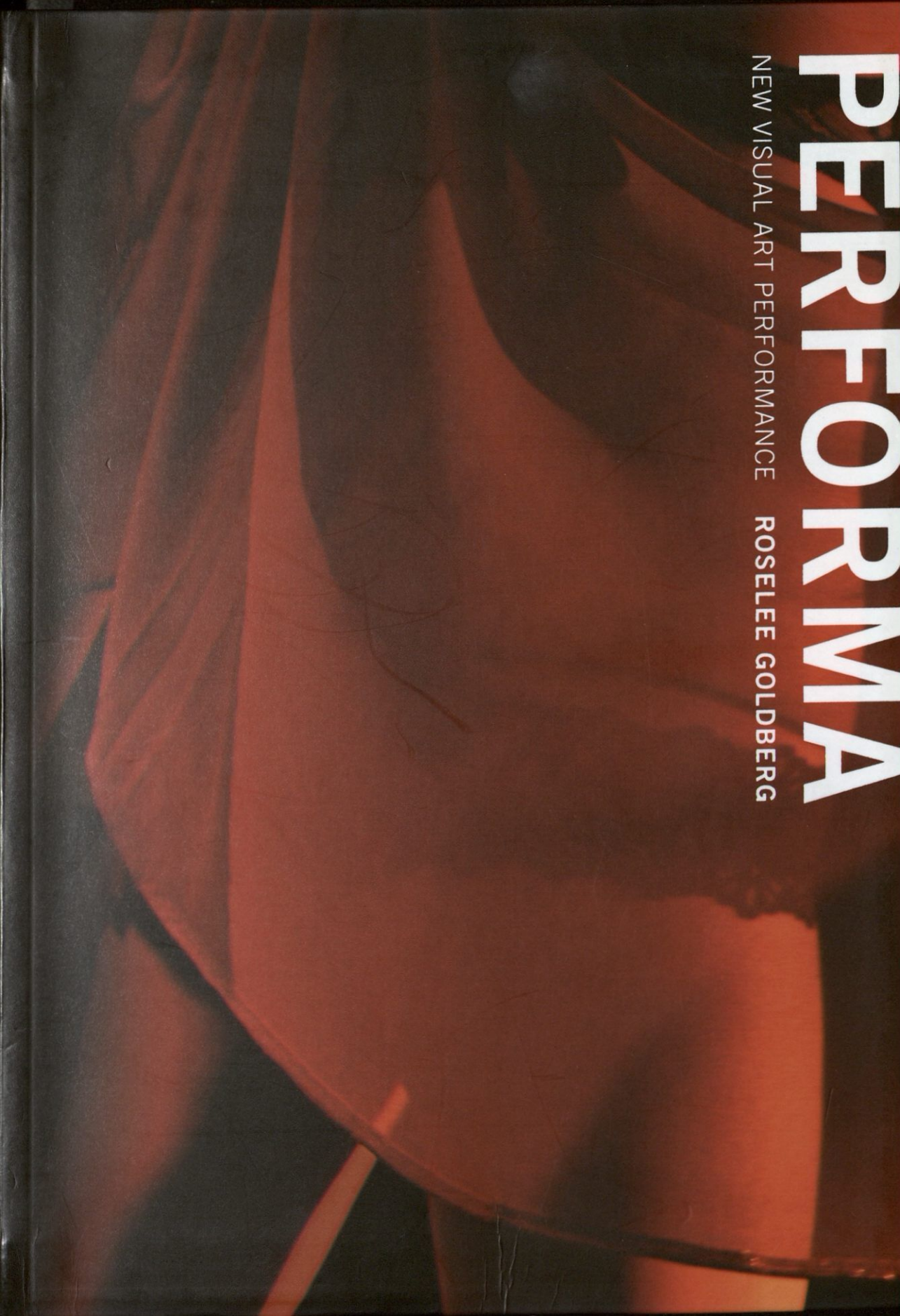
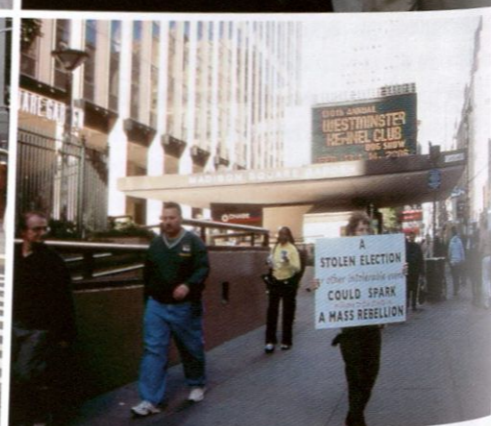
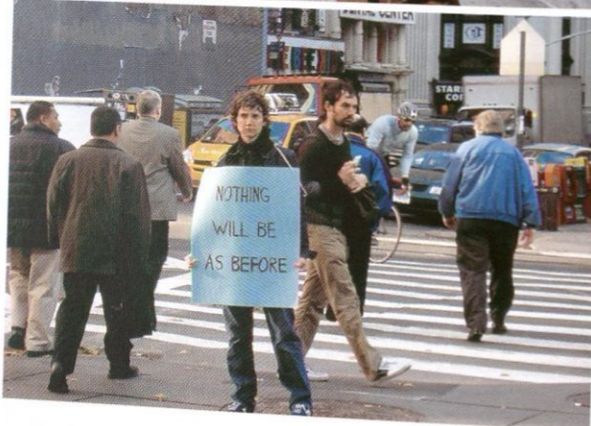
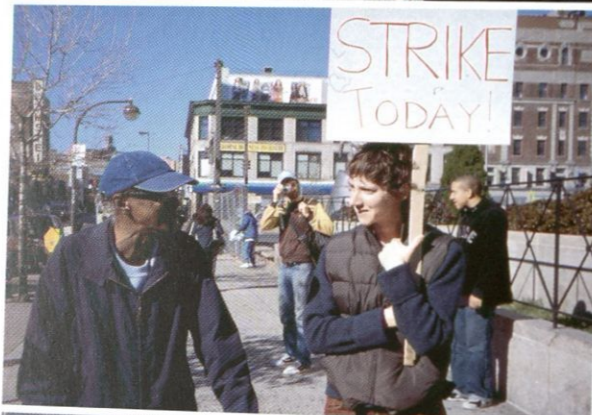


# PERFORMA

NEW VISUAL ART PERFORMANCE ROSELEE GOLDBERG





## IN THE NEAR FUTURE

SHARON HAYES

### ART IN GENERAL

CURATED BY SOFÍA HERNÁNDEZ CHONG CUY

#### SOFÍA HERNÁNDEZ CHONG CUY ON IN THE NEAR FUTURE

On the morning of November 7, 2005, Sharon Hayes stood in front of the Adam Clayton Powell State Office building on 125th Street in Harlem, New York, holding a placard that read “STRIKE TODAY!” The placard’s handmade lettering and slapdash design seemed to indicate that a pressing issue was at hand, but in the words of a passerby, “What was there to strike about?” Hayes’s gesture was one in a series of nine fictional acts of protest collectively known as *in the near future*, which she performed on nine consecutive days at various locations of historic significance in New York City. *in the near future* did not reenact historic events, nor was it intended to convince the public that these were authentic acts of protest. Rather, for Hayes, it was the potential for confusion around the live event, and the prompting of memory—of the historic event itself or images of it—that charged the work.

The set up for these acts, or “actions,” as the artist calls them, began with Hayes standing at each site for one hour, holding aloft a handmade placard, while several collaborators orbited around her, photographing and videotaping her performance. The conspicuous activity of documenting the staged protest became part of the action, transforming the location into a stage, and calling attention to the artist herself as the protagonist of each event. At the same time, the ongoing presence of the documentarists-as-performers emphasized how protests (like performance) depend on their documentation to communicate messages beyond a particular time and place.

Some of Hayes’s slogans are drawn from documentation of historic events—photographs of worker strikes and rallies that not only revisit but reinvigorate events that subsequently shape collective memory. Such was the case with “I AM A MAN,” an emotional and powerful civil rights slogan drawn from the picket lines of the 1968 sanitation workers’ strike in Memphis, which Hayes displayed on the steps of St. Patrick’s Cathedral during Sunday morning mass. Fifteen years earlier, on the very same spot, ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, had gathered thousands in protest against the Roman Catholic Archdiocese’s lack of support for AIDS education and women’s right to abortion. By virtue of their shared location, Hayes’s action meshed the demands of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, AIDS activism of the 1980s, and today’s public outcry for minority representation and action.

