

# Advanced Art and design



PERSONAL STUDY

ON

BARBARA KRUGER



## My chosen artist and why

The artist that I have chosen to look at is Barbara Kruger. I have chose to look at her work because I found her work very appealing and it inspired me more then any other artist that I have researched. The reason I think her work inspired is because most of her work consists of violence against women and I am very against this matter. Kruger expresses her views on this matter through text and photography in her art work. It's like her aim is to show people how women are treated in this world. As I am a female myself I was attracted by her work and it made me want to research more in depth and create work in her style. She layers found photographs from existing sources with pithy and aggressive text that involves the viewer in the struggle for power and control that her captions speak to.

Most of her work includes text in black or white letters against a slash of red background, some of her instantly recognizable slogans read "I shop therefore I am," and "Your body is a battleground." I think much of her text questions the viewer about feminism, classicism, consumerism, and individual autonomy and desire, although her black-and-white images are culled from the mainstream magazines that sell the very ideas she is disputing.



*Here is a few of Kruger's works attached together. It shows a view of what her work is about. She uses words such as "hate", "body" "battleground", and "world". These are big words, and have strong meanings. This shows that the message she is trying to get out to people is also big, strong and has a lot of meaning.*

Her works are direct and evoke an immediate response. Usually her style involves the cropping of a magazine or newspaper image enlarged in black and white. The enlargement of the image is done as crudely as possible to monumental proportions. A message is stenciled on the image, usually in white letters against a background of red. The text and image are unrelated in an effort to create anxiety by the audience that plays on the fears of society.

Barbara Kruger's works has appeared in museums and galleries worldwide, her work has appeared on billboards, buscards, posters, a public park, a train station platform in Strasbourg, France, and in other public commissions.

### About the Artist



Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1945, Barbara Kruger grew up in a working-class family. After graduating from high school, she spent a year at Syracuse University. The death of her father brought her to New York City, where she studied photography and graphic design at the Parsons School of Design. Kruger accepted a position at Condé Nast Publications designing ads for Mademoiselle magazine, where she was eventually promoted to chief designer. In the 1970s, Kruger decided to resume making art. Drawn to the work of Magdalena Abakanowicz, she produced fabric wall hangings. After experimenting with painting for a

time, she began juxtaposing photographs with text, a method that allowed her to apply her knowledge of graphic design. Kruger's text-and-image works have appeared in various forms, such as billboards, posters, and even matchbooks and tote bags.

Kruger makes her works from images she finds in the popular media, not unlike how other artists use found objects, notably Tony Cragg, and Jeff Koons. She notes that her work as a graphic designer for a magazine influenced her choice of images: "If you didn't make people look at that page you were fired." Once she selects the pictures she attempts to match them with phrases, drawing inspiration from lists of phrases she compiles, favorite books, and the thesaurus.

After choosing a phrase to use with the image, Kruger makes Photostats of the pictures, manipulating the size, framing, and contrast so that the images can be re photographed. During the layout process, she arranges the type faced words with the images. Next she sends them to a photographic studio, which enlarges the designs to the size she specifies and prints the photographs in either black and white or color. Finally, the works are fitted into red enamel frames.

Kruger adopted a format that is deceptively simple (photograph, text, and frame) to convey a powerful message about relationships in society. The artist has said about her work: "Basically I want to be effective in making changes in power relations, in social relations. . . The spectators who view my work don't have to understand [art history]. They just have to consider the pictures that bombard their lives and tell them who they are to some extent. That's all they have to understand."

## Appendix

Barbara Kruger's work sends out the message on violence against women. Although her work sends out the message on violence against women, as a female looking at her work I still feel strong. I think this is because I feel like I have come this far in life without experiencing any of these problems such as violence against women, looking at her work makes me feel confident that I can manage ahead in life without experiencing these problems. It makes me feel confident and to me confidence is the key to prevent violence against women because looking at Kruger's work, I found out that most of her images on women show that they are under the control of men and they look as though they are being under pressured. For example looking at the image below shows a woman looking downwards and the text in the middle of the picture reads, "we have received orders not to move". This shows that the



women is being treated as a slave. She does not have the free will to do what she wants, she is under someone else's control. This image shows that there are women out there who may be in the same situation, who may not be allowed to do as they want, and are under someone else's control. The colour Kruger has used for the bottom text, where it reads "not to move" is in bigger and bolder writing than the text above. She has also changed the colour of the background for the bottom text whereas the top one is white. With the writing bigger, bolder and the background red shows threats and danger. The image tries and

sends out the message that if she does not follow the rules as she is supposed to her life maybe at risk. The way she is sat down with her head facing downwards shows that she is afraid and fragile. The position she is sat in makes the viewer think she is scared and weak and if she moves she will be punished.

