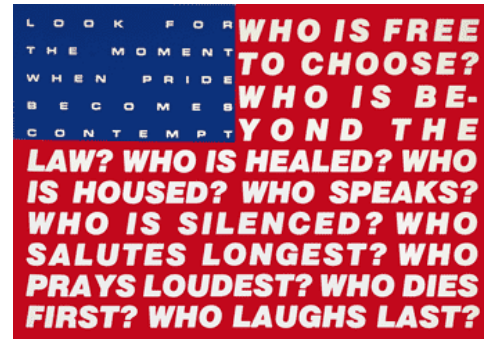


the warhol: resources & lessons

Artists Past & Present: Barbara Kruger

Barbara Kruger is an artist whose work is primarily concerned with issues of feminism, consumerism, and power. She began her career in the 1960s as a graphic designer and photographic editor for *Mademoiselle* magazine. The influence of commercial art is evident throughout her work. Initially, Kruger worked with textiles during the late 1960s and early '70s, when feminist art was reclaiming the aesthetics and politics associated with handcrafts. Later, she combined her own photographs with original text and this process led to her signature style, one that incorporates found imagery with politicized slogans. These works masterfully employ the look and feel of propaganda, while subverting propaganda's traditional alliance with the cultural elite and powerful. Kruger's sloganeering confronts and questions the dominant culture. Her art has been exhibited internationally including the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (1983), Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (1999), and Palazzo delle Papesse Centro Arte Contemporanea in Siena, Italy (2002).



Untitled (Questions), from 1991, appropriates the United States flag to pose various questions regarding authority and power. The red and white stripes are replaced with incisive questions, beginning with "Who is free to choose?" escalating to "Who dies first?" and finally "Who laughs last?" The stars are replaced with the words "Look for the moment when pride becomes contempt." The juxtaposition of provocative text with the iconography of the flag creates a tension that belies the formal simplicity of the work. In an era when the concept of patriotism is anything but clear, this artwork encourages a critical look at American values.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Barbara Kruger conducted by Thyrza Nichols Goodeve in the November 1997 issue of *Art in America*, titled "The Art of Public Address."

TNG: Your use of language emphasizes communication and contact; you're not just saying, "Look here, I'm going to give you an idea." Direct address has always been an important feature of your work.

BK: The brevity of the text is about cutting through the grease. I just want to address people in a very forthright manner. It is why I always use pronouns, because they cut through in the same way. Direct address has been a consistent tactic in my work, regardless of the medium that I'm working in. I try to deal with the complexities of power and social life, but as far as the visual presentation goes I purposely avoid a high degree of difficulty. I want people to be drawn into the space of the work. And a lot of people are like me in that they have relatively short attention spans. So I shoot for the window of opportunity.

Research:

Propaganda, Collage, Appropriation, Subversion, Feminism, Consumerism

Links:

Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, "The Art of the Public Address," *Art in America*, November, 1997.

Comprehension Questions:

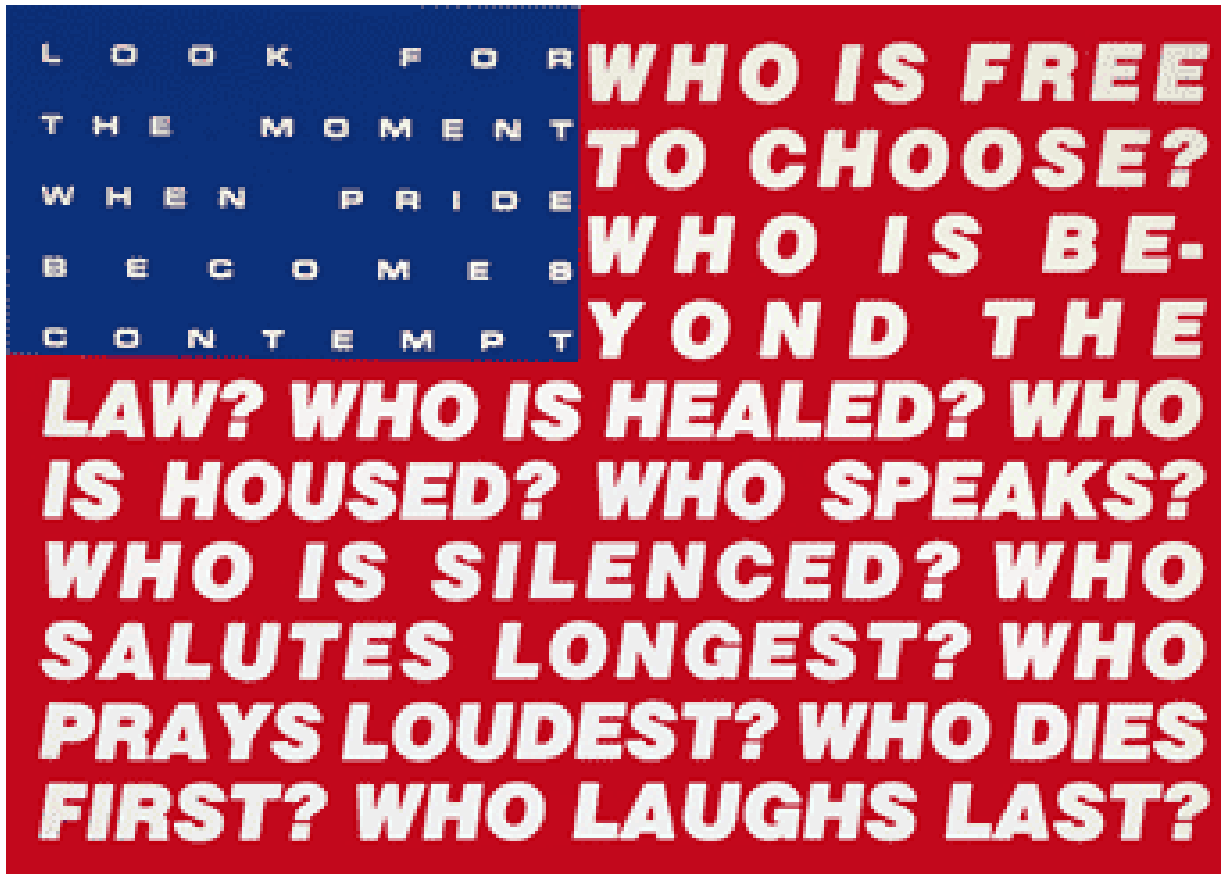
1. Compare and contrast Kruger's flag to an advertisement. How long does it take to understand an advertisement versus this work of art?
2. What does Kruger mean by, "Look for the moment when pride becomes contempt?"
3. Do you think this artwork is endorsing or criticizing the ideals of the United States? Explain.
4. Where would be the best place to put this artwork? Why? (For example, museums, billboards, magazines, television, etc.)

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Artists Past & Present: Barbara Kruger



Barbara Kruger

Untitled (Questions), 1991

Photographic silkscreen/vinyl

66 x 93 in. (167.6 x 236.2 cm.)

Collection: Marieluise Hessel Collection, Center For Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-On-Hudson, New York

Courtesy: Mary Boone Gallery, New York