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Leslie HEWITT

*Carnegie Museum,
57th Carnegie International Guidebook*

*The
Guide*

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Carnegie Museum of Art

LESLIE HEWITT

Born 1977 in Saint Albans, New York
Lives in New York

If you are looking for Leslie Hewitt's art in the museum, stop. *We should always think about what isn't present*, says Hewitt, whose work for the 2018 *International* is a response to the exhibition—as object, site, backdrop, and idea. Until its appearance in the *Dispatch* publication, it lives as a rumor—an in-process negotiation with space, time, and representation.

I am interested in infrastructures that hold data, says Hewitt, who trained as a sculptor and sees the construction of images as corollary to the shaping of perception and ideas. *Riffs on Real Time* (2006–2009) is a series of ten photographs of books, snapshots, and assorted papers elegantly stacked on the studio floor. Like Dutch still-life paintings (which the artist studied firsthand in Holland), Hewitt's pictures are materially rich and precise renderings. The stacks—strata of data—manifest public and private spheres of black life in America in the 1970s and 1980s: pages from *Ebony* and *Life* magazines, a catalogue of African American quilts, somebody's family photo of a little girl in a backyard, a piece of homework. As photographed, this evidence attests not only to the fragmentary nature of history but also to the delicate and critical act of piecing it together. Intriguingly achronological, Hewitt's nonlinear, ephemeral, and constantly evolving arrangements put pressure on historiographic modes of address. The artist points to the collage of her grandmother's family albums as a vernacular structure for making space.

Anatomy of a Flower is the title of Hewitt's work for the *International*. Necessarily it began with a proposal. *I basically work in a structuralist manner*, she says. The piece is conceived as *three short structural films in the form of still photographs*, which Hewitt further specifies as follows: *Each film consists of 24 photographs*

employing effects like horizontal orientation, dissolve, and jump cuts. I am using the form of the flower as a metaphor for the physical building of the museum or something even more oblique like the pursuit of the connection between contingent aspects of a vast ecosystem.

Each part receives its own filmic treatment: the “panoptic” uses drone footage and surveillance footage to orbit the museum; the second, “pedestrian,” is staged in the exhibition; and the “innermost” derives from working within the museum's library and archive. For Hewitt, these parts correspond to three-point perspective—the rules of representation that locate and fix bodies in space according to Western tradition—a subject central to the larger aims of her work. Hewitt's compositions distinctly lack the diagonal lines that draw the eye into the picture—potentially toward that modern unicorn, the decisive moment. Instead, she constructs strangely flat picture planes, in which we must puzzle our way into images that hold a multiplicity of entry points and exits. She cites 2004 *Carnegie International* artist Harun Farocki's notion of the “operational image,” which does not represent but triangulates, references, and complicates. Given the ubiquity and unreliability of photography in the digital era, what better way to use it to understand the world today?

Hewitt's slightly incongruent participation in the *International* adds a temporal register to the exhibition, which unfolds even after it opens through her work in the *Dispatch*. This is not her first foray into time-based media. *Untitled (Structures)* (2012), filmed at sites connected to the civil rights movement, is a collaboration with her friend the cinematographer Bradford Young—whose 2017 commission for Carnegie Museum of Art's Hillman Photography Initiative produced a video installation based on the Teenie Harris Archive.