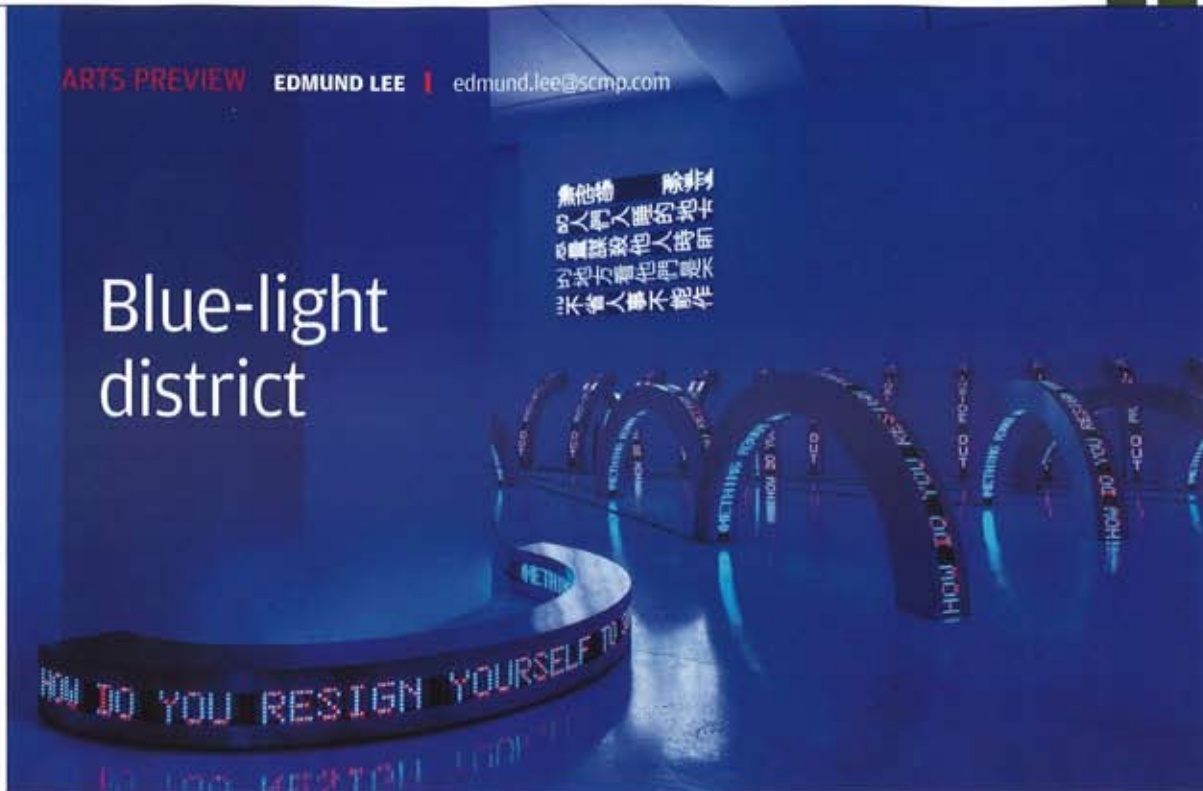


ARTS PREVIEW EDMUND LEE | edmund.lee@scmp.com

Blue-light district



Jenny Holzer (below), and her LED installation *Light Stream* (left). Photos: Jessica Hromas, Collin LaFleche

LIGHT STREAM Pearl Lam Galleries

It should come as no surprise that Jenny Holzer has a fine command of words. Known for her public displays of aphorisms, poems and provocative pronouncements since the late 1970s, the American artist is quick to turn disarmingly self-deprecating when asked to predict the audience reception to her latest showcase.

"I don't know," she says, looking straight at me. "Does it look like the same old junk to you?"

The answer to that lies somewhere between an apologetic yes and a courteous no. For her solo exhibition at Pearl Lam Galleries, named after the centrepiece *Light Stream*, Holzer is drawing upon some of her early text series – *Truisms* (1977-79), *Living* (1980-82), and *Survival* (1983-85) – and presenting new works in both English and Chinese. The translation from the original English has required the efforts of five translators.

"We tried hard with the translation," the artist says of the LED installations and slogan-inscribed marble benches, which are her first artworks with Chinese characters. "We relied on any number of very intelligent, diligent and earnest people."

Holzer's preoccupation with texts came after a period of uncertainty at the beginning of her career. She recalls: "Early in the 1970s, I wondered whether I was going to turn out to be one of those crazy people who stands in the park and says things, or whether I could become something I admired, like a Dadaist. I wasn't sure whether I was going to go the crackpot route, or be somebody like [Marcel] Duchamp."

Holzer became neither. Instead, she turned her subject matters into a text-based oeuvre that led to her being the first woman to represent her country at the Venice Biennale, in 1990.

For the past decade Holzer, who nonchalantly claims to have "no skills as a painter", has been focusing on

exactly that practice, creating paintings which are based on declassified US war documents.

Speaking of her current Hong Kong exhibit, the artist explains that it's her desire "to bring the newest technology here – both for my sake, because I'm an old woman who doesn't really want to act like one, and to reflect the reality of this city, which is hyper and modern at the same time."

She has, nevertheless, no plans to delve into social media any time soon, no matter how readily transposable her iconic one-liners are to Twitter. "I want to think I understand a little about it... but I don't do it, because other people will do it for me."

After stating that she has spotted three fake Twitter accounts that are impersonating her (there are, in fact, even more), Holzer expresses her pleasure, possibly ironically, at the fact that the man behind @jennyholzer has since revealed his identity to her. "That was nice of him. It was flattering that he did it," she says. "I'm concentrating more on @JennyHolzerCat and @JennyHolzerMom now."

Pearl Lam Galleries, 6/F Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Monday-Saturday, 10am-7pm. Ends November 2. Inquiries: 2522 1428

