

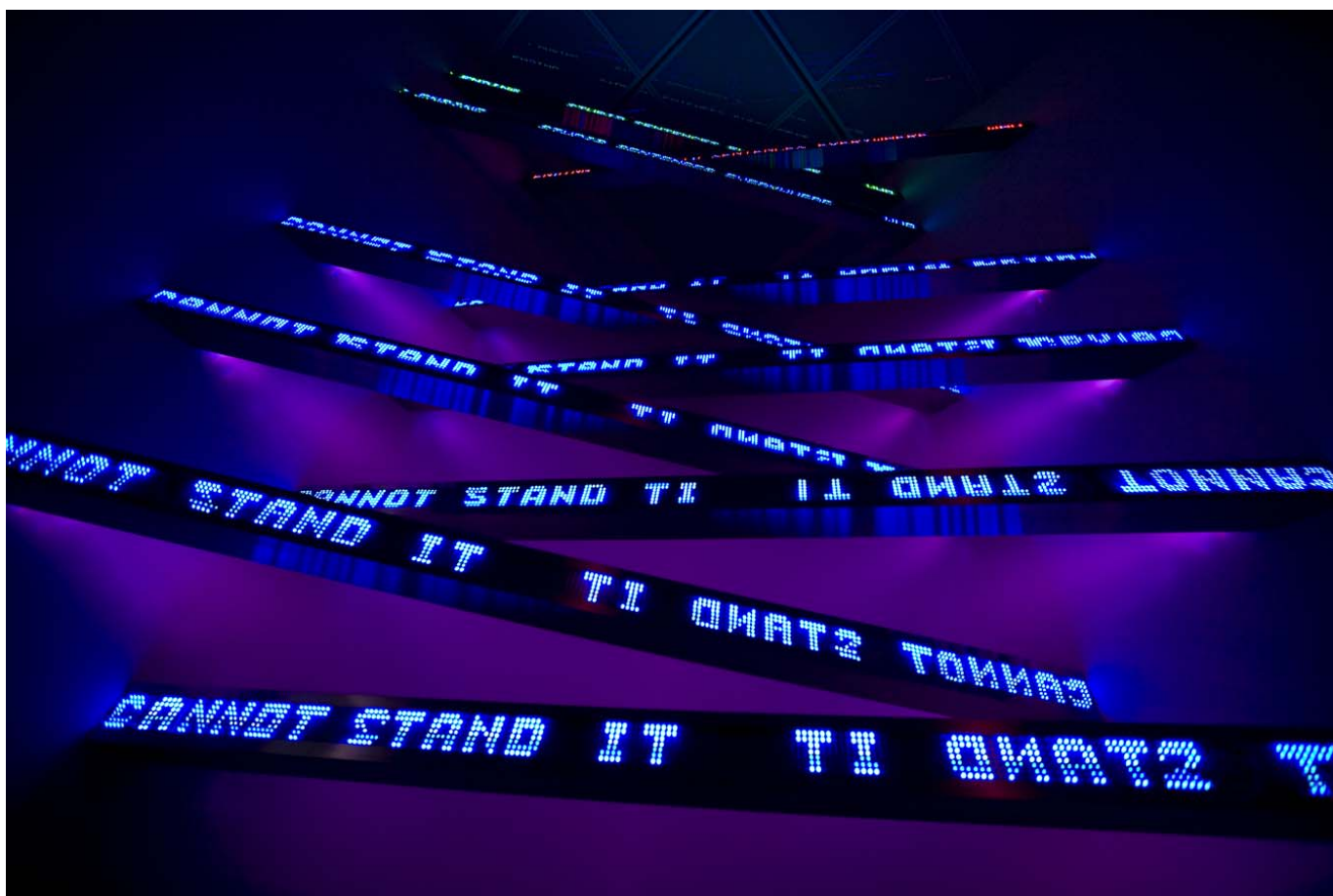
WHITNEY

Education

Jenny Holzer: PROTECT PROTECT

March 12 - May 31, 2009

Pre- and Post-Visit Materials for Teachers



How can these materials be used?

These materials provide a framework for preparing you and your students for a visit to the exhibition and offer suggestions for follow up classroom reflection and lessons. The discussions and activities introduce some of the exhibition's key themes and concepts.