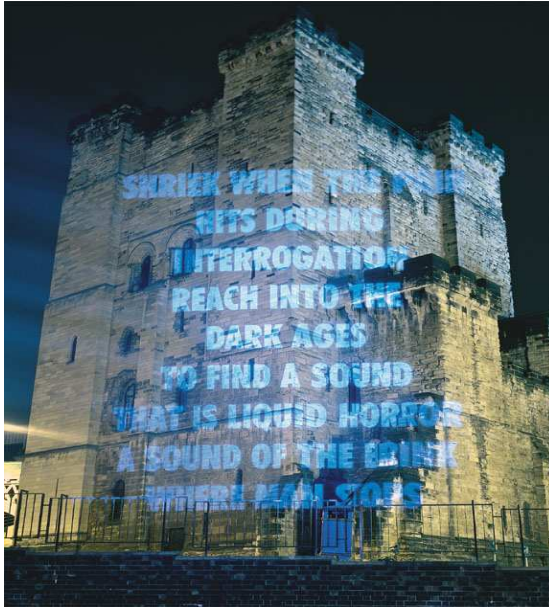


Looking at this image you can see a mother pointing at her daughter's muscle and saying to her, "we don't need another hero". This shows that Barbara Kruger is also trying to send out the messages to women and girls that they don't need anyone else to protect them. They can be strong too although they are females. They don't have to have men as their heroes, females can be heroes too. She is trying to show that you don't just need a man in your life to feel safe and

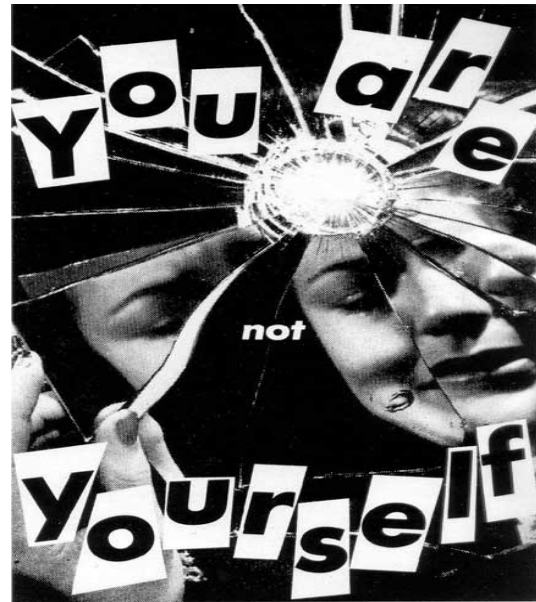
secure. You alone have the power to keep yourself safe and secure. Looking at girls face you can see the power and strength in her. Barbara Kruger may also be sending out the message to females to keep a strong face and don't let anyone see your weakness show no fear in order for you to live a stronger life.

## Comparing Artists

When doing my artist research, I also came across Jenny Holzer her work is similar to Barber Kruger's work because she also uses texts and photography in her work. Some of Jenny Holzer's work is also based on violence against women. But as Kruger uses small text and words in most of her work, Holzer uses long sentences and paragraphs in most of her images. Barber Kruger's use of text seems to match the image she had linked it to whereas most of Holzer's work is on images on big buildings with long texts.



*Jenny Holzer*



*Barbara Kruger*

Above you can see the difference between Holzer's (*left*) and Kruger's (*right*) work. Jenny Holzer's work looks as though she has used an over head projector to get the text on the building whereas Kruger's work looks as though she has edited the picture in order to place the text on the image.



This image on the left is also some work created by Jenny Holzer again you can see the difference between her and Kruger's work when expressing their views on violence against women through art. In this image Jenny Holzer has an image of a woman running with a t-shirt on that reads "Abuse of power comes as no surprise" the text makes abuse against women sound normal like it's not a shock and that it's a normal everyday thing. Also when looking at her work it doesn't seem as powerful as Kruger's work, I think this maybe because Kruger's work doesn't show much expression or live as Kruger's work like when looking at Holzer's work everything looks still everything looks at rest. For example looking at this image all you see is a woman who seems to be

running with a straight face on, it doesn't look real she look as if she's a zombie who doesn't seem to care about what is happening around her. You then notice the text on her t- shirt which says "Abuse as power comes as no surprise!" and it sort of confuses you a little because when you look at them women's face she doesn't even seem to be bothered whatsoever. But maybe that is perhaps the message that Holzer is trying to get through to other people that abuse comes as no surprise that's why the women probably has a straight face on because she may find abuse regular. That's why she's not surprised because she thinks of abuse as a normal everyday thing.

Most of Holzer's work appears to be still, for example looking at the images above created by Holzer you can see that they are just photographs taken with the text already on. By this I mean she hasn't edited the pictures or done anything with them, all she has done is set everything up and take a picture and that's it her work is done. Whereas Kruger edits her picture, she uses different affects on the images so they look more attractive and adds short words or short sentences on the image so it's easier to read and so the public finds it interesting to read whereas if it was too long the public won't be bothered reading in other words may be bored doesn't get bored by reading it.

By saying most of Holzer's work appears still, by this I also mean that most of her work is on real pictures such as pictures on buildings, places, people and so on, she doesn't edit them or change them in anyway whereas barber Kruger, changes the colour, the effect and makes the image look more attractive and different than normal everyday images, so they look as though she has created them herself. Although they may have some differences they also have one or two things in common. This is that they both use text in their work. Albeit not all of Holzer's work appears to be about violence against women, however some of her work does consist on this issue.

