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Barbara Kruger Exhibition Explores Artist's Standout Profile Works at National Gallery of Art, Washington, September 30, 2016–January 22, 2017



Barbara Kruger

*Untitled (Know nothing, Believe anything, Forget everything)*, 1987/2014

screenprint on vinyl

overall: 274.32 x 342.05 cm (108 x 134 11/16 in.)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the Collectors Committee, Sharon and John D. Rockefeller IV, Howard and Roberta Ahmanson, Denise and Andrew Saul, Lenore S. and Bernard A. Greenberg Fund, Agnes Gund, and Michelle Smith

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Washington, DC—The striking works of Barbara Kruger (American, b. 1945) will be featured in a focused exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, timed to celebrate the newly renovated East Building galleries. On view September 30, 2016, through January 22, 2017, ***In the Tower: Barbara Kruger*** is the first exhibition in the Tower Gallery in three years, renewing the series devoted to the presentation of works by leading contemporary artists. The exhibition presents fifteen of Kruger's profile works — images of faces and figures in profile over which the artist has layered her attention-grabbing phrases and figures of speech — from the early 1980s to the present, varying in scale from magazine-size to monumental.

Inspired by the Gallery's recent acquisition of Kruger's *Untitled (Know nothing, Believe anything, Forget everything)* (1987/2014), the exhibition centers on the artist's profile works, among her strongest commentaries on cultural production. They present Kruger's distinctive direct-address texts (using active verbs and personal pronouns) that confront the viewer head-on and contrast with the underlying images of (mostly passive, often female) figures looking off the picture plane, and receiving or denying the viewer's attention. This tension creates conceptual works of great visual power.

Kruger's works are by turns so strong, shocking, or humorous that they grab the viewer's attention. This is due to her signature style which includes pronouncements printed in white Futura Bold Italic typeface across red bands reminiscent of the *Life* and *Look* magazine banners from the golden age of picture magazines. Kruger's text slashes the black-and-white images beneath, effectively shattering the clichés represented in both words and images. Using the language, color, image, and scale derived from the media-saturated world she queries, Kruger's work illuminates and interrupts cultural tropes to encourage an active visual readership.

"Barbara Kruger's profile works count among her most iconic images," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "We are delighted to present to our visitors from around the world this exhibition featuring such an outstanding artist."

#### Exhibition Support

The exhibition is presented with support from the Tower Project.

#### Exhibition Highlights

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Among the key works on view will be Kruger's *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)* (1983) that served as inspiration for Craig Owens's 1983 essay, "The Medusa Effect, or The Specular Ruse." At the time they were made, Kruger's 1980s works powerfully engaged and promoted theoretical discussion of "the gaze" around the construct of the viewer and the subject of representation. More broadly, these works resound with the use of the profile in the genre of portraiture in the long arc of history, while also probing matters of identity in contemporary philosophy. For this work and others, the exhibition will present Kruger's original paste-ups to illuminate the artist's process.

*Untitled (Know nothing, Believe anything, Forget everything)* (1987/2014), acquired for the Gallery by the Collectors Committee and a group of generous patrons, presents an image of a woman in profile, lying prostrate and receiving medical treatment to her eye through a large, funnel-like device. Over the image are three red bands with the artist's admonitions emblazoned in white text that warn against the pleasures and perils of our "truthy" photography-based mass media and the knowledge, beliefs, and memories that it imparts.

*Untitled (Half Life)* (2015), a monumental wall work measuring fifty-five feet wide and twenty-five feet high and covering the entire west side of the Tower Gallery, was created by the artist for the exhibition. As visitors enter the large Tower Gallery they will confront the stare of the floor-to-ceiling, black and white female face, half in profile and the other half covered by a sculptural mold. On the upper right of the image read the words "Half Life" in white letters on a block of red.

A new five-minute film will feature excerpts from an interview with the artist discussing works in the exhibition. Made possible by the H.R.H. Foundation, the film will play continuously in the anteroom of the Tower Gallery.

### **Related Programs**

Kruger, a professor in the art department at UCLA since 2006, has long maintained a commitment to teaching as a part of her practice. In December she will visit the National Gallery to talk with high school art students from DC Public Schools. The students will participate in education programs throughout the fall with Gallery educators, studying Kruger's work in the Tower exhibition and exploring the construction of identity in artworks across the museum's collection. This program marks the first time that an artist with an exhibition currently on view has worked with local students at the Gallery, and highlights Kruger's commitment to teaching and inspiring the next generation.

As a former film and television critic for *Artforum*, Kruger has acknowledged a deep interest in the moving image. In December the Gallery will feature an extensive film series, "Barbara Kruger Selects," chosen by the artist around the theme of the show and the artist's methodologies.

Exhibition curator Molly Donovan, associate curator, department of modern art, National Gallery of Art, will present a lecture on Sunday, October 23, 2016, at 2:00 p.m.

### **Barbara Kruger (b. 1945)**

Kruger's higher education began at Syracuse University and continued at Parson's School of Art and Design in New York, where she studied with Diane Arbus and Marvin Israel in 1966. Beginning in 1967 Kruger worked as a layout editor at Condé Nast for twelve years, including posts at *Mademoiselle*, *House and Garden*, and *Aperture*. In 1969 Kruger began to make her own art while also writing poetry and film and television reviews. A decade later she had developed her "picture practice" with photographs repurposed from 1940s–1970s manuals and magazines that she overlaid with her own texts or commonplace phrases. The completed works alter her found materials, inscribing her admonitions and questions over the images to stimulate and rouse the viewer from passive acceptance.

Kruger's background in design is evident in these works, for which she is internationally renowned. Owing to her interest in the public arena and the everyday, Kruger's work has appeared on billboards, bus cards, posters, T-shirts, matchbook covers, in public parks, and on train station platforms. Recent work has included immersive installations of room-wrapping images and text, and multiple-channel videos.

Prior to teaching at UCLA, Kruger taught at California Institute of the Arts, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the University of California, Berkeley. In 2005 Kruger received the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale. Her work was featured in the Whitney Biennial in 1973, 1983, 1985, and 1987; the Venice Biennale in 1982, 1993, and 2005; and Documenta 8 in 1987. Notable solo exhibitions include P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York (1980); Institute of Contemporary Art, London (1983); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1985); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1999, traveled to Whitney Museum of American Art in 2000); South London Gallery (2001); Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow (2005); the Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2008); the Museum Of Modern Art, Oxford (2014), and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (2012–2016). Kruger lives and works in Los Angeles and New York City.

### **Press Contact:**

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### **General Information**

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The

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Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt), Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ngadc](http://www.twitter.com/ngadc), and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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Exhibition Page:

[In the Tower: Barbara Kruger](#)

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