- I. About the Artist
- II. About the Exhibition
- III. Pre-Visit Activities
- IV. Post-Visit Activities
- V. Bibliography & Links

What grade levels are these Pre- and Post-Visit materials intended for?

These lessons and activities have been written for High School students. We encourage you to adapt and build upon them in order to meet your teaching objectives and students' needs.

Please note that a portion of the exhibition includes declassified and other sensitive government documents that reference war, detainees, torture, homicide, filial relationships, arms, and the oil trade. There is adult language in the exhibition. We recommend that you visit the museum in advance of bringing your students to prepare for questions that might arise from the exhibition's content. We are happy to send you an Educator pass so that you can preview the exhibition. Please email schoolprograms@whitney.org if you would like to request one.

At the Museum

Guided Visits

We invite you and your students to visit the Whitney. To schedule a guided tour, please visit www.whitney.org/education.

If you are scheduled for a guided school group tour, your museum educator will contact you prior to your visit. Let them know what preparatory work you have done, how this connects to the rest of your curricula, and what you would like your visit to focus on.

Please know that we focus on careful looking and observation in the galleries, so you can expect to examine four to five works of art during your hour-long visit. Museum educators lead inquiry based conversations as well as sketching or writing activities in the galleries. If you are visiting during public hours, you and your students (in chaperoned groups) are welcome to stay after your guided tour.

All educators and students who have a guided tour will receive a pass which enables them free admission to the Whitney through July 1, 2009.

High School Dispersal Visits

High School students are welcome to visit the museum during public hours in a self-guided capacity. A maximum of 60 students may arrive at the museum together and must then break into small groups (no more than 4 students) to visit the galleries. One chaperone must accompany 15 students.

Discuss museum rules with students before visiting the museum. We recommend giving students something to focus on or a task to complete while in the galleries. You may want to create a worksheet, free-writing or poetry activity, or sketching assignments. We have found that artworks are more accessible if students are provided with some structure or direction. For information and sample activities, visit Learning@Whitney at <http://whitney.org/learning/>.

High School Dispersal Visits must be scheduled in advance. Please visit <http://www.whitney.org/www/information/group.jsp> for more information.

We look forward to welcoming you and your students to the Whitney!

I. About the Artist: Jenny Holzer

Over the past three decades, Jenny Holzer has created text-based work using nontraditional media such as LED signs, posters, T-shirts, billboards, dinner plates, stone benches, and matchbooks, and projections on surfaces as diverse as ocean waves and the sides of buildings.¹ Her recent work includes electronic sculptures and silk-screened paintings that present information from declassified government documents. Holzer's work contains socially and politically charged ideas and raises questions about the role of individuals within a society and the relationship between public and private realms.²

Jenny Holzer was born in Ohio in 1950. She studied painting at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) but grew increasingly interested in making conceptual art using language and a variety of media. After leaving R.I.S.D. with an MFA in 1976, she moved to New York and enrolled in the Whitney's Independent Study Program (ISP), a theoretically-minded program for artists and scholars. While there, she was assigned a daunting reading list of theory and philosophy books. Holzer realized that the reading was important and thought it might be possible to translate the ideas into accessible language. The result was her first text-based work called *Truisms*. Holzer created lists of aphorisms, made them into posters, and pasted the posters on outdoor walls in Manhattan. The *Truisms* presented points of view that were often provocative and contradictory, such as A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE CAN GO A LONG WAY, CHILDREN ARE THE HOPE OF THE FUTURE, and CHILDREN ARE THE MOST CRUEL OF ALL.

