Barbara Kruger As A Conceptual Photography Artist

Barbara Kruger is an American who works with conceptual artworks and collagist. Her work is concerned with the positioning of the social body, with the ways in which our thoughts, attitudes, and desires are determined by what society's dictates. She produces this work to juxtapose the meaning of the image to what the audience believes and contradicts societies normalities. Kruger came to prominence in the 1980's but continues to develop her work today. Kruger works with her personal beliefs of feminism and uses her political view of the world to express her opinions in her artmaking. She uses typically large images in her work to incorporate photographs taken from different media sources that she has cropped, enlarged, and juxtapose with strident verbal statements or phrases. Kruger is at once a social commentator and a political agitator whose images convey a direct feminist cultural critique.

In the 1960's Kruger began a job at a publication doing graphic designs on advertisements and book covers. Kruger describes her experience as a graphic designer as "the biggest influence on my work" noting that it "became, with a few adjustments, my 'work' as an artist." Like Andy Warhol, Kruger was heavily influenced by her years in graphic designs that helped her in her art making. When Kruger turned to the art world in 1969, it was to a sphere in flux, distinguished by the waning hold of pop and minimalism and by the initial manifestations of conceptual Art. This new art was masculine terrain which had not experienced the social transformations of the 1970s that would give new meaning to feminist practice. In the Eighties the world saw a collapse of communism and the end of the cold war, Apple, IMB, Microsoft had begun to make a large impact on the world of technology as small computers got cheaper. This impact of cheaper technology and rise of technological age impacted the art lifestyle as more artists used graphic designs to express their opinions on the world. Kruger began making contemporary art to express her political views of the world using her knowledge of design and technology. Contemporary art was defined in her time as the new, it was an art movement that asked questions and was refurbishing the old. The most well-known feature of contemporary art is the idea that it has no defining feature instead takes on the art style of the artist and is defined by the artists ability to innovate and bring out a modern masterpiece.

Kruger's photomontage "I shop therefore I am" is an image of a hand holding a sign of a definitive statement that questions the notions of how people define themselves. The large-scale photographic silkscreen/ vinyl photomontage originally titled 'untitled' takes on the name of the sign as the title of the artwork. Kruger uses the tools of advertising, block letters that stand out on a slab of bright red colour, to make an arresting image that captures the imagination of the views. Kruger is making a statement regarding material consumption and the modern needs and wants. The open- ended statement allows the viewer to process Kruger's deeper meaning of materialism and modern age social class. In this artwork Kruger challenges materialism and directs the question towards the audience intending to confront the viewers in their perception of the modern age. By doing this she offers multiple meanings of the one picture, allowing different perspectives to evaluate the photo. This banal artwork allows the viewer to evaluate the deeper meaning of the photomontage and understand the layers of psychology that Kruger dives into within this image. Kruger uses sharp, bold text to further her message conveyed in this artwork. The black and white image of the hand contrasts the bright red of the border and the sign the hand is holding to make the bold message stand out. The

simplicity of this photomontage contrast to the symbolism within the work showing todays capitalist avenue. Kruger makes a point about how people are now defined by what they have or what they don't have rather then their personality, she exposes the world's overbearing need for objects and how materialistic the world is becoming. She creates this photomontage to provoke an emotion in the audience's mind and lets them reflect over their materialism. Kruger prints this image into bags, mugs and other materialistic objects. She does this to show how people will buy anything and further reflects her image by selling the photomontage and making money, by this she shows how materialism is taking over the world and juxtaposes the artwork with an actual materialistic intent. Overall, this image accurately depicts the world's current state of consumption and what the world finds important in the 21st century.

Kruger's attention is directed to the control and positioning of the social body, a control that was normally male dominated. She communicates to the audience societies normality's that should be challenged and expresses her view of the world through her graphic design art, juxtaposing the image and the text to further convey her ideas to the audience. She manipulates her artworks through technology to show the rising use of this art making technique, this style is also widely used by the artists she was influenced by and pulls knowledge from her job at a graphic design studio. Kruger chooses her images through what is happening in the media/ world, she uses relevant material to get through to the audience her ideas of the new. Her use of bold text and black, white images exposes the text to get her point across. Her artworks are photomontages that questions society and juxtaposes the idea of the image and text together.

Barbara Kruger uses photomontages to respond to the culture of the time by contrasting images and texts to express her overlying ideas of society. Kruger uses social relations as experiences in everyday activities to make her art. She addressed this theme in various modes and media, continuing the double- panel format or composing installations and performances, employing slide projections and audiotapes or live readings. Kruger uses a range of modes for her art making but uses text and image photomontages to express her ideals of modern society. Kruger influences future artists as the one of the first female artists to use graphic design as a mode to express her opinions. She broke through the male dominated art world and leaves room for many more female artists to express their concerns for modern art through photomontages and graphic designs.