

# The New York Times

**WEEKEND Arts** FINE ARTS  
LEISURE

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## **LUIS CAMNITZER**

*Alexander Gray Associates  
526 West 26th Street, Chelsea  
Through April 26*

This pioneering Conceptual artist, who exhibits infrequently in New York City, has something new and something old in this concise solo. The new piece, “Last Words,” right, is a series of six large posterlike sheets of paper with a stream of printed text made up of hundreds of short, direct-address sentences: “Tell Mom I love her. I love you all. Good bye to my family. Don't forget me. I love all of you.” And so on.

The valedictory words suggest dire situations: I thought of cellphone calls made from the World Trade Center on 9/11. In fact all of the phrases are from final statements made by death row prisoners, which Mr. Camnitzer found on the official Web site of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. The sentiments subtly change in tone as the series progresses, shifting from loving farewells to giving thanks to helpful friends, including lawyers, to verbal displays of bravura. The final sentences in the piece are: “I am ready. Tell the guys on Death Row that I'm not wearing a diaper. I can't think of anything else.”

Mr. Camnitzer's text art is almost the opposite of that by another Conceptualist, Lawrence Weiner. Mr. Weiner's words, alternately prosaic and pretentiously oracular, as if pulled from fortune cookies, are abstract. Mr. Camnitzer's, by contrast, have an implicit narrative content and project the sound of individual voices from a world beyond art-about-art. Or mostly beyond it. The single early piece here, “Sifter (The Mechanism for Killing a Spectator)” (1978) is also word based. But in this case the words are written by Mr. Camnitzer and challenge viewers to respond positively to the art experience he is providing or risk instant electrocution. Thus in one small show, two sides of an important artist's essence — ardent heart, mordant wit — are accounted for. (Through April 26, Alexander Gray Associates, 526 West 26th Street, Suite 1019, Chelsea, 212-399-2636, alexandergray.com.)

HOLLAND COTTER