

JENNY HOLZER
TEXT DESCRIPTIONS

TRUISMS (1977-1979)

The Truisms series (over two hundred fifty single sentence declarations) was written by Holzer to resemble existing truisms, maxims, and clichés. The series was influenced by the reading list provided by Ron Clark at the Whitney Independent Study Program, where Holzer studied in 1977. Each truism distills difficult and contentious ideas into a seemingly straightforward fact. Privileging no single viewpoint, the Truisms examine the social construction of beliefs, mores, and truths. When they are displayed in serial format, Holzer organizes the aphoristic statements in alphabetic order. The Truisms first were shown on anonymous street posters that were wheat pasted throughout downtown Manhattan, and subsequently have appeared on T-shirts, hats, electronic signs, stone floors, and benches.

INFLAMMATORY ESSAYS (1979-1982)

Influenced by Holzer's readings of political, art, religious, utopian, and other manifestos, the Inflammatory Essays are a collection of 100-word texts that were printed on colored paper and posted throughout New York City. Like any manifesto, the voice in each essay urges and espouses a strong and particular ideology. By masking the author of the essays, Holzer allows the viewer to assess ideologies divorced from the personalities that propel them. With this series, Holzer invites the reader to consider the urgent necessity of social change, the possibility for manipulation of the public, and the conditions that attend revolution.

LIVING (1980-1982)

In the Living series, Holzer presents a set of quiet observations, directions, and warnings. Unlike the Inflammatory Essays, the Living texts are written in a matter of fact, journalistic style, suitable for descriptions of everyday life. The commentaries touch on how the individual and his or her body negotiates landscapes, persons, rules, expectations, desires, fears, other bodies, one's flesh, and one's self. The Living writing appeared on cast bronze plaques, of the sort that often appear on historical buildings, to lend the writing authority. The writings were also incorporated into hand painted signs.

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SURVIVAL (1983-1985)

Survival is a cautionary series where each single sentence instructs, informs, or questions the ways an individual responds to his or her political, social, physical, psychological, and personal environments. The tone of Survival is more urgent than that of Living. The Survival texts were the first to be written especially for electronic signs; the sentences are short and pointed so as to be easily available to passersby. "Protect me from what I want" is a key Survival text.

ARNO (1996)

Begun as an account of losing someone to AIDS, Arno, more expansively, treats living with the death of one who was loved. A version of the text made its debut in a music video for Red, Hot and Dance, an AIDS fundraiser. The writing was completed, and made general, so as to treat anyone's loss after a great and terrible love. Arno next was presented to the public as a light projection on the Arno River in Florence, Italy, in 1996. This projection on the Arno was Holzer's first, and this medium has been crucial to Holzer's practice since.

BLUE (1998)

More lyrical and obliquely narrated than Holzer's earlier works, Blue touches on the pervasive fallout of abuse and bad sex. The text examines how individual memory can be situated next to and within unnamed but global catastrophe. By addressing and eliding individual and mass trauma, this text indicates that no disaster is purely local but leaks into the world's political and psychological groundwater.

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