus, medley is a form of identifying shared postures, primarily in the context of underdeveloped areas versus developed centres, respecting the different sequence of events and the speed this context generates. *Compota*, on the other hand, is a good image to describe the adjustments, the acquisition of density, and the turning process these splashes underwent through cooking, to finally lead to a more scholarly term like *Latin American Conceptualism*.²⁹ For the artist, "cooking" represents the qualitative leap that transforms the nature of historic events. In objective terms, he was intrinsically deconstructing the idea that art has evolved in a linear process from cubism to conceptual art in the United States and Europe. Metaphor by metaphor, he preferred medley and sweetmeats to an arrow-shaped model of time. Through these images, however, he proposes a new model for art history, which results from pluralist processes that are simultaneously synchronic and diachronic, and include geographic heterogeneities.

Through disciplinary cross-pollination, Camnitzer comments on this theoretical endeavour in *Fenster* (2002–11), which has been shown several times and became a permanent installation at the Belkin. It is located at the end of the gallery's main corridor, consisting of a section of the lateral wall, whose bricks were replaced by books that filled the span of a window (window being the translation of the German word *Fenster*); the books are on multiple subjects, such as literature, art history, philosophy, poetry, etc. The installation belongs to a series of works that Camnitzer created to focus on the notion of history, including *Lecture on Art History* (2000), which was presented at the Casa de América in Madrid, where he placed ten slide projectors on pedestals made of disposable materials, with the objective of projecting the light frames of empty slides on the walls,

floor, and ceiling of the gallery. In *Fenster*, on the other hand, the artist overcomes this "cynical" response to the problem of history in a more positive fashion.³⁰

Here, the artist uses the window as a well-known metaphor for perspective.³¹ Besides representing objects in space, this procedure promotes the perception of culture as a distinct object in history, allowing for the understanding of the Renaissance as the rebirth (or repetition) of classical culture. In this sense, the invention of perspective enabled the traditional notion of history that eventually typified interpretations of Western art.³² In *Fenster*, however, the artist not only blocks spatial perspective literally, he also—and perhaps more importantly—subverts its historicist parameters, favouring the organization of a pluralist system, which is as varied as the subjects of the books incorporated into his work. For Camnitzer, indeed, history results from an all-inclusive and open process.³³

About the Author

Renato Rodrigues da Silva holds a PhD in art history from the University of Texas at Austin. He has written largely on contemporary Brazilian art, publishing articles in *Third Text*, *Leonardo Journal*, *Word & Image*, and *Border Crossings*, among others. He is currently writing a book on neoconcretism for the University of Texas Press. He is also a curator and recently organized the 10th Northwest Biennial for the Tacoma Art Museum.

[Notes](#) begin on page 151.

Labor, and many affinity groups and collectives that are often composed of artists, art workers, and other art professionals. The movement has thus always been informed by the art community with which it forms a complex matrix of participation and influence. 37. Consider also experiments such as the Public School (<http://fillip.ca/wb2o>), or YouTube's "Expert Village," or the whole culture of the free online tutorial. 38. For more on the problems of many collaborative, relational practices see Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and It's Discontents," *Artforum*, February 2006. Available online at <http://fillip.ca/1bsn>. 39. For this ethical call and more of OWS's relation to contemporary art, see Erin Sickler, "Art and the 99%," *Art in America*, January 2012, <http://fillip.ca/7yb8>. 40. The VIP Art Fair did in fact hold an open call and awarded a prize. The competition, however—though it was online—was only open to a list of "over 50 of the top MFA programs in the world." As the prize money is split with the institution, it also sets up a complex and problematic relationship between the art academy and the art market/art fair where one seamlessly bleeds into the other.

