

Luis Camnitzer

b. 1937, Lübeck, Germany | lives and works in Great Neck, New York

Artist, critic, educator, and theorist Luis Camnitzer was born Germany and moved to Uruguay when he was a year old. In 1964, he founded the New York Graphic Workshop with artists Liliana Porter and José Guillermo Castillo, and in 1971 helped establish New York's Museo Latinoamericano, and a splinter group, Movimiento de Independencia Cultural de Latino América (MICLA). Camnitzer's installation *Art History Lesson no.6* (2000) is made up of ten slide projectors ranged around the gallery space, each one casting an empty rectangle of light onto the wall. The Uruguayan artist's work underscores the fact that art history is written by those in power, and tends to exclude certain accounts.



Photo: Jean Noel Schramm

More about the [artist](#) | [artwork](#)

MAP Collection Artworks



Art History Lesson no. 6, 2000



A Museum Is a School, 2011–

LATIN AMERICA

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Artists Discuss Political Art, Immigration, and Identity



Artist Profile: On “Art Thinking” and Art History



Teacher's Guide for *Under the Same Sun*

Q & A

During the Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today exhibition in New York, the Guggenheim’s [Nisma Zaman](#) interviewed Luis Camnitzer about the installation of and reactions to his work Art History Lesson #6, the impact on his practice of his move from Uruguay to New York, and the ideas that he used in the exhibition’s Teacher’s Guide.

TO WHAT DEGREE WERE YOU INVOLVED IN THE INSTALLATION OF *ART HISTORY LESSON #6*?

There was one awkward moment with the staff of the museum, who wanted precise instructions on how to build the platforms, and what books, and what pieces of cardboard did I use. They wanted to make an inventory of all those pieces so that it would be set up exactly the same way. I tried to explain that what the museum bought was basically a set of instructions on a piece of paper, and that was it. And that then the rest was totally open to interpretation, or to decision by the museum people. And I explained that, if the curator would have a room assigned, in any place, and get a set of Picassos to hang, Picasso’s not there to tell what to do. And the curator would therefore decide how to place the paintings, how many, and at what distances so that they made some sense. And that this was about the same, in my case; the projectors would be placed so that the projection of the empty frame would have a relation with the one next to it. And that the only thing I required was that they handle the projection with care, as if it were a Picasso painting. And I think she got it.

HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT ANY PARTICULARLY MEMORABLE REACTIONS TO PREVIOUS INSTALLATIONS OF *ART HISTORY LESSON*?

The first time I showed it, it was in Madrid, in Casa de

More About the Artist

BLOGS

Contrabienal: Art, Politics, and Latin American Identity in 1970s New York

May 6, 2015

Aimé Iglesias Lukin revisits *Contrabienal*, an artist’s book that called for a boycott of the 1971 São Paulo Biennial, and documented the influence of politics on Latin American artists in 1960s and ’70s New York. [More](#)

We are Here, They are There

April 7, 2015

Curator Carla Stellweg relates her journey through the New York art world—one that began in the late 1960s—and asks how ideas of what constitutes Latin American contemporary art have changed during that time. [More](#)

RELATED EVENTS

La Universidad Desconocida (The Unknown University)

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, September 19, 2014

Organized by Pablo León De La Barra, Guggenheim UBS MAP Curator, Latin America, this daylong symposium included exhibition case studies and conversations with artists, which address critical issues of collecting and curating in the context of studies of anthropology, colonialism, modernism, and political activism. [More](#)

Around the Web

TALKS AND INTERVIEWS

Luis Camnitzer: Montevideo

Colección Cisneros, July 2, 2014

As part of the artists’ cities series, Luis Camnitzer shares his impression of Montevideo. [More](#)

América. And I heard that one of the guards said an old lady came up to a guard and said, “Well, are there images or not?” And the guy, who must have been a sadist, said, “One picture. You just have to wait.” And the poor woman, I don’t know long she spent there, until she gave up.

HOW DID YOUR MOVE FROM URUGUAY TO NEW YORK AFFECT YOUR SENSE OF ARTISTIC IDENTITY IN RELATION TO CULTURE?

I think by moving, two things happen. One, you become very aware of your own education, which I cherish—I had an excellent education, better than most people I encounter here. And it was free. I didn’t pay a penny. And I never graduated—I didn’t need to graduate. So that gives you somehow an identity, I think. The other one, I never had any interest in assimilating into this culture, which means, I always maintained a critical distance. And that critical distance was informed by my education. And by that, I mean also politically, my outlooks, and my persona, which I tried not to change, in the shift. (So, on the other hand, identity is not something you plan. It’s something that you can see after something happens. And it’s there whether you can find commonality or not with other artists in this group. I do not believe in “global art.” I don’t believe that art is universal. I think art is local. And it’s a mistake, trying to put it into a global framework. What you should do is try to find out what commonalities are in the identities you seek after, and how you define locality. Locality is not geographic anymore, as it used to be. It may be regional, or it may be purely informational. Your locality may be a mix of people in Indonesia and Africa and Latin America that are united by some common interests. And for instance, the Conference of Bandung in the ‘50s, of the Non-Aligned countries, was one precedent for this; based on economics and relations with economic and cultural centers, there was a decision: “Okay, we have things in common, and we can develop things from that.” And on a micro level, I think you have that happening in art. So to try to uniform this into a global language is a market ploy, but not a cultural ploy.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE SOME OF THE ART EDUCATION CONCEPTS THAT YOU EMPHASIZED IN THE TEACHER’S GUIDE FOR *UNDER THE SAME SUN*?

