

LOOK ONCE, THINK TWICE:

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Pavel Buchler's black-and-white photograph, "Blind Circles (Under Surveillance)", is part of the "Frames and Documents" exhibition at CIFO through March 4, 2012.

Enter the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation (CIFO), and one of the first things you'll see is a deceptively simple suite of ten etchings by Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer. The same image repeats in each one: A small square inside a large one, their corners connected by diagonal lines. Yet each etching is stamped with a different word — envelope, grid, roof, tunnel, window — leading the viewer to see the same image in different ways.

Camnitzer's work, collectively titled "Envelope," is a vivid display of his admonition to students at the State University of New York at Purchase and at his studio in Valdottavo, Italy (of which I was one) that art should challenge the way we perceive things. It is also a succinct definition of conceptual art, which is the subject of CIFO's exhibition, *Frames and Documents: Conceptual Practices*, on display through March 4.

Comprised of over 60 works from the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, the show spans the

period from the 1960s to the late 1980s when many artists were focusing more on process than product, on content more than image.

This de-emphasis of art as a consumer object and consequent rejection of traditional forms of painting and sculpture resulted in a body of work that could be as fleeting as it was thought-provoking.

The artists represented in the exhibition range from pioneers such as Camnitzer, Joseph Kosuth and Ed Ruscha to contemporary artists such as Marina Abramovic and Barbara Kruger. The Latin American tilt of the show reflects both the content of the Cisneros-Fontanals collection from which it is drawn as well as the strong foothold that conceptual art had in the Southern Hemisphere.

These artists questioned not only artistic forms and institutions, but political authority as well. As Cisneros-Fontanals summarized it in her catalogue foreword, "They challenged the materiality of the art object and created works outside of the institutional framework.... Artists began to abandon the traditional forms of expression and emphasized the use of ideas and text as a medium. This shift is a result of artists dealing with their own struggles such as political strife, civil unrest, or the fight for equality."

Many of the works in Frames and Documents record the process of art-making. Italian artist Claudio Perna, for example, is represented by “Sin titulo-Del blanco a negro [Untitled--From White to Black],” 11 sheets of paper progressively filled with black lines rendered with copier toner. Exhibition co-curator Jesus Fuenmayor, called this work “a Xerox version of monochrome painting, which itself represented the height of Modernism denial of painting. ... Perna reinvents the limits of this self-referential gesture by placing mechanical reproduction at the service of fragmenting the unity of painting.”

Other artists focus on themselves as subject and medium. Among the best known of them is Cuban artist Ana Mendieta, whose photographs and videos exploring gender and cultural identity are well represented in the exhibition. Particularly striking among the artists for whom their own bodies is the theme is Chilean Carlos Leppe. His photographs deal with what he calls “a crisis of sexuality.” In one grouping, “El Perchero,” he depicts himself as male, female and both.

A multi-sensory approach characterizes much of the work on display. Like Camntizer, Kruger uses words to amplify her message in, “Untitled (We are the Objects of Your Suave Entrapments,” as do Vito Aconcci, Eugenio Dittborn and Ricardo Brey. Many of them employ video, film and photographs to document their more ephemeral creations and performances.

Co-curators Fuenmayor and Philippe Perrote have made a provocative selection of works that both present the individual pieces of art as well as document the process and historical content in which they were created. Their insightful commentary is unfortunately presented in labels with type too small to read easily. Nonetheless, Frames and Documents--and its elegant installation--amply rewards the time and thought a visitor gives it.

After contemplating the CIFO show, a visit to a polished jewel of an exhibition at the Miami Art Museum would be in order. Focus Gallery: Marcel Duchamp, on view through April 29, offers a chance to see work by the godfather of conceptualism. With a key work from its own collection augmented by loans from the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, MAM highlights the roots of conceptualism that flourished so verdantly two generations in the works showcased at CIFO.