



art21.org/barbarakruger



Barbara Kruger

ABOUT

Born

1945, (Newark, New Jersey)

Education

Attended: Syracuse University, Parsons School of Design

Lives and Works

New York and Los Angeles

About the Artist

Kruger began her career as a graphic designer and picture editor at Condé Nast Publications, an experience that greatly impacted her artistic practice. Drawing from this professional background, the artist uses the visual tropes, language, and design aesthetics of commercial advertising and magazines. The resulting images and installations combine image and text to reflect and critique the ways in which mass-media culture influences our beliefs at a societal and individual level. Her work directly addresses the viewer, interrogating them about feminism, classism, consumerism, and individual autonomy and desire, while appropriating images from mainstream magazines that sell the very ideas she is disputing.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

photography
collage
printmaking
installation

Key Words and Ideas

activism
advertising
commentary
public space
site-specific

commodities
consumerism
feminism
society
text

Related Artists

Meriem Bennani
Nathalie Djurberg &
Hans Berg
Mark Bradford
Nick Cave
Minerva Cuevas
Ellen Gallagher
Ann Hamilton
Trenton Doyle
Hancock
Jenny Holzer
Brian Jungen

Lynn Herschman
Leeson
Glenn Ligon
Allan McCollum
Barry McGee
Elizabeth Murray
Bruce Nauman
Raymond Pettibon
Paul Pfeiffer
Mary Reid Kelley
Laurie Simmons
Nancy Spero

“What it means to point a camera at another person—I think that there is a brutality about that.” —Barbara Kruger

How to Use This Guide

Art21 encourages active engagement when teaching with our films. The questions and activities below are recommendations for incorporating Art21 films featuring Barbara Kruger into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

NOTE: Please view all films before sharing them with your students.

Before Viewing

Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):

- ① Where can art be seen? How can an artwork's location have an influence on its meaning?
- ② Think about a time in your life when written words mattered. Why did they matter? What was the context?
- ③ What does it mean to call oneself an artist?

While Viewing

Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:

- ① Where can you find Kruger's work? Take notes as you watch the film.
- ② Make a list of questions or phrases from Kruger's work that resonate with you.
- ③ How did Kruger become an artist, and what materials was she drawn to at the beginning of her career?

After Viewing

Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):

- ① Kruger says she "activates a space." How does she do this?
- ② Why are words an effective tool for Kruger? How does her writing reveal her values?
- ③ Kruger questions commodities and consumerism. After encountering her work, what do you think she wants a viewer to do?

Related Activities

Engaging in creative activities after watching Art21 films can reinforce learning and stimulate ideas. Art21 encourages educators to adapt these activities to their classrooms.

- ✓ Kruger states, "My first love is architecture. I just 'spatialize' ideas." Ask students to pick a local space and plan a site-specific artwork that, as Kruger says, "activates the space."
- ✓ Feminism is a recurring theme in Kruger's work. Prompt students to create an artwork that concerns issues about gender, without showing the human body.
- ✓ Use text as an inspiration tool. Like Kruger, students can write their own texts or use another author's writing (similar to how Kruger adapted Virginia Woolf) as the foundations for their artworks. The final products can feature legible words or not.
- ✓ Choose one of Kruger's artworks that you find inspiring or intriguing because of the quote or combination of words. Use these words to initiate a short story. Share the story with classmates. It can be included in a larger volume of short stories that are inspired by Kruger's work in this way.