Krzysztof Wodiczko WORKS
October 25, 1988–January 22, 1989

Krzysztof Wodiczko's presentation for the fourth WORKS—the Hirshhorn Museum's series of temporary, site-specific exhibitions—takes two parts. On the evenings of October 25, 26, and 27, the artist will project a large-scale image onto the Mall side of the exterior of the museum building. For the duration of the exhibition, he has created a videotape to be shown in the museum's Orientation Room, addressing that specific interior space and the museum's function as an educational institution.

Wodiczko is concerned with today's international and urban crises. His work focuses on such issues as war, memory, and the historical past in relationship to poverty, disease, and housing. According to the artist, we walk through the city without realizing it is a manipulated environment. The structure of the city isolates groups of people and prevents communication between them. Wodiczko believes we can analyze the symbolic functions of the city and its capacity to exploit and alienate us as well as participate actively in understanding, and thus communicating through, the cities in which we live.

The artist's work is specific to individual buildings or monuments onto which he projects images representing such social facts as poverty and homelessness. Using the physical "body" of a building to support his easily recognizable iconic images, he exposes its symbolic function in contrast to the environment in which it exists. He thus hopes to create a medium of communication between those opposing realities. The impact of Wodiczko's work depends on the "spectacular" or theatrical quality of his projected images as well as his poetic and effective use of irony and metaphor.

The following statements are excerpted from a July 27, 1988, discussion with the artist.

Phyllis Rosenzweig
Associate Curator

Among observers of the economic, social, political, and semantic transformations of urban space, there is growing concern that the city, with all its old and newly built architectural structures as well as their spatial configurations, is losing the capability to operate as communicative environment.

In today's contemporary real-estate city, the mercilessly dynamic space of uneven economic development makes it extremely difficult for city dwellers and nomads to communicate through and in front of the city's symbolic forms. The unstable and uneven situation around and between the monuments is complemented by the transformation of the monuments themselves, which become victims of the same social and aesthetic manipulation as the entire city. Aesthetic simulation and trivialization turn historic sites into decoration representing the past. Our historic harbors are being turned into seafood restaurants.

The meaning of city monuments—whether intentional or unintentional, historic or contemporary—must be secured today, as in the past, through the ability of the inhabitants to project and superimpose their critical thoughts and reflections on the monument forms.

We are witnessing the return of themes of nationalism and militarism in politics in the context of gentrification and the gradual destruction of social programs that affect urban life. In front of our memorials and monuments, which were built to commemorate heroes of liberation, the flight to freedom, civil liberties, and the right of the individual pursuit of happiness, are facts such as homelessness, segregation, the isolation of individuals, and the destruction of community ties—all processes that project themselves already on these monuments. My projection is a clarification or specific articulation of those projections.

Not to speak through the city monuments is to abandon them and to abandon ourselves, losing both a sense of history and the present.

Today, more than ever before, the meaning of our monuments depends on our active role in turning them into sites of memory and critical evaluation of history as well as places of public discourse and action. This agenda is not only social or political or activist, it is also an aesthetic mission.

Krzysztof Wodiczko
BIOGRAPHY

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1969  6e Biennale de Paris (also 1975).
1977  Kassel, West Germany, Documenta 6 (also 1987).
1979  3rd Biennale of Sydney (also 1982).
1985  Centre Internationale d'Arte Contemporain, Montreal, Aurora Borealis (also Lumières, 1986); Kunstmuseum, Bern, Alles und Noch Viel Mehr.
1986  42 Biennale di Venezia.
1988  Edinburgh Festival.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Photos courtesy Hal Bromm Gallery, New York.

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SELECTED PUBLIC PROJECTIONS
1980 University of Toronto Power Plant, Toronto Subway. 1981 Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge); School of Architecture, Nova Scotia Power Corporation Plant, Scotia Square Towers (Halifax); City Hall, Empress Hotel (Peterborough, Ontario); Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto). 1982 War Memorial, Festival Center Complex (Adelaide); MLC Centre Tower, American Express Building, Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney). 1983 Bow Falls (Banff, Alberta); Memorial Hall (Dayton, Ohio); Federal Court House (London, Ontario); Museum of Natural History (Regina, Saskatchewan); Main Train Station and Victory Column (Stuttgart); South African War Memorial (Toronto). 1984 International Conference of Humanities on George Orwell’s 1984 (Columbus, Ohio); AT&T Building, Tower Gallery, New Museum / Astor Building (New York); Seattle Art Museum. 1985 Grand Army Plaza (Brooklyn); Bundeshaus (Bern); Royal Bank of Canada (Montreal); Performing Arts Center, State University of New York (Purchase); Grand Parade War Memorial (Halifax); Nelson’s Column, Duke of York Column and Steps, South Africa House (London, England); Guildhall (Derry, Northern Ireland). 1986 Arsenale, Piazza San Marco Campanile (two versions), Santa Maria Formosa and Campanile, Condottiere Colleoni Monument (Venice); Replica of Colleoni Monument (Warsaw); Fine Arts Center, University of Massachusetts (Amherst); Memorial Hall (Pittsburgh). 1987 Bonaventure Hotel (Los Angeles); Museum Fridericianum, Martin Luther Kirche, Statue of Frederick II (Kassel, West Germany); Civil War Memorial (Boston). 1988 San Diego (California) Museum of Man; Centro Cultural Tijuana (Mexico); Flaktum Arenberg Park (Vienna); R. C. Harris Water Filtration Plant (Toronto); Calton Hill Memorial (Edinburgh).

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