

Leslie HEWITT

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Leslie Hewitt

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y Collins
rt Museum, USA

onths have seen extreme
ct like punctuation: first came
er's Hurricane Helene in the
tern US; then, in January, the
es fires, which continue to burn
untains above me as I write. In
mber, I happened to see Bethany
Seattle Art Museum exhibition,
uring a bomb cyclone in Seattle
d two people. The weather was
t backdrop: much of the work
e-examines canonical literature
ends with loss – of hometowns
rness, of lovers and countries.
ppropriates and transforms
ts to reflect each vivid descrip-
saster, resulting in degraded,
royed artworks that feel almost
calyptic.
he bewail'd / His native isle,
sive steps and slow / Pacing
r of the billowy flood, Forlorn,'
xcerpt of an 1837 translation of
Odyssey (8th century BCE). It is
ly two lines of text that remain
Collins's wall-based diptych,
ey: 1862 / 1837 (2024), which dis-
pages from the Homeric epic,
l on Somerset paper and sub-
y made illegible with Pink Pearl
id spit applied by the artist. The

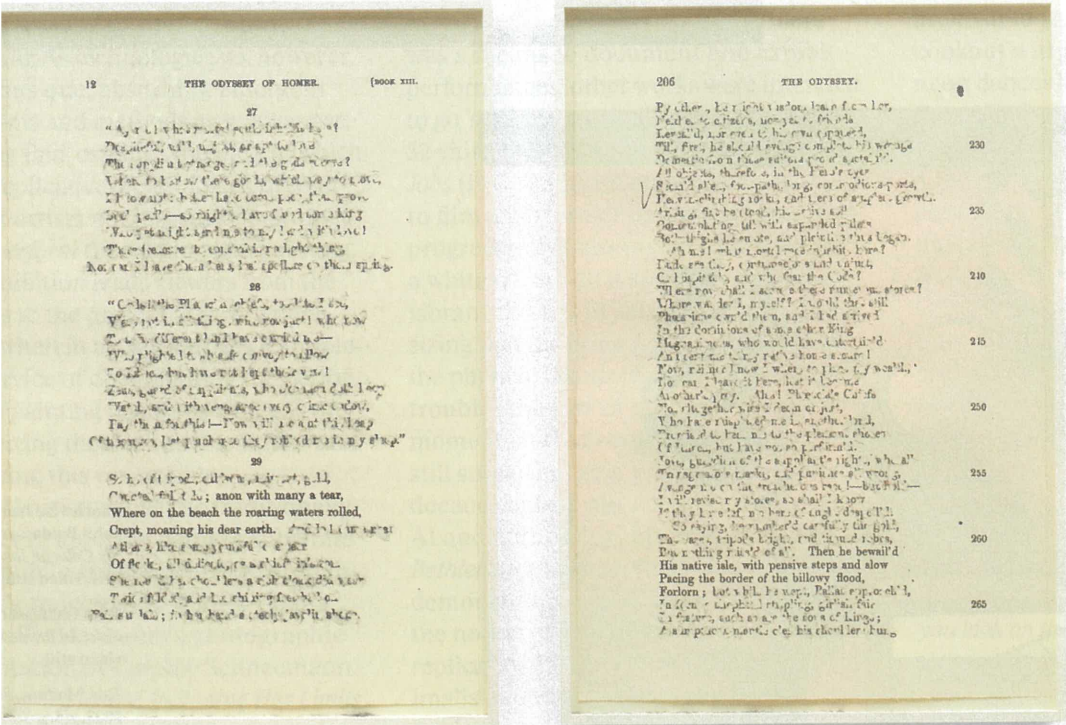
passage, taken from Book 13, describes
Odysseus's return to Ithaca, his home,
and his failure to recognize it. Collins's
technique nods to the misty, obscure
landscape witnessed by Odysseus: the
oversized pages appear tear-stained and
worn. The remaining works in the series,
all of which employ pages from *The
Odyssey's* Book 13, present a similarly
sparse version of the tale shaped by
thoughtful redactions. As Odysseus –
'a wretch in exile doom'd to stray' and
shed 'many a tear' – is untethered from
his ancient moorings, he becomes
a vessel for contemporary expressions
of displacement.

