

# BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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**MEDIA CONTACTS:**

Carlotta Stankiewicz, 512.475.6784, [carlotta.stankiewicz@blantonmuseum.org](mailto:carlotta.stankiewicz@blantonmuseum.org)

Penny Snyder, 512.471.0241, [penny.snyder@blantonmuseum.org](mailto:penny.snyder@blantonmuseum.org)

**Blanton Museum Presents *Words/Matter: Latin American Art and Language at the Blanton***



*Exhibition celebrates history and future of Latin America at the Blanton*

AUSTIN, TX—January 7, 2019—The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin will present *Words/Matter: Latin American Art and Language at the Blanton* from February 17, 2019 to May 26, 2019. The exhibition examines how modern and contemporary Latin American and Latinx visual artists have engaged written language to make personal, political, and poetic statements.

*Words/Matter* is drawn primarily from the Blanton’s extensive collection of Latin American art. The collection began in 1963, when the museum’s first director established a collecting priority that identified contemporary art from both North and South America. Since then, the Blanton has continued to focus on collecting, researching, and exhibiting Latin American art. In 1988, it was the first museum in the US to establish a curatorial position devoted to this field. The collection now includes 2,500 works of modern and contemporary painting, prints, drawing, conceptual art, installation, video, and sculpture.

“We are very proud to shed new light on the museum’s Latin American art program with exhibitions opening simultaneously at the Blanton and at the Reina Sofía in Madrid this winter,” said Blanton Director Simone Wicha. “The Blanton has long been a leader in this field and continues to build on its commitment to celebrating the unique art histories that have emerged from Latin America.”

The 2019 Blanton Gala will honor the museum's enduring innovation and engagement in the field and showcase the exhibition *Words/Matter: Latin American Art and Language at the Blanton*, organized by Beverly Adams, the Blanton's curator of Latin American art, and Florencia Bazzano, the Blanton's assistant curator of Latin American art. "We are thrilled to share Beverly's brilliant scholarship with audiences both here in Austin and concurrently in another exhibition drawing from the Blanton's Latin American collection that begins a world tour in Madrid this February and will conclude at the Blanton in 2020," continued Wicha.

*Words/Matter* highlights the depth and breadth of the Blanton's Latin American collection, featuring approximately 150 works in a variety of media, dating from the 1930s to the present. The exhibition will also debut recent gifts to the museum, including several works donated to the museum by the late Jacqueline Barnitz, an internationally recognized scholar of Latin American art and UT Professor Emerita, and a group of Chicana prints given to the Blanton by Gilberto Cardenas, a collector of Latinx and Chicana art and professor at UT from 1975 to 1999.

"*Words/Matter* is a testament to the origins and future of the Blanton's Latin American collection," said Beverly Adams, curator of Latin American art and co-curator of the exhibition. "Bringing together works from the beginnings of the collection, such as Barbara Duncan's seminal gifts of South American paintings, which came to the museum in 1971, with more recent gifts from collectors Charles and Judy Tate, *Words/Matter* showcases the Blanton's deep ties to artists, scholars, collectors, and others working and interested in Latin America."

Several key loans in the exhibition demonstrate the strong campus partnerships that continue to position UT and the Blanton at the forefront of this field. A collection of sculptural poems, as well as several Chicana protest prints from the 1970s, are featured in the exhibition and are on loan from the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, the largest university research collection focused on Latin America in the United States.

"Organizing this exhibition allowed us to present our collection of Latin American art in a new way, organized around a significant theme: visual artists' enduring interest in language and the written word," said Florencia Bazzano, Blanton assistant curator of Latin American art and co-curator of the exhibition. "*Words/Matter* calls attention to the inventive and subversive aesthetics of artist's books, poems, socially engaged printmaking, and conceptualist practices, revealing the powerful messages that emerge from the convergence of art and language."

The exhibition has six sections that examine the varying ways artists made written language a key aspect of their work.

### **Alphabets**

In this section, artists explore the experience of bilingualism by inventing new languages and designing alphabets—calling attention to what makes languages unique and sometimes untranslatable. Works range from Leandro Katz's book *Ñ* (1971), which highlights a letter that exists mostly in Spanish, to Xul Solar's watercolor *Una grafía* (1935), which features his use of shorthand to represent language phonetically, illustrating his desire to create an international language.



