

## **Carmen Hernández presentation**

**00:10 – Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy:** Thanks to all the Pecha Kucha participants. Before we have our conversation with curator Carmen Hernández, whose work has been extensively mentioned throughout today’s activities, she’s going to share a few words with us. Carmen, welcome. **00:27 – Carmen Hernández:** Good afternoon, firstly, many thanks for the invitation.

**00:30 -** Later we will have a conversation; Sofía told me we would reflect on art, or let’s say, the future of art. But I’ve brought a few notes because it’s the only way I can be brief and concise and not bore you. Man is a political animal because he is a literary animal, who allows himself to be separated from his natural destiny by the power of words.

**01:00 -** I have a quote from Jacques Rancière: “It is possible that my diagnosis of art today, and in the near future, may not be very optimistic, depending on my particular insistence on differentiating the artistic practices by their functionality and contextualization, from consensus or dissent.” I believe that the artistic practices of dissent as a form of knowledge represent a potential signifier of communicational order above those more associated with consensus, which are

**01:30 -** subjected to power relationships to make, in quotes, “everything equal”; and in this way inscribe themselves in legitimization processes from the recreation of an instituted sensibility, whether from individual turning in on one’s self, a sort of interior decoration—according to Tania Bruguera—or from the forced declarations of patronized political narrative—according to Luis Camnitzer. These comfortable postures that flirt with the tensions in the system of art seem to put us face-to-face with the therapy represented by narcissistic,

**02:00 -** catharsis, on the one hand, and the empty banality of conformist literalism on the other. Beyond narcissism and banality, we find those practices that [Digna] has identified as cultural insubordination, those that don’t obey a programmed instrumentalization, that, in the condition of their discursivities that assume critical positions in the face of the redistribution of power, deconstruct institutional knowledge and propose new social relationships from a self-consciousness of their possibilities of the existence of intervention, that stimulates a contextualized

**02:30 -** gaze at their community, whether it is territorial or symbolic. These practices assume a rebellious attitude in the face of the orthopedics represented by diverse factors, and, first, question the hegemonic cultural models that inhibit social transformation. Second, they resist the reduction of a work to an object of the marketplace, marketable and “museum-able,” decontextualized or reduced to its exchange value, its worth in prestige within the market of cultural goods. Third, they reject

**03:00** - the reduction of the artist's work to the simple making of objects, depoliticizing their labors as conductors of meaning. From this rebelliousness, these practices oppose the validity of the modern system of art as a representation that exercises a differentiating role in that which is social and the market's systems of calculating worth. When distinctive differences are assigned among subjects and cultural objects are given a hierarchy, their political or intervention-oriented action can be understood as a way of offering visibility

**03:30** - to those residual forms that have been deferred by the dominant models, whether as mechanisms of memory or as the problematizing of instituted representations, associated with diverse problems of identity, or as a stimulus of merely playful activities that cast doubt on hegemonic insistence on productivity. They also propose to investigate the very nature of art or its institutional conformation, rejecting self-referentiality inherited from the constructive formalism that favors

**04:00** - the idea of universality or international style. In this way, these insubordinate artistic practices assume an interpretive labor that questions the canon as a modeling mechanism, nonexempt from an andro- and ethnocentric profile; and at the same time, they propose to stimulate constant negotiations that favor the distention of the system of art and its politics of representation, with which to offer many elements for the analysis of social dynamics.

**04:30** - From this positioning, I think that the notion of "useful art" —which recur in the reflections of Tania Bruguera and Luis Camnitzer— is appropriate. For example, Camnitzer says: "The useful part of art is that of the activation of people that would normally be in the process of consumption. That is its task: to challenge a conventional stereotype in which there is no place for subversion; subversion not in the sense of terrorism, but in that of the study of systems of order to see if they are still viable and if there are alternative

**05:00** - systems that could function better." And Camnitzer warns us that perhaps, today, the only remaining transitable path to utopia may be that of keeping alive our ability to speculate, not that something is certain, but on the possibility that it is certain—he says this in his book *Arte Boludo*. Which leaves us with this third option of infiltration, which can also be understood as rebellion against the politics of representation that constantly renews its strategies

**05:30** - to avoid fixed postures and to attend to continuing institutional depoliticization and canonizing tendencies. From within the frameworks of institutions, or from outside of them, artistic practices that assume a constant play of provisory infiltrations promise a healthy future. But the future of art does not depend only on the positioning of artistic production, but rather its institutionality, consisting

**06:00** - of physical and symbolic spaces, because it must be included in this public environment of symbolic transactions that also represent criticism, academia, theoretical terminology and all the agents that constitute the scene. In accordance with the visible traces of power today, and following the reach of politics as the activity that reconfigures sensitive frameworks, at that heart of which common objects are defined, the future of art in our context does not inspire hope, as we experience a polarization that

**06:30** - makes dissent invisible. I think that superficial gazes abound in our country that have made political art a two-sided pamphlet, easily digestible, that turns to the appropriation of historical elements—of the heroic memory, in many cases— to question or strengthen partisan narratives. Criticism, when it emerges, is characterized by comments limited to the works exhibited, avoiding contextualizations in a wide framework of meaning and, rather, sustaining a discursive polarization, so that, at least in Caracas, the field of

