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# Women in the City

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## Women in the City

SAN FRANCISCO



In February Emi Fontana's Los Angeles-based enterprise, West of Rome, launched its inaugural project "Women in the City," featuring 10 site-specific works by Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler and Jenny Holzer. Like a subversive, viral ad campaign these works are situated

in over 50 locations in the Los Angeles region. Nobody walks in LA, but "Women in the City" encourages the car-flaneurs of Los Angeles to put down their cell phones and lattes and look for the billboards, posters, LED screens and movie marquis that host the works in this exhibition.

"Truisms" (1977-79) by Jenny Holzer ("Ambivalence can ruin your life") scroll across a Zipscreen above a massive GAP store. Holzer's "Survival Series" (1983-85) resurfaces as stickers ("It is embarrassing to be caught and killed for stupid reasons") in Spanish and English, inserted into a local weekly culture magazine, and her "Inflammatory Essays" (1979-82), also bilingual, are fluorescent posters that are plastered on construction site walls, in-between concert posters and graffiti. "Untitled Film Stills" (1977-1980) by Cindy Sherman appear on Hollywood billboards like fashion or movie ads, but are disconcertingly devoid of any text or slogan to help the viewer contextualize them. Kruger's video *Plenty* (2008) plays in sequence with actual advertise-

ments on LED screens throughout the city, presenting images of desirable luxury items and phrases that critique the politics of commodity culture. Louise Lawler's *A movie will be shown without the pictures* (1979) was re-screened in its original location (the Aero Theater in Santa Monica) on Valentine's day. Perfectly suited for Los Angeles, a city of aspiring starlets, in which Lawler's piece denies the spectator's gaze by screening *The Misfits* sans any visuals (including Marilyn's lovely face), presenting only the audio. *Birdcalls* (1972-81), another audio piece by Lawler, plays in a local botanical garden, embedded in the utopian notions of cultivated nature within the city. For this piece she sings the names of famous male artists.

The siting of Los Angeles has long been problematic. In a city rife with simulacra, the sites with most potency often exist on television or in movies. But LA has also been the very real site of Womanhouse and a significant women's activist movement in the '70s. More recently, LA is also the home of the new Broad Contemporary Art

Museum (which the Guerrilla Girls have been quick to critique for its disproportionate holdings of work by male artists). The four artists in "Women in the City," renowned for their groundbreaking exploration of gender stereotypes, the power of language, and appropriating the techniques of advertising and cinema, take back the streets of LA as they ferociously revoke and return the gaze. The works in the show reinfuse the local landscape with a critical voice that is an antidote to the innocuous and ubiquitous pop culture images that ceaselessly promote consumption and beauty.

— Micol Hebron

From top: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled*, 1980/2008. Installation view. Courtesy West of Rome, Los Angeles. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen; Jenny Holzer, *Sex differences are here to stay*, 2008. Installation view. Courtesy of West of Rome inc., Los Angeles. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.