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Art and Education

Luis Camnitzer
Pablo Helguera
Betty Marín

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Preface

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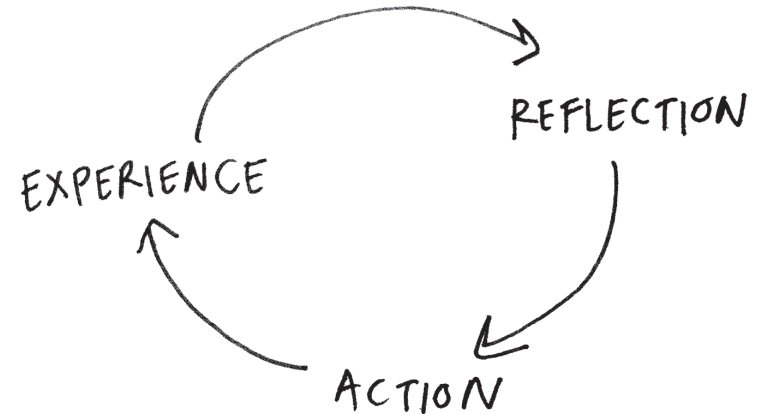
This book is an opportunity for me to explore where and how art and education can exist together. I came to them at different moments in my life. As a young person, I first embraced art through a drawing practice that led to painting. My belief in the role art should play in society was influenced by my work with a community arts organization, the Social and Public Art Resource Center in Venice, California. They use murals and public art to work with communities to tell their own stories. The road to becoming an educator included work with this organization and others where I have assisted and led educational experiences during the last decade.

My most concentrated time teaching and facilitating was in Mexico, doing Latin American solidarity work with Witness for Peace. I worked as an educator in a team of four, helping to coordinate delegations of ten to twenty-five people from the U.S. to visit southern Mexico. Participants learned about the impact U.S. foreign policy had had on the region, particularly with regard to the reasons people migrate to this country. Thanks to the organization's multidecade history, I entered a setting where workshop and facilitation methods had been critically tested and revised over many years. The work demanded that I be fully present, carefully expressing the appropriate level of energy as well as deliberately choosing my language, both verbal and physical. I'd like to think it was similar to the way a performer might consider her audience, being conscientious of the best ways to transmit a particular feeling and message. Unlike a traditional performance, however, in most cases I needed the participants to react, reflect, and act on what they were hearing, seeing, and experiencing. My own growth as a teacher and facilitator, alongside theirs, made the work even more fulfilling. Building relationships with them and our community partners, seeing

where pedagogy was effective or not, and witnessing how they were applying what they had learned sustained me in the work.

The pedagogical methods that Witness for Peace used derived from Paulo Freire's model of praxis: Participants learned or experienced something, reflected on it, and then planned for action based on that reflection. Freire's praxis accounts for the importance of personal experience in generating agency by creatively identifying problems and solutions through reflection, which in turn produces an appropriate course of action. In his seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire discusses how crucial each element of his praxis is. Intellectual pondering is not enough; it must be accompanied by action. Just the same, action without careful reflection can be empty and unproductive.¹ This praxis is often represented by the image of a cycle, demonstrating the interdependence of experience, reflection, and action. We are in a constant state of experiencing the world and responding to it through our actions, but only through a process of reflecting on and revising what we are learning.

Working with Witness for Peace also taught me about teaching and facilitating that constantly grappled with balancing the multiplicity of voices of the participants and facilitators. Participants regularly included students, activists, and people from organizations; sometimes they included policymakers, and in one case a police sergeant. The collaboration between facilitators (we worked in pairs for every delegation) was both challenging and beneficial. It created a system of support and a way to test our ideas and help us learn each other's approach. It also meant respecting and giving space for the other to build leadership, in addition to negotiating and compromising on our different styles. Education that appealed to multiple senses was another key



aspect of our methods. For example, participants completed workshops on Mexican history by way of a walking tour, and on U.S.-Mexico economic relations through time lines and graphics. We relied on local knowledge by meeting with Mexican NGOs and spent time in a rural community to hear from people who were directly impacted by policies. We programmed processing and reflection sessions every day to take stock of what we were learning and how it affected us personally. Despite an intense and compact schedule of seven to ten days, we consistently designated an entire day at the end of each trip to planning for action. This encouraged putting what was learned into practice on returning to the U.S.

The belief that the process of teaching is about leading educational experiences rather than simply imparting knowledge springs primarily from my involvement with Witness for Peace and is further carried out in the research for this book. I have learned that successful teaching involves creating a context for learning, just as much as it includes sharing information. I entered the Portland State University Art and Social Practice MFA program recognizing that creativity is essential to educational work, but not fully understanding how that might mix with my conception and practice of art. At that point, I understood art broadly, knowing that I valued art that had the capacity to transform a person, but I understood it only in formal and material terms. By transformational capacity, I mean art that gives pause, allows people to learn about themselves and their world, and opens up space for more learning.

The two artists and educators I have invited to participate in this book, Luis Camnitzer and Pablo Helguera, have expanded how I think about art and education. My experience

in the program, along with their writings, allows me to redefine art and education together and ultimately see how they both help us learn.

Luis was a visiting artist in this MFA program in my first year. Initially I was intimidated by his clear sense of what art was and what art wasn't, but was drawn to the connections he made between art and critical thinking. I was struck by his basic definition of art as a tool for acquiring knowledge, for learning. Elevating the basic qualities of art to this level was appealing to me, and it fit with how I wanted to define art personally and within my own practice. Luis's educational program as pedagogical curator of the Sixth Mercosul Biennial in southern Brazil was an exciting example of practice. Exhibiting artists were pushed to rethink their works based on their own search for knowledge. The problems and questions they identified were used as starting points for students to learn and use art to solve similar problems. I have had many a contemporary art experience where I failed to find meaning, feeling discouraged and alienated. This method of art education gave the power back to the students, allowing them to create their own analysis about the problems and context that had produced the artwork, rather than simply being asked to describe the object or its formal qualities.

I also became familiar with Pablo Helguera through his relationship to this MFA program. I encountered some of his projects including *Instituto Telenovela*, *The School of Panamerican Unrest*, and, most important, his book *Education for Socially Engaged Art*. Pablo authored this incredibly helpful manual of topics and terms, which characterize the field of Socially Engaged Art practices, after teaching a course in this MFA program and "seeking adequate materials for this practice."² Pablo's writing describes the embodied

nature of education and socially engaged art projects; both are dependent on the participation of other people and require successful navigation of these relationships between artists and participants, or collaborators. Seeing these parallels between teaching and socially engaged art helped me understand my goals as an artist. The projects I mention use pedagogy in these ways—breaking with institutional education and creating a space for dialogue, thus engendering learning across horizontal relationships with others. Pablo was also pedagogical curator of the Eighth Mercosul Biennial, two biennials after Luis. They know and respect each other; their shared history was productive to the conversation.

Another essential reference point in this discussion is Paulo Freire. Both Luis and Pablo refer to Freire in their writings. Rereading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* gave me a theoretical lens through which to focus Luis and Pablo's ideas, and served to guide the conversation.³ While I don't cite Freire extensively, his concepts of the political nature of education and how genuine learning and liberation are achieved form a crucial foundation for the questions I ask.

The interview with Luis and Pablo focuses on definitions of art and education, pedagogical philosophies, didacticism, Latin America, and their work as pedagogical curators of the Mercosul Biennials. I have included two additional texts, one by Luis and another by Pablo, which complement some of the ideas they put forward in the interview. While we discuss some practical teaching experiences, the interview primarily focuses on theory. Luis says that once he started teaching, he quickly realized that teaching was about solving problems, and not about imparting technical skills.

I am currently working on a project with artists Patricia Vazquez and Sharita Towne that applies Luis's educational

model for the Sixth Mercosul Biennial to a middle school class at King School here in Portland, Oregon. We asked five artists to identify the problems and questions that were the basis for their work, and then created prompts for the students to tackle similar problems through their own art. We will then put several of the students in conversation with these exhibiting artists during this year's Shine a Light event at the Portland Art Museum.⁴

My intention is that this book can provide teachers and artists with a framework to support how they develop creative strategies and goals for learning and agency, both in the classroom and beyond. For me, the research process of making this publication brings me closer to recognizing a fundamental connection between art and education—one that pushes me and, I hope, others to be more critical artists and teachers.

1. "It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis." Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: International Publishing Group, 2005), 69.

2. Pablo Helguera. *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), ix.

3. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

4. See "A Reflection: Art for Education," pp. 64–73 in this volume, where I discuss this project more fully.

Coding and Decoding How and What

Luis Camnitzer

Sixty-five years ago, when I was learning how to write, I was forced to fill pages with the same letter, repeating it over and over again. I had to copy single letters before I was allowed to write words. I was given words before I could express other people's ideas, before I could express my own ideas, before I could even explore what my own ideas might be. It only occurred to me as an adult that, if I know how to write with a pencil, I also know how to draw with that pencil.*

For my mother, educated in the Germany of World War I, matters were even worse. She had to use a pen designed specially—not for writing—but for learning how to write. The pen looked as if it had been designed for torture. Oval pieces of sharp tin forced the placement of the fingers into one particular position. If the fingers were not in the required position, they would be hurt. One could speculate that these pens were instrumental in preparing for Nazi Germany's ethos of obedience.

