



Palais de Justice

by Carey Young

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For more than seventeen years, Carey Young has created a body of law-related artwork across a variety of media to explore the relationships between the body, language, rhetoric, and systems of power. Works including *Declared Void* (2005), *Uncertain Contract* (2008) and *Report of the Legal Subcommittee* (2010) addressed legal definitions and the language, aesthetics and performativity of law, thoroughly permeated by political and moral judgments. With *Palais de Justice* (2017), on view in the temple space of La Loge, Young develops and extends this ongoing work into timely concerns with gender, power and the cinematic.

Palais de Justice is a video installation which was filmed by the artist at the eponymous nineteenth-century courthouse in Brussels, one of the largest buildings in Europe. Architect Joseph Poelaert built this labyrinthine hilltop edifice between 1866 and 1883 during the reign of Leopold II, with the commission to represent law and sovereign power, in terms of the sublime. To commence construction, 3000 houses in the historically working-class Marolles-Sablon area were destroyed. Ever since, the palais de justice has been mired in controversy, and the word 'architect' has locally become a derogatory term: 'schieven architect'. As Belgium's main courthouse, the building has long been a symbol of judicial power, although it has also famously suffered the ongoing indignities of collapsing ceilings, interior damage and ever-present, rusty scaffolding. However, in *Palais de Justice*, Young sees the building through fresh eyes, using it to propose an alternative narrative of law in which women seem to control the justice system itself.

Denied official permission to shoot, like every other film request received by the Palais at the time, Young consulted a lawyer and then decided to continue with her project. Over the ensuing two-year period, she filmed regularly at the Palais, working 'in plain sight' and shooting real events and real trials, but without the knowledge or permission of anyone depicted. Young was undeniably taking a risk yet felt bolstered with her lawyer's proposed defence: that, during a trial, judges (and anyone on the court bench) in courtrooms are public figures revealing themselves in public space, and therefore not protected by Belgium's privacy laws.

The piece begins with a shot of a young man wearing a tracksuit, casually descending the monumental courthouse steps. (He is a figure who may come to seem excluded, once the work concludes.) While the blindfolded Roman goddess Lady Justitia is often represented in courthouses, patriarchy has traditionally infused the legal system and all its workings, making invisible and often denying the needs and life experiences of women. Yet in Young's piece the familiar patriarchal culture of law is contradicted. Whilst the camera establishes the grandiose scale

of the building with a wide view of the gargantuan *salle des pas perdus* (entrance hall), which dwarfs human scale, in the rest of the piece Young positioned her camera in corridors, to peep voyeuristically through circular windows in the courtroom doors, always the outsider, as if excluded – or as if a peeping tom. The artist shows us many female lawyers and judges at work, whether directing trials, giving judgements or paused in thought, captured in a series of unflinchingly long, fixed shots. Young subtly builds a counter-narrative: a legal system seemingly centred on, and perhaps controlled by women, as if male presence may be optional or unnecessary in this particular future. Young's camera becomes implicated, either caught within reflections, or through seemingly-becoming noticed by some of her subjects. The windows and the camera's lens are suggested as an interwoven series of oculi, in which we watch justice as performance, and are ourselves implicated, like the artist, as witnesses or voyeurs. The artist absorbs the judges into her image-world, projecting them at monumental scale and with painterly light: a flattering portrait of female intellectuals at work. The camera, on its locked-off tripod, never moves – only the people within the frame come and go, as if the camera ultimately sides with the permanence of the architecture, rather than its fleeting inhabitants. Men still appear within the piece, but their usual societal agency seems reversed – here, they wait to be heard, noticed, or given access, or they are pictured as lonely, minor figures. Motifs of eyes, gazes, vignettes, apertures and lenses abound throughout the piece, whilst the glass of the courtroom windows captures reflections of action taking place behind the camera, giving many shots a layered, 360-degree field of view, which adds a floating sense of unreality to proceedings in court.

The soundtrack is an important part of the work's hallucinatory atmosphere and sense of scale. Instead of capturing audio of the trials depicted on camera, the recordings captured the sounds of the Palais' vast marble hallways and corridors, filled with distant footsteps and ethereal, echoing but indistinct voices. These were mixed with occasional real-time sound from the shots themselves, such as heavy doors closing, or the footsteps of passers-by whom we see on screen, creating occasional moments of quasi-realism, where sound synchronises with image, within the otherwise abstracted soundscape of this juridical space. *Palais de Justice* considers the complex relations between law and the senses, between the judicial and the fictional and between the camera and ideas of gender, using documentary-style footage to conjure a thought-experiment of female power and agency.

Projected to fill a large wall in the temple space of La Loge, *Palais de Justice* harbours a particular relationship with La Loge's dimensions, symbols and history. Located near the Palais de Justice, La Loge is a former Masonic temple built in 1934–1935 by modernist architects Fernand Bodson and Louis Van Hooveld. Le Droit Humain, the first masonic obedience in Belgium that allowed women into the lodge and considered equality a central value, commissioned the construction of the art deco building. Though Freemasonry is generally associated with patriarchy, nepotism and elitism, it is interesting to note that Le Droit Humain originated in the nineteenth-century as an extension of the first feminist movement in France. With a subtle façade, an internalized layout and decorative details within

the interior of the building only, La Loge could be considered almost as an inversion of the palais de justice. While it is also a temple on a hill, its labyrinthine space was not designed to regulate human behaviour, but rather to defend and reflect on humanist virtues of liberty, integrity and honesty. Lastly, the upper floors of La Loge look out onto a water reservoir on Rue de la Vanne with monumental facades of Vitruvian proportions, designed by architect Joseph Poelaert 1857.

on view

Palais de Justice, Carey Young, 2017. Single-channel HD video (from 4K), quadraphonic sound; 17 mins 58 secs.

credits

Camera: Carey Young

Camera Assistant (main): Constantin Didisheim

Camera Assistant (second): Albin Metthey

Editor: Carey Young

Online editor: Sue Giovanni

Sound recordists: Fabrice Osinski, Aurelien Lebourg, Carey Young

Sound Design: Niall Kearney and Mike Avgeros, Soho Sonic Studios

Production Management: Ioanna Karavela, Carey Young

Legal advice: Annick Mottet, Lydian

about the artist

Carey Young's work has been exhibited widely, including solo shows at Dallas Museum of Art, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst (Zurich), The Power Plant (Toronto), Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, and recent group shows at Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris and Brussels), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), Hayward Gallery (London), Tate Britain amongst many others. She is represented by Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. *Palais de Justice* has been exhibited at Dallas Museum of Art, Paula Cooper Gallery (New York), Front Triennial and Towner Art Gallery (Eastbourne).

thank you

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Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
Slade School of Fine Art, University College London
SohoSonic Studios

In fondest memory of camera assistant Constantin Didisheim (1992
– 2017)

the team of La Loge

Curator: Laura Herman
Curatorial intern: Sophie Fitze
Visual identity: Antoine Begon, Boy Vereecken
Partner: Brussels Gallery Weekend

opening hours

Thursday - Friday - Saturday

12:00 to 18:00

Free entrance

Visit our website for more details about our program and events.

La Loge

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