

Seeing Things | The Art of the Billboard

By [BROOKE HODGE](#) | The New York Times Style Magazine | February 18, 2010, 12:43 pm



Gerard Smulevich/Courtesy MAK Center for Art and Architecture

The artist Kerry Tribe's billboard on LaBrea Avenue was commissioned by the MAK Center for Art and Architecture as part of its "How Many Billboards? Art in Stead" exhibition.

Seeing Things is a biweekly design column by Brooke Hodge, a design writer and curator based in Los Angeles.

Billboards, like palm trees and freeways, are ubiquitous elements of Los Angeles's vast cityscape. Over the next seven weeks, "How Many Billboards? Art In Stead," an ambitious urban exhibition organized by the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, will be displayed on 21 billboards across the city. When the Museum of Contemporary Art unveiled its controversial 2001 marketing campaign, in the form of billboards plastered with clever plays on museum labels, Kimberli Meyer, the MAK Center's director, imagined billboards as a site for art rather than for advertising.



Gerard Smulevich/Courtesy MAK Center for Art and Architecture

Kori Newkirk's billboard for the MAK Center exhibition is on Wilshire Boulevard opposite MacArthur Park and is a self-portrait of the artist with a large snowball stuffed in his mouth.

Artists could use the billboards like large blank canvases to create work in the context of the city — work that would be seen by an almost unlimited audience. Three years ago, Meyer revived the project and — with the curators Lisa Henry, Nizan Shaked and Gloria Sutton, each of whom has her own approach to contemporary art — commissioned 21 contemporary artists, including Kerry Tribe, Kenneth Anger, Michael Asher, Kori Newkirk, Jennifer Bornstein, Yvonne Rainer and James Welling, to submit proposals. The first billboards went up last week, and more will pop up across the city. "The streets of Los Angeles become the walls of the exhibition, and the city itself becomes a large museum," says Meyer, who hopes it will become an annual event. A series of public programs, bus tours and an overview exhibition and orientation station at the [MAK Center](#), which opens on Feb. 23, will complement the billboards. Go to [the project's web site](#) for an interactive Google map with up-to-date information on billboard locations, and don't forget to look up!



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