



Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Art Review: Barbara Kruger at L&M Arts

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Barbara Kruger's first solo show in Los Angeles since her sprawling survey at the Museum of Contemporary Art in 1999 is transitional in the best sense of the term. At L&M Arts, four large-scale pieces show the 65-year-old artist beginning to move away, in fits and starts, from her signature works toward new ideas, priorities and commitments, which are still under construction.



The results are mixed. More engaging for the potential they demonstrate than for the insights they deliver, Kruger's bold pieces show an artist renowned for her acerbic works about the evils of consumerism striving and struggling to break away from the brand her oeuvre has become.

In the pre-digital 1980s and '90s, Kruger set up shop in the world of print media. Combining imagery from midcentury advertisements, double-edged captions and jaunty graphics that recalled Russian Constructivism, she made super-sized bumper stickers that looked great on billboards, T-shirts and gallery walls.

Today, her works feel a bit dated. In the west gallery, an untitled piece covers just about every square inch of the walls, floor and ceiling with big black letters that spell out pithy clichés about power and money. The experience of stepping into the space is far more compelling than the banal messages

printed everywhere. You feel a bit like Alice falling through an information-overload looking glass.

At night, two short video projections on an exterior wall read like billboards that inform us of the consequences of smoking or the benefits of recycling.

Kruger's most ambitious and least resolved piece, "The Globe Shrinks," is a 13-minute video projected on the four walls inside the darkened east gallery. Various scenes, showing actors, stand-up comics and what appears to be news footage, are interspersed with words that scroll by as a portentous soundtrack plays.

The piece has its moments. Its scale, pace and presentation are effective. Its subjects are important: sincerity, cynicism, insecurity, manipulation, group-think and yearning. But it reads too much like a trailer for a movie whose scenes neither tell a coherent story nor falls apart in ways that yield eye-opening insights.

Part of the problem is that the world of print media, in which Kruger cut her teeth as artist, is not what it used to be. "The Globe Shrinks" reveals that she is still finding her footing in the digital world, which appears to be a lot bigger than the title of her work suggests.

-- David Pagel

L&M Arts, 660 Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 821-6400, through July 9. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lmgallery.com

Images, from top: Barbara Kruger, "Untitled (wrap)," "The Globe Shrinks." Credit: JW Pictures/Joshua White and L&M Arts, Los Angeles