Collins's three-dimensional works,
which she calls 'erasure sculpture', take
this approach to even more destructive
ends. Her term and technique borrow
from poetic erasure traditions, wherein
portions of an existing text are obscured
to form new work. Situated on a pedestal
and encased in Plexiglas, each sculpture
is made of the fragments that accrued
as Collins took an eraser to a text that
describes failure, heartbreak or apoca-
lypse: subject matters that chime with the
material transformation at hand. *Loving,
Leaving, 2001* (2023), for example, turns an
essay by Rachel Cusk, which examines
the writer's difficult divorce and its
aftermath, into a small pile of colourful
eraser shreds and paper strips. Former

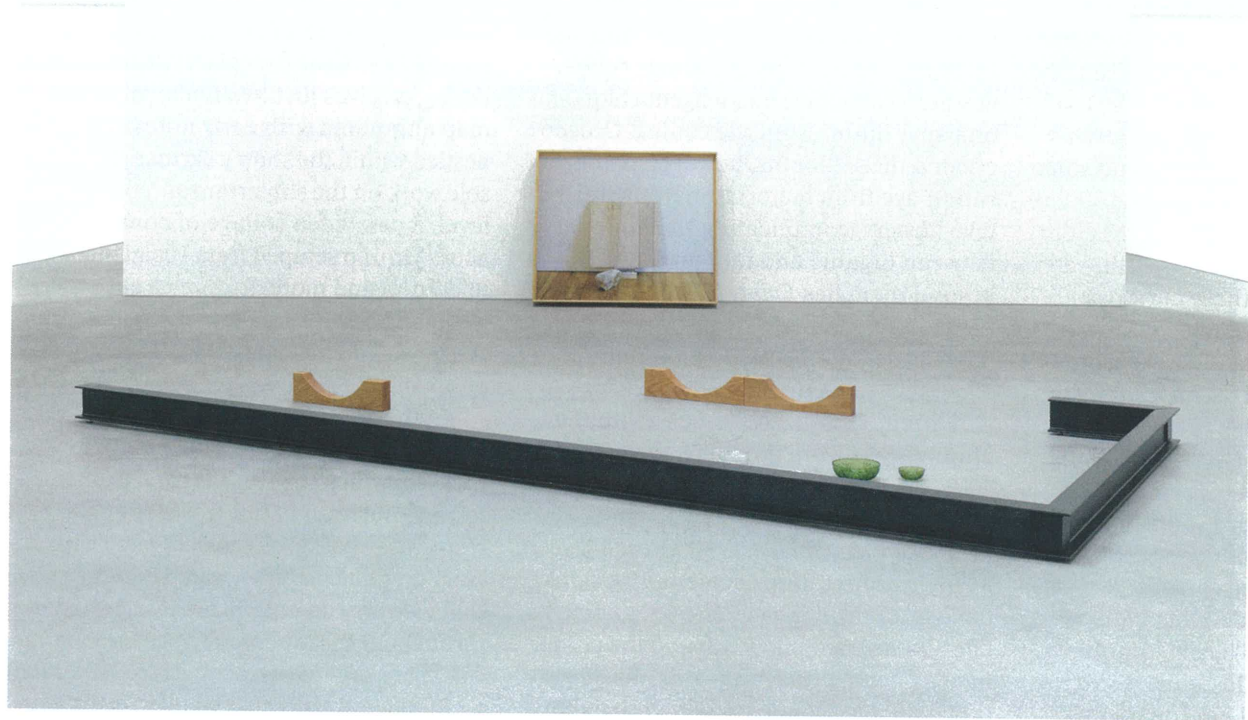
US president Jimmy Carter's concession
speech, in *Remarks on the Outcome of the
Election, 1980* (2023), suffers a similar
plight. The artist's choices – of the original
content and the degree of legibility in her
reprisings – suggest aesthetic judgment.
Where Homer's pages of poetry remain
intact enough to convey a new, evocative
meaning that updates and subverts the
original text, these modern and contem-
porary writings are uniformly destroyed
by Collins – only the works' titles identify
the shrapnel.

Maybe, as Collins seems to imply,
it is true that only what we deem most
precious will survive. (Also on view is *Or;
the Whale* (2024), a hand-copied section
of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, The
Whale* (1851) in long-lasting iron gall
ink.) But destruction, either natural or
man-made, may not always have the same
discerning taste that Collins demonstrates
in her erasure artworks. Still, the artist's
new forms reflect the ways in which lan-
guage continually may be reborn; these
'translations', however illegible, render
the experiences depicted in their origi-
nals more evocative than before. Collins's
eraser lends particular poignancy to
Odysseus's feelings of statelessness, grief
and unrecognition – whether we are
watching a new presidency take shape
or seeing a flame flicker on the horizon.

