

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

Amada, Miguel. "Carey Young", Artforum, Summer 2009; illus.

TORONTO

Carey Young

POWER PLANT CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY

Carey Young's *Everything You've Heard is Wrong*, 1999, documents the artist at the Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park, a place practically synonymous with free speech. Standing on a small step-ladder in the middle of a crowd peppered with other orators, including a gesticulating Muslim cleric in white, she distinguishes herself by wearing smart executive attire and attracts passersby with a lecture on how to speak in public. This video—the oldest of the twenty-one works on view in "Counter Offer," Young's recent solo show at the Power Plant and her first major survey—encapsulates the aesthetic strategy for which she is best known: the appropriation and *détournement* of corporate ideology as critique of the financial, political, and cultural relationships of global late capitalism.

A number of works in this exhibition explore branding and manipulation, such as the video *Product Recall*, 2007, in which a psychotherapist asks a reclining Young to match from memory names of multinational corporations (many of which are sponsors of art fairs and biennials) with their respective advertising campaigns. Simulating a session of analysis, the artist and her interlocutor exchange words—he pronounces a slogan and she searches for an answer—in a succession of failures that disturbingly prompt the viewer almost involuntarily to come up with the correct responses. In this video Young underscores the economic sector's co-opting of artistic values and creative practices to continually renew and perpetuate its domination of the social world.

Other significant works on view from Young's decade-plus career include *Inventory*, 2007, a framed graph representing the natural

chemical elements present in the artist's body on a particular day, and, on an adjacent wall, the figure £13,003.23 written large in vinyl, indicating the sum of that day's market prices for the graphed chemical components. (The valuation is also the buyer's price for *Inventory*.) In the video *I Am a Revolutionary*, 2001, set in an empty office space, a motivational coach shows the artist how to say the title phrase with the conviction of an activist—needless to say, without success. Performance and the spoken word also meet in the video *Speechcraft* and the photographic series "Body Techniques," both from 2007. The former consists of footage from a meeting of Toastmasters International—a club that teaches individuals how to achieve an assertive public presence. As part of her infiltration, Young selected the topics for the participants' required improvised speeches: for example, "critique," a sly subversion of the club's purpose. The eight photographs of "Body Techniques," made in the United Arab Emirates, document Young's restaging of historic performative events; one image pits the draped figure of Valie Export's *Lean In*, 1976, against backdrops of uninhabited or unfinished urban complexes, most likely built with petrodollars.

Recently, Young has been investigating in greater depth another facet of her production based on issues of law and civil governance. Constituting the central nucleus of the show, these works included *Mutual Release*, 2009, a framed pair of documents. In one frame, the word OFFER appears above the phrase I OFFER YOU LIBERTY, and in the second, COUNTER-OFFER is the heading under which I OFFER YOU JUSTICE appears, thus proposing a contradiction between foundational utopian ideals of modernity. The finest of these recent works, however, is the video *Uncertain Contract*, 2008. Standing in a bright, white-cube-like space, a male actor reads in an introspective tone from a script composed of legal terms lifted from some vague commercial agreement formulated by Young and a team of media and intellectual-property lawyers. Here she demonstrates the sometimes Byzantine rules for viewing and buying art, offering an intelligent extension of an ongoing interest in undermining arbitrary systems—a concern felt throughout this show.

—Miguel Amado

Translated from Portuguese by Clifford E. Landers.



Carey Young, *Product Recall*, 2007, still from a color video, 4 minutes 27 seconds.