

the everyday / Leslie Hewitt  
April 19–May 24, 2009



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curator Kate Menconeri  
April 19–May 24, 2009  
a Master's Thesis exhibition  
Center for Curatorial Studies  
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504

For many artists working today, there is a renewed sense of urgency—to respond to, organize, and question the labyrinth of visual and material information that exists simultaneously. Reading between the lines, they take up the task of re-writing history, challenging the document, or reconfiguring the archive. Richly adding to this conversation is the work of Leslie Hewitt, who isolates and juxtaposes objects, images, and texts amidst the daily cacophony, asking for our sustained focus on an “intimate and imperative level”<sup>1</sup>.

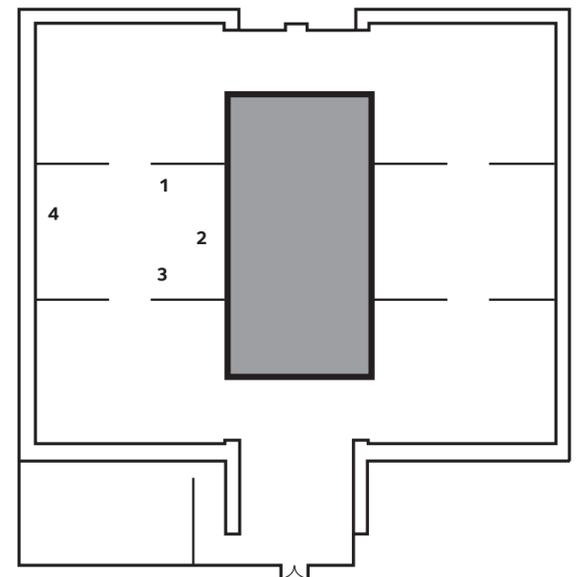
Hewitt's work is significant for the ways in which it questions history, memory, time, and the language of images, but something gets lost when neatly matched to one of those topics alone. What is perhaps most compelling, opening into conundrum or epiphany, is the way in which this work allows for multiple readings and perspectives at once, as a gesture, if not a call for an ethos of seeing. Inspired by Third Cinema, conceptual art, and modes of syncopation—Hewitt's vantage point seems at once poetic and critical, and as deeply tied to the past as it is to a hope for the future.

Hewitt reshuffles historical and everyday ephemera in a new suspended time and context to consider the role of images and objects in our personal and collective consciousness. In the series, *Riffs on Real Time*, 2008, three perspectives, or frames, are literally and conceptually compressed into one new photograph. Snapshots of domestic personal scenes—a family at a picnic or banal living room interiors, are layered over items that circulate in public and private contexts—books without title, UN treaty maps, magazine pages, or letters—that often show the signs of time and handling. Both come together in the “real” space of a hardwood floor, creating new conversations about the role of photography in our interior and exterior worlds, “where do they meet, conflict, or come apart?”<sup>2</sup> In *Afterimages*, 2009, objects seen in passing—a street grate, cameo, or pair of earrings, are rendered by hand from memory and fixed anew in gouache and pencil on a solid piece of wood. *Untitled (Capsule)*, 2005–2006, presents seventy-six first and second editions of Alex Haley's *Roots* on a cypress shelf. This work sits in conversation with *Untitled (Resist, Resist, Resist...)*, a floor sculpture of untitled books made of concrete.

Working across mediums, Hewitt engages formal play and subtle gestures, both within and outside of the picture plane, to confront and transform perspective. In her restaged documents, the artist calls upon the promise of photography to re-assert specific histories, but simultaneously subverts our expectations of the photograph—subtly disrupting the view, picturing multiple frames in one, or leaving the edges of the photographs visible. Photographs, dislocated from time and space, are always only questions. They reveal as much as they conceal and “rely on the knowledge we bring to them.”<sup>3</sup> These seemingly quiet works are what Roland Barthes called “thinking images”. They make us reflect, and they suggest many meanings often in contrast or balance with their literal meanings. “Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.”<sup>4</sup>

