

Press Release

DEMENTED WORDS Jenny Holzer

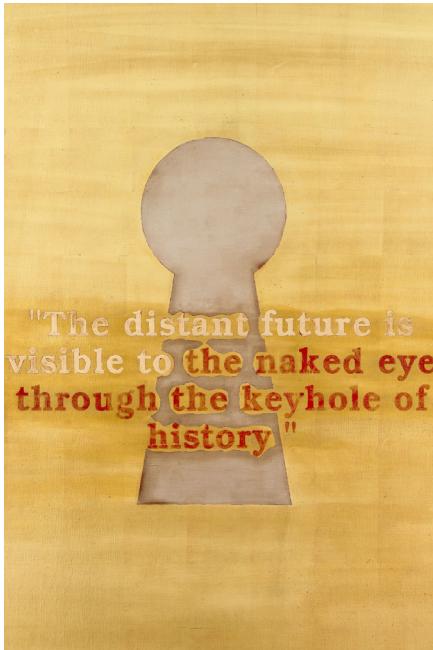
8 September – 29 October 2022

Hauser & Wirth New York, 22nd Street



New York...Renowned American artist Jenny Holzer has used language as her primary medium since the 1970s, mobilizing poetic, political and personal texts to reflect on our experiences of power, violence, joy, idealism, nonsense, despair, fun and corruption. This September, Hauser & Wirth New York will present Holzer's most recent works — including paintings, 'curse tablets' and a monumental kinetic display packing presidential tweets — in the artist's long-anticipated solo exhibition for New York City.

Holzer's Hauser & Wirth New York debut sees the artist engaging directly with the present moment, drawing from new and ancient cultural-political materials to illuminate contemporary life. A centerpiece of the presentation, 'WTF' (2022), is a swinging electronic sign with tweets posted by Donald Trump during his presidency and posts by Q, leader of the QAnon conspiracy. The latest in a string of experiments with kinetics, 'WTF' slides along a track in an unpredictable cadence that echoes the erratic rhythm with which the messages appeared online. The flashing and scrolling texts illuminate nearly 300 'curse tablets' lining gallery walls and scattered across the floor. This new body of work was inspired by inscribed lead tablets used by ancient Romans to seek vengeance. Holzer's tablets were created by stamping tweets onto metal fragments, then distressing and aging them through crumpling, folding, piercing and chemical baths. Like ruined or molten iterations of Holzer's previous evocations of public plaques, the damaged tablets suggest refuse, wreckage and devastation. Together, the battering-ram-like electronics and quasi-archaeological tablets compose a time capsule of the recent past and present, recording the hyperbolic, enraged rhetoric characterizing today's political and media landscape — divisive language matching or exceeding that employed in Holzer's 'Inflammatory Essays' (1979 – 82).



The exhibition also presents a selection of new large-scale paintings on linen, marking the latest phase in Holzer's painting practice, which analyzes and visualizes the ongoing and interconnected tumults in American politics from the era of George W. Bush to the present. The surfaces of these works are built over tracings of enlarged pages of heavily redacted government documents, including Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report on Russian interference in the 2016 US Presidential election and FBI records pertaining to the Patriot Act. Holzer meticulously covered the redactions and blank space with colorful blocks of oil paint before adding layers of luminous gold, platinum and other metal leaf. The paintings' seductive beauty belies the difficult content beneath their surfaces, reminding viewers that the world around us contains truths and secrets that are suppressed yet eminently present.

About the Artist

Born in 1950 in Ohio, USA, Jenny Holzer studied painting and printmaking at Ohio University and received an MFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1977. She also undertook studies in the liberal arts at Duke University and the University of Chicago, a broad education that resonates throughout her multidirectional artistic practice. While her early efforts engaged painting, she quickly turned to text and dynamically incorporated new technologies to thread her work through public space: Holzer's oeuvre is as accessible on billboards, T-shirts, benches, and electronics in New York's Times Square as it is in museums and galleries.

Since 1996 Holzer has used light projections — in which powerful projectors cast scrolling texts onto architecture or landscape — as another means of presenting writing in the public realm. The texts and light are dramatic yet enigmatic, adapting to varied surfaces, from the mountains and ski jump in Lillehammer to the Pyramide du Louvre in Paris. In the wake of 9/11, Holzer returned to painting, alluding to such touchstones as suprematism and abstract expressionism to reinforce the continued relationship of art and politics.

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Caption and courtesy information:

Jenny Holzer

I WOKE UP NAKED, 2018

LED sign with blue, green & red diodes

5.5 x 141 x 5.5 in / 14 x 358.1 x 14 cm

Text: Interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch (HRW), © 1992–2017 by HRW.

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Installation: Jenny Holzer: Thing Indescribable, Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain, 2019

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Photo: Erika Ede

Jenny Holzer

keyhole of history, 2022 (detail)

24k gold and moon gold leaf and oil on linen

58 x 44 in / 147.3 x 111.8 cm

Text: US government document

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Photo: Sveva Costa Sanseverino

Jenny Holzer

Curse tablets, 2022 (detail)

Stamped lead with precious metal plating, patina and pigment

Dimensions variable

Text: Tweets by former President Donald Trump

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