barbara kruger

"i work with pictures and words because they have the ability to determine who we are and who we aren't" - barbara kruger

Barbara Kruger
Twelve 2004
installation view
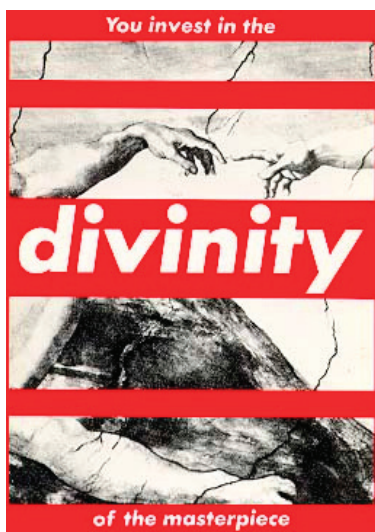courtesy of the artist and Monika Sprüth
Philomene Magers Gallery, Munich

Twelve, a major component of Barbara Kruger's exhibition at ACCA, was launched at the famous Mary Boone Gallery in New York and recently shown at Glasgow's Tramway Complex. *Twelve* is a large scale video installation of twelve short scenes, written by Kruger, performed by actors and projected on opposite sides of the space to each other. Nine of the 12 scenes occur at the same time in a mealtime setting. Text scrolling along the bottom of each scene suggests the thoughts or words of the people involved who tackle the issues of global politics and prejudice.

artist's background

Barbara Kruger was born in New Jersey, USA on 26th January 1945. Initially studying at Parsons School of Design, Syracuse, NY, her teachers included the photographer Diane Arbus and Marvin Israel (b 1924), a successful graphic designer and art director of Harper's Bazaar. When Kruger's interest in art school waned in the mid-1960s, Israel encouraged her to prepare a professional portfolio. Kruger then moved to New York and entered the design department of Mademoiselle magazine, becoming chief designer a year later. During the late 1960s and early 1970s she also designed book covers for political texts and became increasingly interested in poetry, writing and in regularly attended readings.

From 1976 to 1980 Kruger lived in Berkeley, CA, teaching and reflecting on her own art. In photograph-based images, she examined the representation of power via mass-media images, appropriating their iconography and slogans and deconstructing them visually and verbally.

Barbara Kruger
Untitled (You Invest in the Divinity of the Masterpiece) 1982
unique photostat
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Such works as *Untitled (You Invest in the Divinity of the Masterpiece)* exploits an economy of image and text to articulate and undermine the power-based relations established in such media images.

Barbara Kruger
Untitled (I shop therefore I am) 1987
photographic silkscreen on vinyl
Private collection, Zurich

Her messages have been displayed in both galleries and public spaces, as well as framed and unframed photographs, posters, t-shirts, electronic signboards, billboards and flyposters.

inspiration and investigation

Kruger uses popular culture as both a subject and a tool in her work. Images taken from sources such as fashion magazines are juxtaposed with provocative texts to critique the structures and values these magazines propagate. Her work poses questions, scenarios and ideas on a range of subjects; economics, consumerism, gender politics, race, personal rights, autonomy; but all can be reduced to a simple exploration of how people function and co-exist within a hierarchical society.

"Power and its politics and hierarchies exist everywhere: in every conversation we have, in every deal we make, in every face we kiss. I try to address this power and how it choreographs the issues of violence and control, of wealth and poverty, of hope and abjection," the artist says.

Major influences cited by Kruger include film, television, the stereotypical situations of everyday life and especially her training as a graphic designer.

Barbara Kruger
Twelve 2004
installation view
courtesy of the artist and Monika Sprüth
Philomene Magers Gallery, Munich

materials and techniques

In having worked as a graphic designer, art director, and picture editor in the art departments at *House and Garden*, **Aperture**, and other publications, Kruger's understanding of the power of the graphic image is evident in the work for which she is now internationally renowned.

Many of Kruger's iconic work from the 1980's layer found photographs from existing sources with pithy and confronting text. Using the colours black, white, and red, Kruger manipulates images and attaches text to prompt emotion. These works engage the viewer in a range of issues surrounding power and control which her captions express. Much of her text questions the viewer about feminism, classicism, consumerism, and individual autonomy and desire. Some of her instantly recognisable slogans from that time read, "I shop therefore I am," and "Your body is a battleground."