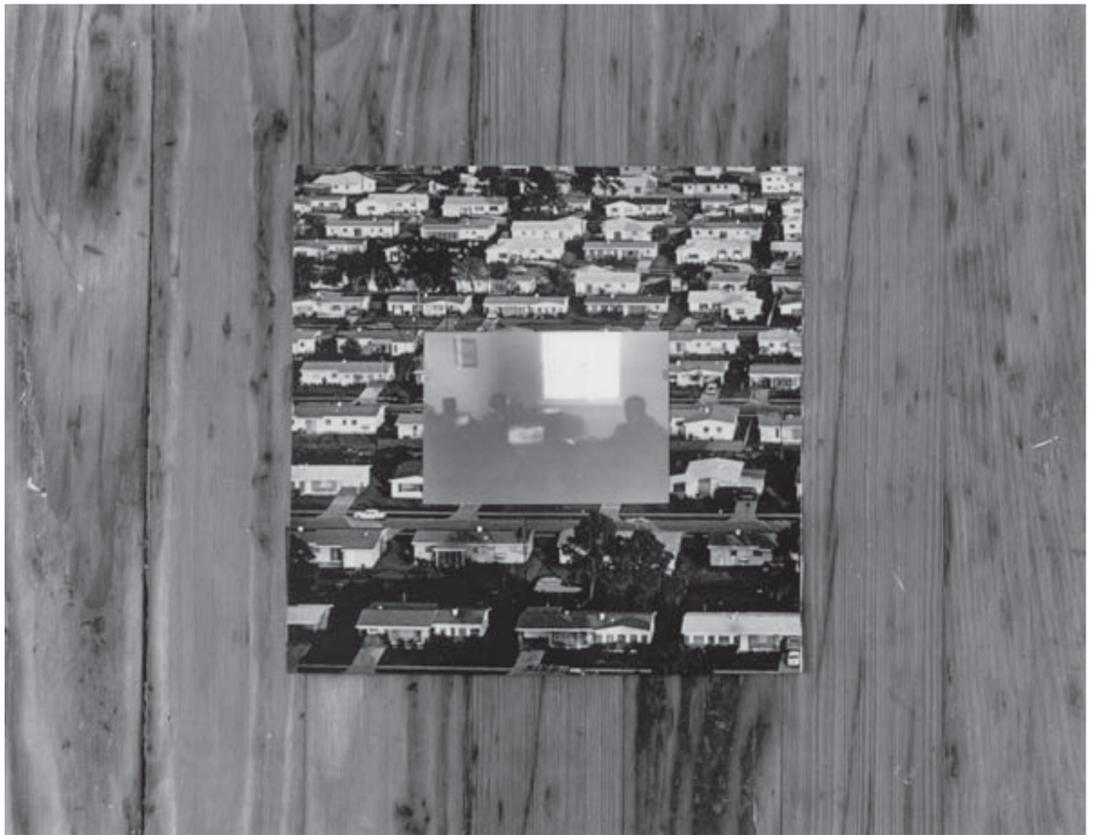
Rather than posing literal narratives, Hewitt's works invite a collective dialogue. What are the limits and promise of photography now—as a tool for social discourse, marker of memory, and arbitrator of meaning? What role do photographs play in our interior and exterior worlds? What personal, social, and political associations do we bring to what we see everyday? What is the gap between personal and public perception—between picturing yourself and being photographed? The questions posed by Hewitt's work are at once critical and deeply personal. What one reads into it changes as you open to the possibilities, but to quote the artist, they allow us to “to confront every second as if it has always been in existence, though its materiality is fleeting.”<sup>5</sup> Hewitt takes the familiar to new places, images that are at once recognizable are imbued with new meaning. That which is overlooked is given new form, perspective, and weight. These seemingly straightforward works tell stories of poignant complexity. In presenting multiple views and new correspondences, Hewitt's works open a space that is our own, to confront, enrich, complicate, and transform the ways in which we see photographs, history, the current moment, and ourselves.

