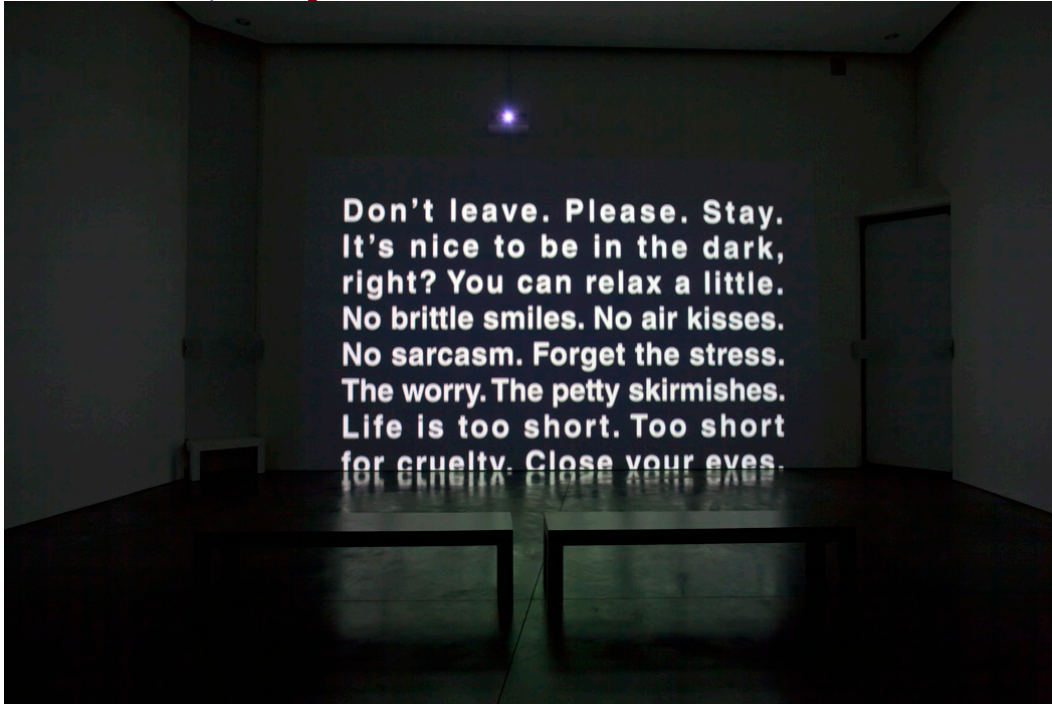


# Los Angeles Times

Hammer Museum and LACMA add major Barbara Kruger works to their collections

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As an artist who exposes social hierarchies and power structures, Barbara Kruger likes to be the observer, not the observed. But this month she has been a hot topic of conversation in the boardrooms of L.A. museums – the kind of talk that leads to acquisitions.

The Hammer Museum has just finalized the purchase of a room-sized video installation from her current exhibition at L&M Arts in Venice, her first local show since a 1999 survey at MOCA. And the L.A. County Museum of Art has acquired a 94-foot tall work that wraps around the elevator shaft at BCAM, the Renzo Piano building that the museum opened in 2008.

For the Hammer, where Kruger is an artist member on the board of overseers, this is the

first purchase of her work; the county museum already owns two photographs. The four-channel video bought by the Hammer, "The Globe Shrinks" from 2010, deals with questions of personal agency and responsibility. It juxtaposes footage from zealous religious gatherings with actors and comics performing slick routines, with lines of text occasionally appearing a bit like a live-action version of her celebrated billboards that bring together bold images and words. (One of her most famous images reads "Your body is a battleground," which she revised recently in light of the current abortion debates to say: "Your body is still a battleground.") "The video has her usual subjects of power, hypocrisy and brutality, but I think it's done with great humor and it's also very beautiful," says Hammer Museum director Ann Philbin. "In a way in the video she gets to be even more nuanced and layered -- there's a subtlety to the work." The video, which premiered at the Mary Boone gallery in New York last year, was priced around \$125,000 in an edition of six. The Hammer is the first museum to acquire the piece. Philbin says that her curators "decided unanimously we had to have it" and talks about possibly showing it within the year.

As for the LACMA acquisition, "Untitled (Shafted)" has already been on display since 2008, when it was commissioned for BCAM, the Broad Contemporary Art Museum. Strangely, it was not purchased at that time by the museum or then-museum patron Eli Broad.

"Obviously I didn't have the funds to buy it," says LACMA museum director Michael Govan. Since then, he says, "people assumed we already owned it, so that made finding funding even more challenging."

Now, however, he reports that the songwriter and LACMA trustee Carole Bayer Sager is buying the work for the museum for an undisclosed amount. An in-your-face statement about American consumerism, the three-story, red-white-and-black mural with serious graphic punch is visible from and through the glass-fronted elevator at BCAM. A stream of words referring to products like "sneakers" and "sun glasses" culminates in the pairing of "shop" and "stare," which plays on "stop" and "stare."



It's the first major piece Sager has acquired for LACMA. "My life is so much about words in songs, and I love the way she uses words in her art. It was a no-brainer to me that I should acquire it for LACMA," she said. She added that she was glad to help even out the gender imbalance, as "LACMA has bought so many works lately by male artists -- I like that there's a female artist joining our collection."

Meanwhile, Kruger says she's "thrilled" to see both works find a permanent home in L.A., where she has lived for two decades. Yet, true to her work's emphasis on the limits of wealth and the happenstance of success, she doesn't take this sort of recognition for granted.

"Who becomes visible and who remains not so visible is a confluence of different things: making consistent if not good work, historical conditions, and fortuitous relationships," she says. "I consider myself fortunate to have things play out the way they have."

-- Jori Finkel