

Leslie Hewitt

*On this island things fidget.*¹

Leslie Hewitt's approach to photography and sculpture reimagines the art-historical still-life genre from a postminimal 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 syncopation and 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 history, and this body of work is tuned in to the sonic echoes of the site and landscape of the East End. Following King's theorization of shoals—rock formations, coral beds, and sandbars—as a locus of resistance to settler conquest and worldview, Hewitt directs us to where land and sea have met and re-formed each other across epochs and generations. “As an in-between, ecotonal, unexpected, and shifting space,” King contends, “the shoal requires new footing, different chords of embodied rhythms, and new conceptual tools to navigate its terrain.”² Slowing down conquest and eluding cartography, the ever-resurgent shoal offers a perspective through which to view the lateral logic in Hewitt's exhibition, which loops inward and outward in three verses or movements.

Inside the gallery, three bronze sculptures reference the bodies of water on the East End, namely the Mecox, Peconic, and Shinnecock Bays, in relation to the depths of the Atlantic Ocean. As suggested by their titles—*Untitled (Basin Hmm, Hum or Hymn)*, *Untitled (Bay Valley Rift)*, and *Untitled (Shinnecock Bay Atlantic Sound)* (all 2022)—the sculptures are an amalgam of the invisible and the sensible. Approximating the outline

of the bays, their polished tops convey the surface tension of brimming water, while their textured bodies reference the deepest points in the bed of the Atlantic. Modestly sized, the three works sit directly on the ground, their gravitational tilt slightly pronounced. Arranged in relation to the perimeter of the gallery and shaped by natural light varying in incidence and warmth depending upon the time of day and weather, the sculptures call attention to the outdoors. Like the movement of the tides, the ambivalence in material, scale, and temporality—rock and water, quotidian and geological, inside and outside—in these works is a function of Hewitt's process of abstraction. Generated from a range of 2D-mapping conventions, digitally rendered in 3D, and sand-cast in bronze, the sculptures are a meditation on the magnitude of oceanic formations and the complex histories articulated in this space.³

A fourth sculpture, *Birthmark* (2022), is installed on the grounds of Dia Bridgehampton. The work consists of a locally sourced boulder—formed, like the bays, by the interplay of sand and water over epochs—upon which lies a matte bronze silhouette pointing toward the sky. Typical of Hewitt's method, with *Birthmark* she slows down perception in order to foster attunement. The boulder evidences a time scale exceeding 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.⁴ 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 Solo Piano, Alto Saxophone, or Tambourine. . .* (2022) builds 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 still life. A pictorial genre that emerged from the historical conjuncture of modern optics, global trade routes, and personal taste, the still life is reimagined here as a relational form for passing on an oral tradition. Onscreen, a driftwood tambourine sculpture is placed beside an iridescent shell, while metadata scrolls next to the objects and a sound is audible. The tambourine, shell, and sound reference the titular instruments for which the score was designed and suggest an atmosphere to its interpreters. The score can be imagined in conjunction with jazz pianist Thelonious Monk's composition “Evidence” (first recorded on July 2, 1948), and the scrolling text in the legend includes a transcript of directions that Monk once gave orally to

saxophonist Steve Lacy. Hewitt and Cyrus therefore see the indeterminate logic of Fluxus notations and the fractal 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.⁵

Provoked by King's study, Hewitt's exhibition suggests that “ceremony is also geography.”⁶ 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.

— Matilde Guidelli-Guidi

- Kei Miller, “What the Mapmaker Ought to Know,” in *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014), p. 15.
- Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 4.
- See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).
- See Sylvia Wynter, “The Ceremony Must be Found: After Humanism,” *boundary 2* 12/13 (Spring–Autumn 1984), pp. 19–70.
- See Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Books, 1983).
- King, *The Black Shoals*, p. 72.

Dia:

biographies

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.

events

Jason Moran

Performance. Sunday, November 27, 2022, 3 pm

Village Vanguard, 178 7th Avenue, New York

Tiffany Lethabo King

Lecture. Sunday, January 22, 2023, 12 pm

Dia Chelsea, 537 West 22nd Street, New York

Immanuel Wilkins

Performance. Sunday, March 5, 2023, 12 pm

Dia Chelsea, 537 West 22nd Street, New York

Rashida Bumbray

Performance. Sunday, May 14, 2023

Location and time to be announced

further reading

Bass, Marisa Anne, Anne Goldgar, Hanneke Grootenboer, and Claudia Swan, eds. *Conchophilia: Shells, Art, and Curiosity in Early Modern Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.

DuFour, Tao. *Husserl and Spatiality: A Phenomenological Ethnography of Space*. New York: Routledge, 2021.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original*. New York: Free Press, 2009.

King, Tiffany Lethabo. *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019.

McKittrick, Katherine, ed. *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.

Rabinowitz, Cay Sophie, ed. *Leslie Hewitt*. New York: Osmos, 2019.

checklist

All works courtesy the artist and Perrotin

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 in Tokyo, Columbia Records (1963) with Thelonious Monk on piano, Charlie Rouse on tenor saxophone, Butch Warren on bass, and Frankie Dunlap 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, Ahamed Abdul-Malik on bass, and Shadow 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
Digital file, monitor, and headphones

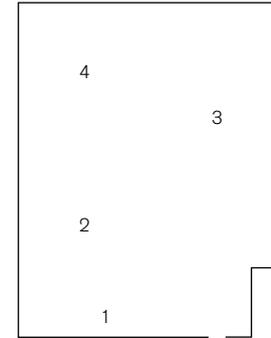
2. *Untitled (Basin Hmm, Hum or Hymn)*, 2022
Bronze

3. *Untitled (Bay Valley Rift)*, 2022
Bronze

4. *Untitled (Shinnecock Bay Atlantic Sound)*, 2022
Bronze

5. *Birthmark*, 2022
Boulder and bronze

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