

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 1, 2011

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**ART INSTITUTE PRESENTS EXPLORATION OF
PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPEECH BY CONTEMPORARY ARTIST SHARON HAYES**

Moving-Image and Photo-Based Installations Featured in Artist's

First Solo Museum Exhibition in United States

Focus: Sharon Hayes on View November 10, 2011 through March 11, 2012

Sharon Hayes (b. 1970), one of the most original and outspoken visual and performance artists working today, is the subject of the Art Institute of Chicago's latest installment of *focus*, the museum's esteemed contemporary art series. Featuring three recent moving-image and photo-based installations, ***focus: Sharon Hayes***—on view from **November 10, 2011** through **March 11, 2012** in **Modern Wing Galleries 182–184**—is the artist's first solo show



at a major museum in the United States. The exhibition opens on **November 10** with a compelling live performance, ***Spoken Word DJ***, in which Hayes mixes and samples original spoken-word vinyl recordings by the likes of Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, and Angela Davis, in the museum's Griffin Court.

Focus: Sharon Hayes could not be more timely given the large-scale protest movement currently occupying the United States. The role of speech and the act of speaking—privately or publicly, in personal or political contexts—have been at the center of Hayes's work for the past 15 years. As an undergraduate working in New York City in the early 1990s, Hayes was immersed in a world of radical cultural change. She found herself in sympathy with many members of the staunchly

political, feminist, queer-identified scene there, which was at the time besieged by the AIDS crisis. She attended performances, plays, readings, drag shows, and exhibitions and participated in protests and activist demonstrations. This rich and roiling background contributed significantly to the formation of Hayes's artistic approach, through which she reveals the subtle and overt ways that speech and language—the protest sign, the rhetoric of political debate, and even the act of not speaking—shape personal identities as well as political and social history.

The earliest work featured in *focus: Sharon Hayes* is *In the Near Future* (2005–2009), a project that examines the political construction of speech in public space through the figure of the protester and the protest sign. *In the Near Future* consists of 350 slide images running through 13 slide projectors. The slides document a series of performances that Hayes conducted between 2005 and 2008 in which she stood alone on a street corner for several consecutive days, holding a different protest sign each day. The slogans on the protest signs are taken largely from historical protests, including those related to the Vietnam War or the women's liberation movement, but they vividly demonstrate the parallels between the issues of the past, the problems of the present, and how speech is constantly constructed and recontextualized. The



Vietnam-era slogans could well be applied to American actions in Iraq and Afghanistan; the women's liberation slogan reminds us that the Equal Rights Amendment has yet to be ratified.

Hayes's *Parole* (2010), which debuted in the 2010 Whitney Biennial, is a four-channel video installation that continues Hayes's investigation of the public and private voice. The piece

depicts a central character, played by actress Becca Blackwell, who listens to and records the voices of others but who never speaks. The character intently documents speeches and sounds—a 1974 James Baldwin lecture, the sounds of a dancer's body, Hayes's own performances—as a repository of “speech encounters” without an expected narrative arc. Screened on four walls, *Parole* offers a welter of language that confronts itself repeatedly, all with the mute character at its center.

The exhibition also features *An Ear to the Sounds of Our History* (2011), Hayes's new series of photographic works that draws upon the artist's vast archive of spoken-word vinyl records

including speeches by some of the most prominent public figures of our time: John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and Eleanor Roosevelt. Hayes organized the album covers for these records into “sentences” of varying lengths to examine the systems of distribution that have determined whose voices predominate and whose have been all but forgotten to history. Though records are intended for private, individual use, Hayes has repositioned their images in the semipublic space of the gallery and will bring the voices to life once again through her *Spoken Word DJ* performance on November 10. Together the works in *focus: Sharon Hayes* cover the most important themes in the artist’s practice, utilizing video, installation, photography, and live performance to explore the nexus of speech and identity, politics, and history that shape individual subjectivity and experience.

Related Events:

Performance: *Spoken Word DJ*

November 10, 5:30–7:00 p.m., Griffin Court
Free with museum admission

Exhibition Overview

December 16, 12:00 p.m.
Lisa Dorin, associate curator of contemporary art

Exhibition Overview

February 10, 2:00 p.m.
Tracy Parker, curatorial assistant

focus: Sharon Hayes is curated by Lisa Dorin, associate curator, Department of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute of Chicago. Ongoing support for *focus* exhibitions is provided by the Alfred L. McDougal and Nancy Lauter McDougal Fund for Contemporary Art. Generous support is provided by the Exhibitions Trust: Goldman Sachs, Kenneth and Anne Griffin, Thomas and Margot Pritzker, the Earl and Brenda Shapiro Foundation, Donna and Howard Stone, and Melinda and Paul Sullivan. Additional support is provided by the Society for Contemporary Art and Susan and James Herrmann.

IMAGES: *Spoken Word DJ*, (artist performance at the Guggenheim Museum in conjunction with *Haunted: Contemporary Photography/Video/Performance*, July 24, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin.

Sharon Hayes. *In the Near Future*, 2005–2009. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery.

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MUSEUM HOURS

10:30 am–5:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

10:30 am–8:00 pm Thursday

10:30 am–5:00 pm Saturday, Sunday

Museum free to Illinois residents on first and second Wednesdays of every month.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

ADMISSION

Adults \$18.00 Includes all special exhibitions

Children 14 and over, students, and seniors \$12.00 Includes all special exhibitions

Chicago residents receive a \$2.00 discount with proof of residency

Children under 14 always free

Members always free

City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Museum Passport" card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago.