



Carey Young

Laura Fried

LAURA FRIED: *You titled your recent solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis "Speech Acts." Could you describe the project — one I see as central to your ongoing interest in performance?*

Carey Young: "Speech Acts" centered on a series of telephone-based artworks offering a meditation on corporate systems, criticality and individual autonomy, and which linked to a call center based in St. Louis. The company also sponsored the show by providing their technology and agents (who had asked to take part.) By picking up a phone receiver in the gallery, you'd be connected to any of seven different works, which featured labyrinthine navigation, audio recordings and live agents. For example, *Welcome to the Museum* (2009) played with the automatic answering system used

by any large museum, but here callers were offered a choice of departments and live operators from a seemingly delirious institution, which collaged together military, public sector and cultural functions. The piece inverted the real museum in which it was staged, while offering an uncanny, extreme echo. Another piece, *Follow the Protest* (2009), offered recordings of protestors chanting and interviews I made at the G20 protests in London's financial district to create a kind of "protest on demand." And in *The Representative* (2005), an agent presented callers with a "telephonic self-portrait" using information I'd selected about their personal lives and work experience in the call center industry. There is a performance element here, but I envisaged these works as "reversed" corporate systems containing a polyphony of voices which

Carey Young was born in 1970 in Lusaka, Zambia. She lives and works in London. Selected solo shows: 2009: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence; Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis; The Power Plant, Toronto. 2007: Paula Cooper, New York; Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis; Modern Art Oxford. 2005: Ibid Projects, London;

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invite the viewer to join in.

LF: *What is your interest in the legal contract?*

CY: I use contracts as an artistic medium to create imaginary structures for possible relationships between people, spaces, objects and periods of time. Contracts can be laden with emotion and action; they imply promises, offers, agreements, obligations, good faith; they necessitate performance and invite consent. Their erotic, masochistic, literary tradition is a rich seam. Their constituent legal dialect fascinates me, and their rules give me challenging creative constraints. Equally important are the contract's innate political implications, for example, questions of State force, human rights or the social contract. Working with a lawyer, I can create contractual structures which are legally valid yet entirely absurd, which

interrogate the institution of law whilst pushing legal structures to their limits, and which imply some kind of end point of law.

LF: *Where do you position your audience? As an active agent or as a complicit player within a system?*

CY: My intention is to have both — to create a dialectical tension. Often there is an equality between the viewer and the artist in my work, but it's more than just "participation": the work might offer a certain kind of intimacy between viewer and artist, or invite them in an authorial sense to create some of the content of the piece.

From top left clockwise: Declared Void, 2005. Vinyl drawing and text, dimensions variable, 338 x 338 cm. Speech Acts, 2009 (detail). Installation view at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Photo: Peter Wockniak. Welcome to the Museum, 2009 (detail). Mixed media. Photo: Alexandra Cardon. All courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper, New York.