1. Leslie Hewitt, excerpt from statement
2. Hewitt, excerpt from statement on *Riffs on Real Time*
3. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 28–29
4. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 38
5. Hewitt, excerpt from interview



- 1 Untitled (Capsule)**  
2005–2006, 76 first and second edition copies of Alex Haley's *Roots*, cypress shelf, 58 x 43 x 6½", courtesy the artist and D'Amelio Terras Gallery, NY
- 2 AFTER IMAGES I**  
2009, gouache and pencil on wood panel, 60 x 84"
- \* AFTER IMAGES II**  
(at CCS foyer entrance)  
courtesy the artist and D'Amelio Terras Gallery, NY
- 3 Riffs on Real Time, 4 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 40 x 30", courtesy Marilyn and Larry Fields, Chicago, IL
- Addendum (Composition / Consumption)**  
2009, fabricated wall, 120 x 72½ x 14 ¾", courtesy the artist and D'Amelio Terras Gallery, NY
- 4 Riffs on Real Time, 10 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 40 x 30", courtesy Noel Kirnon, NY
- Riffs on Real Time, 2 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 40 x 30", courtesy Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins, NY
- Riffs on Real Time, 3 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 40 x 30", courtesy Beth and Anthony Terrana
- Riffs on Real Time, 8 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 40 x 30", courtesy Sherry and Stacey Fabrikant
- Riffs on Real Time, 1 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 40 x 30", courtesy the artist and D'Amelio Terras Gallery, NY
- Riffs on Real Time, 7 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 40 x 30", courtesy Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg
- Riffs on Real Time, 9 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 40 x 30", courtesy the artist and D'Amelio Terras Gallery, NY
- Riffs on Real Time, 5 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 30 x 40", courtesy Noel Kirnon, NY
- Riffs on Real Time, 6 of 10**  
2008, C-print, 30 x 40", courtesy Bernard I. Lumpkin and Carmine D. Boccuzzi

Design: Ronny Quevedo / BASE 2009



Excerpt from an extended interview between Kate Menconeri and Leslie Hewitt 2008–2009

**KM- One cannot always locate the “author” in your work.... Is this in some way a response or resistance to representations that take an essentializing impulse toward identity?**

LH- Resisting the “essentializing impulse” is a position many photographer’s take in this highly mediated culture we are in. The ability to see an image in a complex fashion is required now. There is no strict concept of “truth” or “reality” photographically, with the virtual affect and the constant manipulation of images in everyday life... many artists react in opposition to this... I could be wrong, but I feel this is the case.

**KM- In our last meeting... you have talked about Third Cinema [and French New Wave] as being an important influence, especially the ideas of inverting form to shift perspective... could you elaborate on this?**

LH- I think about what it meant for various independence movements, student movements, anti-war protests—all of these consciousness—building movements to thrive during a time of uncertainty. Film was a strong medium to document that new reality. So [the use of] hand-held cameras, where camera shake becomes okay, rather than something that was edited out, or allowing strong subjective narrative to play a main role—It was breaking away from a strict aesthetic form. I think about these artists/ filmmakers, and what it meant to break with those conventions and allow for something new to occur. I take a lot of cues from that because that is in a way how I photograph. I break several conventions—not just to be rebellious or resistant—but in my mind it is, perhaps to open up another way of thinking about the medium—to open up another way of constructing an image or allow for another breath—to open our eyes, again.

**KM- There are a lot of references to the 1960’s and 70’s in your work. Why is this time period of particular interest to you?**

LH- It is of interest for many reasons, on a personal note my parents were very active in the civil rights and black consciousness movement in overt and subtle ways. Growing up this history was very fresh and a part of my upbringing. Now the reality is that much of the world saw a shift after the 1968 Independence Movements—internationally and domestically—and much of this transition was being recorded in color and black and white, still and moving imagery. That was a raw time, full of struggles, and a simultaneous questioning and creation of ideological movements. In addition, artists responded to this time with amazing urgency. In particular, I am really moved by Third Cinema, Cinema Verité, and French New Wave, modes that mobilized thought and resourceful expression either by necessity or influence.

