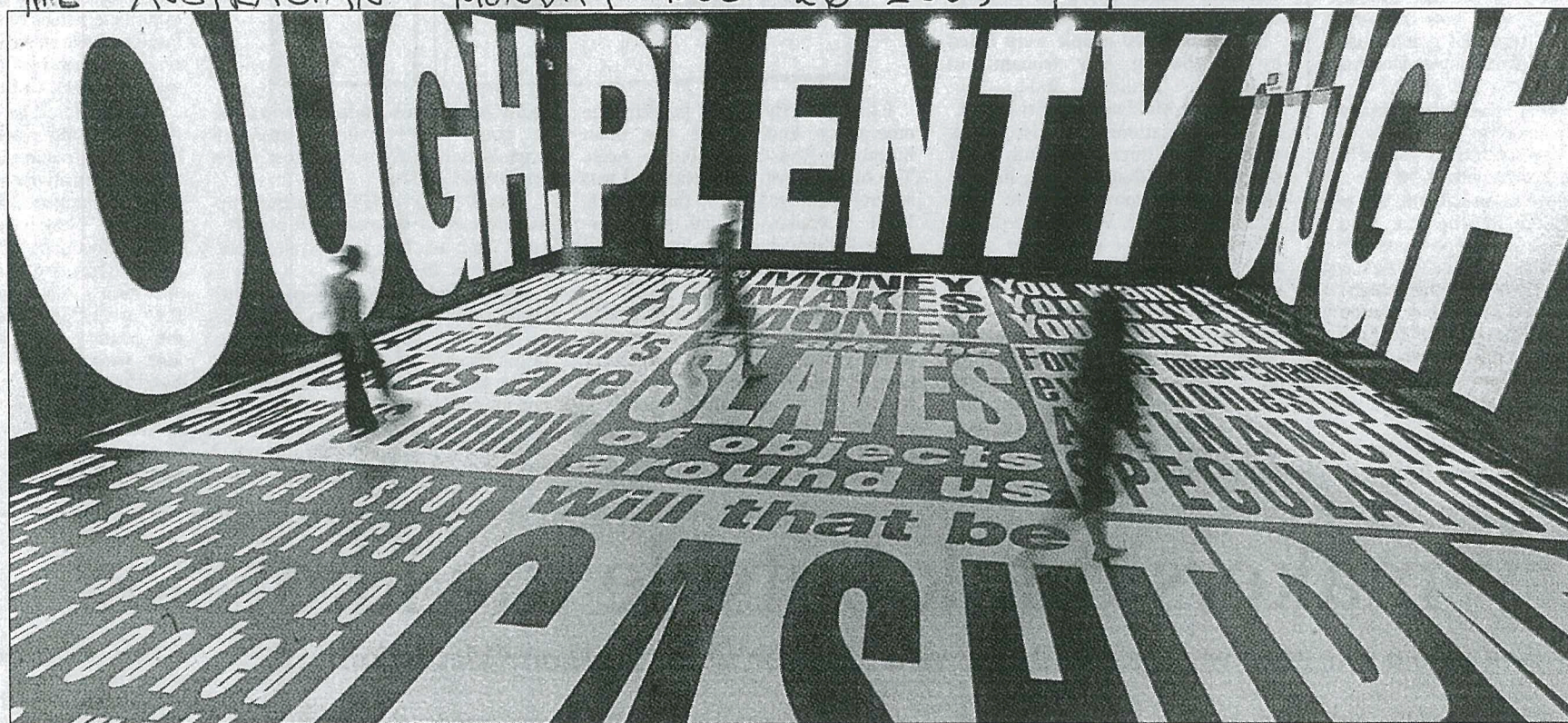


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Been there, read that: One of the rooms in Barbara Kruger's show at Melbourne's Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

## Anti-consumerist chic makes a statement

**B**ARBARA Kruger's limited edition coffee mugs, released as tie-in merchandise with the show at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, sport her characteristic reproaches and decrees against consumerism.

"You want it, you buy it, you forget it," announces one of the mugs in Kruger's signature black-and-white Futura Bold font. Resembling generic office kitchen crockery tagged with one-line jokes, Kruger's mugs are indeed forgettable or at least disposable.

For the past 25 years, American artist Kruger has protested against the manipulative power of mass media messages using the simple graphic design style she acquired in the 1970s as a layout artist at

### VISUAL ART

**Barbara Kruger**  
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art,  
Melbourne. Until February 26.

Conde Nast magazines such as *Mademoiselle*. As the exhibition at ACCA shows, not a lot has changed during that career in terms of medium or message, other than its market value: her famous 1987 screen-print of the slogan "I shop therefore I am", which has also turned up on a line of shopping bags, sold last year for more than \$US600,000.

In two rooms, video-projected text scrolls steadily across the floor, like a television newsreader's autocue pouring

out bland accusations: "You scare me"; "You used to be nicer". Moisturisers, iPods and bigger lips are included in a monumental shopping list, sarcastically defining professional and personal success, that cascades down a wall.

The room beyond that is papered over with massive headline-style banners declaring "Money makes money" and "You make history when you do business". Ironically, the overstatement of these glib, critical aphorisms can sound like affirmative, aspirational lifestyle maxims. And, despite the volume, it all sounds a bit stale. This is particularly so in *Twelve*, a multiscreen video work featuring a series of talking heads that berate, abuse and snipe at each other in deafen-

ing soundbites reminiscent of so many soap opera scripts.

In a sense, Kruger's complaints are incontestable and carry a certain baby boomer, chic, political poise. But this is because they're as banal and rhetorical as the daily exhortations quoted on a desk calendar. Her targets may dress like they're on Wall Street, but they're made of straw.

Kruger is a no-logo activist and is on record saying that she is not indicting people for their consumer desires. But her strategic ambiguity turns her billboards, placards and dialogue into decor. In fact, one thinks how good a bar or boutique may look decked out like this.

Edward Colless