Art education has always been faced with a confusion between art and craft: In teaching how to do things, one often neglects the more important question of what to do with them. The conventional way of teaching how to write concentrates on readability and spelling, which only addresses the how of writing without regard to the what. Exemplified by the practice of teaching someone how to write by concentrating on a frozen aesthetic feature such as calligraphy, this approach fails to first identify the need for a message, which would then open an approach to writing that concerns the structure and clarity of what is being written.

In an exaggerated form, the pen synthesizes everything I hated about my education: the fragmentation of knowledge into airtight compartments, the confusion between how-to-do and what-to-do, the development of communication without

first establishing the need for it. It was like learning how to cook without first being hungry—without even identifying what hunger is. After all, education is less about being hungry than about awakening appetite to create the need for consumption. In fact, I believe that this is how cooking is taught.

Why can't one first identify and explore the need to communicate in order to then find a proper way of communicating? Languages themselves are generated in this manner, and this is how they evolve. Words are created to designate things that had hitherto been either unknown or unnameable. Today's spelling errors determine tomorrow's writing. Many of those errors are the simple product of an oral decoding that overlays written coding. Of course, errors should be acknowledged—but they should also be subject to critical evaluation. As a derogatory term, "error" reflects a particular code-centrism typical of our culture. Illiteracy is, after all, only a problem within a literacy-based culture. In general, codes are created by a need to translate a message into signs, and then decoded by a need to decipher the message. Through this coding and decoding, there is a process of feedback in which "improper" or misplaced codings produce evocations that change or enrich the message.

FINDING DISCOVERY

When the reason to read and write is primarily to receive and give orders, it is understandable that the need for learning should not be identified by the person to be alphabetized, but by the same power structure that produces those needs. Knowledge becomes predetermined and closed when both definition and identification are performed within this

restricted functional field, while a more open field would stimulate questioning and creation. In essence, one cannot educate properly without revealing the power structure within which education takes place. Without an awareness of this structure and the way it distributes power, indoctrination necessarily usurps the place of education.

While this is true for education in general, it becomes more insidious when applied to the teaching of reading and writing. In this case, indoctrination is not necessarily visible in the content, but instead seeps heavily into the process of transmission: If one is taught to repeat like a parrot, it doesn't really matter what is actually being repeated; only the desired automatic, internalized act of repetition will remain. If we only teach to recognize things by their forms without addressing concepts, it won't matter what generates these forms. Only the recognition of the packaging will remain, and worse, the acquisition of knowledge will stop there.

A real education for an artist consists of preparation for a pure research of the unknown. In a strong art education, this starts at the very beginning. But as institutional education in other areas is organized to convey only known information and to perpetuate conventional habits, these are two pedagogies in fundamental conflict. Where, then, should the fight against illiteracy be placed? Should alphabetization be handled as a subject for training or as a tool for discovery?

The question may be too schematic. In art, pure discovery leads to amateurism, while pure training leads to empty professionalism—good preparation ultimately seeks a balance between them. The question does not concern which activity should be eliminated, but rather which one should inform the other. Those in favor of training often defend it with the need to supply good scaffolding for the student. Yet if one hopes

that discovery will be the main purpose of a student's life, whether for self-realization or for collective enrichment, it is clear that the student should not just learn to build scaffolds.

We now find ourselves in an age when the amount of available knowledge far exceeds our capabilities for codification. The imbalance is such that we must speculate on whether the concept of restricted alphabetization based on the re-presentation of known things may be an unforgivable anachronism. We may have arrived at a point where we need an education that goes far beyond all this: one that first makes the subject aware of the personal need for literacy and then identifies the coding systems already in use, so that they may be used as a reference; one that proceeds to activate translation processes as a primary tool for entering new codes; one that, from the very beginning, fosters the ability to reorder knowledge, to make unexpected connections that present rather than re-present. In other words, we need a pedagogy that includes speculation, analysis, and subversion of conventions, one that addresses literacy in the same way any good art education addresses art. This means putting literacy into the context of art. By forcing art to focus on these things, in turn, the art empire itself will also be enriched.

Excerpted from "Art and Literacy," e-flux journal, no. 3 (February 2009), <http://e-flux.com/journal/art-and-literacy>.

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*In fact, John Gadsby Chapman had already proclaimed, "Anybody who can learn to write can learn to draw," in the first lines of his *American Drawing-Book* (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1847), as quoted by Arthur D. Efland in his *History of Art Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990).

FOUNDATIONS

BETTY MARÍN: First of all, thank you for taking the time and for having the interest in creating this book with me.

I'd like to ask you to think about your own education. My assumption is that you both had identities as artists before you considered yourselves educators, but I could be wrong about that. What was your personal education as young people into adulthood; in particular, what were some of the key things that started to shape your ideas around art and education?

PABLO HELGUERA: To me, definitely, the notion of being an artist came much before being an educator, just because I came from a family focused on the arts. My father was very invested in the idea that we would be artists. In my own education, it was not even a question that my siblings and I would end up in art. But it was not an imposition. I was happy to be part of it.

Education as a discipline really came much later, when I went to Chicago to study. Because I couldn't afford school, I got an internship in the museum. This was at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, which is a school and a museum. Somehow I landed in this world where I was between the museum and the school, and because I was bilingual, I ended up in the education department. I realized after a little while that the concerns that I was being drawn to as an artist (performance, dialogue, interaction, conversation, etc.) were things that I was also working on as an educator in the museum. Very quickly I noticed that the two things were together. They were just expressed in different contexts. It was at the beginning, when I was really starting to see my practice as a whole and as enacting education in everything I did and in the process

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of art making. That's kind of what set me off on this course of projects that have had education as a primary concern.

BM: I didn't know very much about your family history related to the arts. Could you say more about that foundation?

PH: It's an unusual history. My family are all classical musicians in Mexico City. I grew up in a very classically educated household, where, interestingly, there was no significant exposure to contemporary art. I had no idea what conceptual art was when I was growing up. That I encountered much later. I had to also struggle on my own with more traditional notions of art when I was encountering these new and exciting things. They were at the same time fascinating and difficult for me to comprehend, because I didn't understand their parameters. But that's also always why I do kind of go back. That's why I'm interested in history, and I'm always negotiating instability or practices that are unstable, that are explorative, with practices that are very traditional, more standard. I'm interested in the tension between those.

BM: And you, Luis, how would describe your fundamental experiences?

LUIS CAMNITZER: I think the other way around. That is, I entered art school very young. I was six years old. I didn't know anything about art. I didn't have any conception about art. I had skills, and that's why I ended up going. In my family, the idea was that I would be an architect, and that art would be a good complement for that. So I approached my studies, and at some point studied both at the same time. But it took me a while to have an inkling of what art

really was for me. I slowly went into expressionism after learning how to copy Roman busts and do anatomical stuff. But in the process, without knowing much about art, I really did get involved in the notion of unlearning, because I realized that what I was learning wasn't very useful and that something was wrong with the structure of the institution. I started seeing contemporary art, and that was totally ignored in art school. Some shows from the São Paulo Biennial of 1954 came to Montevideo and proved art history hadn't finished with Maillol (I was studying sculpture at the time).

There was a generation that was preceding me that was very particular about curricular change, and I connected with that generation. When I was seventeen, I think, I became the secretary general of the student union in art school. The first mission was to change the plan of studies. We went with the notion that if we wanted to change, the students needed to know more about curricular planning and pedagogy than the faculty. That was the only way we could change it. When I was nineteen, I got a grant to study in Germany at the Academy of Munich, and I got an official mission (I received a semi-diplomatic passport for that) for studying curricular models in Germany, what happened after the Bauhaus, in order to bring back that information to the school. When I returned, we fought to introduce changes. We had sit-ins and a strike and finally kicked out the faculty and were able to change the structure.

We basically abolished the degree, took away realism as a fundamental dogma, and opened the whole thing to experimentation with heavy ruling by the students. It was a long process and I ended up teaching. I didn't know if I was interested in curricular structure, and I was very shy and I didn't know if I would like to have contact with people and

teach. But I did. The approach was—though in art I was still very retrograde, still doing expressionism—it was clear in education, I had to deal with problems and not with skills. I had to deconstruct the way students were thinking, so that they would be in conditions of reinventing everything, skills and ideas.

That was also the basis of the reform we put into the school. Shortly after, I got a Guggenheim Fellowship and came to the States and was here in '62 for six months. I went back to Uruguay and continued working on curricular reform, helping adjust things. By '64 I came back to the States to finish the Guggenheim Fellowship, and then I started teaching here. In 1969 I went back for an extended visit. Things were shifting politically in Uruguay and I decided not to stay. After that I couldn't go back for political reasons.¹ And I'm still here, basically. I always felt that teaching and making art are the same thing, two different media for the same activity. I don't see much conflict. I don't see any conflict. So I'm happy in either activity.

BM: You've just mentioned this idea of reinvention; the redefinition, renaming, that can happen in the classroom. Paulo Freire uses the term *reinvention*² to describe knowledge acquisition as well. How do you understand his usage?

