

## School Is In

Luis Camnitzer's "A Museum is a School" goes up at the ICA.

By Rich Griset March 21, 2022



Luis Camnitzer, "A Museum is a School," 2009/2022. Vinyl, 3D postcard. Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU, Markel Center, A Museum is a School, (Mar 12, 2022 – Jan 1, 2023). Artwork © Luis Camnitzer. Photo: David Hale

It began with a disagreement.

While working as an education curator at a museum, German-born Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer and his team developed an interactive learning station for the institution. The museum's director scrapped their plans, saying "This is a museum, not a school."

Camnitzer resigned from his post shortly thereafter, sending the director an image of the museum with the words "The Museum is a school; the Artist learns to communicate; The Public learns to make connections" imposed upon it.

Since then, Camnitzer's conceptual work about the intersection of public education and contemporary art has adorned the front of roughly two dozen institutions around the world, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Just over a week ago, the site-specific installation was put up at the Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU in Richmond. Installed just above the main entrance, Camnitzer's words are now emblazoned at the busy intersection of Broad and Belvedere streets.

The idea for the installation came out of an internal meeting at the ICA discussing how they could use the building to communicate the purpose of the ICA to the community. Sarah Rifky, the ICA's senior curator and director of programs, thought of "A Museum is a School."

"I was bringing it up as a good example [for] how we could use the building for what we do on the inside, rather than create something outside that says what we do inside," Rifky says.

Meredith Carrington, the ICA's creative director, took to the idea and created a mock-up of what it might look like. A message to the artist, who now lives in New York, received a quick response. "A Museum is a School" will be on display until the end of the calendar year.

"Essentially, we're trying to use the building as part of our gallery spaces to activate them through different kinds of projects," Rifky says.

"There will be other projects coming up."

Instead of being considered the author of the artwork, Camnitzer is credited as the copyright holder, with the intention being that institutions are creating a contract with the public by placing it on their building.

"The idea, essentially, is not so much to create an assertion, but to establish an opportunity for the public to ask why and how a museum might be a school," Rifky says.

Camnitzer wasn't directly involved with the installation; instead, the ICA received instructions from Camnitzer on how the piece should be displayed. Among other directions, the wording must be created in the same typeface that the institution uses for its name.



"A Museum is a School" is in form with Camnitzer's other work. An artist, academic, curator and art critic who was at the forefront of 1960s conceptual art, Camnitzer often uses the psychological and political elements of language to explore themes of repression, social justice and critique institutions.

Even though the installation has only been up a week, Rifky says it's already sparked interest from the public "There's definitely been curiosity," she says. "We get a lot of people pausing and having some sort of response to it."