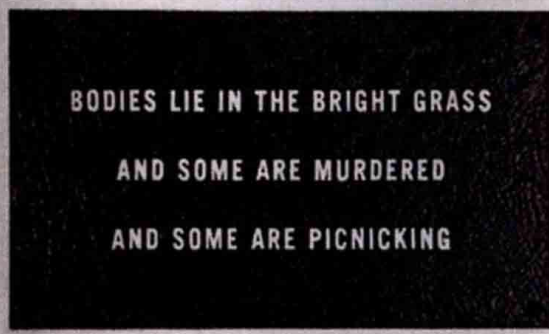


Art

Jenny Holzer: Sophisticated Devices



Sprüth Magers Galleries Central

This exhibition of 1980s works by the established American conceptual artist, Jenny Holzer, is modest in scale – there are none of the large-scale projected texts or sculptural arrangements of multiple rows of scrolling LEDs that she has become famous for. However, it does highlight an important aspect of Holzer's work: namely, how the medium changes the message.

Holzer rose to prominence in the late '70s by co-opting the structures of advertising and public display – posters, billboards, plaques and, later, electronic notice boards – in order to present often appropriated phrases or pithy one-liners that speak about troubling aspects of the human condition. 'When someone beats you with a flashlight you make light shine in all directions,' is one

example here, as is the foreboding, 'I am not free because I can be exploded anytime'.

Her sentiments don't date, but what's more interesting is the subtle shifts in how the same texts are received, depending on the medium in which they're shown. When inscribed on granite benches they become poignant memorials. When stamped on aluminium plaques they function more as warning signs (such as 'Survival', 1984, left) and when hand-painted onto enamel, the non-uniformity of the letters give the message a more personal feel. Two paintings are the result of a collaboration with street artist Lady Pink, famed for her role in the 1982 graffiti flick, 'Wild Style'. Against these spray-painted backgrounds, Holzer's words take on the attitude of protest. But it's the ticker texts presented on two simple, LED wall displays that have the most lasting impact ('More Survival', 1985, below). There's something mesmerising in the variations of their scrolling, flashing and pulsing lights that keeps the eye engaged, which is exactly what they were originally designed to do, after all. **Helen Sumpter**