LC: I believe that Freire is crucial in pedagogical thinking. He is my intellectual generation, the same that did pedagogical reforms in the late '50s and early '60s, and also the generation that conceptualized art in Latin America. We all had a great precedent, which was Simón Rodríguez, the tutor of Simón Bolívar, who set down many of the principles we "reinvented"

nearly a century and a half later because we didn't know enough about him. But there was something in our culture—the same stuff that brought about the University Reform of Córdoba in 1918.³ It's funny, in 1970 or '71, I wanted to have *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as required reading for all faculty in the college I was teaching in, and it didn't go anywhere. And the college was supposedly interested in being cutting edge in pedagogy.

DEFINITIONS

BM: You've started to define art and education, and I think definitions are really important to the conversation. Luis, you describe art and education as two different media for the same activity. From your writings, Luis, I've basically understood that art and education have the same goals: to liberate and creatively problem solve. Could you talk more about these goals and how art and education can do these things?

LC: I think the word *art* is actually an obstacle, because it forces you to put a lot of stuff into one word, which is a prejudiced word. I mean, usually, art is confused with craft and with perfection of skills. For me, art is really a way of thinking, a way of acquiring and organizing knowledge. It's like a meta-discipline that is actually more important than science. Not more important, but it includes science in the sense that science is limited to speculating on causality and explanation, while art includes that but can also deal with the illogic and lack of causality, with absurdity, with alternative orders that do not necessarily function in reality. It is a broader range of possibilities that includes boundless imagination, while

science always ends up as some kind of practicality, applied or not, even when dealing with speculative science. I miss in the whole educational structure that freedom of speculation, one that should start in preschool and be nourished all the way till postgraduate studies, and do it in conjunction with critical analysis that allows you determine what to use to that end and what not, without closing possibilities. The way knowledge is dealt with today is really fragmented and in disciplinary cubicles, with the point not of developing and empowering people, but of training them into the job market. That is an impoverishment of the individual and of society.

There are two main paradigms in art. One is represented by realism and figuration, which implies quantitative thinking. And there is another paradigm, which came to the fore with conceptualism, which allows us to have qualitative thinking and problem solving. The child is put immediately into the first paradigm. Alphabetization is quantitative. Numeracy is based on quantity, on sequential accumulation of things and not on the reading of patterns and recognizing configurations, to which quantity comes to refine the point. By pushing the child into quantitative processes, all the way until graduation, you are curtailing freedom.

BM: Pablo, you seem to make a distinction between the conditions or parameters in which education is enacted and art is made—namely, that art is ultimately not restricted in the same way.

PH: Let me elaborate on this. I never really studied education theory or anything like that. My own process is of learning, of still figuring out that relationship. It emerged in a very intuitive way, and it really came from the context in which

I developed, which was museum education, to which I am very grateful. Museum education, as both of you know, has a lot of problems when it's practiced in a very traditional or conventional way. It's very much predicated on the notion of interpretation, and when applied in a traditional way, it suggests that there is an authoritative voice that explains to you what something is. I was always very fortunate to work with people (educators) who were critical of that idea and who believed in the practice of education in a different way, which was mostly through making and experiencing.

But for me, the real distinction in the way we apply education in art has less to do with the divide between passive interpretation and doing, and more with the divide between formal education and informal education. By formal education I mean the structured instruction consisting in going to school, to a class, going through a regular school program; it is the hours that you are officially a student in your life. But the most important dimension of learning, I think now most people agree, is informal education, the school of life. It is that which you don't really learn by sitting in a classroom with somebody lecturing to you, but those things you learn as you go through your life. Formal education is very limited when you compare the entire scheme of your lifetime, it is a very tiny portion of that. Yet informal education goes on forever. That's where I think art plays such an important role. Art and informal education are very much connected. You learn by making art. The experiential process of making things, whether it is art or not, allows you to learn. That's really the experience where I came from—I was trying to use art to learn. At the very beginning I was still trying to do my job as museum educator, because I worked at a museum and still do. I realized that my greatest discomfort with museum education was that

it was only teaching someone about art so that he or she could appreciate art. It becomes a very circular goal. A tautological goal; I will teach you art, so that you learn art. Instead, I see art as a tool or process so that you can learn about the world. You can learn about art, but that to me does not seem like such an interesting or important goal. Art is the language that you can use to gain a better understanding of reality, and art can structure itself in such a variety of ways. It can be structured or unstructured, but ultimately it does exist in that informal realm. But in the end, I think Luis and I agree that it is about problem solving. It is about confronting an issue and using the tools that you have at hand to gain a better understanding of where you are positioned with the problem. How to fix it, how to move forward, I guess.

BM: Pablo, you mentioned art language. How do you define that?

PH: Art is a convention; it is social convention and social construct that we create for ourselves. It is a discipline realm or, as Luis calls it, meta-discipline that simply is out there in the world. If you say you are an artist, then you develop some sort of expectations about what that means, depending on whom you talk to. You are either crazy, you are on the fringes, or you are supposed to entertain someone, or you are the decoration in the hallway, or you are a revolutionary—whatever those definitions could be. But for better or worse, that concept of an artist, an art world, an art scene, exists, and it's up to us to know what we do with it, whether we subscribe to more conventional patterns of what being an artist means. You may decide, I will be a gallery artist, and I'll show my work in a gallery, and maybe be collected

by a museum, and so forth. Or you try to rewrite the script of what an artist is and what an artwork is and does, which I think is usually the kind of practice that has pushed the whole discipline forward. When you say: Well, I don't have to make something in particular to be an artwork; or, it doesn't have to be in a gallery; or, it doesn't have to be beautiful; or, it doesn't have to be this or that.

So when I was talking about the language of artists, I was referring to those set of conventions that we work with to try to experiment and solve those issues we are interested in. We work with that construct to pursue projects that, perhaps in other situations, would be difficult to pursue. For example, there are situations under which, if you say something is an art project, it allows a certain degree or territory for experimentation that would not be possible to achieve in other disciplines. If I were to go to a social-research foundation, and I proposed a sociological experiment on a particular subject, they might be very critical of my approach if I am not following a very strict sociological approach or methodology. I might not get support for it. But if you call it an art project that has a sociological dimension—there is a certain freedom to what that can be. There are many examples of artists who incorporate disciplines from other areas to answer a variety of questions they have. You called it art not because you necessarily want to be a famous artist or you are searching for the notoriety that that conveys, but more because it can't really be called anything else at that moment, because it is something that doesn't have a name. It is kind of ambiguous, and you are trying to figure out what it is.

BM: I relate that back to you, Pablo, saying that art can really challenge what we consider reality; and you, Luis, have

talked about art's capacity to make illicit connections, and that only its inexplicable qualities can expand knowledge.⁴ Freire talks about "limit acts" as those that challenge the limitations we understand are barriers to our liberation, including discussing the role of abstract decoding, as a strategy when those limitations aren't apparent.⁵ Do you consider these ideas of limit acts and abstract decoding related to the way you have both described art's capacity to challenge what's possible?

LC: What you try to do is not just acquire knowledge in a given order or a new order but expand on it, so that you are continually pushing the limit. I think that's what makes art so addictive. Whenever you push the limit, you create a new limit, which you have to push again, so it never stops. Sort of like Sisyphus pushing the rock that keeps falling. Yeah, I don't have any problem, and I agree with everything that Pablo has said. We are on the same wavelength. I also don't have any educational background in that sense—same process Pablo went through. Conclusions one draws through making and thinking and trying to break down the limits. Precisely that. Maybe it is an advantage for both of us that we did not study education. We would be bound by the limits of the discipline of education and basically be uneducated. Making art for me was probably the area in which I learned most. One thing I discovered early, and that's what made me an expressionist initially, was the distribution of power between the maker and the tool, and how you administer that power. How much do you let the tool and material contribute, and how much do you control them? By developing a horizontal relation, expressionism came out instead of the highly controlled realism that I was learning in the normal class. So that actually determined my politics: I learned my politics

from doing art and analyzing what the power relationship was there, and that in turn determined my vision of society, and that in turn determined my educational outlook.

BM: So was it simply that analyzing and locating the power relationships in art making allowed you to understand that society and education were also structured through power? Or what was it precisely that informed this line of thinking? Please elaborate on those connections you made between art making, society, power, and education.

LC: Well, it wasn't that I reinvented political systems just studying a pencil. The student leadership in art school was predominantly ethical anarchist, and architecture school was mostly communist and Trotskyite. So I had a challenging atmosphere around me. But the work with tools and materials allowed me to discover power in a more profound manner. That led me to think of education as a process not of training and imparting information, but of discovery, experience, and problem solving. It also led me to believe that art is a normal activity, and that those who don't use it are affected by social pressures that prevent them from being free. Toward the late '50s that also became the philosophy of the reform movement in the school, sort of in line with what Freire would proclaim shortly after, and Beuys a little later. I guess those things were in the air (or in the water).

PH: What Luis is saying about not really coming from a particular educational doctrine, versus being educated into education, so to speak, is similar to the actor who learns how to act more intuitively as opposed to the actor who is obsessively trying to follow a Method system to act. In other words,

when you become so self-conscious that you have to enact certain concepts, it actually could become an obstacle to really enact them in an effective way—which is why experience is so important in the process of learning.

