

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART EXPLORES THE ROLE OF CONTEMPORARY PRINTED ART

Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980-95
June 20 - September 10, 1996

Printed art created during the past decade and a half is the subject of a wide-ranging survey opening at The Museum of Modern Art on June 20, 1996. **THINKING PRINT: BOOKS TO BILLBOARDS, 1980-95** features artists, ideas, and techniques that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as works by long-established printmakers. New formats such as billboards, matchbook covers, subway posters, and T-shirts are seen together with more traditional wood and linoleum cuts, etchings, and deluxe illustrated books. In addition, the exhibition explores important thematic issues of language, photography, politics, and the body that were at the forefront during this period. While focusing on the diversity of American printed art, the exhibition also presents a wide range of works produced by European artists.

Organized by Deborah Wye, Chief Curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, who also wrote the accompanying catalogue, **THINKING PRINT** comprises 235 works by 147 artists drawn primarily from the Museum's extensive holdings of new prints and illustrated books acquired since 1980. The exhibition builds on the Museum's tradition of exploring developments in printed art, following the surveys **PRINTED ART: A VIEW OF TWO DECADES** (1980) and **CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS AS PRINTMAKERS** (1964). In conjunction with **THINKING PRINT**, the Museum has commissioned prints by Barbara Kruger, which will be tail-mounted on 40 Manhattan buses, and by Jean-Charles Blais, which will be seen on 15 telephone kiosks during July; a T-shirt created by Kruger will be for sale in The MoMA Book and Design Stores. In addition, the

Museum is installing a billboard by Félix González-Torres on the inbound side of the Williamsburg Bridge (on view from June 15 to September 30).

The exhibition, which remains on view through September 10, 1996, is made possible by grants from the Lannan Foundation and the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Mr. and Mrs. Ronald S. Lauder. Additional support is provided by TDI, Appleton Papers, the National Endowment for the Arts, and The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art.

Deborah Wye commented, "The last fifteen years have been a remarkably prolific and important period for printmaking. The traditional boundaries of printed art are not as clear as they once were, and political and social issues have pushed artists to devise printing formats that communicate directly with the public." She continued, "Prints and illustrated books have reached a new level of maturity. A new generation is building on the achievements of earlier printmakers through experimentation with traditional techniques, while other artists have introduced radical innovations. This exhibition explores a broad range of these works, presenting them within contexts that hopefully encourage interpretation and discussion."

The Exhibition

THINKING PRINT is organized into three sections, an interpretive framework designed to encourage a greater understanding of the wide range of styles and themes that emerged during the period.

Section I: New Printmakers concentrates on artists who are new to the art form and whose works either communicate directly with the public through commercial techniques or expand upon traditional techniques. Among the artists in this section are Félix González-Torres,

represented by a nine-inch stack of photolithographed sheets that are distributed to the public and continually replenished, and Barbara Kruger, represented by a range of works that mimic mass advertising. Jenny Holzer and Jean-Charles Blais are also seen in works that deal with public address. Other artists in this section, such as Francesco Clemente, Elizabeth Murray, Susan Rothenberg, and Terry Winters, carry over the concerns of their painting into traditional techniques such as woodcut, lithography, screenprint, and intaglio, created in workshop settings. Kiki Smith's works range from lithography to tattoo transfers.

Section II: Techniques and Formats explores in depth some of the processes found abundantly in the contemporary period. Traditional techniques such as **woodcut** and **linoleum cut**, and the **intaglio** processes that comprise etching, drypoint, aquatint, and mezzotint, are represented by a range of artists including Georg Baselitz, Richard Bosman, Anselm Kiefer, and Joan Snyder working in the former techniques, and Luis Cruz Azaceta, Lucian Freud, and Brice Marden working in the latter. A particularly pervasive format during the last fifteen years was the **multipart project**, a series of prints linked by a common theme and published as a group. Among such works in the exhibition are those by Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, and Rosemarie Trockel. Examples of **multiples**, which lie somewhere between sculpture and the editioned print, include a variety of unusual objects, from Peggy Diggs's milk containers containing messages about domestic violence to Rirkrit Tiravanija's apron featuring a recipe for sausage.

Section III: Themes examines several of the most significant issues treated in printmaking and in contemporary art generally over the last fifteen years. **Language** serves as subject matter in a wide range of prints and illustrated books in the exhibition. It is used for its compositional structure by Ashley Bickerton; for its declarative power by the Guerrilla Girls

and Allen Ruppersberg; for its evocative and poetic quality by K.O.S., Richard Long, Tim Rollins, and Edward Ruscha. The related mediums of **photography and printmaking** have been combined in many recent projects for a variety of artistic purposes. John Baldessari's appropriation of mass-media photographs and Sherrie Levine's second-hand reproductions of Degas paintings address the ubiquity of the photographic image in our world; Yong Soon Min and Christian Boltanski use snapshots to relay personal or commemorative history. **Social and political issues** that took on primary importance during this period -- apartheid, race and ethnicity, and especially AIDS -- were treated extensively through print mediums, which in many instances offered a way to bring art out of the galleries and into the public realm. Among the artists in the exhibition whose work communicates a strong social message are Elizabeth Catlett, Sue Coe, General Idea, Keith Haring, and Juan Sánchez. **The body** became the focus of increased attention in contemporary printmaking, both in the Neo-Expressionist figuration of A. R. Penck and Susan Rothenberg and in the unromantic investigations of Louise Bourgeois and Annette Messager.

Publication: *Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980-95*, by Deborah Wye, offers a lucid guide to the contemporary printmaking scene, with concise descriptions of the basic techniques, and discussions of the print market, the master printmakers and workshops, and the role of series, artist's books, and multiples. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, it contains 160 pages and 152 illustrations, including 88 in full color. Paper-over-board cover, designed by Barbara Kruger. \$35.00. Distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, and available in the MoMA Book Store. This publication is supported by Mr. and Mrs. Perry R. Bass.

Special Programs: A variety of public and family programs are being held in conjunction with this exhibition, including the symposium *Books to Billboards: Issues in Contemporary Printmaking* (Saturday, June 22, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.), which is made possible by a grant from The International Fine Print Dealers Association (IFPDA). [see separate press release].

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