Leslie Hewitt

On this island things fidget

Leslie Hewitt’s approach to photography and sculpture reimagines the art-historical still-life genre from a postimperial perspective. Her geometric compositions, which she frames and crystallizes through the disciplines of photography and film theory, are spare assemblages of ordinary materials and personal effects, alluding to the porosity between intimate and sociopolitical histories. She draws these connections through formal rather than didactic processes such as synecdochic juxtaposition, which make her work discursive and layered. Exploring ideas of light, sound, and inertia, Hewitt has realized an array of low-profile sculptures that are laterally distributed within and outside the gallery at Dia Bridgehampton, as well as a diagrammatic score composed in collaboration with artist Jamal Cyrus. Further expanding the frame of the exhibition, Hewitt and Cyrus have invited the scholar Tiffany Lethabo King to deliver a lecture and artists Rashida Bumbray, Jason Moran, and Immanuel Wilkins to interpret the score at venues in New York City and on the East End of Long Island. The exhibition’s expansive sensorium puts forth an alternative corporeal, spatial, and sonic mapping of the site.

Hewitt’s new work takes the history of Dia Bridgehampton and its surrounding landscape as a point of departure. In 1983, when Dan Flavin renovated the building for the purpose of hosting art, he memorialized its previous functions as a firehouse and then a Baptist church. In the room adjacent to his fluorescent sculptures, the building’s former choir, Flavin arranged a collection of items handed down by the congregation. Hewitt takes the material memory of the building as an invitation to the human lifespan, while the bronze silhouette is modeled after the compounded outline of the three bays. Just as the boulder unsettles familiar coordinates by foregrounding geological rather than human time, the opaque bronze—refractive rather than reflective—refuses mirroring. A counter-monument, Birthmark interrupts Western categorizations of the human deployed to justify colonial conquest and instead celebrates elemental entanglements and the ebbs and flows of radical movements. Collectively, the four sculptures accommodate multiplicity and elude containment by calling on light and the surrounding landscape. As a counterpoint to the sculptures, a monitor displays a score for performance conceptualized by Hewitt and Cyrus as a still life that evokes ideas of ritual. For Soli-Flute, Alto Saxophone, or Tambourine... (2022)—built on the tradition of experimental musical notation—from early modern church hymns to 1960s Fluxus instructions and jazz visual compositions—all while extending Hewitt’s interest in the elemental sounds, patterns, and inertia, Hewitt and Cyrus therefore see the indeterminate logic of Fluxus notations and the fractual nature of the jazz standard as a way to explore the intersections of experimental music, notions of political resistance theorized in the Black Radical Tradition, and the elemental sounds, patterns, and breaks of the ocean as it meets the shore.

Provoked by King’s study, Hewitt’s exhibition suggests that “ceremony is also geography.”1 A commissioned lecture by the scholar and interpretations of the score in the register of practice will be presented as Sunday matinees at venues chosen for their resonance with the project and the presenters themselves. Shifting attention away from the primacy of linear notation and finished performance, this focus on practice instead emphasizes interpretation as an exercise in discovery and an opportunity to critically add to the score. As such, Hewitt’s collaborative, decentered project emphasizes sensing and listening as collective memory and future building practices.

Rashida Bumbray is a performance artist and curator living in Brooklyn.
Jamal Cyrus is an artist and educator living in Harlem, New York, and Houston.
Leslie Hewitt is an artist and educator living in Harlem, New York, and Houston.
Tiffany Lethabo King is an educator and scholar living in Charlottesville, Virginia.
Jason Moran is a jazz pianist, composer, and educator living in New York.
Immanuel Wilkins is a saxophonist and composer living in Brooklyn.

checklist

1. In collaboration with Jamal Cyrus, For Solo Piano, Alto Saxophone, or Tambourine (This Score May Be Realized In Any Imaginative Way, or in conjunction with or in response to the recording of the song Evidence (Justice) 00:07:55 on the album Monk at Tokyo, Columbia Records (1963) with Thelonious Monk on piano, Charlie Rouse on tenor saxophone, Butch Warren on bass, and Frankie Dunlop on drums or Evidence 00:04:41 on the album Thelonious Monk Quartet with John Coltrane at Carnegie Hall, Blue Note Records (1957) with Thelonious Monk on piano, John Coltrane on tenor saxophone, Ahmed Abdul-Makil on bass, and Shadak Wilson on drums or Evidence 00:05:00 on the album Evidence, New Jazz (1962) with Steve Lacy on soprano saxophone, Don Cherry on trumpet; Carl Brown on bass, and Billie Higgins (Abdul Kareem) on drums), 2022

2. Untitled (Basin Hmm, Hum or Hymn), 2022

3. Untitled (Bay Valley Rift), 2022

4. Untitled (Shinnecock Bay Atlantic Sound), 2022

5. Birthmark, 2022

Further reading