In 1990, Holzer was the first woman artist to represent the United States in the Venice Biennale. Her installation included L.E.D. (light-emitting diode) signs and benches as well as texts carved into the marble floor of the exhibition space. About her Biennale work, she has said, "My horizontal sign room with multiple texts in five languages flashed a glut of information. I wanted to signal the downside of the orgy of unexamined material and highlight assumptions about free-floating facts, pronouncements, and judgments. That's why I wrapped people with electronics in that room. It was known as the 'toaster oven.'"³

She has also created stone sarcophagi incised with texts concerning death by AIDS and domestic violence and stone benches carved with text representing the history of a particular site, peace monuments, and site-specific "anti-memorials" that incorporate flora and benches. In 1996, the artist presented her first outdoor film projection. Using bright, xenon lamps and film enabled her to project text on materials as different as the sand and water in Rio de Janeiro, the pyramid at the Louvre, and the New York Public Library. Art critic Peter Schjeldahl characterizes her projections as "conscience fireworks" and says her work "awakens what is abject in us to an awed joy."⁴

Holzer has used various written sources for her work—texts she has written herself, writings by poets including Henri Cole and Wislawa Szymborska, and texts and maps taken from declassified U.S. government documents. While the political content of her recent work draws from Francisco Goya, the color and architectural scale is inspired by artists such as Henri Matisse, Mark Rothko, and Sol LeWitt. Holzer's sculptures and paintings present provocative views and voices, challenging the viewer to question his or her own assumptions and consider contemporary culture from critical perspectives.

¹ Joan Simon and Elizabeth A. T. Smith. *Jenny Holzer: PROTECT PROTECT*. (exh. cat.) Basel, Switzerland: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008.

² Steven Henry Madoff. "Jenny Holzer Talks to Steven Henry Madoff, in '80s Then," *Artforum* 41 no 8, April 2003, 83.

³ Peter Schjeldahl. "Jenny Holzer: Conscience Fireworks," in Peter Schjeldahl, Beatrix Ruf, and Joan Simon. *Jenny Holzer: Xenon*. Küssnacht, Switzerland: Ink Tree Editions, 2001, 118.

II. About the Exhibition

Jenny Holzer: PROTECT PROTECT presents work that the artist has created since the 1990s that incorporate selections of Holzer's writings from 1977 to 2001, as well as declassified pages from U.S. government documents. These texts are presented in various media—**Electronic Signs**, **Benches**, **Redaction Paintings**, and the **Lustmord** series.

To create her work, Holzer works with experts in different fields, such as professional stonemasons for the lettering on her benches, and electronics engineers and projectionists for her work with LED signs and projections. The exhibition's subtitle refers to a painting on view that incorporates a formerly classified U.S. government document detailing plans for the Iraq war, and it also relates to the problematic power of personal desire, as expressed in one of Holzer's best-known statements: PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT.



Electronic Signs

The *Electronic Signs* in the exhibition are comprised of LED (light emitting diodes). The content is drawn from declassified government documents as well as texts written by Holzer herself. The artist carefully considers all aspects of these works, including the shape, size, font, color, movement, and speed of the scrolling text as well as the way in which each electronic sign is installed.

Benches

Holzer's granite *Benches* were first made in 1986. They contain words hand carved into their surface and serve as both public furniture and memorial markers. The text is derived from various sources, including Holzer's own writing and that of other narrators, revealing the history of a particular site. When creating the benches, the artist considers the quality, markings, and coloration of the stone as well as the choice of typography.

Jenny Holzer

MONUMENT, 2008

Twenty-two double-sided, semi-circular electronic LED signs: thirteen with red and white diodes; nine with red and blue diodes on front and blue and white diodes on back

194 5/16 x 57 13/16 x 28 7/8 in. (493.5 x 146.8 x 73.4 cm)

Installation view: Diehl + Gallery One, Moscow, 2008
Texts: *Truisms*, 1977–79; *Inflammatory Essays*, 1979–82

© 2009 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Photo: Vassilij Gureev

Collection of the artist; courtesy Monika Sprüth Philomene Magers, Berlin and London; and Diehl + Gallery One, Moscow

II. About the Exhibition (continued)

Redaction Paintings

The *Redaction Paintings* were created in response to the war in Iraq. Since 2004, Holzer has used source material from declassified government documents made available to the public under the landmark Freedom of Information Act of 1966. Many of the documents contain subject matter that is deemed too sensitive for the public eye, and portions of these documents have been redacted, or blacked out by government censors. Holzer located the documents with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) which makes formerly classified information available on its website, and the National Security Archive, a non-partisan organization that collects declassified government documents and makes them public. The *Redaction Paintings* include handprints of American soldiers accused of crimes such as detainee abuse and assault, correspondence related to detainee interrogation, and maps from the US military that propose strategies for the invasion of Iraq. To create these paintings, Holzer works with another artist who is a painter. She says of their process, "I give colors and the level of 'smeariness,' and he translates."⁵ In each painting, Holzer always presents the whole document verbatim, including the redactions. The paintings are "read" by the viewer as both image and text.



