



Photograph by Paul Kamuf

I was drawn to writing because it was possible to be very explicit about things.

JENNY HOLZER

Jenny Holzer

***Kind of Blue*, 2012**

9 LED signs with blue diodes

9/10 x 120 x 576 inches

Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum purchase

Acquired in 2012

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What is one to make of an artwork that is made primarily of words? American artist Jenny Holzer has utilized language as her medium since the start of her career in the late 1970s. It was her participation in the Whitney Museum of American Art's prestigious Independent Study Program in 1977 that prompted Holzer to compile a long list of one-sentence statements for public display. These declarations are distillations of the dense, theory-driven reading materials Holzer was assigned. By paring down these texts to their essential ideas, Holzer's words read as tried-and-true aphorisms and became a body of work later known as *Truisms*. A well-known Truism is ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE. Of course, the veracity of such a statement is up for debate, and each viewer/reader must make sense of it within their personal moral framework. In this way, Holzer uses language to prompt viewers to question their perceptions of themselves and of their world.

Initially, Holzer took to the gritty streets of New York City, anonymously plastering simple, black-and-white placards of the Truisms on building walls, telephone booths, and construction barriers. The artist also printed her statements on T-shirts and other commercial items in an ongoing effort to make her work accessible to the public; as she states, "My work has been designed to be stumbled across in the course of a person's daily life." As her proverb-like texts became more well-known, the artist began using LED technology, displaying the series on large billboards (such as the Spectacolor board in Times Square) and in various galleries and museums across the globe.

For *Kind of Blue*, Holzer has compiled selected segments of nine separate series, ranging from her authoritative, impersonal *Truisms* (1977–79) to the blunt, violent *Survival Series* (1983–85) and the personal, tender *Mother and Child Series* (1995). Commissioned by the Modern in celebration of our tenth anniversary in the Tadao Ando building, this piece is made specifically for a unique, double-height gallery that is visually open on three sides to water and sky. Sited in this extraordinary space, *Kind of Blue* generously provides visual bounty for the viewer. Lines of scrolling blue text move across the granite floor on horizontal LED strips, which hug the ground and form a "river of language" that seems to flow into, and sometimes out of, the pond. Extending this beauty, the luminous blue of Holzer's words reflect off the water just beyond the gallery windows, expanding the reach of the piece.

As a loop of over twelve hours of text, *Kind of Blue* offers the viewer a new experience with each visit, much like a real river. Whether sensitive, obscene, inflammatory, political, or kind, Holzer's words invite viewers to reconcile the mesmerizing visual experience of the piece with the pithy statements being read and absorbed. In the artist's words, she "routinely invites the reader to sort through the offerings and complete the thoughts; and to echo, amplify, or shrink from the feelings the work elicits."