DIDACTICS

PH: What we should learn from the concept of Freire, the way I see it applied to art, is that we need to be aware when we try to make art that has this instrumental agenda—art that is created and applied to the public in a way that the person who experiences it does not have much liberty. Or it doesn't really consider enough that the viewer or the participant has a mind and a set of experiences of their own, or that they need to bring part of those into the experience of the piece. What we can learn is how to prevent ourselves from making projects that we usually call didactic or where you basically tell people what to do or think; this programmatic approach usually never works. I think the most important aspect is to allow the individuals the freedom to think for themselves and to make decisions about what they are experiencing. Sometimes those decisions and those responses might be very different from what one intended. That's just the way it is. That is how it has always been.

BM: This is a great opportunity to go deeper into talking about didacticism and manipulation, even. Luis, in another interview you talk about how manipulation is only bad when it has bad goals, but if it has good goals then manipulation is not bad.⁶ I'm wondering if you see your role and ends as a teacher versus an artist being different with how you relate to didacticism?

LC: I always manipulate no matter what. I mean I manipulate when I am talking to you, trying to convince you or bring across my ideas in the best way possible so that you get them the way I want you to get them. That's manipulation. So *didacticism* is also a tricky word because the way Pablo is using it, it's a very restrictive interpretation. It's more like giving instructions, which I agree doesn't work. Manipulated didacticism, which sounds horrible, is in fact creating the conditions so that the receiver of the message gets it within limits that you set up. You're not giving an order, but you want the other person to reach a conclusion within a margin that is acceptable to you, and you don't want the receiver to reach the opposite conclusion. So if you give a totally open message, it can be interpreted any way the other person wants, and you're really not doing much. The receiver doesn't need you, basically, because the receiver could think whatever he or she wants anyway. Once you put yourself in the position of a communication circuit, you're already conditioning how the message should arrive at the other end. It can arrive as an order, which I think is very negative from every point of view and it doesn't usually work, or it works with resentment. Or it works as a stimulus to unleash a process, which is not chaotic, but it's directed within margins. By setting the margins as a communicator I am already manipulating. We better assume responsibility for that manipulation instead of ignoring it, because if we ignore it we don't know what we're doing or unleashing. If we assume the responsibility then we automatically have ethical decisions to follow. It's that ethics that is crucial to any communication.

BM: What Pablo said before was that sometimes people are going to experience things differently than you intend.

Does that mean that basically, in those cases your margins were not good enough?

LC: It depends how you define what I intend. If I intend that you now get up and get a glass of water, that's a very restricted way. It's an order, and you could say, "Fuck it, I don't want water." Which is fine. But if I start working on thirst and have this conversation about thirst and start talking about my experience in the desert, about how I was drying out under the sun, and blah, blah, blah—which is all fiction, I never had that experience—I am setting a stage in which I am getting an empathic, empathetic reaction from you, where at some point you might think it is a good moment to have a glass of water. I'm manipulating you without giving you an order. Ha! Thank you.

BM: It worked. I just had a drink of water.

LC: Pablo, can you see Betty?

PH: No, I'm sorry. I cannot see you.

LC: What Betty just did was drink a sip of water.

PH: Luis, you are such a master manipulator. I am drinking coffee, so...Luis and I are agreeing too much here.

LC: It's kind of boring.

PH: I actually talk a little about this in *Education for Socially Engaged Art*.⁷ The end of the spectrum is the overcontrolled instrumentalization of art. Such as, I am doing this thing

so that everyone will stand up and drink a glass of water. The other end is equally problematic, which is precisely the thing of the artist who says, I am just here, I am just going to step back, I am really not going to be here, I'm just facilitating an experience and whatever happens is fine. This tends to result in very mediocre art and experiences and also poor education because, essentially, anything goes. What's even the point of doing that?

BM: I'd like to continue to talk about this distinction between ordering someone to do something and creating the right parameters. In a classroom setting, for instance, if I want a group of students to understand their school has few resources because of institutional racism, how do I create the right margins? Would my strategy be to make them curious about those conditions, instead of directly stating that conclusion? Does that make sense?

LC: No.

BM: OK. I guess I need to hear more of a concrete experience in the classroom and this tension between getting students where you want them to be (what you want them to learn) and creating a space for them to experiment and explore and learn what they want to learn.

LC: You have to know what problem you want to be solved. I mean, what is your aim? If your aim is to expose racism, if you just declare there is racism in the school, that's only a matter of opinion. Someone may come and say, "No, there is no racism in the school." What happens then? So if you want to prove that there is racism in the school, you have

to figure out where to apply the leverage. The leverage is probably found by analyzing what canon is being used in the school to promote values, and then you go behind that and find where the canon splits into the canon that is hegemonic and racist and the canon that represents the oppressed. And find out where the common branch is from which they open, and go to that point. That's a very precise point. You cannot go too far back, because you end up in triviality. So you have to identify, as a teacher or as a leader of research or as a person on a team who is contributing in a given moment, which one is actually the best point to initiate the process. You have to help identify that moment of bifurcation and from that point start again and help the students to see the two paths, and see what path the school takes and which path you are on and how we get back, so as to avoid the wrong and repressive direction.

BM: Luis, can you explain how you might begin to develop a curriculum based on this idea of locating the bifurcation? What does that look like in practical terms, let's say for middle school students?

LC: I think that one of the shortcomings of present education is that it is based on training and on the transmission of information units. It really should emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, and how to access information instead. Information itself becomes obsolete very quickly, and training forces retraining once a job is terminated. Identifying the points of bifurcation helps the use of judgment, choice, and the ability to restart. It's like when you have uninstalling features in the programs you install on the computer. Education doesn't teach how to unlearn, but it should. Going back to the bifurcation point is one way of uninstalling.

PH: Let me set a related example. I think that the situation varies, but you as an educator need to first be able to read and understand that problem and approach it in a way that it will not necessarily become basically a brainwashing outcome. In other words, I am teaching you this so that I can convince you to think like me. Instead, the goal should be to make the person reflect on their own condition—they might not be aware of the implications or full meaning of the thing they are thinking about.

Example: I was in a university in Pennsylvania, right smack in the center of the state, in a very white college, with practically no minorities in its population. In the art school, there was a student who was making racist paintings of Muslims with hate words, really demeaning racist paintings of Muslims, because the student hated—or said he hated—Muslims. I was shocked to see these paintings.

I asked the professors at the college, "What conversations are you having with this kid?"

They said, he was within his rights to make these paintings because of freedom of expression and "We cannot tell him he cannot paint these paintings."

I asked, "Has he ever met a Muslim? Are there any Muslims in this town?"

And they said, "Not really," and that "he has never really met a Muslim."

This was during the Iraq war. It was very clear to me that the professors were grossly incompetent, and that they misunderstood their role and didn't understand what they were supposed to do. The approach here, however, would not have been to tell the student, "You're a racist." That's not the road I would suggest. But simply having him understand what a Muslim person is. Humanizing what this guy was looking

at as very abstract concepts of a Muslim. I suggested that the student should come to Brooklyn to my neighborhood, where there are a lot of Muslims, and asked if he would be willing to show those paintings in a place like that and talk to people who are like moms and children and such.

You approach the problem by first understanding what the issues containing it are and what kind of experiential situations you can offer the individual, so that they can reflect on that experience on their own. But for me, to come to the guy and tell him either you are free to paint whatever you want, or you are racist and you should stop making those paintings, would be equally unproductive because it would not really change this guy's mind about what he believes is right.

ART IMPERIALISM

BM: Let's continue talking about teaching at the art school. Luis, when you were first starting the art department at SUNY College at Old Westbury in the '60s, you intended that art be embedded in all the urban-studies classes. While you were not able to accomplish this, you have described this policy as "art imperialism." Can you describe what you meant by that?

LC: What I said was that I am an imperialist as an artist, because I feel that art, being a meta-discipline above all other disciplines, should inform all other disciplines instead of being locked into a department. I still believe that. I am the only one, but I still believe that.

BM: Pablo, you have said something similar, but also that art should never lose its autonomy.

PH: I said that?

BM: Yes, do you want to me to reference where you said it?

LC: When we use ideas, it doesn't mean we have to remember them.

BM: Apparently not. It's what you said in your essay, "Art Education from Noun to Adjective."⁸

PH: It's what I said before. I do think that it is important for art to exist, because it does have great potential for bringing us into this ambiguous territory where nothing is definitive, where every premise can be questioned. This is always a very fertile place to think about things in different ways, in ways that in other disciplines it would not be possible to. That is the kind of autonomy that I find very productive.

LC: Art should actually be embedded in every way we think, which would go against autonomy. The problem is that we confuse art as a field of production with art as a way of thinking. The production part, obviously, will always be autonomous as long as we have the society we do. Art as a way of thinking, which is what you are describing, that should really be integrated into any way of thinking. We should only be able to think critically and creatively no matter what area we apply it to. If you leave art autonomous then you are saying, "OK, now I can be free" and "In the others I cannot be free." I ought to be free in every one.

PH: I agree. But it so happens that in reality that freedom is curtailed all the time.

LC: But that is why we have to fight.

PH: It's just that if you want to try to bring artistic thinking into another discipline, there's this gravitational force causing methods to emerge and formulas to appear. Art can be an antidote to that rigidity of other disciplines. I try to argue that in the essay Betty mentioned—that the art school should not be an art school anymore. It should be a university where art thinking is embedded in everything you talk about. I think it's something that you and I believe in. The discipline of art, when you maintain the territory of it, when you call something art, it's almost like opening a space where you can create that experimentation in the way things operate today. I don't know how you reimagine all these other disciplines within art, but maybe one day we will be able to do that.