Lustmord

Translated from German, *Lustmord* means rape-slaying, sex-murder or lust-killing. *Lustmord* is the title of one of Holzer's texts as well as the work on view in the exhibition. Holzer created the work in reaction to the atrocities of war in the former Yugoslavia from 1992-95, where the rape and murder of women and girls was systematically carried out by Bosnian-Serb forces. The texts are written by Holzer from the perspectives of the victim, perpetrator, and witness. The *Lustmord* texts were originally hand-written on human bodies and then photographed for presentation. The current installation includes human bones (obtained legally in the United States) laid out like artifacts on a wooden table. Some of the bones are encircled with silver bands engraved with Holzer's texts.

Jenny Holzer

PALM, FINGERS & FINGERTIPS 000406, 2007

Oil on linen

58 x 44 in. (147.3 x 111.8 cm)

Text: U.S. government document

© 2009 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Collection of the artist; courtesy Cheim & Read, New York; Monika Sprüth Philomene Magers, Berlin and London; and Yvon Lambert, Paris

⁵ Patrick J.B. Flynn, "Jenny Holzer—Artist—Interview," *The Progressive* (April 1993). Available online at: http://findarticles.com/p.articles/mi_m1296/is_n4_v57/ai_13561338?tag=artBody;col1 (accessed July 10, 2008).

III. Pre-Visit Activities

Before visiting the Museum, we recommend that you and your students discuss some of the ideas and concepts in Jenny Holzer's work.

Objectives

- Introduce students to the work of Jenny Holzer.
- Ask students to think critically about the text they encounter in their daily lives and consider how they interpret it.
- Prepare students to thoughtfully analyze and discuss works of art.

I. Power of Words

Holzer is influenced by the world of advertising and she is interested in the transmission of information. She has created text-based artwork that represents many different and often contradictory points of view. Holzer has created artwork called *Truisms* that are aphorisms or phrases such as ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE and EVERYONE'S WORK IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT.

Words are all around us. Ask students to make a list of the words they see on the way to school.

- Where do they see these words?
- What do they look like?
- For who are they intended?

Ask students to work in small groups to list, share, and then create categories for their words.

- What do they notice?
- Who do students think the "audience" is for the messages they have come across? How do they know?

2. Classified Images

(a) Holzer was asked by *Wired* magazine to imagine something new for the Google homepage. She said that she would like to find out a different secret every time she opened the Google website. This inspired her to look for "secrets." During her search, she came across information about the Middle East that had been formerly classified.

Lead students in a discussion about classified images.

- What does it mean to classify something or keep it secret?
- When do students choose to "classify" things or hide them from public view?
- They may mention diaries or journals. Why do they do this?
- Why might the government choose to classify documents?
- When should this happen? When should it not happen?
- What role do classified documents play in terms of national security?
- Ask your students to consider and discuss how the Internet has changed people's access to information.

(b) Select one of the *Redaction Paintings* featured on the exhibition website.

<http://whitney.org/www/holzer/images.jsp>

Ask students to look closely at it. Lead them in a group discussion about this image.

- What do they notice?
- What has been blacked out?
- Who do they think the author of the text might be? Why?

3. Video Clips

Ask your students to view video clips of Jenny Holzer and her work produced by Art21.

<http://whitney.org/www/holzer/film.jsp>

Ask students to discuss what they have seen.

- How is Holzer different from or similar to other artists they have studied?
- What do they have questions about?

IV. Post-Visit Activities

Building on the Pre-Visit lessons and Museum experience, this lesson invites students to take a closer look at some of the ideas and themes in the *Jenny Holzer: PROTECT PROTECT* exhibition.

Objectives

- Enable students to reflect and discuss some of the challenging concepts and ideas from the exhibition in a safe environment.
- Ask students to create their own text-based art project inspired by Holzer's work and carefully considering form and content.