I think there is a tradition in art appreciation that is totally focused on the artwork, and doesn’t see the rest of the world. And even the more “enlightened” programs present you with a work of art, and ask you, “What do you think? What does it make you think? What do you see?” But everything is contained in the art package. And that is like guiding you through a tunnel, and you see a light at the end, and you see that the light at the end has a certain shape. And then you believe that that’s the shape of the light, and don’t realize that that’s the shape of the tunnel. So, educationally speaking, I think that’s madness. What you should do is go around the work, and not through the work, and identify the conditions that generated the work of art. What are the problems the work of art is trying to solve? Deal with the problem, and the conditions. And then evaluate, what would your attitude be? What would your suggestion be? What would your solution be? Forgetting about art, and anything you can think of. And then once you reach a conclusion, then you compare your conclusion with the work, and decide if the work stinks, or if the work is good, if you’re getting something out of the work that you wouldn’t have gotten any other way. So the manual [Teacher’s Guide] brings up problems that are not art problems, and then at the end, you go to the works of

of Montevideo. [More](#)

‘Seven’ Questions for Artist Luis Camnitzer

KCUR.org, August 20, 2013

Luis Camnitzer discusses *Seven*, on display at The Project Wall, a temporary site for public art at the H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute. [More](#)

Artists in Conversation: Luis Camnitzer

BOMB Magazine, Spring 2011

Artist [Alejandro Cesarco](#) speaks to Luis Camnitzer about art’s inexplicable, transformative function. [More](#)

Camnitzer: La estética vende, la ética derrocha

Museo de Arte de Zapopan (MAZ), 2011

Artista uruguayo de arte conceptual considerado como una de las figuras claves en la historia del arte de la segunda mitad del siglo XX. [More](#)

CAMNITZER IN THE NEWS

Art Review: A Careful Reading Between the Lines Is Required

The New York Times, February 16, 2011

Some stars take longer than others to come into telescopic range. Such is the case with Luis Camnitzer, who, in his early 70s and with a half-century career behind him, is just now having his first New York museum survey. [More](#)

SELECTED WRITING

The Held Essays on Visual Art: A Socialism of Creation

The Brooklyn Rail, May 6, 2015

About once every decade I decide to confront the issue of whether it’s possible to teach art or not. [More](#)

Luis Camnitzer: The Mediocrity of Beauty

Alexander Gray Associates Exhibition Catalogue, February 2015

It is only fair to start with a warning of where I precisely place beauty in art: beauty is the wrapping paper that envelops the gift and makes it desirable and saleable. [More](#)

Who and What is Arts Education For?

Colección Cisneros, September 2, 2014

We may consider art as a way of thinking, acquiring, and ordering knowledge with a boundless use of our imagination, to make connections, and as a tool for subverting conventions in order to refresh and shape culture and improve society. [More](#)

An Artist, a Leader, and a Dean Were on a Boat...

e-flux, May 2014

Does it make any sense to offer a degree that in some cases costs a quarter of a million dollars, but whose financial return is doubtful? [More](#)

Museums and Universities

e-flux, June 2011

Having been educated in Latin America in the fifties, I was subject to two apparently contradictory premises. [More](#)

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

The Mediocrity of Beauty

Alexander Gray Associates, New York City, February 19–March 28, 2015

The artworks on view conveyed Camnitzer’s skepticism of universal beauty, specifically symmetry as a defining visual characteristic of beauty. [More](#)

ARTISTS

South & Southeast Asia

Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla
Carlos Amoraes
Armando Andrade Tudela
Alexander Apóstol
Tania Bruguera
Paulo Bruscky
Luis Camnitzer
Mariana Castillo Deball
Alejandro Cesarco
Raimond Chaves and Gilda Mantilla

Donna Conlon and Jonathan Harker
Adriano Costa
Minerva Cuevas
Jonathas de Andrade
Wilson Díaz
Juan Downey
Rafael Ferrer
Regina José Galindo
Mario García Torres
Dominique González-Foerster

Latin America

Tamar Guimarães
Federico Herrero
Alfredo Jaar
Claudia Joscowicz
Runo Lagomarsino
David Lamelas
Marta Minujín
Carlos Motta
Iván Navarro
Rivane Neuenschwander

Middle East & North Africa COMING SOON

Gabriel Orozco
Damián Ortega
Amalia Pica
Wilfredo Prieto
Paul Ramírez Jonas
Beatriz Santiago Muñoz
Gabriel Sierra
Javier Téllez
Erika Verzutti
Carla Zaccagnini

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