LC: We have to demolish all the walls we encounter. If you preserve art as a room of freedom, you are accepting the lack of freedom in the other spaces; you are losing sight of what the mission is. The mission is not to become comfortable in that free room, the mission is to expand the freedom into all the spaces. That's why I am interested in art, and I am less and less interested in production. I am on my way out of being an "artist." I am more interested in trying to change the whole education system in the whole world. The few years I have left, I will try to do that. I know it's stupid. I know it's a waste of time, but at least I feel that's what should be done, and not add more pollution to the world of objects.

BM: You both have visited and/or taught in the Portland State MFA in Social Practice program, and perhaps other programs that are trying to institutionalize this idea of socially

engaged art or social practice, and in some ways making the connection between art and society more intrinsic, at least more than traditional studio-art programs might. I wonder if you see any hope in any of these programs regarding their potential to embed art in other disciplines, but also in general with regards to how you define good art education. Also, what pitfalls do you see with these programs?

LC: From what I saw, actually, there was a danger of focusing too much on social services and leaving art out of the picture. I don't mean that in terms of art production but in how knowledge is produced instead of confirmed. One of the important parts of art, at least for me, is that it is a methodology to expand knowledge, to generate new knowledge. So there are unknown things, things we may even call mysterious, that open art thanks to art. I missed that component. So while from a political point of view I think that social practice is crucial, from the point of view of cognition I think that we have to be careful not to lose the perception of complexity and the notion that we not only should solve existing problems but also pose and formulate new and interesting problems. I believe those are conditions for a good art education, where I don't care if we use the word *art* or not.

PH: Let me ask you something, Luis, because we never really talked about this. I am curious about your experience in the Dominican Republic in this school that you worked in and created. It was an incredibly ambitious program...

LC: The program was cut.

PH: I wanted to get your thoughts on that particular experiment and what you learned from it. Describe what it was because I am also not sure of all of the parameters of the project.

LC: It was a program that started in traditional art appreciation. The collection would send reproductions of works, and the students would look at the reproductions and would be asked, “What do you see here?” and “What does it make you think?” and blah, blah, blah. Basically using the work of art as a tunnel through which you may reach conclusions, but it’s limiting your evocations to what the work of art allows you to do. We changed that and decided, number one, we will go around the work and not through the work. We will identify the conditions that generated the work. From those conditions, we will formulate a problem and make open-ended assignments that would allow the student to solve that problem any way, in any discipline, in any manner that the student wants. Once that is done, then they would see the artwork that generated the process. As a colleague of the artist, they would decide which solution is more interesting for them. It’s not even a quality evaluation, but one of interest. That meant in that school in Miches, in the Dominican Republic, to first train the teachers to think that way, which was the more difficult part. And have them think in terms of problems that can be solved in many disciplines and not just in one. And slowly form the students to open up the store of mental supplies without divisions. By the time we started having some effect on the teachers, the foundation decided it wasn’t interested in the educational program anymore and stopped it. So I don’t know what to tell you. The process, we didn’t know even how long it would take to have an effect. It could take a generation, it could take two generations, it could take five years. We only had a year and a half to start it and then we were stopped.

PH: Essentially you see it as an incomplete experiment.

LC: Yeah, it was aborted. Mission aborted.

BM: Why was the program aborted? What were the reasons they stated?

LC: We never received a clear explanation, except that the foundation changed its aims. It was a pity because we just had started to build up trust with the teachers, had a very positive evaluation by UNESCO, and had secured a huge grant. I think this is one of the problems of private philanthropy. It’s a great invention to fill the gaps of government, but it has a very different accountability system. The givers don’t have to explain their decisions.

BM: Was that before or after you were pedagogical curator of the Sixth Mercosul Biennial?

LC: After.

BM: It sounds very similar to the curriculum that you instituted in the biennial.

LC: It actually became more radical. In the biennial, by definition, we had to deal with art; same for Pablo. Which was fine, but when you deal with the school system then you have two options: Do you keep art in the intellectual ghetto or do you become an imperialist, which is what we tried to do. We tried to bring creative thinking into the whole school system and not just during leisure time or fun time, which is how schools define the art part. It’s basically not very useful.

I mean, there is rhetoric to justify it as useful, but ultimately it's not, not the way it's done.

BM: Was it all ages or a single school?

LC: We were dealing from primary school to age fourteen. The program itself, the assignments we designed were for up to twenty-two [years old] or more. So it was ambitious; it was trying to deal with the whole educational system.

BM: It was happening at multiple schools then?

LC: It was a small school system in a small, very marginal village in the Dominican Republic, also in Petare, a suburb of Caracas, which is the most violent, neglected. It is like a favela. We had a school there.

MERCOSUL BIENNIALS

BM: Luis, I know that the Sixth Mercosul Biennial curriculum for K–12 students was based on asking participating biennial artists to identify the problems they were trying to solve in their works and developing activities from those for the students. Did you simply ask the artists for this, or was it much more of negotiation/conversation to get to that place?

LC: That was the most difficult part of the project. In part, many artists aren't very articulate. Many are not very focused in terms of putting it into words. It was a lot of going back and forth. Fortunately they were willing to do it, so it wasn't an imposition. But we worked on it until we did find the

paragraphs that would be clear enough for someone else to handle it. So it was really two parts. One, distill from their work what problem they were trying to solve or attribute to their piece, because it doesn't mean that the problem has to exist before they did the work. Sometimes you do something, and then afterward you realize this is the solution to such a thing, which is important because then you can follow up with more work. It establishes the path of the work, instead of having a single work sitting there out of context. But it really doesn't matter if your research problem is defined first and then you try to solve it. Or if you find a solution when you know it is a good piece that you cannot escape from and then you figure out, why is that? What is it responding to? Some people don't have to do it. They have it vaguely in their minds. But it is good to put it into words, one way or another, and that process is difficult. But we did it.

BM: So it sounds like some of the problems might have been more social, and others simply formal. Is that true?

LC: Yeah, and it doesn't matter. I wasn't going to tell people, "Hey, you have to be more political." That's odd. I'm personally not interested in formalism, but one of my favorite artists actually is Waltercio Caldas, who does beautiful work. I don't know if you would agree, but there is an elegance in his work that I find incredibly beautiful and satisfying. It's work that I never would try to make myself. It's like a different world. But he is so good at it that it becomes inevitable somehow, which is a condition I require from art, that the piece has to be inevitable. There are philosophical questions that are unrelated to politics that are still important. In art, you have parallels to that. It really doesn't matter what problems the

artist is solving as long as the solution becomes something you realize was missing, and now we have it.

BM: Once you had the problems, what did you do to translate them into assignments for the students? What were you looking for in developing them?

LC: I was looking that they would not fall into the style of the artist. Mercosul was in that sense the beginning. It wasn't as radical as I would do it today. Because of the dynamic of the biennial, we would send illustrations of the work so the students could see the work. By going behind the work to solve the problems and by giving assignments that didn't have a formal conclusion, but were open-ended, it allowed the student to really work parallel to the artist. So follow the artist, and in that process have a horizontal relation, which is what I wanted. Ideally the student wouldn't even see the work of the artist until they finished the assignment and then compared it. That's what they did later on.

By the way, Gabriel [Pérez-Barreiro, the Sixth Mercosul Biennial's chief curator] is the one who created the term *pedagogical curator* for me. What that meant was that the whole biennial since the very beginning was planned as a team. He selected the artists. I didn't have anything to do with that. He was still the traditional chief curator, but what was good was that the pedagogical part was intimately linked from the very beginning, and not attached later as a public-relations thing, which is the normal structure.

BM: Pablo, could describe how you saw the changes that Luis made under his position as pedagogical curator, and how you expanded or resisted those? I wasn't able to learn

a lot about what you did during your time as pedagogical curator during the Eighth Mercosul Biennial.

PH: I've said it before. I had it much easier than Luis because Luis, in fact, made indirectly a gift to me by creating a context under which the work I did could be done. Basically, the fact that Luis created that whole infrastructure for a department in a biennial that would be permanently dedicated to the education project—it just made an enormous difference. I still think it's a very rare and perhaps unique structure in any biennial to have a pedagogical curator and an education area or department. So I arrived with that already in place and that was really beneficial. I think the biennial that came in between the two of us, well, I think it suffered for a variety of reasons. I think they had a very low budget, and there were other issues. That was not the real reference for me, but really the biennial that Luis had created with Gabriel.

My interest at the time was really pushing those boundaries of what education could be. What I was observing when I got there...well, first of all, it's an overwhelming project. It's such a massive undertaking that it's really not an exhibition. You're creating something like a government program, like a regional program for the area, because they want you to bring forty thousand teachers, they want you to reach every school in the state, and so forth. What I noticed was that the biennial itself was so keen on that inclusivity that, as usually happens with biennials and foundations, they are interested in numbers, but not so interested in what happens to those numbers. So they wanted to ship catalogues to everyone, and books and publications to every single teacher. So my first instinct was to meet with those teachers or a cross section of teachers from different parts of the region. And especially teachers who

have nothing to do with art. And what I found is that, yeah, there was someone in the northern part of the state who was like a math teacher, and he receives this biennial information but he doesn't really know what to do with it.