Pages 49–55

Jesi Khadivi
Artmoreorless

1. According to Arthur C. Danto, each generation possesses a distinct attitude or *mentalité*, and he defines the *mentalité* of the late 1960s as one of revulsion directed against the Vietnam War. Gronk and Gamboa echo this sentiment in interviews and each draws explicit links between their activism and their disgust with violent conflicts in their own neighbourhoods and around the world. Gronk recalls: "a lot of our friends were coming home in body bags and were dying, and we were seeing a whole generation come back that weren't alive anymore. And in a sense that gave us nausea...that is *Asco*, in a way." See C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, eds. C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 40. 2. While conceptual performances

formed the bulk of *Asco's* collective activities, each artist developed and maintained an individual practice spanning illustration, painting, muralism, and publishing. The group's collective activity grew out of their collaboration on the Chicano journal *Regeneración*, a political and literary magazine founded in the early 1900s by the Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon, which Harry Gamboa Jr. helped to revive as an editor in 1971. This collaboration marked the first of many projects, both as a foursome and with a rotating cast of collaborators that included Terry Sandoval, Humberto Sandoval, and Jerry Greva, among others. Like many loosely articulated artist collectives, the group shifted between more and less formal modes of production, ranging from spontaneous street performances to carefully scripted theatre pieces. 3. After a curator at the LACMA allegedly told Gamboa that Chicanos "don't make fine art, they make folk art," the members of *Asco* sought retribution by spray painting their names on the side of the building. The spray paint remained for no more than a day and very few photos of the intervention exist. 4. Performance scholar Peggy Phelan argues that a performance is a singular event and changes in its reproduction or documentation, while both Amelia Jones and Phillip Auslander claim that documentation provides an access point to a performed work and thus forms an integral part of a performance. In his essay "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," Auslander differentiates between two forms of performance documentation/residue: the documentary and the theatrical, arguing that "theatrical documentation" is a performance in and of its own right, since the audience is met not via live encounter, but through the image itself. See Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *Performance Art Journal*, no. 84 (2006), 1–10; Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance and Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997) 11–18; and Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993). 5. The Chicano Moratorium was a political anti-war activist group that organized a broad coalition of Chicano Americans to protest against the Vietnam War. On August 29, 1970, a riot broke out during a protest organized by the Chicano Moratorium, and police

injured a hundred and fifty people and killed four, including award-winning Spanish language journalist and columnist for the *LA Times* Rubén Salazar. Accounts differ regarding whether the protestors or police instigated the rioting. See George Mariscal, *Aztlán and Viet Nam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

6. Gamboa describes this performance in *Gronk*: "On December 24, 1971, Herrón, Gronk, and Gamboa arrived unannounced on the corner of Eastern Avenue and Whittier Boulevard. Herrón was the representation of Christ/Death, dressed in a white robe that bore a brightly coloured Sacred Heart, which he painted in acrylic. His face had been transformed by makeup into a stylized *calavera*. Gronk personified Pontius Pilate (aka Popcorn): he wore a green bowler hat, flaunted an excessively large beige fur purse, and carried a bag of unbuttered popcorn. Gamboa assumed the role of a zombie altar boy and wore an animal skull headpiece to ward off unsolicited communion." Harry Gamboa Jr. quoted in Max Benavidez, *Gronk* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center, 2007), 41. 7. Harry Gamboa Jr., "Against the Wall: Remembering the Chicano Moratorium," *East of Borneo*, November 16, 2010, <http://fillip.ca/wjm9>. 8. Amelia Jones and Tracey Warr, *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon Press, 2006), 43. 9. For more detail see C. Ondine Chavoya, "Internal Exiles: The Interventionist Public and Performance Art of *Asco*," in *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, ed. Erika Suderburgh (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 196. 10. José Esteban Muñoz, *Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 11. C. Ondine Chavoya, "Orphans of Modernism: The Performance Art of *Asco*," *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (New York: Routledge, 1999), 224. 12. Amelia Jones, "Traitor Prophets: Art of the In-between," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 116. 13. Richard Meyer and Michelle Kuo (moderators), "LA Stories: A Roundtable Discussion," *Artforum*, October 2011, <http://fillip.ca/zgk2>. 14. See Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*

(Cambridge: MIT Press), 2004.

15. "Asco's No Movies," *Unframed: The LACMA Blog*, published November 9, 2011, <http://fillip.ca/a40f>. 16. Gregory Sholette, "Dark Matter, Activist Art and the Counter Public Sphere," in *Anti-Catalogue #01*, ed. Amish Morrell (Sligo: The Model, 2010), 64. 17. The exhibition also included sketches for issues of *Regeneración*, a journal that Gamboa, Gronk, Valdez, and Herrón collaborated on, and which also lead to *Asco's* formation.

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Walid Sadek and Mayssa Fattouh
Tranquility Is Made in Pictures

1. Walid Sadek, *Love Is Blind*, in *Out of Beirut*, curated by Suzanne Cotter, Modern Art Oxford, March 13–July 16, 2006. 2. See for instance Sarah Rogers, "Forging History, Performing Memory: Walid Ra'ad's the Atlas Group" in *Parachute 108* (2002), 68–79, and Jalal Toufic, *Distracted*, 2nd ed. (Willits, CA: Tuumba Press, 2003), 82–92. 3. Moustafa Farroukh (1901–1957), a Lebanese painter and essayist, graduated from the Royal College of Fine Arts in Rome in 1927. He returned to Lebanon in 1932 and led a successful career primarily as a portraitist. Next to his autobiography titled *Tariki Ilal Fen* (My path to art) (Beirut: Institute Nawfal, 1986), his most significant essays are published in *Al fen Wal Hayat* (Art and life) (Beirut: Dar El Ilm Lilmalayin, 1967) and *Rihla Ila Bilad Al Majd Al Mafkoud* (Journey to the land of lost glory) (first published in 1932 by Dar Al Kashaf, Beirut, and then in a second edition in 1982 by Dar Al Moufid, Beirut). 4. See for instance *La Rose de Personne*, video, 10 minutes, 2000, and the feature film *Le dernier homme* (The last man), 100 minutes, 2006. 5. Walid Sadek, *On the Labour of Missing/The Wreck of Hope*, in *Seeing Is Believing*, curated by Susanne Pfeffer, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, September 11–November 13, 2011. 6. Simon El Habre, *The One Man Village*, 86 minutes, 2008. 7. Walid Sadek, *Place at Last*, solo exhibition, Beirut Art Center, January 28–April 9, 2010. 8. Paul Indari, *Al Jabal: haqiqa la tarham* (The mountain: an unmerciful truth), 6th ed. (2008), 144.

9. Joseph Saadeh, *Ana al dahiyya wal jallad ana* (I am the victim and the executioner am I) (Beirut: Dar Al Jadid, 2005), 96.

10. Youssef El Howayyek (1883–1962) was a Lebanese sculptor and, most notably, the author of the first martyrs' monument inaugurated in Beirut on September 2, 1930, and removed in May 1951. 11. Ziad Abillama, *Where Are We?*, installation on the Antelias seashore, north of Beirut, 1992. 12. Walid Sadek, *Half-Man*, in *First Sanayeh Garden Art Meeting*, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut, summer 1995. 13. See my "Al Taraf al Thaleth" in the cultural supplement of the Beirut daily *Annahar*, November 14, 1998, 6–8. 14. It is named this in reference to the private company Solidère delegated by the government of the late prime minister Rafic Hariri for the reconstruction of the Beirut city centre and its coastal extensions. 15. Walid Sadek, "Peddling Time while Standing Still; Art Remains in Lebanon and the Globalization that Was," in *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (London: Blackwell, 2011), 43–55. 16. Rania Stephan, *Bint Jbeil*, video, 2 minutes, 2006. 17. Walid Sadek, "Collecting the Uncanny and the Labor of Missing," in *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World*, eds. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John Pedro Schwartz (Ashgate, forthcoming, 2012). 18. The Taif Accord is the name given to the Charter of National Concord signed by Lebanese parliamentarians at Taif, Saudi Arabia, on October 22, 1989, and later approved on November 5 by the Lebanese parliament at a general meeting held at Qulayat military base in Lebanon. It allegedly signalled the end of the Lebanese civil war. 19. See Walid Sadek, "In the Presence of the Corpse," in a special issue of *Third Text*, entitled "Not, Not Arab," edited by Walid Sadek (July 2012). 20. Heinrich Zimmer, *The King and the Corpse: Tales of the Soul's Conquest of Evil*, 2nd ed., Bollingen Series 11, ed. Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 202–35.

Pages 64–75

Renato Rodrigues da Silva
El Instrumento y Su Obra

1. This is not the first time the Belkin Gallery has organized exhibitions of contemporary Latin American art. In 2005, the show *Certain Encounters* displayed works by twenty-one well-known artists from this region. Moreover, from 2005 to 2007, Michèle Faguet, then Director/Curator of the Or Gallery, notably presented work by many contemporary Latin American artists. Hopefully, the Belkin retrospective will renew interest in art from the Americas in Vancouver. 2. Predominantly, there are three distinct moments in Camnitzer's career: the first is defined by the political approach of the 1960s and early 1970s, the second by the production of discrete, self-contained art objects of the 1970s, and the last moment by his emphatic return to politics in the 1980s onwards, a phase that unfolded from his earlier interest in institutional critique. It is important to mention, however, that this classification only depicts a trend-based scenario, since the artist often overlapped different productions at the same time. 3. In the Belkin exhibition, Camnitzer's work *Circunferencia* (1973) also presented the same characteristics. 4. Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 261. 5. According to Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, tautology defined conceptual art since the early 1960s. See "Conceptual Art 1962–69: From an Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October*, no. 55 (Winter 1990), 105–43. In the case mentioned by Camnitzer, the tautology may be verified in the redoubling of information provided by language, since the text inscribed on the scrap of paper reiterates the latter's formal and physical characteristics. 6. In this passage, Camnitzer's expressions "mainstream conceptualist" and "mainstream artist" make specific reference to the New York artists who created conceptual art in the 1960s. Indeed, the term "mainstream"—as used in expressions such as "mainstream artist," "mainstream conceptual art," "mainstream art history," "mainstream system," etc.—is widespread in Latin Americanist art criticism, and particularly in Camnitzer's texts, defining that

“other” with which his works established a privileged dialogue.

7. Camnitzer focused on the notion of politics to differentiate conceptualism from conceptual art. For him, a political work has the capacity to address its context directly.

8. The Tupamaros's internal debate about whether violence was a necessary revolutionary means defined the initial phase of this organization (1967–71), when Dan Mitrione was kidnapped and executed by one of its members since the Uruguayan military government refused to negotiate his exchange for political prisoners. Mitrione was a former chief of police in the United States who had been assigned to go both to Brazil and Uruguay to instruct local military personnel about torture and political safety techniques. See Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 44–59.

9. The artist had another important reason to support the Tupamaros: this organization was closer to art (or theatre) than any other political movement, the same way that the Argentinean Tucumán Arde was closer to politics than any other art movement.

10. “Interview with Conceptual Artist Luis Camnitzer by Sabine Trieloff,” YouTube, posted July 18, 2010, <http://fillip.ca/goa4>.

11. Luis Camnitzer, “Chronology,” in *Luis Camnitzer*, eds. Hans-Michael Herzog and Katrin Steffen, exhibition catalogue (Zurich: Daros Latinoamericana, AG, 2010), 17.

12. *Ibid.*, 22.

13. Luis Camnitzer, “Hans-Michael Herzog in Conversation with Luis Camnitzer,” *Luis Camnitzer*, 43–44. Herzog provided the list of activities mentioned in the text.

14. According to Camnitzer: “My thought process is less ‘Oh, now I’m going to make a print, now I’m going to write an article’ than ‘This problem interests me at this moment, I’m going to try to solve it. What is the best way to do so?’” *Ibid.*, 44.

15. The notion of “deskilling” means the “persistent effort to eliminate artisanal competence and other forms of manual virtuosity from the horizon of both artistic production and aesthetic evaluation.” Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 531.

16. On perspective, see Erwin Panofsky,

Perspective as Symbolic Form (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1997).

17. Victoria Neufeldt and David B. Guaralnik, eds., *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* (New York: Webster’s New World, 1995), 1256. The fragmentary nature of the title *Woman Looking At* also provides an important clue to understand this work, since Camnitzer refers to the existence of an object that remains unknown.

18. Plato’s dialectic founded classical thought, arguing that the definition of the identity of concepts was the first step towards the knowledge of truth, and, therefore, the foundation of any political action. See Plato, *The Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

19. Once again, it is productive to compare Camnitzer’s work with Joseph Kosuth’s *Painting as Idea*. Whereas the former artist developed a practical investigation, which focused on the artistic tool at hand, the latter’s proposal was tautological, suggesting that artistic means were unnecessary.

