

Steptoe

Diversity & Art: A Virtual Tour

Barbara Kruger

United States (b. 1945)



We Will No Longer Be Seen And Not Heard

Work

Most of Barbara Kruger's work is committed to exploring and calling attention to the worlds of advertising and mass media, and their role in shaping our views, especially concerning women. Ironically, she uses her expertise in the industry to promote ideas challenging the status quo often propagated by the media, and to call attention to injustices, biases, and cultural stereotypes that our society has elevated to norms and archetypes. Her goal is to sensitize viewers to question their presumptions and assumptions.

Black and white photographs are a staple in Kruger's work and so is the computer on which she first develops her ideas, ultimately transforming them into images. Often appropriated from mainstream media and removed from their original context, Kruger's images are invariably coupled with confrontational statements or questions, which are superimposed on

the image in Futura Bold Oblique or Helvetica Ultra Condensed bold red font within a white frame or vice versa.

Kruger has no qualms about offering up her art in the service of a political cause. Her silkscreen *We Will No Longer Be Seen And Not Heard* was designed specifically for the 1992 Senate race of Geraldine Ferraro, a women's rights activist, and the only woman Vice Presidential nominee until Sarah Palin and Kamala Harris. Printed on shiny variegated aluminum foil paper, the work features the image of a smiling woman, with Kruger's characteristic white-on-red text. Choosing an image of a woman donning white gloves and opera binoculars lets the viewer know that inequality is not limited to women in the less privileged classes, but exists across the board even against women of high-status who may think of themselves as above the reach of discrimination. The work does not only denounce discrimination. It also lets the world know that something is about to change. Using such pronouns as "you" and "we," Kruger's language throughout her work is direct, inclusive, implicates everyone and holds everyone accountable, including women themselves.

About the Artist

Barbara Kruger is a conceptual artist, designer, photographer, collagist, and graphic artist, known for her postmodern Feminist art. She was born in 1945 to a low middle-class Jewish family in Newark, New Jersey. She studied at the School of Visual Arts at Syracuse University, and at the Parsons School of Design in New York. Though she never graduated, her teachers helped her get a job at Conde Nast's *Mademoiselle*, where she became lead designer at the young age of 22.

Leaving the publishing world, she pursued a career as an individual artist, becoming known for her silkscreens, which juxtapose photographs with text that speaks "truth to power." She eventually began creating site-specific installations, as well as video and audio works. Returning to the magazine world in the 1990s, she has designed covers for such magazines as *Ms.*, *Esquire*, *Newsweek*, and *The New Republic*.

Splitting her time between Los Angeles and New York, Kruger has taught at California Institute of Art, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and University of California at Berkeley. Her work is included in the permanent collections of such major institutions as the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.