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The University of Chicago commissions world-renowned artist and alumna **Jenny Holzer** to create new text-based public artwork incorporating augmented reality app for remote engagement during pandemic October 5–November 22, 2020

*Holzer's first AR project in the United States  
and her first work created in collaboration with a university's students and faculty,  
**YOU BE MY ALLY** will display texts from UChicago's Core curriculum  
on campus buildings, LED trucks, and beyond*

CHICAGO (September 10, 2020)—**The University of Chicago** (UChicago) will debut a new public art commission by world-renowned artist and alumna **Jenny Holzer** (EX'74), ***YOU BE MY ALLY***, premiering October 5 on the UChicago campus and worldwide through a web-based augmented reality app. The text-based artwork is Holzer's first augmented reality (AR) project using virtual projections in the United States and her first work created in collaboration with a university's students and faculty.

A pioneer of art as social intervention, Holzer received UChicago's Rosenberger Medal in 2019 in recognition of her wide-reaching impact on public art. Running through November 22, her artwork will project academic discourse into the public sphere, drawing on texts from UChicago's Core curriculum—the distinctive multidisciplinary curriculum that serves as the common academic foundation for all College students.

***YOU BE MY ALLY*** will feature 29 excerpts from historically significant readings from the Core curriculum, selected in collaboration with UChicago students and faculty, including works by distinguished writers W. E. B. Du Bois, Helen Keller, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Friedrich Nietzsche, Plato, Mary Shelley, and Virginia Woolf. The title of the project itself is an excerpt from *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, a translation by classicist Anne Carson that is among the Core readings. Starting October 5, viewers can access a free, web-based AR app to virtually project and animate these texts on the facades of architecturally significant UChicago buildings. In addition, app users will be able to project the title quote onto their surroundings anywhere in the world. On October 30, additional quotations will become available to project anywhere.

“We are thrilled to host this innovative new work from artist and alum Jenny Holzer,” said David Levin, senior advisor to the Provost for Arts. “The project not only explores and expands the possibilities of virtual projection, but it also makes innovative and imaginative use of texts that are foundational to the UChicago education—putting significant authors in conversation with the public and the present in a new way.”

Text selections from the Core curriculum also will be featured on LED trucks driving throughout the UChicago campus, South Side, and downtown communities on October 5–6, bringing the experience to diverse audiences in an unexpected manner.

Another component of Holzer’s work will incorporate original texts in support of nonpartisan get-out-the-vote efforts. These texts, selected by Holzer from various sources including submissions by UChicago students, will be displayed on LED trucks driven throughout the city on October 24 and 30.

***YOU BE MY ALLY*** operates at the edge of arts and technology, responding to the challenges of participation in the arts during a pandemic. It enables a broad audience to engage these historic texts, and to consider the impact of public speech in a democracy in the weeks and days leading up to the 2020 election.

“Ever since her early—1995!—creation of an interactive internet artwork, I have admired Jenny Holzer’s resolute mobilization of viewer participation and unexpected media, now including AR app technology,” said Christine Mehring, the Mary L. Block Professor in the Department of Art History and an adjunct curator at the Smart Museum of Art. “Jenny is known for the fiercely critical interventions in public space that lead her to seize those media, but hers is a profoundly generous art all the same: inviting our students to submit content, welcoming the full campus community and general public to engage in the kind of close reading we teach at UChicago, opening the boundaries of academic discourse and a liberal arts education, providing a safe and meaningful experience of art amidst the converging contexts of the pandemic, calls for social justice, and the election season.”

Student participation has been a key component of this work from its inception. Over the course of the last academic year, students and faculty submitted excerpts from their Core class readings, from which the artist selected 29 quotes. The artist also invited all UChicago students to submit their own nonpartisan get-out-the-vote phrases for possible inclusion on the second round of LED trucks. A total of ten graduate and undergraduate students, specializing in fields ranging from art history and English to computer science and social work, have worked for the past year on various aspects of the commission, including testing code and developing a related K–12 curriculum for Chicago schools.