1. Museum Visit Reflection

Ask your students to take a few minutes to write about their museum visit. What do they remember most? What did they learn about Jenny Holzer? What did they most enjoy seeing? What other questions do they have—for the artist, the curators who organized the exhibition, or in general? Invite them to share their thoughts with the class.

Holzer has said, "People talk about the content, and that's right, but very few mention how the stuff looks, and that's important."⁶ Ask your students to discuss the choices Holzer has made with regard to form and content.

Ask your students to visit *The Whit* blog on the Whitney's teen website and add their comments about Holzer's work. <http://whitney.org/thewhit/blog/>

2. What is your message?

Discussion

Lead a discussion with your students about how looking at Holzer's projected words are different from reading them in a book, newspaper, or magazine.

Project

Holzer has printed her art on paper, T-shirts, and condoms, projected it on buildings and used electronic LED sign boards.

Have students create a pithy message they would like to share with the world. Then ask them to come up with a way to make this message public. What form will their project take? What shape, size, font, and color(s) will they use?

Ask students to produce a multiple. They will need to reproduce their message enough times for everyone in the class, so that each student receives a class set.

3. Artists and Text

Ask students to select one of the following artists who uses text in his/her work. Have them research their work and compare it to Holzer's.

Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, Glenn Ligon, Bruce Nauman, Tim Rollins and KOS, Ed Ruscha, Carrie Mae Weems, Lawrence Weiner, Christopher Wool, David Wojnarowicz.

⁶ Joan Simon and Elizabeth A. T. Smith. *Jenny Holzer: PROTECT PROTECT*. (exh. cat.) Basel, Switzerland: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008, 11.

V. Bibliography & Links

Joan Simon and Elizabeth A. T. Smith. *Jenny Holzer: PROTECT PROTECT*. (exh. cat.) Basel, Switzerland: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008.

<http://whitney.org/www/holzer/index.jsp>

Jenny Holzer: PROTECT PROTECT exhibition website.

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/holzer/index.html>

Art21 images and information about Jenny Holzer.

http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/holzer_jenny.html

Artcyclopedia links for Jenny Holzer.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jenny_Holzer

Wikipedia entry for Jenny Holzer.

<http://mfx.dasburo.com/art/truisms.html>

Jenny Holzer's *Truisms*.

<http://www.jennyholzer.com/list.php>

Jenny Holzer, *Projections*.

<http://whitney.org/learning>

The Whitney's educational website for teachers.

Feedback

Please let us know what you think of these materials. How did you use them? What worked or didn't work? Email us at schoolprograms@whitney.org.

For more information on our programs and resources for Schools, Teachers, Youth, and Families, please visit www.whitney.org.

Learning Standards

The projects and activities in these curriculum materials address national and state learning standards for the arts, English language arts, social studies, and technology.

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

Links to National Learning Standards.

<http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/index.shtml>

Comprehensive guide to National Learning Standards by content area.

<http://www.nysatl.nysed.gov/standards.html>

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/home.html>

New York State Learning Standards.

<http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/blueprint.html>

New York City Department of Education's *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts*, grades K-12.

Cover image:

Jenny Holzer

Green Purple Cross, 2008, and *Blue Cross*, 2008

Three double-sided electronic LED signs (two with blue and green diodes on front and blue and red diodes on back and one with blue and red diodes on front and blue and green diodes on back); and seven double-sided electronic LED signs with blue diodes on front and blue and red diodes on back

59 x 122 5/8 x 100 11/16 in. (149.9 x 311.4 x 255.8 cm); and 85 13/16 x 109 x 100 11/16 in. (217.9 x 276.9 x 255.8 cm)

Installation view: Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Chicago, 2008

Texts: *Erlauf*, 1995, *Arno*, 1996, *Blue*, 1998 (*Green Purple Cross*); and *Arno*, 1996 (*Blue Cross*)

© 2009 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Photo: Lili Holzer-Glier

Collection of the artist; courtesy Yvon Lambert, Paris (*Green Purple Cross*); and David Roberts Art Foundation, London (*Blue Cross*)

Credits**School and Educator Programs**

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Jenny Holzer: PROTECT PROTECT

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These pre- and post-visit materials were prepared by Heather Maxson and Dina Helal.