PRESSBOOK

Leslie HEWITT

Art in America

November 2016

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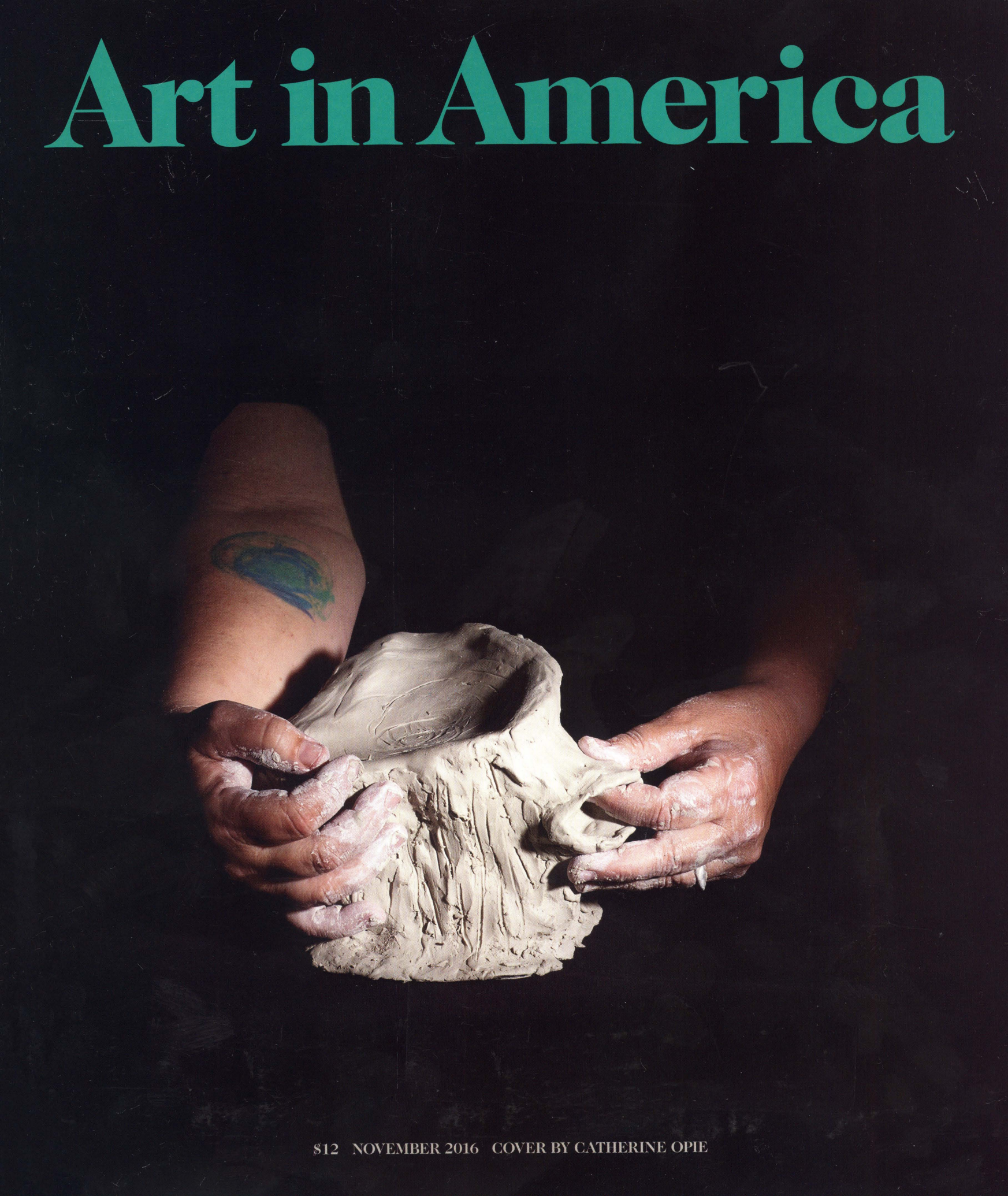

$12 NOVEMBER 2016 COVER BY CATHERINE OPIE

book by China Miéville, the British-American sci-fi novelist and social activist. As in Miéville's book, the story in the video is set in a city that has split into two distinct peoples and nations, segregated from each other less by physical barriers than by their conformity to laws commanding them to willfully "unsee" each other. By mapping this fictional bifurcation onto the geography of an American city whose recent racial turmoil stems from generations of inequality, Ghani opens viewers' eyes to an all-too-real contemporary dystopia.

Ghani's two city-states appear to correspond to the predominantly white, relatively affluent southern portion of St. Louis on the one hand, and the primarily black, economically distressed northern section of the city on the other. At various moments these separate worlds bleed into each other through a series of dissolves and visual effects. We are reminded in these instances that prosperity in this country is sustained by its obverse—that beautiful tree-lined streets are products of the same structures that contribute to urban blight.

Laney, as narrator, lays out a story of an aborted revolution waged by a small group of citizens capable of clandestinely slipping from one city to the other. Laney was among several artist-activists who marched a mirrored casket through the streets of Ferguson at the height of the 2014 protests. Ghani pays homage to this event by representing the dead character's body in her video as a shattered mirror lying in an abandoned construction site.