**07:00** - art seems to divide itself between those who displace themselves territorially and symbolically on the east or west of the city. This polarization, marked by prejudices of the political in factitious terms, is sustained by an emotionality that is not lacking in prejudices that have a particular way of affecting social actors but not institutional order. Galleries and museums continue to exercise their positive functions, but there is a wide contingent of members of the field of art that no longer exercise a meaningful role

**07:30** - because they have had to dedicate themselves to other functions, or they have left the country. Although self-managed spaces have been created by artists and curators, in the end, these initiatives cannot manage to totally avoid this tension that affects the modes of making art, its circulation and its interpretation. To this, add the lack of specialized publics, the product of many material and political factors. Perhaps the most worrying thing is the growing diaspora and the de-professionalization of the institutional field, which leaves the youngest

**08:00** - generations without referential strongholds for artistic and intellectual production. This is to say, there is a great deal of curation done by people who do not know contemporary art's own tensions, and who create incoherent dialogues for the mere desire to exhibit "friends of the house," with whom, as much in the east as the west, there are no interpretive conflicts. But this new "everything goes" approach is justified by a kind of silent complicity. A polarized institutionality,

**08:30** - as a form of power, has contributed to the minimization of dialogue—a reflexive one, above all—to make way for the comments, in favor or in opposition, from the political scene, which in the end don't assume openly critical postures capable of making the scene dynamic. It is possible that all this is a product of confusion between political art and art as politics, understanding politics as the possibility for change and not as a partisan posture. This has been visible mostly in the struggle to appropriate Bolivarian and heroic collective imagery.

**09:00** - Facing this panorama, I believe it is necessary to stimulate criticism, because the mediations represent powerful mechanisms that affect art's good health. One cannot diagnose the future without taking into account the material and symbolic conditions that facilitate its insertion in the public space, including the social actors that determine their circulation, interpretation and evaluation, who can alter its meaning. I believe it is possible to attend to these mediations with the exercise of criticism capable of comprehending sensitive and contextual

**09:30** - paradoxes. For example, the processes of dematerialization—experienced by artistic practices since the middle of the 20th century—did not only focus on declaring a work as merchandise, but also in showing the anchors that demobilized its critical meaning, as happens today when graffiti is exhibited in museums, out of its context of a totally illegal nature—because graffiti is, basically, illegal. The good health of today's art comes from the ethical sense of knowing itself inscribed in a specific

**10:00** - context of values associated with tastes, desires and necessities, which point to consolidating feelings of belonging that go beyond the individual achievements and privileges before the scaffolds of power. The future of art as a possibility of encounter is not the same as the art of the possible future, the accomplice of institutional values. From the perspective of power, we could say the future of art has many possibilities of acting upon what's social, stimulating wider relationships among people, beyond

**10:30** - the aestheticization of life —rejected by Walter Benjamin and celebrated by other contemporary thinkers. Perhaps we could witness an aesthetic of the erotic, associated with a feminization of the world which, for its nomadic and vitalist attitude, would concentrate more on empirical and collective emotions, oriented towards promoting the imaginary, the dream-like and playful, without submitting to the laws of instrumental reason, to focus on the common enjoyment of an internal reason. A form of feminization of the world,

**11:00** - coming from a sensible and integral reason, would hold those proposals that are inscribed in fixed modalities and that favor multiple and even paradoxical interpretations, stimulating allegorical or metaphorical procedures. This is about polysemic, anti-canonical works, without precise objectives of institutional recognition, marked by the enjoyment of sharing, displacing the transcendent authority of authorship with that of the individual as a simple mediator inserted into his social context. Relative to

**11:30** - this posture, it seems appropriate to mention the vision of the *Caósmosis* by Félix Guattari that, in a similar way to the aesthetic of existence of Michel Foucault and Joseph Beuys, represents ethical-political implications, because it speaks of the responsibility of creative instance with respect to the thing created, from a re-dimensioning of the pre-established scenes, committing itself to a destiny of otherness in its extreme modalities. Which implies that care of itself and a

**12:00** - proximity to the other in an integral way. Perhaps the efficacy of art doesn't reside in recovering that tribal subjectivity that was mimicked in the multiple voices of the community, where aesthetics had a ritual meaning, but rather in strengthening the utopic, rebellious, polysemic and maybe paradoxical sense of artistic practices from the interpretive realm, that is to say, criticism. The future of art is promising if it sustains a dialogical and critical gaze that impedes that many practices associated with

**12:30** - design, and open to very wide experimentation, are not absorbed by other instances such as design, politics, popular culture, among others. Finally, I think that, still, the post-autonomy—or relative autonomy or reformulated autonomy that includes differentiated practices—allows us to promote new behaviors and relationships among subjects. Which leads us to imagine that the artistic has much to contribute, from sensible and critical reason

**13:00** - facing the institutionalized norms of power. Well, from that context, from that position, I think we can now open a wider conversation. Thanks.