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Smithsonian American Art Museum Debuts Commissioned Work by Internationally Renowned Artist Jenny Holzer

The Smithsonian American Art Museum debuted a major site-specific light sculpture by Jenny Holzer (b. 1950) Saturday, Nov. 3. Holzer is an internationally renowned artist best known for her pioneering work incorporating texts into light-based sculptures and projections. The sculpture, titled “For SAAM,” is on public display in the museum’s third floor Lincoln Gallery with other contemporary artworks from the permanent collection.

“For SAAM” is Holzer’s first cylindrical column of light and text created from white electronic LEDs (light emitting diodes). The piece, according to Holzer, is “sensitive to the formal integrity of the museum and attuned to the experience of the collection and space.” “For SAAM” is the first major LED piece by Holzer in a Washington museum collection and it is the only work by the artist on public view in the city.

The sculpture features texts from four of the artist’s series—Truisms, Living (selections), Survival (selections) and Arno—and includes some of her best-known statements. The texts are programmed to swirl and travel around the body of the piece. By varying the height, font, intensity and direction of the scrolling letters, Holzer activates the transparent column and the surrounding space with light that reflects off surfaces in the gallery. “For SAAM” is approximately 28 feet tall and 4 feet in diameter. It is suspended from a vault in the museum’s Lincoln Gallery and reaches to the floor.

“Jenny Holzer’s exciting site-specific work for the Smithsonian American Art Museum adds a dynamic element to the neoclassical Lincoln Gallery and is a significant addition to the museum’s collection,” said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

This commission is part of the museum’s ongoing commitment to contemporary art and artists through annual exhibitions, acquisitions, awards and public programs.

“For SAAM” is the latest work that is part of Holzer’s exploration of art and architecture. She has created site-specific work for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, the Reichstag in Berlin and 7 World Trade Center in New York City.

“I like to honor the architect and the building by wedding my work with space in a way that is both active and seamless,” said Holzer.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 41,000 artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building, a dazzling showcase for American art and portraiture, is located at Eighth and F streets N.W. in the heart of a revitalized downtown arts district. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Web site: americanart.si.edu.

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Note to editors: Images of “For SAAM” for publicity only are available at <ftp://saam-press@ftp.si.edu>; call (202) 633-8530 for the password.