

The New York Times

‘Open Work in Latin America, New York & Beyond: ‘Conceptualism Reconsidered, 1967-1978’

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In a world overstuffed with things, Conceptual Art came as a blessing in the 1960s and ‘70s, with its big ideas in small, often ephemeral packages: postcards, collages, written words, gestures. And the dematerializing impulse was an international phenomenon, as the visually airy sampler “Open Work in Latin America, New York & Beyond: Conceptualism Reconsidered, 1967-1978” makes clear.

The “New York & Beyond” category includes familiar American-born artists whose careers unfolded in the city ([Mel Bochner](#), Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt), with a couple of “beyond” figures in the Los Angeles-based Ed Ruscha, and the intriguing Donald Burgoyne of Massachusetts. What’s nice is that more than equal time is awarded to Latin Americans, like the Brazilian [Hélio Oiticica](#), who visited New York, and others — [Jaime Davidovich](#), Rafael Ferrer, [Liliana Porter](#) — who settled here.

Best of all, the curator, Harper Montgomery, professor of Modern and contemporary Latin American art at Hunter, has thrown the spotlight on artists whose careers were largely confined to Latin America and who are only beginning to get the global attention they deserve.

It’s great, for example, to have even a taste of the Uruguayan mail artist [Clemente Padín](#), the veteran Brazilian installation maker Artur Barrio and the Brazilian collagist [Anna Bella Geiger](#), and to be reminded that while Conceptualism in New York often served as an alternative to the era’s protest art, in Latin America it was political to the core, an effort to drive pinpoint-fine wedges into the ideological masonry of dictatorial power.

What else? It’s refreshing to find collaborative work, rare in egocentric New York these days, and poetry, preserved on a tape of intercontinental readings recorded by Eduardo

Costa and John Perreault in 1969. And there's a take-away bonus in the form of a stylish catalog with valuable essays by City University of New York graduate students: Liz Donato, Kevin Kelly, Dominika Ksel, Rebecca Major, Jeremiah W. McCarthy, Hallie Scott, Jieun Seo and Gillian Sneed.

Words are Conceptualism's secret weapons. When, in 1972, the Argentine artist Horacio Zabala, who's in the show, had himself photographed writing the phrase "This paper is a jail," he was calling attention to art's old confining thing-ness, and at the same time, opening it up, setting it free.