

JENNY HOLZER PROTECT PROTECT THROUGH 2.1.2009

By presenting the contradictory voices, opinions, and attitudes that shape society, Jenny Holzer has challenged assumptions and the abuse of power throughout her thirty-year career. *Jenny Holzer: PROTECT PROTECT* focuses on the artist's practice from the early 1990s to the present through sculpture, electronic signs, projections, and paintings. These works feature selections of Holzer's writings from 1977 to 2001 as well as texts and images from US government documents she has used as source material since 2004. The exhibition's subtitle draws from a painting on view in the *MAP* installation that incorporates a formerly classified Iraq war planning document; yet, it also recalls the incisiveness of the artist's earlier writings such as *PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT*. Working between the public and private, the body politic and the body, the universal and the particular, Holzer's work joins political bravura with formal beauty, sensitivity, and power.

This exhibition presents three major bodies of work: redaction paintings, electronic signs, and *Lustmord*.

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REDACTION PAINTINGS

For these paintings, Holzer worked with the National Security Archive—a non-partisan, non-governmental organization that collects declassified government documents and makes them available to the public—as well as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which also makes declassified documents available to the public on its website. Information deemed too sensitive for the public eye was blacked out, or redacted, by government censors during the declassification process.

The paintings' source materials include autopsy reports of detainees in the Middle East (*Homicide*, 2007), correspondence and documents related to detainee interrogation (*Wish List / Gloves Off pewter*, 2007), redacted handprints of US military personnel accused of war crimes (*HAND*, 2008), and maps from a PowerPoint presentation given by the US military's Central Command to the White House that delineate and propose various strategies and plans for the invasion of Iraq (*MAP*, 2008).

ELECTRONIC SIGNS

Holzer began writing early in her career; her most well-known texts are *Truisms* (1977–79) and *Inflammatory Essays* (1979–82). She uses various nontraditional media to disseminate her writings, particularly LED (light emitting diode) signs, which are commonly used for advertising and to report the news in the public realm. The LED signs in this exhibition draw from declassified government documents as well as 13 texts written by Holzer from 1977 to 2001. *For Chicago* (2007), which includes all of these texts, was commissioned by the museum for the MCA Collection. The artist carefully considers every aspect of the signs from font and color choice to the pace of the scroll and movement of the text. In some cases the intent of the work is to soothe; in others, to repel or make the viewer uncomfortable.

LUSTMORD

Loosely translated, the German word *lustmord* means rape-killing, sex-murder, or lust-killing. It is the title of one of Holzer's writings as well as a work on view in the exhibition. Prompted by the atrocities of war in the former Yugoslavia, when women and girls were targeted as an explicit part of the regime's policy, the *Lustmord* text was originally written on human bodies, which were photographed for presentation. Since then, it has been presented in site-specific installations comprised of a range of materials.

The MCA's presentation consists of human bones laid out like artifacts on found wooden tables. The bones were purchased in stores and include male and female specimens. Some of them feature silver bands engraved with fragments of text that detail the rape and murder of women from the perspectives of victim, perpetrator, and witness. The circular texts cannot be read all at once, a metaphor for the variety of viewpoints expressed.