



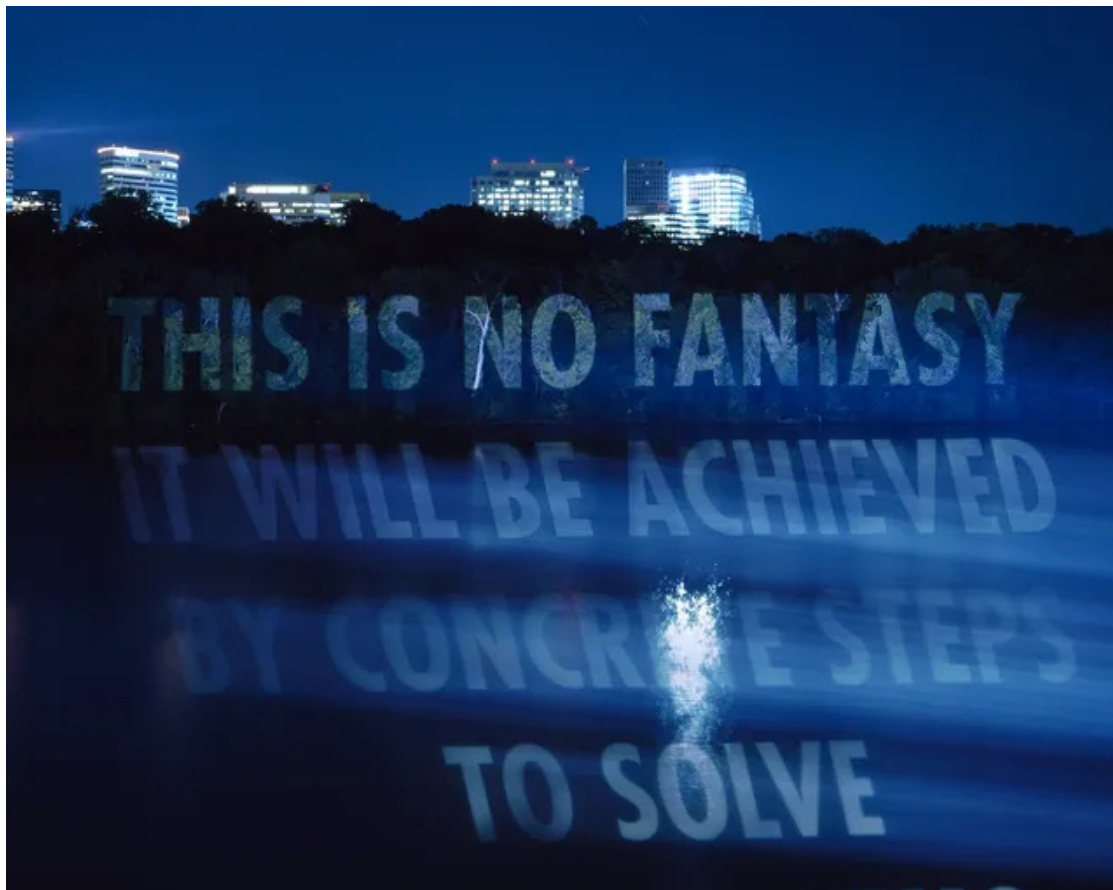
THE ART NEWSPAPER

Jenny Holzer to project quotes about democracy in DC to celebrate Art in Embassies anniversary

The work will appear on the facades of two museums on the Mall, a “very resonant location for democracy in America”

Helen Stoilas

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Jenny Holzer, *THE PEOPLE*, 2023

Photo: Attilio Maranzano, courtesy Jenny Holzer

The artist Jenny Holzer will project famous quotes about democracy, spoken by historical figures from Aristotle to Martin Luther King Jr., on the facades of the Hirshhorn Museum and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, DC. Titled *THE PEOPLE*, the project will launch at 6:30pm on 17 September and run for five days as part of the 60th-anniversary celebrations of the State Department's Art in Embassies programme.

The National Mall is a fitting site for the installation, because "it's a very resonant location for democracy in America", Megan Beyer, the director of the Office of Art in Embassies, told *The Art Newspaper*. The Mall has historically been used as both a platform for official government events (like inaugurations) and public protests, including the Civil Rights milestone March on Washington, which marked its 60th anniversary last month.

In a statement about *THE PEOPLE*, Holzer repeated the quotation she used by women's suffrage activist Mary Church Terrell: "In union there is strength' is a truism that has been acted upon."

Art in Embassies, started by President John F. Kennedy in 1963, promotes American culture by commissioning works by contemporary artists to be displayed in US diplomatic buildings around the world, as well as by hosting exchanges and residencies. To celebrate its anniversary this year, Art in Embassies organised exhibitions in Athens, Lisbon and Geneva, featuring works by artists such as Sanford Biggers, Nick Cave, Deborah Kass, Maya Lin, Amy Sherald, Hank Willis Thomas, Doug Aitken, Jeffrey Gibson, Titus Kaphar, Christine Sun Kim, Bruce Nauman, Ed Ruscha and Carrie Mae Weems.



Installation view of the Art in Embassies travelling exhibition, *Democracy Collection*, in Athens, Greece

Photo: Amanda Brooks/Courtesy Art in Embassies

First Lady Jill Biden, speaking at the opening of the Lisbon show, said that “even when it’s easy to get caught up in differences, yes, art can unite us. Connection is what diplomacy is all about.”

The artist Alexis Rockman (who took part in the Geneva exhibition), together with singer Joan Baez and actor and activist Kal Penn, acknowledged that US society faces many problems. “But the Art in Embassies programme does not try to stifle artists from responding to those issues,” says Rockman, who centres much of his work on the climate crisis. “And I give them credit for that.” (Holzer has also been critical of the US government in many of her works, including her *Redaction Paintings*, in which she reproduces declassified government documents.)

The Art in Embassies programme has permanent displays up in nearly 100 US-government buildings worldwide, from Addis Ababa to Yerevan. When the embassy in Kabul was evacuated in 2021, for example, the State Department had to ship works by more than a dozen artists out of the country.

“You need artists, because they can make you feel what an ambassador can only try to make you understand,” Beyer says, adding that “artists survive on freedom, so they are pretty good ambassadors for freedom”.

In addition to the Holzer projections, which will be on display from dusk to 11pm each night, Art in Embassies will hold a day of talks and performances on 19 September at the National Museum of American History. (That evening, the State Department plans to honour the recipients of its annual Medal of Arts, which is returning after a six-year hiatus due to former president Donald Trump's decision not to appoint a director to the Art in Embassies office.) The touring show, *A More Perfect Union: American Artists and the Currents of Our Time*, will be on view at the National Museum of American History, 19 September-1 October.

- *Jenny Holzer's THE PEOPLE is on view nightly, 17-21 September, on the facades of the National Museum of American History and the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC*

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