

Cheim & Read is pleased to present *Dust Paintings*, an exhibition of recent painting by Jenny Holzer. A catalogue with an essay by the poet Henri Cole accompanies the exhibition.

Jenny Holzer has used government documents as a source for her work since 2004. Language has been Holzer's primary medium since the late 1970s. Placed on electronic signs or stone benches, Holzer's text investigates how ideas are transformed from argument or opinion into fact. While her work has a conceptual base, she involves her viewer through what's intensely physical. Turning to government documents in 2004, months after the invasion of Iraq by the United States and the United Kingdom, Holzer tried to reconstruct the path to war from the language of its architects and executors. The documents painted most recently trace the political fallout and human wreckage in the global war on terror. Holzer's new works, hand-rendered, return flesh to events.

Multiple paintings use the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command's Gardez Report as source material. The report details the investigation of Jamal Naseer's death. Naseer was an Afghan prisoner who died in the custody of U.S. Special Forces. One of eight men made to kneel on the ground while a mixture of snow and water was poured over them, Naseer sustained beating on the back, face, and legs. The descriptions of stark conditions are evoked in the paintings, many of which are painted in whites, blacks, and grays. Holzer's grounds can disintegrate or are left incomplete leaving ragged black holes, and backgrounds can enter words, making text difficult to decipher.

In a second group of paintings based on heavily redacted CIA and FBI reports, once black blocks of censored text have been replaced by color and now recall Suprematist or Color Field paintings—but language interjects. Words like "secret" and "terrorist operation" escape redaction and interrupt a formal assessment that might land in the abstraction of Kazimir Malevich or Ad Reinhardt. History makes a violent return to art history. A few paintings exhibit color bands and merges in homage to poignant late Malevich realist works.

Holzer's 2006 solo exhibition at Cheim & Read featured documents that gave language to the "fog of war." While the earlier paintings were screen-printed (summoning Warhol's Death and Disaster series), the new paintings are done by hand. The content of her new work is traced, transferred, and each letter and its surround are carefully hand-painted and re-painted. Holzer's process echoes and amplifies traditional Arabic calligraphy—ghubar—which translates, literally, as "dust writing." In his essay for the catalogue, Henri Cole evokes the poetics of Holzer's practice. He writes: "These new paintings of Jenny's are a kind of dust-writing, or to be more exact, a kind of dust-painting. After all, they sometimes verge on darkness or dust, and, for me, they are more interesting to ponder as artworks than real evil, which can be predictable or banal. Standing before Jenny's dust-paintings, if

I squint my eyes and let my imagination run wild, I can hear a call to prayer. I can see a crowded street with men rushing past, stirring up dust. And I also can see shrouded women behind them sprinkling water—quietly, methodically— to settle it.”

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