

May 8 – August 2, 2009

our experience beyond the walls of the museum and into the hypertextual labyrinths we explore by phone, Young juxtaposes the Contemporary's distinctive architecture with what she imagines as the negative spaces, and the administrative networks, of the institution. Suggestive of the corporatization of the art world, and drawing on the legacies of Conceptual Art and institutional critique, Young's project blends the commercial and technocratic with the fictional, the political, and the absurd. At its core, *Speech Acts* contemplates the conditions of site-specificity, performance, and our own capacity to communicate in the world.

**Cover image:**

*The Representative*, 2005

**and ongoing**

Professional call center agents, direct dial telephone connection, telephone, chair, lamp, table, area rug, framed photograph of call center agents  
Courtesy of The Power Plant, Toronto.  
Photo by Rafael Goldchain.

**CAREY YOUNG**

(Born in 1970 in Lusaka, Zambia. Lives and works in London.)

Carey Young has exhibited widely in the United Kingdom and internationally, and her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at the Power Plant, Toronto (2009); *Performa 05 Biennial* (2005); the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2004); *Index*, Stockholm (2004); and the Kunstverein München (2003-4). Her work has appeared in numerous group shows including *Objects of Value*, Miami Art Museum (2008); *Business as Usual*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2008), *Hey Hey Glossolalia*, Creative Time, New York (2008); *Moscow Biennale 2*, Moscow (2007); *Global Feminisms*, Brooklyn Museum (2007); *How to Improve the World*, Hayward Gallery, London (2006); *British Art Show 6*, BALTIC, Newcastle (touring 2005–6); *Sharjah Biennial 7*, Sharjah (2005); and *A Short History of Performance Part II*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2003); Young is represented by Paula Cooper Gallery in New York.

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CONTEMPORARYARTMUSEUMSTLOUIS

## 1— Main Galleries

# Carey Young

## Speech Acts

London-based artist Carey Young uses found tools, language and training processes from the worlds of the multinational corporation and global law firm. Exploring ideas of autonomy, duration, intimacy, and dissent, she has involved specialists in fields ranging from conflict negotiators to lawyers and venture capitalists, who act as expert collaborators in her elaborate, participatory projects. For the last ten years, her work has included photography, video, text, and performance, and has taken the form of legal contracts, negotiation-skills training for museum staff, and performed speeches that co-opt corporate and legal rhetoric to critical and often humorous ends.

Young's interest in corporate culture has led her to the call center industry, which allows firms

to offer sales and customer service by telephone. Whether routed to a twenty-four hour live agent, or an automated voice offering infinite menu options, consumers have become accustomed to such spaces of routine communication, wherein branded and scripted exchange endures over personal contact. For her first solo exhibition in an American museum, Young transforms the Contemporary's interstitial spaces—its front entrance, education resource center, and its boardroom—into places where “customer service” assumes a conspicuous, inverted, and unexpected presence.

Entering the Contemporary, visitors are greeted by a large-scale black text: “friendly, honest, straightforward, refreshing, dynamic!” Suspended above the Visitor Services desk, this generic corporate statement of brand values was taken from an international telecoms corporation. Displacing the text to the walls of the museum, Young offers the language of strategic optimism as the institution's own friendly salutation.

Taking up the museum's public and administrative spaces on the second floor, Young continues her insertion of subverted customer-care. Collaborating with a communications company headquartered in St. Louis, and employing its tools, software, and live agents, Young launches a new body of work with specially-adapted call center services. The visitor, upon picking up each phone, becomes both a listener and a performer, in dialogue with live agents scripted and trained by the artist. In the first of two older works restaged for this exhibition, Young creates an “information portrait”: *The Representative* (2005 and ongoing) simulates a generic household living room, adding a single red phone, and visitors are prompted to ask the agent about his or her own life story. In *Nothing Ventured* (2001 and ongoing) call-center agents are trained to treat Young as a commercial product to be marketed over the phone. Armed with information about Young's exhibition history, influences, and the themes that characterize her practice, operators offer a scripted

but concise “sales-pitch,” designed to tempt callers to go “off script.”

Young often distributes political content through existing commercial systems, a nod in part to Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles' *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* (1970). Conceived for this exhibition, *Follow the Protest* (2009) features audio cut-ups the artist recorded during recent G20 Summit protests in London. Each telephone menu option leads to a polyphony of impassioned voices, cut off or rerouted by the caller at any time.

Participation is often key to Young's work and essential to the experience of *Speech Acts*. For *Monster Flat Out* (2009), a new commission, Young asks both callers and agents to determine the subject of the work. Riffing on the childhood game, Telephone, and taking its title from Ernst Mach's theory of physics which posits that there are properties that can be formulated but never observed, *Monster Flat Out* proposes that the artwork assumes a new subject, and perhaps a new meaning, every time the phone changes hands.

Challenging us to extend