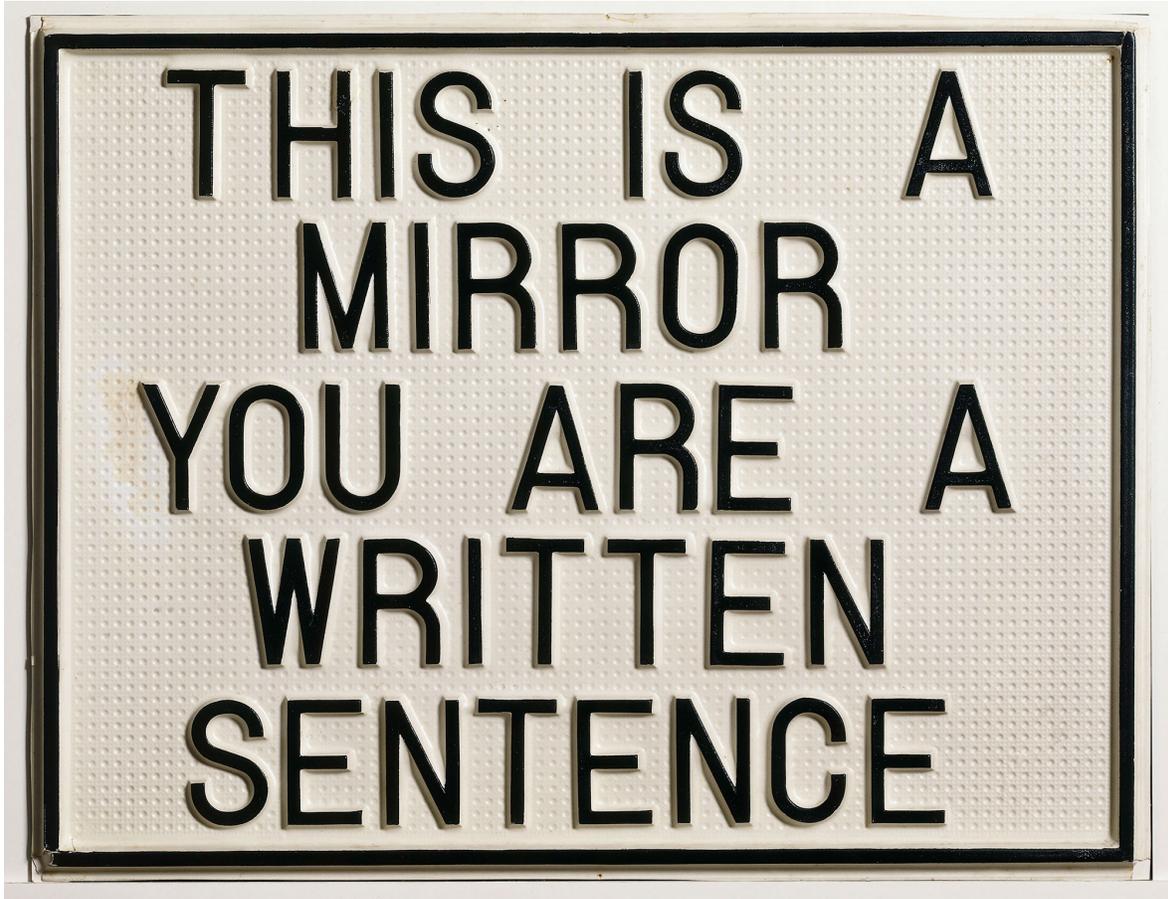


A LATIN AMERICAN ART SERIAL

by Hans Herzog



This is a mirror. You are a written sentence, 1966-68, Polystyrene, 48,4 x 62,5 x 1,5 cm, Photography: Peter Schälchli, Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zürich

Luis Camnitzer (born in 1937 in Lübeck, Germany, raised and educated in Uruguay,

lives and works in Great Neck, New York, and Valdottavo, Italy)

HANS HERZOG / OCTOBER 12, 2019 / 0 COMMENTS

“I still would like to change the world, but it turns out to be more difficult than I thought.” (Luis Camnitzer, in conversation with Hans-Michael Herzog, Zurich, June 22, 2009)