A lot of my focus was connected to the geographic theme of the biennial, called *Pedagogía en el Campo Expandido*, basically "Pedagogy in the Expanded Field." We were using the biennial as an interlocutor for a variety of different disciplines so we created a publication that was more oriented to history teachers. We created a publication that was focused on people who were teaching social sciences or teachers who were interested in language. It was nothing that was earth shattering, but at the time, in that context, it was important. The other thing was, it was really focusing on the experience of the immediate interlocutors of the biennial, which were the *mediadores* [mediators], the three hundred students. Many of them were not art majors. Most of these were university students who didn't always have an art background. There were people who were biologists. There were people studying literature or whatever. We tried to take advantage of that to see if each of them in their own individual way could actually focus on specific artists that related to their interests and produce activities or discussions, or things that they were more invested in. For example, someone who was more of a natural-science or biology major became interested in an artist who was exhibiting who had this wonderful video about bees or about fighting between insects. It was a way of trying to make personal connections, and connections of disciplines, in the entire biennial. There was a lot more than that, but I think that crossing disciplinary boundaries was an important focus of this biennial.

LC: Pablo, tell more about *Casa M*, which I thought was a brilliant contribution. I should have thought of it for my biennial and didn't.

PH: It's really to Jose's [Roca, the Eighth Mercosul Biennial's chief curator] credit. What happened was that when we arrived there was an immediate sense of tension among local artists. Usually this happens in a biennial, local artists wonder, what is this thing, and why am I not included, and why are there international people coming and so forth? Local artists wanted to create their own biennial. They were calling it Biennial B. We wanted to engage them, of course. Instead of them creating their own biennial, we wanted to come up with something to work on together with them. Jose was very inspired by Colombian experiments of this nature like *Lugar a dudas*, which is in Cali, a fantastic place that is not an exhibiting organization. It is, essentially, an artist residency, and it's kind of like a social space. The idea was could we create something like that in Porto Alegre only for the local artists, not as a service particularly to the [whole] community. We were looking for a place, and we landed on this house that turns out belonged to an art educator who had passed away recently. The house was available. It was very weird and serendipitous. This woman was actually very well known as an art teacher in the university, so it became very meaningful.

This functioned as a venue where we constantly did public programs in a very concerted way. Every Tuesday, every Thursday, there were artist talks or conversations, and we mixed disciplines and we did this thing called *duplas* and *trios*; two people, three people. Usually the *duplas* were the local artists, and someone who was visiting to do something at the biennial could be a curator, could be an artist

doing research for a show. The most important part of the house was the kitchen, of course. So people were cooking there all the time. Everyone seemed to have keys to the house at some point and this was completely unregulated. We had a manager making sure everything was in order and nobody was stealing anything, but overall it was a self-sustained thing. People loved that house! They loved it! There was something going on every day: conversations, cooking, showcasing current projects, performances. It was amazing.

What was most important was that when the biennial finally opened, it didn't even feel that important because what had been most important is what we had experienced together in that house. There was a moment of celebration, but everyone felt that the most important conversations had already taken place. There was a whole movement toward the end of the biennial to save *Casa M*. They wanted *Casa M* to continue. Here are again the institutional realities, like what Luis was saying about the foundation defunding the program. It was a constant fight to get it open and to maintain it, and the biennial foundation didn't see it as possible to fund it anymore, so it closed with the biennial, to the great disappointment of the local community. I know that ever since that time there have been other attempts to create a new cultural space for the local arts community. But overall, indeed in that biennial, the most important contribution in our view was at least creating that space that showed the potential of what a very integrated dialogue between artists, among each other and the rest of the world, could be. And the fact that they could do it themselves, and they probably will do it again themselves. They're doing it themselves in other ways. It feels like the perfect outcome. You don't create something for them that will last forever, but you basically create something that

shows the possibilities of what can be, if you are willing to take on a certain responsibility and make it happen later on your own.

MORE LATIN AMERICA

BM: I'm curious to hear about a couple more projects that you both have engaged with in Latin America. To start, Luis, could you describe for us the role you played in *Miss Education*, and how that fits with your beliefs around art and education?

LC: *Miss Education* was a project of Humberto Vélez, who is a Panamanian artist who works with communities and tries to create relations between unlikely groups within them. He once had a boxing contest of boxing schools near the Tate in London and had the competition take place in the atrium of the Tate. He brought in people who had never been in an art museum and merged the two communities in a phenomenal festival. It's that kind of project. Somehow he ended up being on the jury of Miss Panama in 2012. From that experience he thought about creating a new title, which is Miss Education. Then he managed to have me as president of the whole Miss Panama contest, not just Miss Education. So I was the president of the jury for Miss Panama 2013. As an addition to my functions, I was to identify among the misses one who would be Miss Education. That was not voted by the whole jury, but just by me. But I was a pawn in this. I was not the creator. Humberto insists on crediting me as a coauthor, but I wasn't. I was a performer in a performance that he planned, which was terrific.

The person I gave the title to was a wonderful girl (I don't know if I can use the word *girl*) who actually had her own little school for models in Colon, which is a hellhole in Panama next to the Canal. The Canal is making millions per hour, and none are invested in Colon. She was Miss Colon, and she identifies adolescents whom she feels have potential and invites them to learn to become models, or at least to assume their personality and body. It is a terrific project. She was very lucid, and the whole experience was really fascinating. I had the same prejudice that most people have that misses are just like beautiful shells, nothing much happening inside. That prejudice was totally blown away. They were all interesting and complex personalities, and on top of that they were phenomenally pretty. It really moved me. And in particular Jennifer Brown, who was the winner of Miss Education. I found that some of them were more interested in Miss Education than in becoming Miss Panama, which also was fantastic. More important is that the title of Miss Education stays. Now in 2014 there will be another Miss Education appointed by whoever is on the jury. That is like a breakthrough internationally, I think.

PH: That's a great project.

LC: The credit goes to Humberto, not to me.

BM: Pablo, please share a bit about your project *The School of Panamerican Unrest*, which in large part also happened in Latin America and in relation to political history there.

PH: *The School of Panamerican Unrest* was intended as a project of dialogue between regions, cities, and individuals

in North, Central, and South America. It was meant to make them aware of each other but also of themselves and their circumstance, which they would have to articulate for the public that was witnessing the project, primarily through the blog through which I reported the experience daily. When I started the trip, I don't think I had a preconceived notion of what kind of spirit I would encounter in those discussions, but it became almost immediately apparent as I went south that there was a huge difference between the conversations in North America and the ones I was having down south. Mainly, not only was there a much greater immediacy and urgency for these conversations south of Rio Grande but the place from where people were drawing their concerns was much more colored by the direct experience of social and political conflict. American participants, in places like Portland, Oregon, for instance, spoke about conflict in abstract terms, while sipping Starbucks inside an art school. In San Salvador, I was in conversations with artists who had lost their family in the civil war and felt they couldn't make art about that because it was too difficult for them. In general, because adversity was so great in some places, it made the potency of the conversation much greater. And it is that awareness and daily living of conflict that made those discussions so much more meaningful and powerful, at least to me.

BM: Luis, how do you relate this back to also the differences in teaching in the U.S. versus Latin America? What about these histories and contexts lends itself to these differences?

LC: Latin America has an advantage of having a long tradition of student co-government in universities. The whole process started in 1918, and it has been diluted and

it is slowly getting lost, but the student still feels part of a militant generation that is there to improve society, and is not only studying for individual success. That mentality never happened in the U.S. It happened very shortly during the 1960s, but it was distorted, it didn't have a tradition behind it, and it disappeared. The college in which I taught is actually a perfect example. It was created in 1968 with the idea of locking all the leftists in one place so they wouldn't bother the rest of society. It was a very interesting place. It was very unstructured and very progressive. Now it's a college that is worse than the bad traditional colleges. It's very depressing. I had myself erased from the mailing list. I totally lost interest in the institution. You have a big difference there—in the U.S. you would have to start creating a tradition, but in Latin America you only have to preserve a tradition. That's a big difference.

BM: Based on that, how are the conversations around teaching art in Latin America different from in the U.S.?

LC: That's actually too vague. I don't know what's really happening in all the schools in Latin America. I should, but it would require going systematically to all the countries and doing the research, which I am not interested in. In some ways there is an alarming situation at large, not just in art education, which is the system of credits instituted in the U.S. slowly expanding all over the world. In Europe it's the Bologna Plan, which is now being applied in Latin America.⁹ Once again, education is quantified instead of focusing on the quality, which you cannot quantify. The PISA system is evaluating countries on a competitive basis and ranking them, but with the focus on math, reading, and science, not on creativity.¹⁰

It's all geared for job opportunities, which sounds like it is good for the students, but ultimately it is only good for the market. There is a distortion of the educational function, which is getting worse and worse, not better. That's not just Latin America, it is also in the U.S. with STEM.¹¹ STEM underlines science and technology as the crucial components in education to make the U.S. competitive with other countries. So it's all under the ideology of competition and profit and not of developing a better society and better people. And that's where art the way I see it could be an antidote.

BM: You've talked about the importance of uninstalling and unlearning in the education process as key to art thinking, which I relate back to this idea of reinvention. You've also mentioned the importance of creating new problems and not just solving existing ones. I wonder if, in this idea of uninstalling and reinvention, there is room to address existing problems. (Basically, if by reframing or restructuring existing problems, we can create more interesting and creative solutions than those that existed in the past. I'm thinking in terms of political and social problems, which are very urgent. How do we not lose sight of those when we are creating problems to solve?)