Hayes evoked a similar sense of layered time at Times Square with “WE ARE INNOCENT,” a reprise of the slogan used by supporters of accused spies Ethel and Julius Rosenberg during their trial in the early 1950s. The “we,” stood not only for the Rosenbergs’ claim to innocence but also implicated a wider public in questioning

Opposite page: Sharon Hayes, *in the near future*, 2005. Performance views. Photos: Art in General.

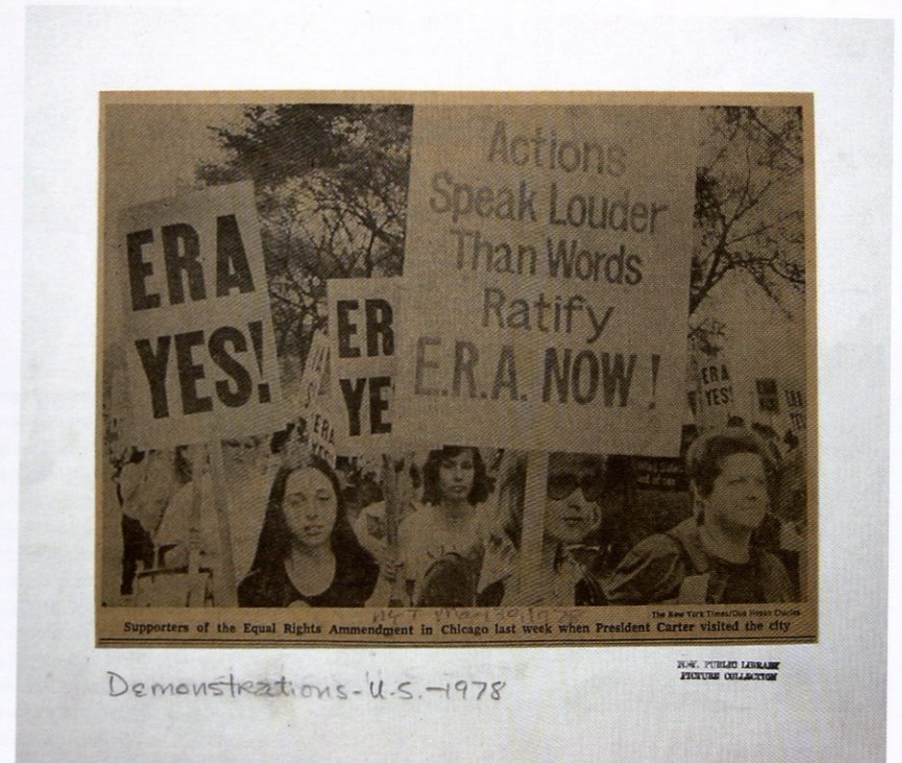


Sharon Hayes, *in the near future*, 2005. Installation view, Art in General. Photo: Art in General.

the government's suspension of rights during the cold war years. Today, that speculative "we" persists in protests against the Bush Administration's so-called War on Terror.

Some of Hayes's slogans are not quotes from history, but are rather her own poetic texts referring to what she calls "hypothetical or impending events." Outside of Madison Square Garden, the site of the Republican National Convention a year earlier, she held high a placard that read "A STOLEN ELECTION or other intolerable event COULD SPARK millions to the street in A MASS REBELLION," recalling the claim that George W. Bush had stolen the presidential election from Al Gore. At Washington Square Park, her sign read "The AMERICAN PRESIDENT might have to call in the NATIONAL GUARD to put this REVOLT DOWN," expressing a sense of anxiety and vulnerability given the persistence of Bush's war in Iraq. Her third (and most apocalyptic) text, "Nothing Will Be As Before," which she held in front of City Hall, underlined the great paradox of the archive—unearthing the past makes it instantly new.