First come, first served

Luis Camnitzer with Hans-Michael Herzog, installing at Daros Exhibitions, Zürich, 2010

When I first met Luis Camnitzer in the early years of this century, his work was still more or less an insiders' tip in «classic» conceptual art. This was for one thing certainly due to the fact that his political worldview had prevented him from ever becoming involved in the art market; and for another, because his relentlessly analytical writings as art theorist, critic, and educator had in many places gained him more attention than his artistic oeuvre, which I had the privilege of closely inspecting and analyzing together with the artist, gradually reaching a thorough understanding of it, over a number of years. In this way I was able to freely select from his plethora of works precisely because they had not been put up for sale yet, thus purchasing for the Daros Latinamerica Collection the largest collection worldwide of Luis Camnitzer's works.

Playful conceptualism

Born as the child of Jewish parents in Lübeck, Germany, in 1937, two-year-old Luis emigrated with his parents to Montevideo, where he grew up and studied. He moved to the art metropolis of New York when he was only 27 years old, and he has lived there since. Luis Camnitzer can thus be considered a perfect blend of Latin American and US-American culture, a composition of 100% Uruguay and 100% New York. He is one of the few artists in whose works a Latin American socialization and mind-set (tinged by a German upbringing) merge with the so-called Western hegemonic culture in a highly prolific, synergetic, and symbiotic manner.

Based on US-American conceptualism and minimalism of the 1960s and 1970s, Camnitzer's creation at that time was already generally independent, and it clearly and unequivocally distinguished itself from that of his US-American art colleagues by its savvy subtlety and its sharp wit, by its playful poetic qualities and its ironic metaphorical ambiguity, as well as by its marked social and political commitment.

Art, an invitation to thinking

Luis has the potential of a father, who is simply always right—something that can definitely be intimidating. I am relating to his written and spoken words, here. Quite in the style of many of his US-American academic colleagues, he always takes care that his

statements and lectures are «bulletproof», leaving his readers or listeners overwhelmed with dialectical eloquence and thus not daring to retort, at least not ad hoc.

His artistic works are a different matter. His performance and results are always at their best when he seeks to prove nothing to himself or to others, when he allows himself to be completely drawn into the casual play of the mind that he incessantly demands the viewer to become involved in. His art is a never-ending invitation to use our faculties for thought, a charming, eye-winking request to utilize and expand our perception.

Luis was and is at heart a confirmed idealist, and that in itself is something quite wonderful in our time and age. Witty, ironic, and sarcastic, his creative range is at the same time interspersed with deeply poetic moments. He is an agnostic with a keen analytical mind, with a distinct inclination towards political subversion of the established systems; and as a person he is moreover thoroughly honest and to the greatest possible extent incorruptible. He has always categorically rejected the idea of a maestro's authorship and has brilliantly expressed this attitude in his numerous superb works on the *Signature* of the artist.

Once rid of archaic, contemplative art observation, art liberates itself and meets with its recipients, the attentive observers who sharpen their perception—and thus ultimately their politico-social awareness, too—in and with art. And the artist is the DJ, or the bartender, who mixes this cocktail.

Luis Camnitzer at Daros Exhibitions, Zürich, 2010

Education

This is where we find a Luis Camnitzer who fervently stands in for his primary concern, the unconditional interconnectedness of art and education, and who puts forth the joint, constructive search for ever new questions and answers in a common pursuit of knowledge. His utopia lies in «art as such» being made redundant one day in a world that has become creative.

Traditional «art education», by the way, is something Luis Camnitzer deeply abhors, as he remarked on the occasion of a lecture a few years ago in Panamá:

“Generally, those who are not properly wearing their antennas to relate to a work of art—no matter the cause—are just looking to have it explained to them in order to understand it. Those who ask for that explanation expect to receive a translated narrative that exhausts all parts of the work. Interestingly, when this exhaustive translation is possible, it means that the work of art is not. The possibility of being translated precisely implies that there is no inexplicable residue. It also means that what the work is presenting lies within the field of the predictable. The explanation of the true work of art, therefore, cannot be a literal translation, but the offering of guidelines that will allow us to reorient our antennas for a more accurate communication, so that we may see the unforeseeable and the inexplicable.”