

NEW MUSEUM

KIDS MENU

DEAR _____

During December 2007, in the shadow of the Iraq War and as the New Museum opened its current home on the Bowery, artist Sharon Hayes took to the streets of lower Manhattan in a series of performances. Standing on street corners near the New Museum and speaking through a megaphone, Hayes's heartfelt words variously invoked war protests, gay liberation marches, and romantic love letters. Combining these themes created a portrait of New York City as a site of longing, loss, mourning, love, desire, and absence. Now, amidst the uncertainty of a pandemic, wildfires in the American West, Black Lives Matter protests, and an imminent presidential election, the New Museum is sharing Hayes's performance as a sound recording. Visitors to the museum can hear one of Hayes's speeches in the Seventh floor Sky Room, while seeing a clear view of lower Manhattan. We can also listen to Hayes's piece on the New Museum website and think about how her words, although private, relate to public spaces while referencing both contemporary and historic political events.

"...To give you a picture of where I am, I'm standing on the corner of Prince Street and Bowery. I'm speaking into a megaphone. It's Saturday, December 1st. Today is World AIDS Day... Things here are spiraling so far down I'm afraid that people just can't face it anymore. They're packing up their pain, and they're packing up their anger, and they're moving on, which I know, you would find shocking. You would be surprised at how different it is now from when you were here nine months ago. No one seems to talk about the war. It's like we can't find the words, or we're tired of saying the same things over and over. There's no movement here, and yet so much, so much happens."

-Sharon Hayes, *I March in the Parade...*

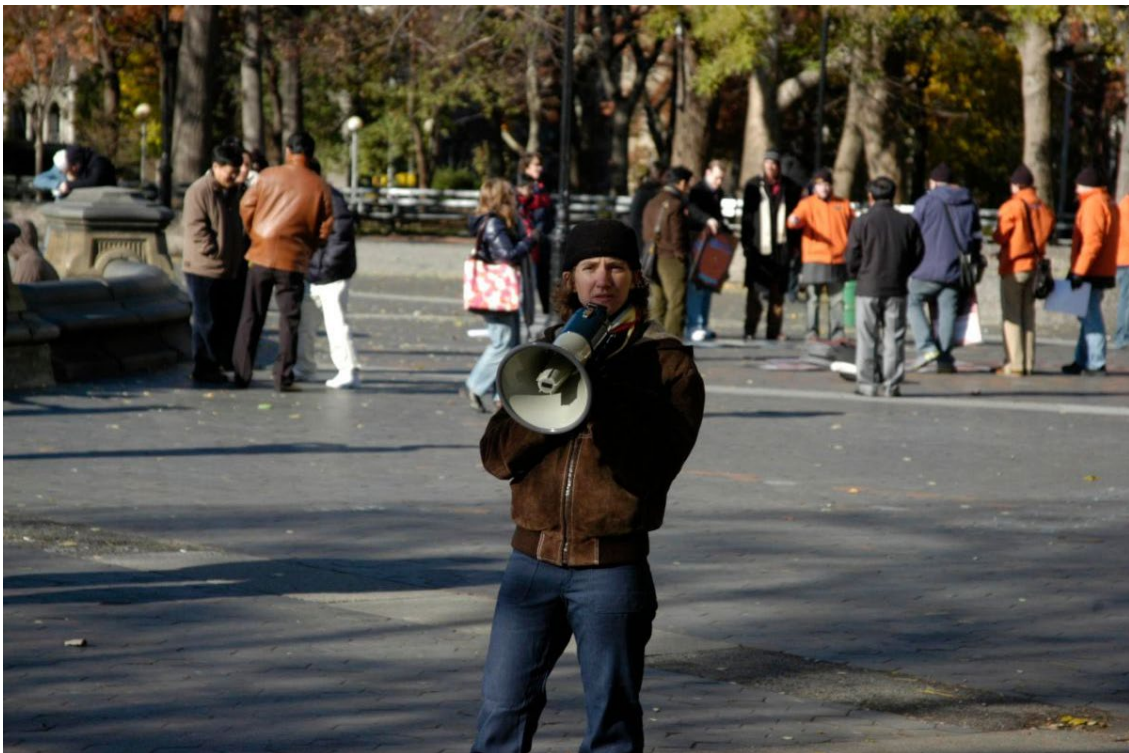
To learn more about how Hayes's performance work explores the distance between public and private experience and emotions, you can watch a [video](#) or [listen](#) to the artist's performance.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

- **performance**: the act of presenting a speech, play, concert or other form of entertainment or public engagement

- **gay liberation:** a movement from the 1960s through the 1980s to eliminate discrimination against gays and lesbians through direct action such as public marches and demonstrations. The movement included people with a greater diversity of LGBTQI identities than “gay liberation” would suggest today. This includes trans and queer activists, and their legacies in continued movements for rights today.
- **Iraq War:** a military conflict from 2003–2011 in which troops, led by Great Britain and the United States, entered Iraq. After violence declined in 2007, the United States gradually withdrew troops until complete withdrawal in 2011.
- **mourning:** the rituals, process, and act of saying goodbye to a loved one who has moved or passed away; in addition to mourning humans, we can mourn the loss of pets and even inanimate objects
- **politics:** the activities of governing a country, state, city or other area, including conflicts or debates among individuals or parties involved in governance

START WITH ART: SHARON HAYES



- How would you describe this photograph? What is the artist (the person in the center of the foreground) doing?
- Does the artist have an audience?
- Do you think the artist is performing?
- Does it look like any of the people in the background are listening to the artist?
- Does one need an audience to perform?
- Do you think this photograph is recent or historic? When might this scene

have occurred?

