

Artillery Gallery Rounds  
April 20, 2022

Barbara Kruger  
*Thinking of You. I Mean Me. I Mean You.*  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
March 20 - July 17, 2022

by Jody Zellen



“Thinking of You. I Mean ~~Me~~. I Mean ~~You~~.” is a classic Barbara Kruger experience. The exhibition serves as an introduction to those who may be unfamiliar with her work, yet also engages with seasoned viewers by re-presenting older works in grand, high tech and spectacular ways. Kruger is a master appropriationist who cleverly re-contextualizes her imagery, often enlarging the original photographs to monumental scale, or configuring them into dynamic videos. She is also an astute observer and cultural critic who uses her art to challenge, provoke, inspire and educate.

A good place to start however, is not at LACMA but across the street at Sprüth Magers gallery. Here, a selection of Kruger’s original paste-ups—small scale, pre-digital collages— are on view. In these pieces from the mid-1980s, Kruger juxtaposes appropriated black-and-white photographs of statues, animal jaws and body parts with declarative statements, including the iconic *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)* (1981) and *Untitled (Business as usual)* (1987). It is wonderful to see the original mock-ups for these early pieces, then walk across the street and see them again in large-scale, digital works and room-sized immersive installations. When walking across the street viewers are drawn to billboard-sized works plastered on LACMA’s construction fence. These new pieces serve as a dramatic introduction to the exhibition.

Though the exhibition spans four decades of Krugers work, “Thinking of You. I Mean ~~Me~~. I Mean ~~You~~.” is not a chronological survey. The exhibition begins in a room that reimagines Kruger’s 1987 photograph, *Untitled (I Shop therefore I am)*. In the original work, a red card with bold white words rests in the center of a black-and-white hand proclaiming, *I Shop therefore I am*. In this iteration, the hand holds montages of photographs by others that Kruger found copying her signature style. Kruger embraces these imitations and integrates them into her work, rather than dismissing them. Installed on one of the walls in this room is a large video display with texts that riff on the original, changing the wording to read variously *I shop therefore I Hoard*, *I sext therefore I am*, *I need therefore I shop*, etc. The image is separated into puzzle pieces that cohere and then break apart as the video cycles through the different variations.

As viewers traverse through the exhibition, they happen upon single channel videos, digital prints on vinyl, as well as room-sized, site specific installations where text, image and video projections fill the walls and floor. While the design and tenor of Kruger’s works has remained

consistent throughout her career, the presentation has evolved, partly due to changes in technology which Kruger has embraced and used to her advantage. In *Untitled (Forever)* (2017) and *Untitled (Floor)* (1991/2020), digital prints on vinyl span the gallery walls and floors. It is necessary to step on and over the words and move through the space in order to read the entire text. *Untitled (Forever)* states: "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face." Often Kruger's texts are about the physical body, its relationship to theory and current events. Watching Kruger analyze an *Artforum* article in the video *Untitled (Artforum)* (2016/2020), by circling and then commenting on words like 'post-identity', 'post-race', 'post-gender' and 'post-human' concretizes the depth of her thinking.

While Kruger's works are graphically bold and eye-catching, they are always about more than what can be seen on the surface. She looks hard at war, oppression, racism, feminism, social and cultural injustices, often presenting contradictory statements and allowing them to clash. In her work, Kruger wants to get at the truth, whatever that may be at any give moment. She immerses her audiences in a bombardment of images and texts, asking them to sift through the many layers to find a personal takeaway.

<https://artillerymag.com/gallery-rounds-barbara-kruger/>