

CHEIM & READ
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Jenny Holzer

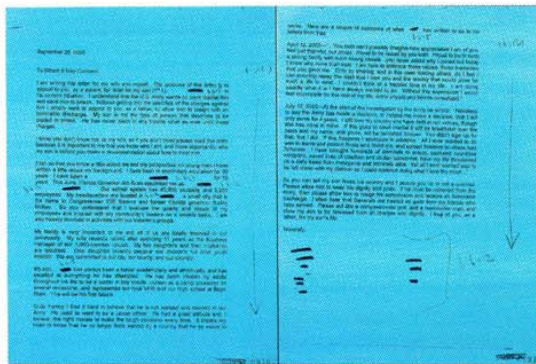
CHEIM & READ/YVON LAMBERT

Jenny Holzer's "Redaction Paintings," 2005–, some of which were shown recently at Cheim & Read in an exhibition titled "Archive," reproduce, in silk-screened oil on linen, a series of declassified United States government documents mostly relating to military activity in Iraq. The material contained in these letters, statements, memos, orders, lists, and reports, which traces a brutal narrative of physical and psychological violence, both illegal and officially sanctioned, is bluntly shocking, even taking into account the fact that much of the text—no doubt the most damning portions—has been obscured with heavy black ink. And the overall impression it communicates—one borne out by those fields of obliterating black—is that the more classified information the administration generates, the less the public is allowed to see (as Robert Storr observes in his catalogue essay, "the heavily redacted materials released by the federal agencies, and the vastly expanded recourse to full, long-term classification by the present administration, clearly suggests that the day is soon coming—it may, in fact, have already arrived—when the flow of information will trickle to a halt").

We're accustomed to Holzer using words ambiguously—even when their sentiments appear extreme (or at least uncompromising), the questions they ask tend to be oblique, the situations they present more often teasingly psychosexual than explicitly political. So in making us so immediately aware of her sources and linking them so closely to current events, the artist here made a bold, even dangerous move. The content of the selected documents is so chilling and the manner of their presentation so seductive (Holzer imposes a range of slick Warholian colorways, and seems to dwell on the censor's oddly expressive gestures) that the dissonance between "obscene realism and formal elegance" (per Storr) does threaten to soften the content's necessary blow. The series's aesthetic is so tight that it soon begins to feel airless—even, at worst, cynically programmatic. Would we allow a lesser-known artist to get away with this? Storr's conclusion, that "any means necessary" should be used to "get the word out" about the horror of modern war, seems perilously close to an apology.

The lush black-and-white photographs on display in "Night Feed," Holzer's concurrent exhibition at Yvon Lambert, find the artist drawing on more familiar kinds of source material, but these works too are problematic, the too-decorative residue of a once powerful intent/event. Documenting a number of large-scale temporary light projections staged around the world over the past ten years, these shots, most of which were taken by the artist's long-term collaborator Attilio Maranzano, show quotations from poems and letters, rendered in block type, covering the facades of grand buildings—including Rockefeller Plaza in New York, the Palazzo Corner della Ca' Grande in Venice, and the Pyramide du Louvre in Paris—or illuminating natural scenes such as a dense pine forest or breaking ocean waves.

Sometimes, as in *See sorrow* (all works 2006), the complexity of the architectural backdrop, in this case the facade of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, fragments the text, here Henri Cole's "To the Forty-third President" (2004), to such an extent that it's virtually unreadable. In others, such as *To acquire*, which pictures an extract from "Children of Our Age" (1998) by Wislawa Szymborska projected onto the Hotel Pennsylvania, the wording is clear, even if the extract seems at thematic odds with its surroundings. This isn't necessarily a problem, nor is Holzer's taste at issue here—the extracts are consistently evocative. It's simply difficult to avoid thinking of these images



Jenny Holzer, *AS A PARENT (TURQUOISE)*, 2006, oil on linen, 2 panels, each 33 x 25 1/2".

as unresolved artworks—the flat, static by-products of experiences to which space and movement, and the peculiarities of particular, real places and times, were vital.

—Michael Wilson