

Luis Camnitzer

March 19 – April 26, 2008



Luis Camnitzer, Installation view, 2008

Alexander Gray Associates is pleased to present an exhibition of two text-based works by Luis Camnitzer: *Last Words* (2008) and *Sifter (The Mechanism for Killing a Spectator)* (1978). Since the late 1960s, Camnitzer has created works in a variety of media—including installation, printmaking, drawing, and photography—that expose our collective indifference to the violence governments inflict on individuals. A pioneer of conceptual art, Camnitzer critiques current political realities with a perspective informed by his first-hand experience of dictatorships in Latin America. This exhibition is particularly timely because it comes on the heels of New Jersey's historic decision to abolish the death penalty, and as the Supreme Court continues to consider the constitutionality of lethal injections.

Death row prisoners' final statements are the texts that constitute *Last Words*. Forgiveness, apologies, declarations of love to mothers, sisters, daughters, and others are interspersed with phrases alluding to death; the refrains like "I love you" is followed by "I am ready" or "It's my hour." Camnitzer collected these phrases from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's website, and reprinted those that include the word "love." Printed in reddish brown toned ink on six sheets of paper measuring approximately five and a half by four feet each, these works' human scale mirrors viewers' bodies. Their formal rigor alludes to minimalism, but the emotion of the texts undercuts this elegance.

In *Sifter (The Mechanism for Killing a Spectator)*, Camnitzer compares the violent dictator with the artistic genius by forcing the viewer into an uncomfortable position. The installation consists of a brass plaque on the wall, a brown welcome mat, and electrical tubing connecting the two. The plaque is inscribed with text describing a system for measuring the viewer's response to a work of art and killing the viewer if that response is not satisfactory. To read this text, one must step onto the mat, which resembles a low-budget execution apparatus.

Luis Camnitzer's work has appeared in numerous exhibitions since the early 1960s, including individual shows at the Galería Ruth Benzacar, Argentina; The Kitchen and El Museo del Barrio, New York; List Visual Arts Center at M.I.T., Cambridge; and Museo Carillo Gil, Mexico City. Retrospectives of his work have been presented at Lehman College Art Gallery in the Bronx (1991) and Kustshalle Kiel (2003). His work has appeared in biennials and group shows, including *Information* (1970), The Museum of Modern Art, New York; *Biennial of Havana* (1984, 1986, and 1991); *Whitney Biennial* (2000), *Documenta 11* (2002), and *Beyond Geometry* (2005), Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Camnitzer's work is in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), among other institutions. Camnitzer received Guggenheim Fellowships in 1961 and 1982. A highly regarded critic and curator, Camnitzer is a frequent contributor to *ArtNexus*, and wrote *New Art of Cuba* (1994, 2003) and *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (2007).

Alexander Gray Associates is a contemporary art gallery and advising firm based in New York. Our exhibition program focuses on mid-career visual artists who emerged in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Through consulting and collection advising, we provide expertise for our individual and corporate clients. Our ultimate goal is to provide a direct experience with Modern and contemporary art that encourages discourse around art's role in the advancement of culture. Gallery hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 11:00 AM – 6:00 PM.