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Leslie Hewitt, *A Series of Projections*, 2010. Digital chromogenic prints, each 30 x 40 inches. Installation view: *On Beauty, Objects, and Dissonance*, The Kitchen, New York. March 27 - May 10, 2010. Photo: Adam Reich

Leslie Hewitt: Sudden Glare of the Sun is organized by the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis and curated by Dominic Molon, Chief Curator.





Leslie Hewitt: Sudden Glare of the Sun

Leslie Hewitt's sculpturally constructed photographs address photography's impact on the visual and physical dynamics of the act of seeing and how we come to understand the past. This exhibition features two of her multi-part works, *A Series of Projections* (2010) and *Blue Skies, Warm Sunlight* (2011), together and in their entirety for the first time. Both series explore the interplay between public and private interests and the personal and the political as they relate to the photographic image. Hewitt's work has emerged within an increasingly "post-historical" world in which pictures of eventful situations and circumstances are captured, distributed, and seen instantly via digital technology. The speed at which we receive images makes it difficult for us to comprehend and assess their historical significance, a situation described by philosopher Jacques Rancière as one in which "the reign of the informational-present... , [not] satisfied with rejecting out of hand everything as already in the past, ... doubts the past itself."¹

Hewitt's exhibition and depiction of photographs as sculptural objects prompts us to address the fact of their physical presence and to heighten our awareness of their documentary and interpretive function.

Hewitt's training as a sculptor is reflected in her approach to materials and formats in earlier works such as *Make It Plain* (2006) and *Riffs on Real Time* (2006–2009) as well as in *A Series of Projections* and *Blue Skies, Warm Sunlight*. Her work is also informed by various art historical styles and genres. For example, it reflects her interest in seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting and its anticipation of photography's emphasis on optical effects and making us more aware of the experience and act of seeing. It also draws on the format of serially arranged photographs in definitive works of 1960s conceptual art. Cinema is another strong influence, particularly in the works' suggestion of a progression of time and their dynamic use of cropping and editing techniques—a reflection of her parallel development

of film-based works in collaboration with cinematographer Bradford Young. An engagement of historical visual and archival material places Hewitt within a current context of art practices devoted to addressing contemporary issues and concerns through an investigation of the past. These various artistic and cultural precedents are unified in her work to prompt contemplation of the often problematic manner in which photographic material is experienced and understood in contemporary society.

A Series of Projections is an open grid of 12 black-and-white photographs shot in color based on over 10 years of exploring the nature of the Bettmann Archives, a collection of 19 million photographs now owned by the Corbis

Corporation, which licenses the rights to photographs and other visual media. It features fragments of sourced photojournalistic imagery from the 1960s that were projected onto the wall of Hewitt's studio and interlaced with projections of original photographs of domestic interiors. The resulting work creates a relationship between the photographic representation of the historically significant and the intimately personal, suggesting how documented history comprises both uneventful as well as eventful moments. This negotiation of the relationship between the momentous and the mundane is one of the most fundamentally important aspects of Hewitt's practice. Her process of citation, projection, translation, and re-presentation also prompts us to question the power over



Leslie Hewitt, *Blue Skies, Warm Sunlight* (installation view), 2011. Photo: Jason Mandella / D'Amelio Terras, New York. Courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

imagery and knowledge possessed by Corbis and similar companies. This consideration, joined with the work's emphasis on everyday objects, evokes a subtext often overlooked in seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting: how its various compositions of displaced ordinary objects and effects reflected the socioeconomic and political interests of the time. Other aspects of *A Series of Projections* demonstrate the manner in which cinematic techniques inform her overall practice. The layering and synthesis of disparate images to create multiple viewpoints, shifting perspectives, and the production of new meanings echoes the similar approach of montage in filmmaking. Likewise, its exhibition as an open grid of images on the wall that the viewer "connects" across empty spaces alludes to the "jump cut"—a condensation of space and time achieved through editing and the construction of a cinematic experience.

Blue Skies, Warm Sunlight features seven photographs depicting varying arrangements of objects, books, and snapshots that Hewitt staged in her studio. Six of the images are framed within box-like structures that lean against the wall—a signature format that allows the works to function simultaneously as photography and sculpture. Her deliberate positioning of the works in relationship to the architectural dynamics of the gallery space creates an opportunity for an entirely non-linear experience of the progression of images. The items that Hewitt depicts in the photographs range from anonymous and nondescript—a

wood board, for example—to extremely time-and-place-specific—the 1969 book *The Politics of Protest*, which is a study of the socio-political climate surrounding the anti-war and civil rights protests in America during the 1960s. She also includes snapshots that depict atmospheric conditions. These pictures, which remind us of a time when photographs were primarily physical objects, depict natural phenomena that we all experience collectively but internalize differently based on our individual circumstances. Hewitt's shifting of this minimal assemblage from picture to picture thus creates a relationship to the viewer that is spatial, pictorial, and temporal, while subtly suggesting how the personal and the political are forever changing yet inevitably interconnected.

The title of the overall exhibition, "Sudden Glare of the Sun," is taken from one of the photographs in *Blue Skies, Warm Sunlight* and demonstrates how something as fundamental as sunlight can illuminate and bring clarity and beauty, and yet, when it hits a reflective surface at just the right angle, can make indiscernible what was once extremely clear. Both series featured in the exhibition suggest the way that a photograph, implicitly expected to provide the visual "truth," is subject to sharp shifts in meaning depending on context, revealing the inherently volatile nature of photography in the contemporary sense.

1. Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista, Berg Publishers, Oxford and New York, 2006, 158.