Kruger's work has been presented on t-shirts, as billboards, video and film, buscards, posters, as environmental work and on a train station platform in Strasbourg, France. 1

Barbara Kruger
Untitled (Your comfort is my silence) 1981
black-and-white photograph
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Some view as only an artist, whereas others debate she is a 'social commentator and a political agitator'. 2

points for discussion with students

Visit /www.accaonline.org.au/exhibitions to listen to a podcast on Barbara Kruger and www.accaonline.org.au/mediarel for a media release.

www.maryboonegallery.com/artists.html

1. Explore the range of political and social issues which Kruger explores and how these ideas are are conveyed in her work.

2. Kruger explores a range of ideas and issues in relation to sexualaity and gender. Research specific works in which these ideas are explored.

3. Examine how Kruger has developed a particular style using a range of materials and techniques and incorporating new technologies etc.

4. Explore the ways in which Kruger's work questions traditional artistic styles and incorporates parody, irony, satire etc.

5. Track and document the stages of Kruger's work over time and the devopment of her ideas.

6. Black-and-white images used by Barbara Kruger have been culled from mainstream magazines. How are these composite photo/texts different from magazines?

7. Many artists borrow or use images from other sources. Kruger's work makes use of appropriated and found imagery from the mass media. What is the difference between 'appropriation' and 'copying'?

8. Research the legal and ethical issues involved in reproducing the work of another artist.

9. Explore the work of other artists who have also incorporated text in their work. (see below)

1. www.pbs.org/art21/artists/kruger/
2. www.geocities.com/soho/cafe/9747/who.html

Barbara Kruger
Untitled (Your body is a battleground) 1989
photographic silkscreen on vinyl
The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica

Barbara Kruger
Twelve 2004
installation view
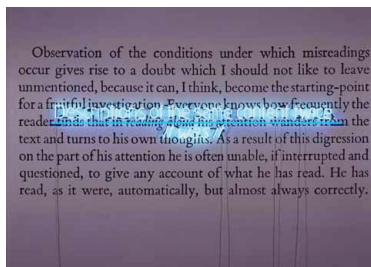courtesy of the artist and Monika Sprüth
Philomene Magers Gallery, Munich

artists and text

Other artists who have used text in their work include:

Jenny Holzer
Xenon on Berlin's Matthäikirche, 2001

Jenny Holzer b. 1950 USA

Jenny Holzer was born 1950 in Gallipolis, Ohio, USA. She began to use text in her work while attending Ohio University. An abstract painter while at Rhode Island School of Design in 1975, she shifted to public projects and works that were 'sublime and impressive'. She later created the first 'truisms'(short statements), as a series of one-liners on posters pasted anonymously around the city. Holzer's ideas later extended to installations with electronic LED displays, toether with large-scale xenon projections of text on buildings and in landscapes. Holzer's 'truisms' include common myths while others are just phrases on random subjects in the form of slogans. Often Holzer's work presents both explicit content and minimalist aesthetics that make profound statements about the world of advertising and consumer society today.

Joseph Kosuth b. 1945 USA

Joseph Kosuth attended the Toledo Museum School of Design from 1955 to 1962 and studied privately under the Belgian painter Line Bloom Draper. From 1965 to 1974. Kosuth explored the idea that language possesses meaning only in relationship to itself.

Joseph Kosuth
"It was it" No. 4, 1986
Phototext by Sigmund Freud from
"Psychopathologie of Everyday Life" with Neon
"Description of the same content twice / It was it"
white neon letters and blue neon-line

Kosuth was coeditor of *The Fox* magazine in 1975–76 and art editor of *Marxist Perspectives* in 1977–78. In the series, *Text/Context* (1978–79) the artist posted statements about art and language and their sociocultural contexts on billboards. In 1981, he began using the theories of Sigmund Freud in series such as *Cathexis,* which is composed of text and inverted photographs of Old Master paintings marked with colored Xs. Also in 1981, the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and the Kunsthalle Bielefeld organised a major Kosuth retrospective. In his work *Zero and Not (*1986), words were mechanically printed on paper and then partially obscured by tape. The artist lives in New York and Belgium.

Emily Floyd b. 1972 AUS

Emily Floyd creates islands of discourse in which the world is ordered by concepts and theories. Floyd's works made from wooden letters and architectural forms reference specific texts,while parodying artworld notions of artistic personae.

For futher information regarding image and text refer to the article by Peter Hill, The Age, January 7 2006.
'Words for art's sake.'

Emily Floyd
A strategy to infiltrate the homes of the bourgeoisie, 2005
painted wood

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