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MIZZOU

Billboard Blowout

Anne Thompson turns billboards into artwork in I-70 Sign Show.



This summer, Mel Bochner's artwork, *Blah Blah Blah*, appeared on the main billboard of the *I-70 Sign Show*, an art exhibit curated by MU adjunct assistant professor Anne Thompson.

Story by Kelsey Allen

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Photos courtesy Anne Thompson

More than 300 billboards dot the landscape along the 250-mile stretch of Interstate 70 between Kansas City and

St. Louis. Ads for gas stations, hospitals and restaurants stand next to signs for insurance providers, religious organizations and politicians. On one of those billboards, near the Hatton Exit 144, facing westbound traffic, adjunct assistant art professor Anne Thompson, MA '91, is curating an art exhibit.

“You have this thing that wants to get your attention, and people try very hard to ignore them,” Thompson said. “But billboards are such a part of the landscape. Let’s really look at them. Let’s pay attention not just to what the sign is telling us, but what does it mean in conversation with the signs surrounding it.”

With the support of the Mizzou Advantage Media of the Future initiative, the Office of the Provost, the Missouri School of Journalism and DDI Media, Thompson launched the *I-70 Sign Show* in April 2014 with artist Kay Rosen. A new piece goes up every two months. Then the artwork moves to an empty billboard on I-70, making room for the next artist on the main billboard and extending the reach of the *Sign Show* exhibit. Thompson says this allows the message of each work of art to change given the new context depending on the landscape and the surrounding billboard messages.



Blurred, by Kay Rosen, was the first piece of art to go up on the *Sign Show* billboard.



Artist Kim Beck's skywriting work *Next Exit* currently appears on the main billboard of the I-70 Sign Show. A new piece goes up every two months.

Other featured artists include Mel Bochner, Mickalene Thomas and Kim Beck, whose piece *Next Exit* is on the main billboard. To create her artwork, the *Sign Show* hired an expert pilot to skywrite phrases including “Space available,” “Open Daily” and “Next Exit” in the clear blue sky above Faurot Field before the Nov. 1 Mizzou versus Kentucky

football game. Then Beck photographed the words and selected images to appear on the billboard.

Ken Lum and Karl Haendel's work will also appear on the billboard before the yearlong project ends.

MU Honors College students are also involved in the project, helping Thompson photograph and categorize all of the I-70 billboards to create an online archive. To view the artist archive, visit i7osignshow.org.

Topics: Alumni, Arts and Humanities, Journalism and Communication, Web Exclusives

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