— Claudia Ross



Bethany Collins,
The Odyssey: 1862 / 1837,
2024, graphite on Somerset
paper in two parts, overall
118 x 175 x 4 cm



Leslie Hewitt,
'New Waves', 2024–25,
exhibition view

Leslie Hewitt
Perrotin, Los Angeles, USA

In 'New Waves' at Perrotin, four large-
scale, elegantly minimalist photographs
by Leslie Hewitt rest on the floor leaned
against the wall – an irregular display
tactic that the artist frequently employs.
Embracing the dimensional space of the
room, these works breach the invisible
boundary between image and viewer; their
physical weight and heft position them
as discrete sculptural entities. Referencing
the concept of mise-en-abyme, or the
image within the image, the photographs
depict tidy arrangements of objects staged
on a floor and leaning against a wall. In
each, the thin edge of a plywood square
is perched atop one or two piles of books,
gently compressing the volumes with its
weight. Mimicking the installation of the
photographs in the gallery, the flat plane of
this tilted board faces the viewer as it rests
against the wall behind it, articulating a
sense of synchronicity between real and
imagistic space and destabilizing the
distinction between image and object.

The sculptural totems in Hewitt's
photographs can be read as both still lifes
and minimalist abstractions. In *Untitled
(The Notion of Labor)* (2019), the image is
predominantly geometric: the plywood
square obliquely rests on two rectangular
piles of books, spines obscured, rendering
their contents anonymous and their
shapes strictly formal. Largely devoid

of contextual information, this sparse,
poetic image could be a photographic
ode to Josef Albers, with its perspectival
lines coalescing to form simple abstract
geometries. As a vignette of objects in
space, it likewise alludes to *vanitas* paint-
ings of the Dutch baroque, wherein
each component carries symbolic mean-
ing. The only spines that Hewitt divulges
appear in *Untitled (The Sun Rose and
the World Became Radiant)* (2019). The
titles revealed – *Ark of Bones* (1974), Henry
Dumas's short story collection, and
Black Orpheus (1948) by Jean-Paul Sartre,
a reflection on the anti-colonial Négritude
movement – highlight Black narratives
and voices: a gesture of illumination
reinforced by the work's title. With
photographic abstractions that often
serve as metaphoric monuments to
Black literary traditions (this work stems
from the artist's 2019 exhibition that
reimagined Harlem's National Memorial
African Bookstore), Hewitt posits post-
minimalism as a vehicle for historical
remembrance.

While these photographs physically
lean into the space of the gallery,
a three-dimensional still life across the
room sculpturally recedes from it. Here,
a rectangular alcove carved from the wall
forms a sunken frame blanketed with
porcelain-hued Moroccan tiles. Perfectly
centred within this is a bulbous conch
shell framed by a triangular tambourine
and haloed by a cymbal: all bronze-cast

objects the colour of bone. A taut, copper
wire extends horizontally across the top
of this concave space, suggesting the
conduction of sound or energy. Aptly, part
of the 2024 work's 111-word title proposes
the sculpture as a musical score: *This
Score May Be Realized in Any Imaginative
Way, or in Conjunction with or in Response
to the Recording of the Song Rock Steady
00:03:15 on the album Young Gifted and
Black, Atlantic Records* (1972). As Hewitt,
with collaborator Jamal Cyrus, centres
another Black cultural touchstone, she
invokes a sense of synaesthesia, folding
the rhythm and cadence of sound into
the haptic qualities of sculpture with
a speculative musical composition.

At the centre of the gallery, *Untitled
(Imperceptible, Slow Drag, Barely Moving)*
(2022) – a loose installation of chartreuse
glass bowls, curved wooden wedges
and steel beams – functions as a visual
parenthesis: a sculptural punctuation
mark that frames the entire exhibition
as a multifaceted negotiation of language.
Here, as Hewitt posits looking as a form
of reading, interpreting her work is akin
to engaging in literary analysis: her visual
text evades didacticism and revels in the
poetics of buried symbolism.

— Jessica Simmons-Reid