LC: Look, I think that a painting is only good if it gives the feeling that the act of painting was especially invented to produce that particular painting. That means that often it doesn't matter if the problem is already there or not. It matters that you approach it and solve it in a way that everything has been "invented" just to deal with that. Since most of usable knowledge is already there and has been digested, the only way you can do that is by using deep, critical thinking, by checking out what is behind everything,

what question is behind the question, etc., and check out where things deviated and went wrong, or were not carried out to the needed extreme. Then there are problems that haven't been posed yet, problems that expand knowledge and are waiting to be posed. Those are all pressing needs that I consider more important than producing objects, and that is why I believe we should approach art as a form of cognition and not as a means of production. Within that, art thinking has a freedom that other ways of thinking don't have, and that is why it is crucial that we incorporate it into all modes of knowledge. This doesn't mean that with art we are going to solve immediate social problems, and that is where I distrust social practice a little bit. But it may help by opening the mind to other perspectives. That is now, speaking generally and not as an artist; speaking as an artist I should do all of that (like everybody else) plus tackling, in terms of cognition, the unknown. So, answering your question more directly, we shouldn't lose sight of those political and social problems because we should be good citizens. And we also should go beyond them because we should be good artists.

This conversation took place on February 28, 2014, and was edited by the participants during the following months.

1. Luis elaborates on the political situation in Uruguay at the time: "The economy in Uruguay had started to deteriorate after the Korean War, and by the mid-'60s discontent started rising and the government became increasingly repressive. In '69 the army was already in the streets and it felt like dictatorship was operating, even if legally it only started in 1973. The U.S. had offices in the police quarters, and torturers were being trained to deal with whomever was considered 'subversive,' a very arbitrary and flexible term that could hit anybody. I was a correspondent and illustrator for *Marcha*, a center-left periodical where Eduardo Galeano was also working. That put us on the 'blacklist' of the army."
2. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: International Publishing Group, 2005). "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other," 72; "In the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade," 48; "The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and recreation is not possible if it is not infused with love," 89.
3. See Mark Edelman Boren, *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2001). "Universities became autonomous institutions, student representatives were included in all university decisions, including the hiring of faculty; the university entrance policies were democratized, and financial assistance programs instituted; and students could design their own programs of study, select what course they would take, and attend universities free of charge. Most significantly, the doors to the universities were opened to Argentina's lower classes" 71.
4. "Luis Camnitzer by Alejandro Cesarco," *Bomb*, no. 115 (Spring 2011): 90.
5. For Freire's discussion of limit situations (the barriers), limit acts, and abstract decoding see *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 99, 105.
6. "Luis Camnitzer by Alejandro Cesarco."
7. Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011).
8. See Pablo Helguera, "Art Education from Noun to Adjective." pp. 76–83 in this volume; #18 in particular addresses the point.
9. The Bologna Process is a plan to create a European Higher Education Area to standardize higher education standards and processes in Europe. See the goals of the plan at <http://ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/about>.
10. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that measures fifteen-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy. See an overview and details of the program at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa>.
11. *STEM* is an acronym referring to the academic disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

A Reflection: Art for Education

Betty Marín

It was important for me to test the ideas I found so compelling from Luis's educational program during the Sixth Mercosul Biennial. Was it possible to create a critical relationship between elementary school students and exhibiting Portland Art Museum artists? What could they learn from one another? What does facilitating this learning look like?

In collaboration with Sharita Towne and Patricia Vazquez, we formulated Art for Education, a project with a sixth-grade math class from King School in northeast Portland, Oregon. Over two months, we worked with the class of a brilliant and supportive teacher, Io Eltagonde. The project culminated with a public presentation during Shine a Light, the annual participatory evening of social-practice art at the Portland Art Museum on June 6, 2014.

Art for Education adopted the basic framework from the education program of the biennial, inviting Northwest artists showing at the museum to provide the questions or problems they were resolving in their work. We developed all other details of the curriculum (the primary meat of it) in relation to the particular group of students and artists we worked with.

We heard from five of the artists showing in the museum and additionally invited the collective Weird Allan Kaprow, which was participating in Shine a Light, to give the first prompt. The artists responded with narratives telling about their works, from which we created succinct prompts that captured the intention of the work. We stayed away from revealing its original form in order to avoid any temptation for the students to simply copy the artwork. Here are the finished prompts:

*Problem 0**Artist: Weird Allan Kaprow**Create an artwork that critiques an institution in your neighborhood.**Problem 1**Artist: Christine Bourdette**Create an artwork that is an unspoken dialogue.**Problem 2**Artist: Jim Riswold**Create an artwork that is an homage to something in your life that helps you stay healthy.**Problem 3**Artist: Kaila Ferrell-Smith**Create an artwork about something that needs to be remembered in the history of your family or your community.**Problem 4**Artist: Jackie Johnson**Create an artwork that tells about a place in your personal story.**Problem 5**Artist: Joe Seymour**Create an artwork about something traditional and identify its original everyday use.*

While the prompts left room for experimentation, their open-endedness was a challenge because of the students' minimal knowledge of forms. Rather than spending time working through new forms, we prioritized the students' presenting a personal narrative in their works. Encouraging the students to value their own experience and draw from that knowledge to produce content felt effective.

We still questioned the success of the project and wondered whether we had created a space for art as a realm of ideas and problem solving, as opposed to craft, the purely technical skills required to build, draw, or make other forms.

Mariam (shown second from left on the first image on the following page) responded to Problem 2. She made her first video. She also choreographed and performed a solo dance routine, something she had previously done only privately in her bedroom. Mariam questioned putting herself "out there" throughout the process, but after much encouragement from her classmates and us, she went for it, even if reluctantly.

Meaningful experiences like these contradicted our doubts, as did the public presentation.

The conclusion of the project presented its core intentions honestly. Through a playful and open structure during Shine a Light, the audience witnessed and took part in a dialogue where the students and museum artists conversed on equal ground. Because the students were nervous and shy about presenting their works, we decided on a "fish bowl" format; a mix of students sat in a circle with some of the museum artists and answered questions developed by the students beforehand. The questions explored the content of the museum, whom art is for, and how to make the museum more fun and accessible to visitors and artists like themselves.

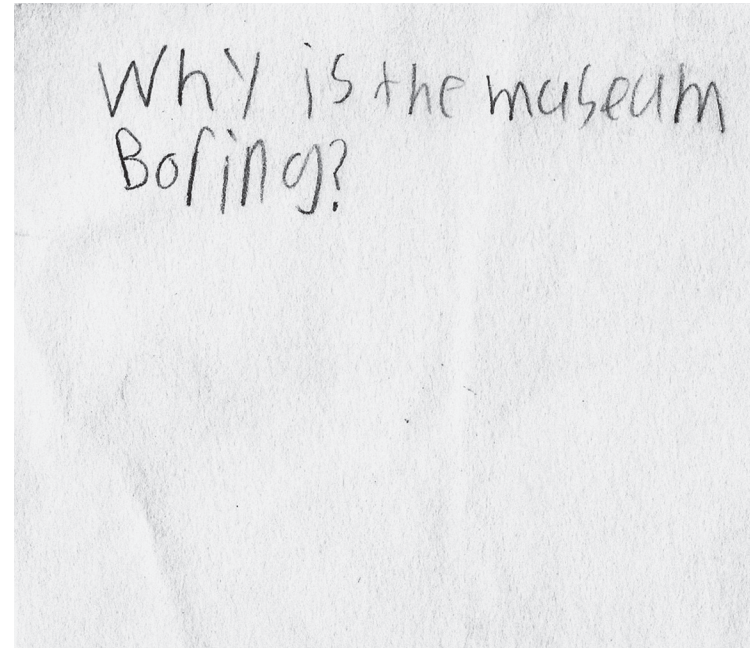




Students blindly pulled questions out of a box, read them aloud, and took pleasure in choosing whom they would oblige to answer. They mostly asked questions of one another, and the artists and audience members had a chance to respond. Because of the frank nature of the questions and the play and agency involved in asking them, the students' voices were prominent; their opinions and experiences were on a par with those of the museum artists. This place in the museum was briefly transformed into one focused on criticality, plurality, and discussion.

One of the things that the overall project experience reinforced for me, and that I also heard in the interview with Luis and Pablo, was the importance of paying close attention to who is in the classroom and adapting your teaching from there.

I am still learning (and I imagine I will continue to learn for the rest of my teaching days) the right balance between teaching skill and creating a setting where students unlearn and reinvent, as Luis suggests. As we confront an entire educational system, systems of oppression, and our own learning, these ideas are much more challenging in practice. I'm committed to growing as a teacher by creating learning structures that expand opportunities for students to experiment and learn for themselves, while at the same time solving problems vital to their experience and world.



Art Education from Noun to Adjective

Pablo Helguera

1

The literature, symposia, essays, and other similar efforts produced around the reinvention of the art school depart from the premise that art making requires a space outside the normal confines of the university.

2

The emergence of the European academies was based on the drive to professionalize artists through a separate environment that would best facilitate their development. This rationale has continued to permeate every kind of thinking about art practice, ranging from the Bauhaus's first-year program to the present-day art school.