I am invested in giving the aesthetics of a thing an equal footing with the content of the same thing and all of this is somewhat governed by socio-political concerns related to that thing. The idea of resistance, that it includes a resistance to an aesthetic of commercialization or conformity interests me. This “resistance” is what drew me to the medium of photography. Being born after 1968, my connection to the moment is through the images of that time versus that time directly. This fact coupled with the history of the medium: revolutionizing vision, the technological force, the history of optics and logic of the camera obscura... all of this, to me, is what gives a photograph the “charged object” status, and gives historical and revolutionary weight to the photographic medium.

**KM- I have been thinking a lot about your work that we looked at together at the Studio Museum of Harlem in September [2008].... There are three frames within one photograph—the snapshot of the ancient monumental rocks and a woman on a train passing through, maybe she is coming or going. This image sits on top of a book we cannot read, which rests in a third frame of a blue carpet floor. I’d like to hear about this, as well as the image where you layer the photo of the ocean waves over notes about trees—there is a poignant tension between solid and fluid. Then there are pieces with more overt political references—the Soweto Marches—where do all of these intersect for you?**

LH- Part of this piece is about challenging memory—or trying to understand it. I am not necessarily posing that these works translate literally, I feel like my approach to doing these is also very pragmatic. I’m not creating an illusion that’s not equally alluding to the construction of its making, the edge of the photograph is visible, you are aware of the construction of the illusion in terms of the juxtaposition of light and shadow, color and texture play... it’s very one to one... At the same time, there is this play with language within the photographs. Relationships between forms of knowledge are challenging each other in the same frame or the same line of perspective within the picture frame. So these two elements—text and image—shallow depth of field and grand illusions of perspective—are constantly active in the work, creating moments of conflict, silence or harmony, and teetering on the limits of language and the limits of form... But together, perhaps in unconventional ways, [they] open up both modes of expression for new readings and interpretation. I ask questions; there is a curiosity I hope it provokes in the viewer.

For instance, the Soweto Marches [which is an overt reference to media/press photography], well, we all know how crucial media was for the Civil Rights movement and Anti-War protest in the United States in the 1960’s. I was interested in this reflected in an international context—quite specifically the struggles in South Africa and the history of Apartheid. The uncanny similarities within protest imagery was worth paralleling for me. The [pictured] march documented students protesting the Africans Medium Decree of 1974—which was about language and the power of language and history. There is a direct relationship photography has to recording time but at the same time, it is unstable—nothing is fixed and there is a desire for me to reveal this contradiction. The content of a photograph could be highly political and how we perceive it or value it is politicized and informed by a series of external factors, some of which are very subtle. We tend to gloss over these realities. Much of my interest in this play with form in space stem from a connection I find to the Brazilian movement of concrete poetry and the early and extremely formal works of artist Helio Oiticica. Another strong influence in terms of language and formal play is the work of David Hammons—his overall sophisticated use of language, puns, and play on cultural meanings that are rooted in the cadence of black cultural traditions in the trans-Atlantic sense.

**KM- What’s next?**

LH- I plan to travel to the Netherlands to look critically at still life paintings from the 17th century—to re-read them with the trans-Atlantic and eastern trade routes in mind. I also want to think critically about the roll that objects play and the signification of objects from symbolic to representative of “colonial power”, the privileged view, stand in for other-ness or curiosity, and the objects relationship to capitalism... all are of interest and will be points of departure for me in terms of thinking about how knowledge traveled and travels. I am also in search of the work of an early optic scholar—Ibn Al- Haytham... to expand my understanding of the Camera Obscura. I hope to find many parallels and plan to begin a new body of photo-sculptures in response to the research and the trip in general... It should be very interesting...



From top left  
Riffs on Real Time (1 of 10), 2008  
Riffs on Real Time (5 of 10), 2008  
Riffs on Real Time (10 of 10), 2008

Reverse  
Riffs on Real Time (6 of 10), 2008