“The Core curriculum has always been conceived as a foundation for fiercely creative and independent thinking. It has been so impactful and resilient because it continually renews itself by interrogating its very premises and practices. Jenny Holzer’s engagement with some of its foundational texts is emblematic of such self-interrogation and captures the intellectual and aesthetic power of the Core for subsequent work in the arts and every other discipline,” said John W. Boyer, Dean of the College and the Martin A. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of History.

AR experiences for ***YOU BE MY ALLY*** will be hosted on the web platform 8th Wall and can be activated by users at specific points outside buildings on the UChicago campus: Cobb Lecture Hall (designed by Henry Ives Cobb), D’Angelo Law Library (Eero Saarinen), Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts (Tod Williams and Billie Tsien), Joe and Rika Mansueto Library (Helmut Jahn), School of Social Service Administration (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe), Cummings Life Science Center (I. W. Colburn), and Rockefeller Memorial Chapel (Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue). Off campus, viewers can experience the work by accessing the app on 8th Wall.

Holzer’s projects have long been inextricably linked to the built environment of their setting. ***YOU BE MY ALLY*** will invite viewers to interact with their surroundings and forge new cultural and architectural meanings from the juxtapositions of historic texts and lived urban environments.

### Artist bio

For more than 40 years, Jenny Holzer has presented her astringent ideas, arguments, and sorrows in public places and international exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale, the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Her medium, whether formulated as a T-shirt, a plaque, or an LED sign, is writing, and the public dimension is integral to the delivery of her work. Starting in the 1970s with the New York City posters and continuing through her recent light projections on landscape and architecture, her practice has rivaled ignorance and violence with humor, kindness, and courage. Holzer received the Leone d’Oro at the Venice Biennale in 1990, the World Economic Forum’s Crystal Award in 1996, the U.S. State Department’s International Medal of Arts in 2017, and the University of Chicago’s Rosenberger Medal in 2019. She studied at the University of Chicago in 1970–71 and holds honorary degrees from Williams College, the Rhode Island School of Design, The New School, and Smith College. She lives and works in New York.

### About UChicago Arts and the University of Chicago

**UChicago Arts** is the University of Chicago’s robust cultural scene where scholars, students, artists, and audiences converge, explore, and create. UChicago Arts connects and amplifies the impact of the University’s nearly 100 arts organizations, initiatives, and academic programs, bringing together the efforts of students, faculty, artists, and community partners to infuse creativity throughout the intellectual life on campus while solidifying the University’s role as a cultural destination and resource on Chicago’s South Side. For more information about UChicago Arts, visit [arts.uchicago.edu](https://arts.uchicago.edu).

**The University of Chicago** is a leading academic and research institution that has driven new ways of thinking since its founding in 1890. As an intellectual destination, the University draws scholars and students from around the world to its campus in Hyde Park and to its centers around the globe. The University provides a distinctive educational experience and research environment, empowering individuals to challenge conventional thinking and pursue research that produces new understanding and breakthroughs with global impact. In 2017, the University launched an Urban Architecture and Design Initiative to highlight and grow University curricular and research strengths in these fields.

**The Core curriculum:** The cornerstone of the University of Chicago College's transformative curriculum, the Core prepares undergraduates to explore and debate complex ideas with faculty and peers. Through sequences in the humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, and biological sciences, as well as a sequence in the historical development of a civilization, students engage with the language, questions, and methods that characterize broad fields of inquiry. The goal is to engage students with the range of insights, habits of mind, and academic experiences that can enrich their own reflections and activities in the world—while at UChicago and after they graduate.

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Photo credits at top, from left

*OF WAR*, 2017

Virtual reality app

Installation: *SOFTER: Jenny Holzer at Blenheim Palace*,  
Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, England, 2017

© 2017 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Photo: Tom Lindboe

*VOTE YOUR FUTURE*, 2018

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With March For Our Lives.

Photo: Collin LaFleche