3

Given the era of specialization that we live in today, it would only make sense to think that the art profession needs to continue existing, more than ever, in its own environment. Yet this is precisely the push to isolate the art school that is now outdated in terms of how artists have moved art into the social realm.

4

Art that is fueled by a modernist or even a post-modernist sensibility continues to need a self-enclosed environment that helps signify it—a social and cultural space that, like the museum, is specifically designated to turn any gesture into one specifically designed to be interpreted within the cultural framework and universes of meaning of art. Yet the gradual push toward art as process and the abandonment of the art object—or the use of the art object merely as a reference, but no longer the final product of the art experience—has also eroded the boundary of art and the world. By and large the desire of new generations of artists who try to break ground is to reintegrate art practice into the world, and not reject it.

5

In this state of affairs, the art school gradually takes more and more of the place of the art academy of the nineteenth century. Art students in art school produce academic conceptual or performance works, pieces that replicate the rhetorical twists and turns of feminism, identity politics, and Minimalist aesthetics, but always without fully resolving the great contradictions that rebelling against a safe environment generates.

6

For an example of how the art school is the new academy, look at the roster of the most influential artists of the past two decades, and see the extent to which most of them did not go to art school, or nurtured themselves through their interest and knowledge from other disciplines. While the existing art school model has excelled at providing artists with the manufacturing and technical skills to present their work, and only barely has helped artists to articulate their ideas, it has generally proved to be a poor environment for true multidisciplinary, producing artists with mostly naive ideas about any area outside of art practice. It is possible that, once historians conduct a thorough study of the effect of art schools on the artistic production of our time, they may find that there was a “correcting” process that all art school graduates underwent, where

they integrated their own life experience or other expertise into their work, reconciling it with what they had learned in art school. I remember Gabriel Orozco saying once that he truly started being an artist when he decided he would give up making art, shortly after leaving art school.

7

It is often argued that art cannot be taught, and as such, art schools are meaningless institutions anyway. This commonplace statement glosses over self-evident truths about art practice: Certainly, there is much to be learned about the manufacture of art, about the historical context under which art is made, about the myriad ways in which art becomes a language, and, more specifically, about the worldview of a wide range of artists. While all of this could ostensibly be learned individually, this statement is similar to calling for the end of all structured schooling.

8

The likelihood is that the art school, like its predecessor the art academy, will continue living, just as the academies continue living in their own anachronistic way. Just as there is a market for academic art, there will likely always be a market for abstract painting and conceptual photography.

9

The true debate is then not about whether the art school model is viable; it is about the viable model to form artists who will advance art practice.

10

At the core of the construction of that model is the problem of what constitutes deskilling/expertise in art, or, in other words, the question of what artists need to know, what is it that they do know, and where their expertise lies.

11

Many current art schools have dismantled the technical skills once provided by the Bauhaus model, while not truly replacing them by other than theory, along with a tenuous and generally random set of subjects that usually satisfy the personal taste or political views of the schools' instructors and decision-makers. As a result, we produce artists without developed traditional skills and instead with an extremely self-conscious understanding of their own practice, as Method actors who focus so much on the Method that they become paralyzed.

12

A traditional model can hardly be dismantled in order to be renewed; it needs to be either followed thoroughly or replaced by a new model.

13

So while the traditional twentieth-century art school may still be functional and necessary for the production of twentieth-century art, the new school needs to respond to the terms under which new practices are currently redefining art production.

14

There may certainly be many models to conceive and pursue in the future, but while we must be visionary as we reconfigure new environments for art learning, we also need to think about the reconfiguration in pragmatic and realistic ways.

15

The most direct and logical way to think about this problem, I believe, is to institutionally embody the idea that art has become a meta-discipline—that is, that it modifies other disciplines by bringing their activity into a territory of experience, ambiguity, contradiction, and criticality. Art making becomes a vehicle of producing knowledge in relation to other disciplines, and while it can continue to be a vehicle in and of itself, it can also function as a vehicle to advance the discourse of other areas of knowledge and human activity. This is not to imply that art will cease to become a specialty, but rather that the artist will become a trained, mediating agent between a given discipline or set of disciplines and the sphere of art production.

16

An art university would be a hybrid institution that understands art not as a set of aesthetic principles (the academy) or technological ideas (Bauhaus), or a place where art is produced to exist and be interpreted within its own controlled context (the present-day art school). Instead it would be a location where visual art ideas permeate the sensibility of all that is studied there, where they are the container within which the humanities and sciences are studied. It is not that chemistry, say, is an art form—it is not—but studying it in the art context informs both art making and the original discipline itself.

17

In the same way in which art practice abandoned the object and instead focused on its modifiers, art education needs to abandon art instruction as the objective and instead focus on how art modifies reality. This may be seen at first as a difficult and perhaps suspicious venture—since the territory for art as a meta-discipline has yet not been traced. Yet given the current debates and collective interest of the practice, this seems to be the logical progression toward the goal of building an institution that would retain enough flexibility to produce innovative and critical thinking through creativity and that would be structured enough to allow future artists to not produce art in a vacuum.

18

Finally, an art university is not an art school embedded within a university program, but the other way around—a university under the umbrella of an art institution. Its conceptualization and implementation may be the great challenge for the new generation of those working today in institutionalized education—those who may want to offer a truly experimental environment for art making that is truly in sync with other disciplines, allowing art production to remain an autonomous zone while also being a source of knowledge production—art as knowledge of the world.

Dis Magazine, Spring 2012, <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/33606/the-art-school-is-dead-long-live-the-art-university>.

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Luis Camnitzer is a Uruguayan artist born in Germany in 1937. He immigrated to Uruguay when he was one year old and has lived in the U.S. since 1964. He is a professor emeritus of art at the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury. He graduated in sculpture from the Escuela de Bellas Artes, Universidad de la República, Uruguay, and studied architecture at the same university. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship for printmaking in 1961 and for visual arts in 1982. In 1965 he was declared an honorary member of the Academy in Florence. In 1988 he represented Uruguay in the Venice Biennale. In 1998 he received the Latin American Art Critic of the Year award from the Argentine Association of Art Critics; in 2002, the Konex Mercosur Award in the visual arts for Uruguay; and in 2011, the Frank Jewitt Mather Award of the College Art Association and the Printer Emeritus Award of the SGCI. In 2012 he was awarded the Skowhegan Medal and the USA Ford Fellow award. He participated in the Liverpool Biennial in 1999 and in 2003, the Whitney Biennial of 2000, and Documenta 11 in 2003. His work is in the collections of more than thirty museums, among them the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum, New York; Whitney Museum, New York; Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Sao Paulo; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires; and Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo de Costa Rica. He is the author of *New Art of Cuba* (University of Texas Press, 1994/2004); *Arte y Enseñanza: La ética del poder* (Casa de América, Madrid, 2000), *Didactics of Liberation: Conceptualist Art in Latin America* (University of Texas Press, 2007), and *On Art, Artists, Latin America and Other Utopias* (University of Texas Press, 2010).

Pablo Helguera (Mexico City, 1971) is a New York–based artist working with installation, sculpture, photography, drawing, socially engaged art, and performance. Helguera's work focuses on a variety of topics ranging across history, pedagogy, sociolinguistics, ethnography, memory, and the absurd, in widely varied formats including the lecture, museum display strategies, musical performances, and written fiction. His work as an educator has usually intersected with his interests as an artist, and the work often reflects on issues of interpretation, dialogue, and the role of contemporary culture in a global reality. This intersection is best exemplified in his project *The School of Panamerican Unrest*, a nomadic think tank that physically crossed the continent by car from Anchorage, Alaska, to Tierra del Fuego, making forty stops in between. It is considered one of the most extensive public art projects on record, as well as a pioneering work for the new generation of artworks regarded as socially engaged art. Helguera has exhibited or performed at venues such as the Museo de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; ICA Boston; RCA London; Eighth Havana Biennial; Shedhalle, Zurich; MoMA P.S.1, New York; IFA Galerie, Bonn; Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum; MALBA museum, Buenos Aires; and Ex-Teresa Espacio Alternativo, Mexico City, among many others. In 2008 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and in 2005 was the recipient of a Creative Capital Grant. In 2011 he received the International Award of Participatory Art of the Region Emilia-Romagna in Italy. Helguera has worked since 1991 in a variety of contemporary art museums, including as head of public programs at the education department of the Guggenheim Museum in New York (1998–2005). Since 2007, he has been director of adult and academic programs at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. He served as pedagogical curator of the Eighth Mercosul Biennial in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2011.

Betty Marín is an artist, educator, and social-justice worker from Wilmington, CA. Her work centers around creating educational spaces that encourage dialogue and solidarity between different communities. Her work has recently focused on the role of undocumented labor in this society. Marín's work has been shown at the Portland Art Museum; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Barbara; and LAXART, a gallery in Los Angeles.

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Notes

68–69 From left: Caleb J. Jordan, Mariam K. Gilay, Alaysia A. Miles, Pablo Prado-Madrugal, Yunnior L. De Leon, and Misael Torres-Grandes. Photo by Patricia Vazquez, May 2014. **70–71** From left: Jim Riswold, Christine Bourdette, Prince A. Brown, Jada M. Jackson, Mariam K. Gilay, and Yunnior L. De Leon. Not pictured: Jackie Johnson and Dorimar García Sanchez. Photo by Betty Marín, May 2014.

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—BM