In the Artist's Words:

"...I'm speaking with total freedom. What holds me to this microphone is you. Don't you remember, the last time we were on these streets together, striding arm and arm in that pack of people, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of them, swaying their body, stamping their feet, shouting movement talk, and whispering, whispering little nothings that could hardly be heard in the ear they were spoken to, so loud was that crowd. You yelled and yelled and yelled and then you lost your voice..."

-Sharon Hayes, *I March in the Parade...*

- Listen and/or read Sharon Hayes's ***I March in the Parade...***
- How would you describe the artist's tone of voice? What makes it different from speeches you might hear more often on the news or in public?
- For the artist, "you," is "my love," but she also talks about world events and histories that affect other people, distant and close, too. Do you think that something that sounds personal, or private can have meaning for a public audience?

LOOK AROUND

- Do you read, watch, or listen to news about current events?
- What do you worry about and wish would change for yourself, your friends and loved ones, and even strangers?
- For instance, can you identify aspects of pre-pandemic life that you miss? Are there things that have changed in your home?
- Are there specific events for which you have concern? For instance, have you or have you overheard adults talking about the election, or movements for racial, gender, and climate justice?
- Does anything make you frustrated? What makes you hopeful?
- Do you know which presidential candidate you would vote for?
- How would you express these concerns or fears if you could share them with someone who has the power to enact change?

How might you write a personal letter expressing how you feel about a contemporary social or political issue? To whom would you write it? Letter recipients can include a politician, the American people, your local government, your school board, your classmates, your country, the climate, a friend or relative.

In the Artist's Words:

"... And we really thought things could change. And so, the next day, when you saw the headline in the paper about our march, you said, now the president would have to respond. You said, that many people can't take to the streets for nothing.... We lay in bed and we read each one, cover to cover, looking to see

what they would say about our work, waiting to find some mention that we had been heard, some evidence that things were shifting, some sign that our movement was a tide that couldn't be stopped, that everyone, young and old, political and apolitical was prepared to talk about the war and that everyone would want to. That our message would be repeated again and again in a thousand mouths until the world was full of nothing but voices of protest as far as the ear could hear..."

-Sharon Hayes, *I March in the Parade...*, excerpt

MAKE ART

Let's write a letter to a politician, teacher, representative of our local school board, classmates, the climate, the country, expressing how we feel about a current **political** issue or event.

Materials

- Pen or pencil
- Paper
- Newspapers, magazines and/or online journalism for research
- An adult who can help with writing
- Optional, if available: a microphone
- Optional: a device to record your statement instead of writing it down

Making

1. Start by identifying an issue you're concerned about. The issue can include the presidential election, local or federal responses to Covid-19, your school or school district's Covid-19 policies, the state of the environment, or any other local, national or International issue you find compelling, or concerning. You can also think about something you miss from pre-pandemic life and write a letter to that missing person, place, object or activity.
2. How do you feel about this issue? What do you most want to say about it?
3. Will you include facts related to the issue? Will you explain how it affects you personally? It may help to write down all of your feelings, who and what you miss, fear, care about, or are hopeful for.
4. Consider doing research before writing your letter or speaking and recording your statement. You can look for information in newspapers, magazines and online. You might want to ask an adult to help identify and read articles.
5. As you're reading, you may wish to take notes. You can write down ideas or facts you might want to include, or underline or circle these in an article.
6. When you feel you've gathered enough information, consider whether or not this information has changed or reinforced your opinion about the issue. Try to incorporate these changes into your writing or speech.
7. If you're planning to write a letter, you might want to start with a draft and ask an adult to help you edit it. You could also speak it, to an adult who

writes or types it.

8. If you plan to speak your statement, you might want to record it, play it back, and then re-record it until it sounds the way you want.

REFLECTION

- How did it feel to write your letter and express your feelings? Do you wish the intended recipient could read it?
- If you spoke your statement, did you speak it for anyone else to hear? Do you consider it a performance, even if there was no audience?

Hayes performs her speeches in public. How do you think it would feel to read your letter or perform your statement in front of other people? Consider staging a performance for household members, classmates or friends. How do you think it would feel to share your message?

Did someone forward this email to you? If you would like to receive these art activities directly, sign up [here](#).



NEW
235 BOWERY
NEW YORK NY
10002 USA
MUSEUM

IMAGES:

Sharon Hayes, *I march in the parade of liberty, but as long as I love you I'm not free*, 2007. Performance: Washington Square Park and New Museum, New York, 2007. Photography Credit: New Museum Staff

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New Museum
235 Bowery
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