

Jenny Holzer

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Installation view of Jenny Holzer, *Now Tilt*, 2011

The image © Jenny Holzer (b. 1950), *Now Tilt*, 2011. LED light with blue, grey & red filters, 111.8 x 69.8 x 27.1 x 209.3 x 18.2 x 18.2 cm, each. Text: LAJG, 1993-92. Installation: Jenny Holzer, Kaye Silverman, 2011. Photo: © Artistic Culture. Jenny Holzer. Art Resource, NY. Artwork © Jenny Holzer. A&P, NY and LAOS, London 2020. Copyright © Jenny Holzer. All rights reserved. A&P, NY and LAOS, London 2020.



JENNY HOLZER

Artist

Jenny Holzer makes memorable art from nothing but language. Like a sculptor with a piece of wood or marble, she weighs words and phrases in her hands, feels their form and their heft, then shapes them to her own ends. Along the way, she has expanded ideas about what art can do.

Her first well-known work was *Truisms*, a collection of gnomic thoughts that she pasted on walls all over Manhattan. 'Hiding your motives is despicable,' said one truism; 'Sacrificing yourself for a bad cause is not a moral act,' read another. These sentences were Holzer's attempt to summarise her wide reading as densely and tersely as possible. It was an almost chemical process of distillation, like Marie Curie boiling down cauldrons of pitchblende to isolate half a teaspoonful of radium. And it produced results that had a glowing intensity: 'You are responsible for constituting the meaning of things...'

After *Truisms*, Holzer moved to other public forms of declaration that were more authoritative, less obviously subversive. Her word-art has been projected on buildings, carved in stone, flashed up on digital advertising displays, pasted on billboards and — her signature medium — programmed into rolling LED ticker-tape strips. In all these contexts, the meaning is deeper than it would be on the page of a book or, come to that, inside an art gallery. Holzer's art doesn't look like art is supposed to look, and it appears in places where art is not supposed to be. That's what catches you out, and gives pause for thought.