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DESIGN CULTURE COMMENT

## Women in the City

By Alissa Walker  
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**Women in the City, featuring the work of Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, and Cindy Sherman**

Curated by Emi Fontana



Out in front of **Grauman's Chinese Theatre** in Hollywood on a recent

afternoon, a pasty-faced Marilyn Monroe walked back and forth while Spiderman perched on a nearby trashcan. But what got my attention was the marquee message on the hotel across the street: "Sex differences are here to stay." Now that's odd, I thought.

Two days later, I discovered that I had just gotten my first taste of the public art installation "**Women in the City**," launched by Italian curator Emi Fontana. More than 50 large-scale artworks from four women artists are embedded throughout the city of Los Angeles until March 31, including Jenny Holzer's *Truism* on the marquee of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. "I love the idea that this is like a treasure hunt," Fontana says. "This is a show that requires work for the viewer."

The four artists Fontana picked—Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler and Cindy Sherman—all burst onto a very male art scene in the late 70s and 80s using messages that borrowed heavily from advertising and film. For the "Women in the City" show, billboards, Jumbotron and wild-postings are the media, appropriately enough, used to break through the urban landscape. Many of the works are centered around the part of Hollywood Boulevard suffering from the aftermath of the Academy Awards, a surreal place to see Sherman's self-portrait film stills, seen in a public art setting for the first time. Two of the other works are similarly monumental. On February 14, Lawler reprised her 1979 work *A Movie Without the Picture* at the original location, the Aero Theater, in Santa Monica. And Holzer's *Inflammatory Essays*, propagandist speeches pasted along construction sites, have been translated for the first time into Spanish.

Two pieces created for the installation are so slick and place-specific they might not even be seen as art. Kruger's video *Plenty* plays atop the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, broadcasting messages like

PLEASE STOP TEXTING in her trademark all-caps Futura Bold—followed by an image of a hideous car crash. But on two different places on the Sunset Strip, Kruger’s messages are sandwiched between regularly-scheduled ads, which might lead some commuters to see them as exceptionally well-designed PSAs. A set of stickers with Holzer’s *Truisms*, one of which reads, “The beginning of the war will be secret,” appeared last week in 250,000 issues of alt-weekly *LA Weekly* with no context whatsoever, but a story about war crimes in Fallujah a few pages later might have persuaded readers to believe they were linked. This in-context connection made by the audience completes the relationship between the women, the art and the street, says Fontana. “If you think about it, the city is already full of signs and icons,” she says. “We’re adding more signs to the city and creating more confusion.”

A Los Angeles that sends messages to its residents is not without precedence; in the movie *LA Story*, a signboard on the side of the freeway famously counsels Steve Martin’s character. But in real life, Angelenos don’t seem to be as receptive to the city’s advice. A few days ago, two women standing at the corner of Hollywood and Highland seemed to be the only ones aware of the scrolling *Truisms* on the giant LED Zipscreen two stories above. “I don’t know what it is,” said one woman to the other. “I’m trying to read it: ‘Something is the tyrant of...’” The walk sign flashed, and her friend started across Highland, calling over her shoulder, “I’m gonna go be a tyrant across the street.” ALISSA WALKER

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