

LUIS CAMNITZER

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EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO
by eleanor heartney



NEW YORK

Though there are hints in this exhibition of the darker issues that have frequently populated Luis Camnitzer's work—among them torture, colonialism and abuse of power—this show presents a surprisingly lighthearted take on this underappreciated Latin Conceptualist. Camnitzer is a German-born, Uruguayan-raised artist who has lived in New York since the early 1960s. The show, curated by Hans-Michael Herzog and Katrin Steffen, comes from the collection of the Daros Latinamerica in Zurich.

The works span five decades. In true Conceptualist fashion, much of the show centers around the arbitrary nature of the value of art objects, the slippage between language and meaning, and the creative aspects of viewership. Concurrently and independently of better-known Conceptualists like Lawrence Wiener and Joseph Kosuth, Camnitzer created text-based works that allow the user to substitute descriptive phrases summoning mental pictures for physical ones (e.g., "a perfectly circular horizon," one of the phrases from Camnitzer's 1967 *Rubber Stamps*). In the same mode is the largest work here, a room-size installation from 1968 titled *Living Room*, which conjures its elements out of words; spaces where rugs, wall hangings, furniture and windows would be are marked with labels for the missing objects. It's exhilarating and stimulates the imagination, thus placing the spectator in the middle of the creative process.

Works dealing with the art market are laced with a mordant humor. *Pintura mural original* (Original Wall Painting), made in 1972 and re-created for this show, presents two large gray squares painted directly on the wall, one by a housepainter, the other by the artist. Invoices in the center of each reveal the difference in the value of these otherwise identical paintings. The first is listed at \$489 and the second at \$42,950. Other works have a gentle Fluxus quality. *A Fragment of a Cloud* (1967), for example, a framed swath of cotton imprinted with the words of the title, brings to mind the equally effervescent confections of Yoko Ono.

ON VIEW THROUGH MAY 29. Above: *Landscape as an attitude*, 1979. Laminated b/w photograph, 28 x 35.5 cm. Courtesy Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zürich. Photo: Peter Schälchli, Zürich.