20. Camnitzer, “Hans-Michael Herzog in Conversation with Luis Camnitzer,” 41.

21. According to a critic, in Camnitzer’s art there is a “constant fluctuation between education and creativity, ‘boundaries’ and transgression, doing and thinking, learning and acting. Fooling around, therefore, the space of creativity, must be powered with disparate intellectual fuels from the realms of literature, music, philosophy, politics, and the economy, if the concept of art, and with its range of contents and strategies, is to be expanded across the spectrum.” Michael Glasmeier, “The Gracián–Cervantes Impulse,” in *Luis Camnitzer*, 170.

22. According to the artist, “I printed the image of a ruler, signed above it, and wrote down the expenditure. These speculations also made me realize that the future buyers of my art were working with my money from the moment I was making the work to the moment they paid it. So the buyers should not only pay me the actual price, but also the interest corresponding to the time they had waited to buy.” Camnitzer, “Chronology,” 22.

23. My translation. The Colombian artists that took part in Camnitzer’s proposal were Jim Amaral, Olga Amaral, Felisa Burszty, Juan Cárdenas, Santiago Cárdenas, Beatriz González, Enrique Grau, Ana Mercedes Hoyos, Edgar Negret, Eduardo Ramírez, and

Carlos Rojas.

24. See “Luis Camnitzer Interviewed by Scott Watson,” YouTube, posted October 3, 2011, <http://fillip.ca/uxh4>. In the Belkin retrospective, whereas the house painter charged CAD\$4,448.00, the artist increased the value of his work to CAD\$59,782.00. These prices, however, fluctuate in accordance with each exhibition venue.

25. Camnitzer, “Hans-Michael Herzog in Conversation with Luis Camnitzer,” 34. The artist exhibited at Paula Cooper Gallery in 1970 and 1971 and at the Marian Goodman Gallery in 1978, revealing that, during this decade, his work was characterized by the contradiction between his critical approach to experimentation on the one hand and his attempt to fit New York art world expectations on the other.

26. Some of Camnitzer’s political pieces focus specifically on the problems of torture in Uruguay. The *Uruguayan Torture Series* (1983–84) and *Memorial* (2009) are two examples. The latter restates the names of three hundred missing people in the Montevideo phonebook, in ironic references both to memory and to the cold discourse of conceptual art. But nowhere did he declare the political goals of his practice clearer than in a manifesto written in 2008: “6) I believe that the strategy for an ethical redistribution of power defines a policy,” and “7) I believe that art is an instrument to implement such policies.” Luis Camnitzer, “Manifesto of Havana, 2008,” in *Luis Camnitzer*, 50–51. 27. On Camnitzer’s notion of a canon, see Sabeth Buchmann, “Media in Process,” in *Luis Camnitzer*, 176–86.

28. See Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss, eds., *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999). This exhibition proposed to open the debate about the legacy of the movements that swept the world from the 1960s onwards, in order to differentiate conceptual art and conceptualism.

29. Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 10.

30. According to the artist: “I have never been able to decide whether [*Lecture on Art History*] is a tribute to Malevich or a cynical statement.” Camnitzer, “Chronology,” 26.

31. On perspective as a window, see Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (London: Penguin Classics, 1991).

32. On the relationship between

perspective and history, see Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

33. The artist wrote: “to describe the Latin American situation with prevision, the closest thing would probably be one of those enormous rhizomic configurations that can go underground and span several (small) countries, popping up everywhere as what we visually identify as mushrooms. Each mushroom is seen as a single fruiting body, or whatever mushrooms are, but it is just one of many tips sprung from one entity that acts as fertile ground and a connecting web for all of them. There is no cause-effect link between the mushrooms; still, they are equal signs of the same thing.” Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 9.

Pages 94–102

James Langdon

A Eulogy for the Cutaway

1. Inomoto was described thus in *Road & Track* magazine, October 1997.

2. Kevin Hulsey, “The Automotive Artwork of Yoshihiro Inomoto,” *Automotive Illustration*, 2011, <http://fillip.ca/8poi>.

3. The *Superman* strip was syndicated, appearing in many US national newspapers.

Pages 104–23

Miwon Kwon and Helen Molesworth
Documents Magazine, 1992–2004

1. *Heresies* was a feminist publication on art and politics, which produced twenty-seven issues between 1977 and 1993. All issues are available as PDFs, archived alongside other feminist projects at <http://fillip.ca/6np4>.