

The big pictures

■ VISUAL ARTS

Felicity Allen

FAR from the usual revolving adverts for lunchtime strip clubs or other salacious lures, this billboard is one city space reserved for public art.

Visitors to the intersection of Queen and La Trobe streets will notice the billboard at the Republic Tower is filled with a gigantic work by internationally renowned artist Barbara Kruger.

"I decided to go straight for the most successful billboard artist in the world, and that's Barbara Kruger," Juliana Engberg, director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, and curator of the Republic site, says.

"She has this wonderful ability to be proactive, not didactic, and has the creative ability to flesh out some of the issues facing the world at the moment."

The three works are untitled, but Engberg offers some thoughts on them.

Beneath *Blind Eye*, *Drained Brain* and *Shattered Skin* are the words "busy hiding", "busy hating" and "busy fighting". One soon realises what Kruger is commenting on.

"There is a certain fatigue facing everyone at the moment about certain world events like war, who's to blame for it, what can we do about it? And Kruger can assemble this kind of visual information beautifully because her work is all coming out of the media," Engberg says.

This is Engberg's first exercise in filling the space and, because she commissioned the work, she is thrilled with the result.

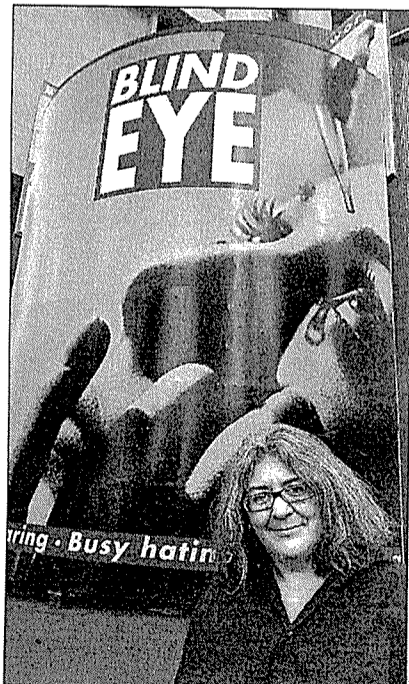
"It is a perfect example of Kruger's ability to attract the public with short, sharp shots of perfectly formed perceptions," she says.

Engberg sent Kruger site specifications, but the artist already knew the corner and had no trouble coming up with an idea.

"This type of public art is about understanding the medium of public address; I think we have moved away from the plonk-space mentality that used to prevail here in Melbourne," Engberg says.

■ BARBARA KRUGER

Where: Republic Tower, cnr Queen and La Trobe streets. The work will be in place for about four months.



Political: Juliana Engberg at the display. Picture: DARRYL GREGORY