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ALL ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Review: Potent visions from Jenny Holzer at L&M Arts



Jenny Holzer's "All Fall," 2012, array of five double-sided LED signs with stainless steel housings. Blue and green diodes on front, red and yellow diodes on back, 103.47 x 95.07 x 103.47 inches. (Joshua White / JW Pictures)

By Holly Myers

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Jenny Holzer's first solo show in Los Angeles in more than 20 years — only her second to date — is a taut mini-survey consisting of works dating back to the late 1970s.

The “truisms” contained in LED signs, benches and plaques scattered throughout the gallery at L&M Arts, as well as in a trio of Gobo light projections that appear on the exterior walls after dusk, will come as a surprise to almost no one, so central have they become to the story of American art over the last quarter-century.

It is useful to be reminded, however, of how potent the work remains. Flickering inscrutably in the conceptual space between activism, poetry, parody and cliché, Holzer's wordplay — “Abuse of power comes as no surprise”; “The beginning of the war will be secret” — rarely hits a stale note. Viewed in a room with multiple LED

screens rolling, glaring and flashing at once, the effect is jarringly visceral, which may indeed come as a surprise to those accustomed to seeing Holzer's work in books or at a distance.

In the dozen or so large-scale paintings and drawings that constitute Holzer's recent works, she draws her language — or conspicuous lack thereof — from an outside source: declassified U.S. government documents.

The paintings, which fill the many blocks of redacted text with gently buzzing fields of color, are striking, if not especially original. The most memorable work in the show combines the elements of old and new, issuing fragments of interviews with U.S. soldiers concerning the mistreatment of prisoners on five individual LED screens installed in scattered diagonals in a corner. Simultaneously banal and appalling, the piece points to the complicated force inherent in Holzer's chosen medium of language.