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## **Delaunay, Camnitzer and Cone: Art, Transformations and Identity on an Upper Fifth Avenue Museum Stroll**

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Here's a way to celebrate the coming of spring: go to that stretch of Fifth Avenue that incorporates the [El Museo del Barrio](#) at 105th Street, the [Cooper Hewitt](#) at 90th Street, and [the Jewish Museum](#) at 91st Street.

Why? The answer lies with two artists -- Luis Camnitzer and Sonia Delaunay -- and two extraordinary collectors, the Cone sisters of Baltimore.

Camnitzer is European, Latin American, U.S. inflected. He was born in Germany in 1937 and, undoubtedly for obvious reasons, his family resettled in Uruguay. Camnitzer is cosmopolitan, intellectual, utterly Duchampian.

Sonia Delaunay, who became central to an idea of French aesthetic, was born Sonia Stern in the Ukraine in 1885. The Cone sisters, genius collectors of Matisse, Picasso, and others from

the panoply of greats, were the somewhat eccentric daughters of a North Carolina textile fortune and the friend of Gertrude Stein.

Let's start with Camnitzer, who is at [El Museo del Barrio](#). The first thing to say is how extraordinary the Camnitzer exhibit is in the clean new spaces of the renewed and expanded facility. Many of the exhibitions -- overflowing with imagery, cluttered with history, exploding with meaning -- draw attention from the renewed galleries, the crisp lobby, and the thoughtfully conceived (believe it or not) café. Not this exhibition. It is cerebral, conceptual, spare and elegant. It breaks away from the aesthetics of figuration, color, and narrative that is often (and well) depicted.

Camnitzer's work has inspired lovely public responses, including this [rather typical one](#) which explores the artist's obsession with signatures -- autographs -- and the relationship to commodification and decommodification.

Now 73, Camnitzer is a theorist, teacher, philosopher, internationalist. All the work plays with these different identities. They are about teaching as much as about creations of the hand.

The exhibition is part of the FOCOS series, which, according to the Museum, highlights "groundbreaking, mature, yet under-recognized artists." Clearly Camnitzer is "mature": his under-recognition may be just in the eyes of the under-informed. But it may be, as well, because of how he situates himself in relationship to other artists, to styles, and to the market.

The image that opens [the exhibition](#), a horizontal human face, surreal -- almost Bunuel-like -- is surmounted by models of a distant but ideal village of one's youth. But the exhibition itself is evocative of Cornell, the 1970s conceptualists, Segalove, Baldessari, even Smithson.

The exhibition is open until May 29. Not at the Museo del Barrio is his 1970 portfolio of woodcut prints, based upon philosopher and theologian Martin Buber's "Tales of the Hasidim," a retelling of anecdotes.

Having seen Camnitzer -- a Jewish refugee to Uruguay -- in the context of El Museo, one can stroll ten blocks to see Sonia Delaunay at [the Cooper Hewitt](#): a different architecture (the rich wood of the Carnegie mansion) and a different aesthetic--but also tied to elements of geographic transformation, redefinition of an aesthetic and the Jewish experience.

This thrilling exhibition -- held over until June 19 -- shows the glories of Delaunay's theory of Simultaneity -- her adaptation of theories of color to principles of textile design and fashion. The exhibition contains a trove of rarely-seen snippets or samples of work she turned out, primarily for Metz and Company in the Netherlands.

According to the Cooper Hewitt's publicity mill, "Known primarily as an abstract painter and extraordinary colorist, Delaunay (1885 -1979) applied her talents and theories to all areas of visual expression throughout her career, including graphics, interiors, theater and film, fashion and textiles. She made little distinction between her paintings and her design work, considering all to be part of a practice of bringing art into everyday life. The exhibition features her 1946 oil painting, 'Rythme Coloré,' as well as gouaches, illustrated poems and pochoir prints."

One gallery, contrasting the museum's domestic interior with the dramatic hues of the artist, is a near replication of the Simultaneous Boutique, which opened in conjunction with the 1925 Paris Decorative Arts Exposition. There she exhibited garments that were extensions of her

painting practice, geometric forms in rhythmic patterns and brilliant colors that suited the modern spirit.

My own recommendation, then, is to complete a cycle by visiting the [Jewish Museum](#). There, more known, more traditional treasures are located in an exhibition, on throughout the summer, called "Collecting Matisse and Modern Masters: The Cone Sisters of Baltimore." Two daughters of German-Jewish immigrants, the sisters started buying art in Paris in 1905, using their own eye and helped by the Steins, Leo and Gertrude, among others. But they were liberated, rich and travel-prone, and assembled wonderful works from many parts of the world - - as reflected in the exhibitions.

Is there a link between Camnitzer and Delaunay, and between them as artists and the Cone sisters as collectors? Have these disparate institutions of upper Fifth Avenue unconsciously created a kind of ode to the Jewish refugee or immigrant experience, drawn from three different eras, three geographical settings, three different roles and histories? It's interesting to compare Camnitzer (Germany to Uruguay to the United States, 1937 to now) with Delaunay (Ukraine, late nineteenth century to Paris and a career through mid-century). And it's useful to think of the role of the families of collectors like the Cones, who like Delaunay made their lives in textiles, and like Camnitzer and Delaunay, were adventurous, pioneering and synthesizing.