I think both Kruger's and Holzer's work try and to make us think about social and political questions, about the stereotypes and clichés created by our society. Consumerism (*I shop therefore I am*), conformity (*Think like us, Look like us*), politics (*Hate like us*), love (*Thinking of you*), and again *Your body is a battleground, Love for sale*, etc.: these are just a few of the slogans and themes on which the American artist has focused.

As barber Kruger's work sticks with one issue violence against women, Holzer's work is on a number of different issues. This is a quote from jenny Holzer stating what different issues her work is on.

*"At the beginning of my work I wanted to figure out how to put war, peace, sex, death and various other subjects in front of as many people as possible. So I first worked with street posters and then moved on to plaques that went on the sides of the buildings, then to electronic signs and on to a number of other media. I put things where there is a fighting chance that people will take notice of them."*

## **Quotes from Barbara Kruger and analysis**

*"I work with pictures and words because they have the ability to determine who we are and who we aren't"*

This quote from Barbara Kruger suggests that the reason she works with words and pictures is to decide who women are and who they are not. This shows that she expresses the way she feels through text and pictures. There must be a reason why she picked the issue on violence against women to work on. Perhaps she may have experienced this issue in life or she may have been a victim of this issue in the past so as a result she maybe expressing her views on how she thinks some women maybe living their lives in today's society.

*"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."*

Another quote from Barbara Kruger suggests that her language emphasizes communication and contact, for example, she's not just saying, "Look here, I'm going to give you an idea." As she has said direct address has always been an important feature of her work. She wants people to get the message straight forward rather than using big words and explaining.

*Look, we're all saddled with things that make us better or worse. This world is a crazy place, and I've chosen to make my work about that insanity.*

This quote from Barbara Kruger suggests that looking at the world all people seem to care and think about is them selves. So after looking at the world she describes it as crazy and decided to base her work on this madness.

*Our culture is saturated with irony whether we know it or not.*

This quote from Barbara suggests that she thinks that the culture we live in is selfish and sarcastic. She also then says although we may not think this or know this, however this statement is still true. This shows that this statement may be one of the reasons why her work is based on violence against women. This may be one of the reasons why she creates images of women being disrespected by men. It shows that people don't care about anything nowadays, their religion, their belief or other all they seem to care about is themselves.

## **More quotes from Kruger**

*All the gossip and craziness becomes a kind of sustained narrative which, in turn, can become history.*

*Although my art work was heavily informed by my design work on a formal and visual level, as regards meaning and content the two practices parted ways.*

*Direct address has been a consistent tactic in my work, regardless of the medium that I'm working in.*

*Do you know why language manifests itself the way it does in my work? It's because I understand short attention spans.*

*I mean, making art is about objectifying your experience of the world, transforming the flow of moments into something visual, or textual, or musical. Art creates a kind of commentary.*

*I think what I'm trying to do is create moments of recognition. To try to detonate some kind of feeling or understanding of lived experience.*

*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'd always been a news junkie, always read lots of newspapers and watched the Sunday morning news shows on TV and felt strongly about issues of power, control, sexuality and race.*

*I'm an artist who works with pictures and words. Sometimes that stuff ends up in different kinds of sites and contexts which determine what it means and looks like.*

*I've always thought that it's good to watch the news to find out what everybody else is looking at and believing, if only because that's how consensus is constructed.*

*If most American cities are about the consumption of culture, Los Angeles and New York are about the production of culture - not only national culture but global culture.*

*It's good to keep in mind that prominence is always a mix of hard work, eloquence in your practice, good timing and fortuitous social relations. Everything can't be personalized.*



## How Barbara Kruger's work influences my work

As Barbara Kruger's work is based on violence against women and the use of text and images in her work, has influenced my work by giving me an idea on what to base my theme and work on.

I want to base my work on the same issue as Kruger violence against women. I will also use the idea of using words and images in my work but not in the exact style of Kruger so it doesn't seem as though I have copied her work exactly.

The reason I want to base my work on Kruger's is because looking at her work makes me think about the world about what is going on around me. One of the reasons why I like Kruger's work is because it brings up a number of questions in my mind such as, how our culture has changed from the past years. How people treat one another? How men take advantage women, and how the world has become so selfish.

I think by basing my work in the style of Kruger's work will give me a deeper understanding of her work. It will help me to understand her work intensely and will give me more knowledge on the artist than I already have.

The use of text in her work gives me an idea on how to use words in my work, on how to make my work look more attractive just like hers by using short direct phrases and words. I want my work to send out strong messages just like hers to make the viewer believe in me.

In my work I will try and change the effects and the colour of the images the way she changes hers, and the way she makes the image look as though she made it rather than an existing picture.

Also the expressions of the people in her image make the image look more real and attractive, it makes you feel like its true whatever she is trying to tell viewer. She makes the viewer believe in her work, that what she saying is true. This also influences my work to take more effective pictures with the correct expressions and text that go together and make the image look real and attractive that would make the viewer believe in you and your work.