### **Poetry and Prose**

This section foregrounds the diverse and enduring collaborations between visual artists, writers, and poets in Latin America during the twentieth century. Some visual artists published manifestos, magazines, or theoretical treatises about art, such as Joaquín Torres García's *Tradición del hombre abstracto* [*Tradition of the Abstract Man*] (1941), a book and artistic manifesto. A painting of the same name by Torres García, composed of a grid and words, will also be on view. Others integrated literary allusions into their works. For example, Liliana Porter's multi-media work *Historia sin fin* [*The Unending Story*] (1980) references Juan Luis Borges and visually quotes Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, and Nury González's embroidered cashmere textile *Recado a Gabriela Mistral* [*Message to Gabriela Mistral*] (1995), features phrases that reference and honor Chilean poet and Nobel Prize winner Gabriela Mistral.

### **Concrete Poetry**

The exhibition also includes an impressive collection of Concrete Poetry, a type of poetry that conveys meaning through visual arrangement of words and letters in space. Several pieces by leading practitioners of Concrete Poetry in Brazil, Augusto de Campos and Julio Plaza, will be on display including *Caixa preta* (1975), a multi-media work containing three-dimensional poems. This section also includes works on paper by Mathias Goeritz, a proponent of Concrete Poetry in Mexico.

### **The Shapes of Language**

This section includes works that take their form from the vehicles used to circulate printed language, such as codices, newspapers, magazines, and books. Visual artists adopted these new formats for the diffusion of art and ideas through public communication channels. The Shapes of Language features several artist's books, such as Paulo Bruscky's *ALTO RETRato* (1981), Waltercio Caldas's *Velázquez* (1996), and Gego's *Líneas* (1966).



### Fighting Words

Artists invested in the social power of art have produced some of the most iconic work in Latin America. Fighting Words explores this radical spirit, with a focus on how the juxtaposition of images and language magnified political messages. This section will feature a salon-style wall of political prints, including Chilean, Latinx, and Chicax printmakers. Fighting Words includes the work of several artists interested in Mail Art, an alternative method of communication used both to evade censorship and to connect to an international network of Mail Art practitioners. Prominent Argentine mail artist Edgardo Antonio Vigo's portfolio *Múltiples Acumulados* [*Accumulated Multiples*] (1983), which he sent via mail to friends and associates, captures the breadth of political and performative work he created throughout his career.



### Between the Lines

This section features works by artists who used conceptual strategies to evade censorship and form coded, yet urgent, political statements. Nemesio Antúnez, in the painting *Estadio negro* [*Black Stadium*] (1977), called attention to the torture of thousands of Chilean citizens by simply writing the title of the

work and the date "September 11, 1973," on the canvas. Similarly, Luis Camnitzer's 35 photo etchings, *Uruguayan Torture Series* (1983), pairs photos with evocative one-line statements, referring to actual incidents of torture by the dictatorship that ruled Uruguay from 1973 to 1985. Contemporary artist Alejandro Diaz, a Texas artist and UT alumnus currently working in New York City, continues this legacy in his presentation of phrases that foreground absurdities in the art market, late capitalism, and US-Mexico relations.

*Words/Matter: Latin American Art and Language at the Blanton* is organized by the Blanton Museum of Art.

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#### **Latin America at the Blanton:**

The Blanton holds one of the oldest, largest, and most comprehensive collections of Latin American art in the country, a continued collecting focus for the museum dating back to 1963. In 1988, the Blanton was the first museum in the US to establish a curatorial position devoted to Latin American art. The collection currently comprises approximately 2,500 works of modern and contemporary paintings, prints, drawings, and sculptures by artists including Fernando Botero, Luis Camnitzer, Leonora Carrington, Carlos Cruz-Díez, Gego, Beatriz González, Sara Grilo, Cildo Meireles, Mira Schendel, Diego Rivera, and Joaquín Torres-García.

#### **About the Blanton:**

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with nearly 18,000 objects. Recognized for its modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings, the Blanton offers thought provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

#### **Image Captions:**

Ismael Frigerio, *Las necesidades (agua)* [*The Needs (Water)*], 1984, acrylic, tempera, and spray paint with charcoal on wove paper, 92 1/16 x 107 9/16 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Barbara Duncan Fund and Archer M. Huntington Museum Fund, 1985

Liliana Porter, *Historia sin fin* [*The Unending Story*], 1980, acrylic, silkscreen, drawing, and collage on canvas, 62 3/16 x 84 1/2 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, the Barbara Duncan Fund in memory of Rocío Duncan, 1981

Ricardo Duffy, *The New Order* [*El nuevo orden*], circa 1996, screenprint, 20 x 26 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Gilberto Cardenas, 2017

Paulo Bruscky, *Returned to sender – ao remetente*, circa 1986, print, 17 7/16 x 12 5/8 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Jacqueline Barnitz, 2017