Barbara Kruger MATRIX/BERKELEY 100 University Art Museum mid-August - late October 1986

Untitled (We don't need another hero), 1986



"We don't need another hero" is the message on Barbara Kruger's billboard designed for the University Art Museum's MATRIX program. Printed in white letters on a red band, these words superimpose a stereotyped depiction of masculine strength, a male flexing his bicep while an admiring female looks on, here enacted by "Dick and Jane" in the style of 1950s advertisements. In Structuralist terms, Kruger has appropriated two signifiers from popular culture (the words are the title of Tina Turner's theme song for a Mad Max film set in a barbaric, post-nuclear holocaust future) to create an entirely new sign, one with a potent and clear warning.

Kruger questions common attitudes about heroism in another recent work in which she quotes Clint Eastwood's famous challenge "Make my day" on a mural-sized picture of a wildcat holding a slab of raw meat in its mouth. Although virtually all of Kruger's works deal with power relationships, she feels such categories as "political" or "feminist" art only serve to isolate and therefore undermine the importance of works addressing controversial social issues.

Often the relationship
between the imagery and words
in Kruger's works is
ambiguous, allowing for
several interpretations. A
bandaged hand with the words
"We will undo you," for
example, could be read as a
warning issued by an abusive
tyrant or the peoples' threat
of revenge (is "we" a pronoun
for the state or for its
victims?). The billboard

image and statement are unusually specific because, unlike works hung in a gallery or museum, the billboard must be seen and comprehended at a glance by a wide and varied audience.

Kruger, a film critic as well as a visual artist and once a graphic designer for Conde Nast, mimics the sophisticated techniques of Hollywood and Madison Avenue, such as cropping and montage, to create her bold black and white works. By adding red lacquered frames Kruger also allies them with socialist propaganda art. In some recent works, Kruger alters her usual format, printing her photographs on a lenticular screen that shifts between image and text as the viewer walks by.

Although Kruger was not directly influenced by the Conceptual Art of the late 1960s and early 1970s, one can see in her work certain affinities with Conceptual attitudes. First-generation Conceptualists like John Baldessari (MATRIX 94) and Douglas Huebler rejected Formalist aesthetic theories and instead insisted on an art that valued ideas over style. Kruger, and certain other artists of her generation, like Jenny Holzer and Richard Prince, disdaining traditional artistic values of originality and craft, also use borrowed styles, words or images in their work. Often placed under the rubric of Postmodernism because of the multiplicity of their sources, they are, in general, more pointedly political in their aims than their immediate predecessors. Kruger employs strategies to uncover the pervasive sexual stereotyping found in the

printed and electronic media, stereotypes that she feels perpetuate society's male dominated power structures.

Kruger was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1945. She attended Syracuse University, Parsons School of Design and the School of Visual Arts in New York. In 1983 she received an Individual Artist's Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Kruger has taught at Parsons, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, and was a visiting instructor in the Department of the Practice of Art, UC Berkeley in 1977. She currently lives in New York and teaches in the Whitney Museum Program for Independent Study.

Kruger's billboard appears at Adeline Street near Woolsey and at San Pablo Avenue near University Avenue in Berkeley, courtesy of Foster and Kleiser, Oakland, and is mounted on the exteriors of the University Art Museum, Wurster Hall, and the Intramural Sports Facility on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley. We appreciate the cooperation of Professor Sam Davis, Department of Architecture, and William Manning, Director, Department of Recreational Sports.

Constance Lewallen

Work in MATRIX:

Untitled (We don't need another hero), 1986, billboard, 9'7" x 22'7". Lent by the artist.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Artists Space, NY, '74; Fischbach Gallery, NY, '75; Franklin Furnace, NY, '79; P.S. 1, Long Island City, NY, '80; Larry Gagosian Gallery, L.A., '80, '82, '83; Institute of Contemporary Art, London, We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture (traveled to Watershed, Bristol, England, Nouveau Musee, Villeurbanne, France, Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland, '83-'84 (catalogue, essay by Craig Owens); Annina Nosei Gallery, NY, '83, '84, '86; Galerie Crousel/Hussenot, Paris, '84; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, '85; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, MATRIX 83, '85 (brochure).

Selected group exhibitions:

Whitney Museum of American Art, Biennials, '73, '83, '85 (catalogues); San Francisco Art Institute, California Annual, '77; Kassel, W. Germany, Documenta 7, '82 (catalogue); Venice, Italy, Biennale, '82 (catalogue); Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Image Scavengers, '82 (catalogue); Museum of Contemporary Art, Sexuality and Representation, '84 (catalogue); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Content: A Contemporary Focus, '84 (catalogue); Queens Museum, NY, The Real Big Picture, '86 (brochure); Margo Leavin Gallery, L.A., Paravision, 186.

Selected bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Buchloh, Benjamin.

"Allegorical Procedures:
Appropriation and Montage in
Contemporary Art, Artforum,
Sept., '82.

Linker, Kate. Artforum, Sept. '82.

Owens, Craig. "The Medusa Effect of the Specular Ruse," Art in America, Jan. '84.

Lippard, Lucy. "One Liner After Another," Village Voice, April 10, '84.

Brenson, Michael. "Can Political Passion Inspire Great Art?" The New York Times, April 29, '84.

Smith, Roberta. "Beyond Gender," Village Voice, Jan. 22, '85.

Indiana, Gary.
"Undermining Media," Village
Voice, Feb. 25, '85.

Sturman, John. "Barbara Kruger," Artnews, May '86.

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