

Press Release

Barbara Kruger

March 19–July 16, 2022

Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles

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The work of Barbara Kruger – bold, trenchant and unmistakable – has made an indelible mark not only on contemporary art of the last four decades, but also more broadly on everyday visual culture. She developed her concise, forthright aesthetic in the early 1980s, and since then has deployed it across myriad forms, from small-scale tactile objects to monumental public facades. Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are pleased to present an exhibition of new and historical works by Kruger at the Los Angeles gallery, timed with her major exhibition, *Thinking of You. I Mean Me. I Mean You.*, on view across Wilshire Boulevard at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (March 20–July 17, 2022).

As visitors enter the gallery, they first encounter Kruger's large-scale triptych, *Untitled (Never Perfect Enough)* (2020). Presented on adjacent walls, we see the face of a young model, in profile and from the back, demonstrating an elaborate hairstyling system of curlers and clips and tinted according to the design-language of red, green and blue (RGB). In all-caps letters, the three panels consecutively announce NEVER, PERFECT, ENOUGH, invoking the lengths to which people go to attain society's impossible ideals of perfection.

Among the woman's curlers and the image's instructional arrows, Kruger overlays a stream of words that move associatively from one to the next, with the viewer left to interpret specific connections between them. The format of the appropriated image, in tandem with the added text, recalls the practice of phrenology, a nineteenth-century pseudoscience in which the shape and size of people's heads was thought to determine their character and mental abilities – and often used historically to argue for white supremacy and class distinctions. Kruger's triptych updates this urge to divide, categorize and control, situating these long-standing human pursuits squarely in the present while simultaneously picturing the connections between "beauty" and the punishing regimens that accompany it.

A group of twenty collages from the 1980s, related to some of Kruger's early and best-known works, completes the exhibition. The artist refers to these objects as "paste-ups," the term for cut-and-paste mockups used in the field of graphic design, which reflects Kruger's time as an editorial designer for *Mademoiselle* magazine and her work designing book jackets and picture editing in the late 1960s and 1970s.

These small-scale collages were then enlarged and produced as large-format gelatin silver print and vinyl works – including iconic pieces such as *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)* (1982), *Untitled (Business as usual)* (1987), and *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)* (1989), whose paste-ups are all gathered here in a selection that shows the varying compositional strategies through which the artist manipulates text, image and the relationships between them.

Displayed together, *Untitled (Never Perfect Enough)* and Kruger's collages span the artist's career both temporally and conceptually. They offer viewers compelling insights into her process and practice, and they illustrate the many ways in which her work has infiltrated our understanding of mass media and the power structures that control and manipulate contemporary culture.

Barbara Kruger (*1945, Newark, NJ) lives and works in Los Angeles and New York. Solo shows include The Art Institute of Chicago (2021), AMOREPACIFIC Museum of Art, Seoul (2019), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2016), High Line Art, New York (2016), Modern Art Oxford (2014), Kunsthaus Bregenz (2013), Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2011), Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2010), Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow (2005), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2000), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1999), Serpentine Gallery, London (1994), MusŽe d'art contemporain, Montreal (1985) and Kunsthalle Basel (1984). Group shows include those at Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston (2021), Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2018), V-A-C Foundation, Palazzo delle Zattere, Venice (2017), Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2014), Biennale of Sydney (2014), Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2013), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2010), Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010, 2009, 2007), Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2006), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2004), Tate Liverpool (2002), Centre Pompidou, Paris (1988) and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1987).

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