Charisma is the perfume of your gods
Once a graphic designer for Condé Nast, Barbara Kruger uses the graphic modes associated with Madison Avenue persuasion. She takes stereotypical images from a wide variety of publications (magazines, instruction manuals, newspapers) of past decades and expands their meaning with the addition of carefully worded, terse sentences. At the core of Kruger's work is a critical consideration of money, power and sexual identity in our society as it is covertly but persuasively expressed in the popular press.

Recent works by Kruger focus on the economics of power. Money (or its absence) figures prominently in both the visual imagery (e.g., a close-up of a U.S. government-minted coin or an empty pocket conspicuously turned inside out) and the words she puts together ("Your money talks," "Money can buy you love," "Our loss is your gain"). Kruger takes well-known but worn-out phrases and, with just a little twist, reinvigorates them. For instance, subtly flipping a familiar phrase into its opposite -- as in her new work, "Money can buy you love" -- Kruger causes the viewer to think twice. Changing the truism "Money talks" into "Your money talks," Kruger swiftly draws the viewer into the work through direct address. The same device is used in "Your fact is stranger than fiction." The viewer finds it difficult to remain indifferent. Is she speaking to us? To me? To you? Maybe yes. Maybe no. In any case, Kruger has animated the phrase and, more likely than not, engaged our interest.

Krugers works consciously intend to subvert indifference and passivity. Their scale far exceeds that of traditional art photography as commonly seen in museums and galleries. The short texts, usually superimposed over sections of the images, are sometimes constructed into banner headlines and at other times broken up into curious staccato phrases which take on still additional sub-meanings.

The red lacquered frames are themselves unconventional. Just as we commonly underline important things in red, Kruger ascribes an importance to these works by outlining them in red. Symbolically, red, black and white remind informed visitors of the Constructivist tradition (as well as a revolutionary stance). Red also connotes danger.

Furthermore, the very act of the artist's own manipulation of word and image in order to grab our attention is something Kruger wants us to consider. Her works often look pieced together, the text applied to the surface. Montage implies a consciously thought-out arrangement, fixed by the artist's hand. Her efforts are obvious and blatant, occasionally parodic. In the context of a magazine chock full of advertisements or a newspaper sensationalizing the news, such manipulative devices and strategies would be taken for granted. However, Kruger's photographs are just the opposite of the refined understatements, the politesse we customarily encounter on the walls of a museum. Thus it is that they effectively take us by surprise.

And yet her works sometimes leave the viewer aroused but puzzled. Who is "we"? Who is the you of "your"? Is Kruger drawing hard lines between male and female? Between rich and poor? Visitors are likely to have multiple and differing interpretations of both the texts and the images. This pleases Kruger. There are no correct, singular readings of these works. Kruger intends for them
to avoid any sense of closure. 
This ambiguity is intentional. 
They raise questions and counter-
act stasis. They deliver 
the power to you.

Barbara Kruger was born in 
Newark, New Jersey in 1945. 
She attended Syracuse Uni-
versity, Parsons School of Design 
and the School of Visual Arts. 
In 1983 she received an Indi-
vidual Artist's Fellowship (in 
the category of new genre) from 
the National Endowment for the 
Arts. Kruger currently lives 
in New York City where she 
teaches in the Whitney Museum Pro-
gram for Independent Study.

Andrea Miller-Keller 
Curator of MATRIX Hartford

PLEASE NOTE: 
Barbara Kruger will give a 
MATRIX Lecture at the Atheneum 
co-sponsored by The Hartford 
Art School, University of Hart-
ford, Tuesday, January 29 at 
6:30 p.m. The public is cor-
dially invited.

Works in MATRIX:

Untitled (Your gaze hits the 
side of my face), 1982, black & 
white photograph, 60" x 40". 
Lent by David Salle, New York 
City.

Untitled (Charisma is the per-
fume of your gods), 1983, black 
& white photograph, 16 1/2" x 
16 1/2".

Untitled (Our loss is your 
gain), 1984, black & white pho-
tograph, 72" x 48". Lent by 
John Weber, New York City.

Untitled (We will no longer be 
seen and not heard), 1983, 
black & white photograph, 48" x 
51".

Untitled (You kill time), 1983, 
black & white photograph, 72" x 
48". Collection of the Chase 
Manhattan Bank, N.A.

Untitled (Your fact is stranger 
than fiction), 1983, black & 
white photograph, 72" x 48". 
Lent by Caroline Stewart and 
Peter Halley, New York City.

Untitled (Buy me I'll change 
your life), 1984, black & white 
photograph, 72" x 48". Lent by 
Lisa Phillips, New York City. 
(Tentative)

Untitled (Money can buy you 
love), 1984, black & white pho-
tograph, c. 86 1/2" x 95 7/8".

Untitled (We are not made for 
you), 1984, black & white pho-
tograph, 72" x 48".

Untitled (You do what you can 
to get what you want), 1984, 
black & white photograph, 72" x 
48".

Untitled (Your money talks), 
1984, black & white photograph, 
57" x 69".

All works are courtesy of the 
Annina Nosei Gallery, New York 
City, unless otherwise indicat-
ed.

Selected one-person exhibitions: 
Artists Space, NYC '74; Fisch-
bach Gallery, NYC '75; Franklin 
Furnace, NYC '79; Printed Mat-
ter (window), NYC '79; P.S. 1, 
Long Island City, NY '80; Larry 
Gagosian Gallery, LA '80, '82, 
'83; Annina Nosei Gallery, NYC 
'83, '84; Institute of Contemp-
orary Arts, London '83 (travel-
led to Watershed, Bristol, Vil-
leurbanne and Basel); Crousel/ 
Hussinot Gallery, Paris '84.
Selected group exhibitions:
Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC Biennial '73, '83; Joseloff Gallery, University of Hartford's "Imitation of Life" '79; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC '19; Artists, Emergent Americans '81; The Kitchen, NYC Pictures and Promises '81 (curated by Kruger); Art Institute of Chicago, 76th American Exhibition '82; Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Image Scavengers '82; Venice Biennale d'Arte '82; Documenta 7, Kassel, Germany '82; Mary Boone Gallery, NYC '83; Franklin Furnace, NYC Artists' Use of Language, Part I '83 (curated by Kruger); Protetch McNeil Gallery, NYC The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter '83; Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn An satzpunkte kritisches kunst heute '84 (travelled to Berlin); ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, New York: Ailleurs et Autrement '84; Sydney Biennial, Australia Private Symbol Social Metaphor '84.

Selected books and articles by Kruger:

We won't play nature to your culture Institute of Contemporary Arts, (London) and the Kunsthalle, (Basel), 1983. With essays by Craig Owens, "The Medusa Effect or, The Specular Ruse," p. 5+ and Jane Weinstock, "What she means, to you," p. 12+.

No Progress in Pleasure, CEPA (Buffalo), 1982.
"Virtue and Vice on 65th Street," Artforum vol. 21 no. 5 (January '83), p. 66+.

"You No Wanna Dadda," ZG Summer '83, unpaginated.
Kruger has regularly written film reviews for Artforum magazine since 1981.

Selected bibliography about Kruger: