

# ARTFORUM

500 WORDS



CAREY YOUNG DISCUSSES HER EXHIBITION AT THE CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM ST. LOUIS

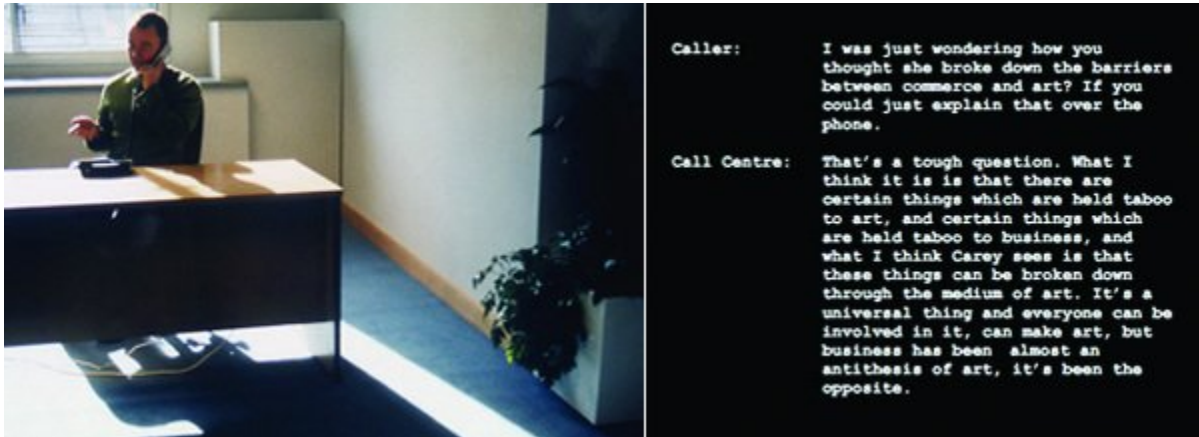
*Carey Young employs the structures and tropes of corporate and legal systems and frequently implicates viewers in playful, yet unnerving participatory actions. To enter her 2005 exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery, visitors were required to sign away the copyrights to a set of their own fingerprints. With the help of a top-notch legal team, the artist also delineated a zone of in the gallery where the U.S. Constitution did not apply. Here Young discusses her first solo museum exhibition in the States, which opens at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis on May 8.*

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# Carey Young

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Left: Carey Young, *Nothing Ventured*, 2000–2009, script, telephone, desk, table, chair, cassette recorder and tapes. Installation view, Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, 2001. Right: Carey Young, *Call Transcript from Nothing Ventured*, 2000, ink on paper.

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**“SPEECH ACTS” WILL FEATURE** a series of my call-center works that are accessed by visitors via phones installed in the museum. The works will have live agents, scripted or pre-recorded information, call-waiting, and menu options. These elements are modified, however, with absurd, poetic, and critical content that adds a twisted utility. The caller’s experience may range from the uncanny to the playful and, at times it might seem unexpectedly cinematic, in that some of the audio recordings are highly evocative of other places, conversations and moments in time.

The museum’s boardroom, with its generic modernist design, is the main installation space for the show. A line of spotlit telephones will sit waiting for the viewer, each housing a different artwork and linking directly to Charter Communications, a communications company who are sponsoring the show by providing their St. Louis call center, systems and agents. (Importantly, all of the agents have volunteered to take part.) Key to these works, and to the show as a whole, is the contrast of the concrete physicality of the museum and the hypertextual, performative labyrinths to be explored and interacted with by the viewer via the phones. The works act as negative spaces, which reflect, invert, and critique the exhibition site while alluding to the corporatization and globalization of culture, as well as the importance of agonism (as in adversarial confrontation) and rhetoric to the artistic context. I like the idea that viewers sitting next to each other will be having profoundly different spatial experiences. Sitting in a relatively empty, theatrical setting, viewers will be aware of themselves as providing the (verbal) action in the space—the viewer as performer providing some of the content of the works.

Like much of my past work, the political dimension in this show is offered in part through the repurposing and altering of corporate tools so that they carry material or methods that are subtly critical and satirical. This method refers in part to Cildo Meireles and his series "Insertions into Ideological Circuits," 1970, in which political material is inserted into, and distributed by a commercial system. A new work in the show, *Follow the Protest*, 2009, will feature quasi-documentary audio material by offering the caller evocative recordings and interviews that I made at the recent G20 protests in London. These recordings of passionate protest add another layer of spatiality and add to the polyphony of voices in the show.

This show expands on a number of my previous works for which I altered corporate and legal tools to consider notions of the relation of art to globalized commerce, site, scripting, participation, language, and viral forms. I've made two prior call-center works, both of which explore ideas of portraiture, and will be restaged for this show. In *Nothing Ventured*, 2000–2009, devised as a "telephonic self-portrait," the call-center agents were asked to treat me as if I was just another "product" to be marketed over the phone. They offer callers a brief overview of my work and career. My aim with this piece is for the script to feel like a limitation, and for the ensuing conversations to go off-script. I ask the agents to respond to any topic the caller may bring up, but interestingly, these queries have linked to concepts in the work, for example whether the caller's telephone was for sale as part of the piece, or whether the agents control the meaning of the work. The agents are given free rein to answer as they wish. I listen to the call recordings and type transcripts that form the documentation of the work. With this piece, the power to create the meaning of the work is, at the very least, *shared* and in some senses controlled by the call-center agents. This theme will be developed further in the show by a new work, *Monster Flat Out*, 2009, which allows callers to decide on the subject of the work.