Hayes's remaining three slogans—"Ratify E.R.A. Now," "Who Approved the War in Vietnam," and "Actions Speak Louder Than Words" were drawn from historical protests that she and most of her generation had experienced only through images. And images they would become again: on the final evening of her nine-day run, Hayes exhibited the documentation of her actions at Art in General. Nine carousels positioned at different heights and pointing in different directions, each representing a day of protest, projected hundreds of slides, one after another, giving a distinct impression of the immediacy of the events. The installation, it turned out, was another kind of performance, that of the projected image, blinking out of the past and into the near future.



Equal Rights Amendment protest, Chicago, 1978. Published in the *New York Times*, May 30, 1978. Photo: Don Hogan Charles. Courtesy The New York Public Library Archive/the *New York Times*.



Art in General  
79 Walker Street  
New York, NY 10013

#### ART IN GENERAL

Following in the footsteps of numerous artist-run alternative spaces that were founded in the mid-1970s in SoHo, Art in General was formed in 1981 by a group of artists led by Martin Weinstein and Teresa Liszka who were seeking an exhibition and gathering space for local and international artists with a distinctly collective selection process. The artists opened a gallery space in the sixth floor of the General Hardware building on Walker Street, at the crossroads of Tribeca, Chinatown, and SoHo, where it remains today. Art in General soon became a beacon for its neighbors, quite literally: its window installations, begun in 1990, provided the only light source on a pitch-black street that saw little activity outside of a typical 9-to-5 work schedule.

Today, Art in General is surrounded by far more commerce and foot traffic, but artists such as Dorothea Rockburne, who has served as a board member since the 1980s, and Michelle Stuart, Donald Sultan, and Keith Sonnier have lived in the neighborhood for decades and have helped maintain continuity with the past. When Holly Block was hired as director in 1988, Art in General created more street-level activities, responding to the local Asian American and Latino artists, and organized more activist and politically oriented programs. Art in General's industrial space inspired unusual proposals from artists who were encouraged to work with its structural elements. In 1990, composer and visual artist Ed Tomney, for example, responded to the seemingly eternal elevator ride to Art in General's gallery by wiring the cab with a sound installation that continues in various iterations to this day as the Audio in the Elevator program. In the same year, Art in General hosted a two-part exhibition titled *Installations*, for which the entire gallery was given over to large-scale artworks by artists such as Ewa Kuryluk, Danny Tisdale, and Bart Uchida.

A singular element of Art in General's programming is its presentation of difficult or underrepresented work, which often requires considerable advocacy on the part of the staff. Glenn Ligon's *Notes on the Margin of the "Black Book,"* shown in the 1991 group exhibition *Positions of Authority*, for example, in which he juxtaposed Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of nude black men with critical texts and articles about them, involved securing permission from the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Other important exhibitions include a posthumous 1996 survey of the work of artist and Mapplethorpe model Darrell Ellis; the national residency program and exhibition *1990s Art from Cuba* (1997–1998), in collaboration with Longwood Arts Project in the Bronx and the Fundación Ludwig in Havana, which was the first major U.S. survey of contemporary Cuban art; and

*Practice More Failure* (2004), a performance and exhibition series organized by the lesbian artist's collective LTTR.

Art in General's mission states that a core commitment is to "change in response to the needs of artists," and, indeed, when the National Endowment for the Arts stopped funding individual artists in 1996, the organization began the Artist Residency Program, now international in scope, which covers artists' fees and project and living stipends, and includes a publication and public events. In 2001, this program expanded to include the Eastern European Residency Exchange, bringing artists from partner sites in Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Croatia to Art in General, and sending New York-based artists to Europe in a reciprocal two-month exchange. This commitment to supporting the production of art as well as its exhibition evolved into the New Commission Program in 2005. Among the program's first projects was *How to Break Your Own Heart: Visitors Welcome* by Xaviera Simmons, who took over the storefront space for six months, transforming it into a rare jazz record listening room with DJ booth, a music salon for jazz rehearsals and impromptu performances, and a screening room for viewing film footage of vintage concerts. In 2006, Holly Block, who served for eighteen years as the executive director of Art in General, left to become director of the Bronx Museum of Arts. This year, Art in General inaugurated a renovated gallery space designed by Steven Learner Studio, and named its new director, Anne Barlow, who will oversee the organization's twenty-fifth anniversary programs.—Chrissie Bradley