A series of photographs from Ghani's project helped connect the images in the fictional world of the video to the real-life history of the metropolis. One image shows a desolate street in Kinloch, a traditionally black suburb bordering Ferguson whose population plummeted in the 1980s after the City of St. Louis began buying out private homes there as part of a noise-abatement plan for the nearby airport. Another depicts the urban forest that has grown over the former site of Pruitt-Igoe, the notorious housing project whose demolition in the 1970s, after years of neglect, became emblematic of the supposed failures of subsidized housing programs. Like the street in Ferguson where Michael Brown's corpse was left to fester for hours in the afternoon sun, these are spaces haunted by the victims of systemic racial violence and disregard.

—David Markus

View of Leslie Hewitt's untitled installation, 2012, sheet metal with industrial paint; at SculptureCenter.

LESLIE HEWITT
SculptureCenter

On view in Leslie Hewitt's recent exhibition at SculptureCenter, an untitled 2012 installation consists of white metal sheets that have been dog-eared or otherwise folded. The sheet-metal sculptures—some standing upright, some laid on the ground with a single part bent upward—appear to alternate between three and two dimensions as viewers circumnavigate them and look from different angles.

Such ambiguity also appears in the photographic and moving-image works included in the show. The diptych *Where Paths Meet, Turn Away, Then Align Again (Distilled moment from over 73 hours of viewing the Civil Rights era archive at The Menil Collection in Houston, Texas)*, 2012, consists of two lithographic prints of similar images—showing the back of a woman's head amid a crowd, partially blocked by a man's shoulder. To make the images, Hewitt used a micro lens to zoom in to a historical photograph (or perhaps two of them; it's unclear whether the images are from the same shot) from the Menil archive cited in the title, abstracting the source material into constellations of pixels. Whether a parade or a protest, the context is illegible. If not for the title, we might never connect Hewitt's quietly banal depictions with the Civil Rights Movement. Offering a counterpoint to photojournalistic images that privilege spectacular scenes and iconic figures over the day-to-day workings of ordinary activists, Hewitt asks us to reconsider histories of 1960s black life and protest.

The Menil archive—which contains photographs by Bruce Davidson, Danny Lyon, and Charles Moore—extends the legacy of the de Menil family's support for civil rights causes, which included donations to a Black Panther chapter in Houston and sponsorship of "The De Luxe Show" (1971), the first of several racially integrated art exhibitions that appeared at the time in response to black artists' protests. Re-presenting fragments of these pictures alongside works like her stark sheet-metal sculptures, Hewitt implies that late modernism, Minimalism, and 1960s political consciousness were not just concurrent but were deeply imbricated.

Lately, Hewitt has been drawn to filmmaking, collaborating with cinematographer Bradford Young. Their three-channel video projection *Stills* (2015), on view in the exhibition, brings together various types of imagery: depictions of grids of glass windows and distant skyscrapers, shots of the infamous "Shirley" cards used to calibrate color and skin tone (favoring white skin), a sequence of introductory film leader displaying a ticking numeric countdown. Some of the material was drawn from the work of director Haile Gerima, a prominent member of the LA Rebellion, a loose movement of black filmmakers and documentarians that arose in the late 1960s. *Stills* references its own materiality as it oscillates between sharply focused and tactile, flickering footage. Hewitt and Young present perfectly composed still-like shots, only to

break the illusion with quick flashes and fades, undermining the desire for coherent meaning.

The duo's *Untitled (Structures)*, 2012, presents extended interludes of everyday moments. The two unsynchronized channels divide attention between pairs of shots—held for roughly fifteen seconds each—filmed at sites significant to black American history, such as Memphis's Beale Street Baptist Church and Chicago's Johnson Publishing Headquarters. In the stillness of each shot, it takes a moment to notice miniscule movements that occur—blinds softly rustling in a window, a man climbing slowly up a flight of stairs. Strip away the typical framing stories, nostalgia, and easy clichés of the Civil Rights Movement and the Great Migration, Hewitt seems to say, and you will find the promise of alternate narratives, the quietly resilient in the utterly mundane.

—Abbe Schriber

CAITLIN KEOGH
Bortolami

Who edits the *Harper's Magazine* "Readings" section? The publication's masthead doesn't say, but I like to imagine that it's a single person with exquisite and wide-ranging taste. He or she collects an array of literary clippings under the subheadings "Dialogue," "Prescriptions," "Fiction," and, ironically, "Confession," among others. The juxtapositions—an excerpt from a romance novel paired with a portion of a court transcript, for example—don't necessarily convey an opinion; rather, the editor's selections reflect a sharp wit and knowing attitude about various cultural strata.

Caitlin Keogh's exhibition "Loose Ankles," a selection of large paintings and mixed-medium works on mirror, shared this sensibility, as it seemed to give visual form to a rich, eclectic imagination. *Repeating Autobiography* (all works 2016) depicts four copies of Christian Dior's autobiography, *Dior by Dior*. Rendered in shallow space on the seven-foot-tall canvas, the books appear to be falling vertically with their front and back covers flapping open to reveal salmon-colored endpapers. Keogh's bold, graphic style shares much with the visual vocabulary of sign painting and wallpaper, but *Repeating Autobiography* also feels dynamic, with the serial arrangement of the books resembling the structure of a filmstrip. Distributed across the painting, illusionistic rips appear to open up the picture's surface, revealing irregular shapes in tarnished gold. (The smaller-scale works on mirror repeat this effect, but with actual torn sheets of paper, painted with fragments of the Dior text, covering the reflective supports.) The trompe l'oeil quality underscores the illusionism inherent in representational painting, and, given the work's literary theme, alludes to the tropes and conventions that operate in autobiography to convey a sense of self.

Headless Woman with Parrot is a riff on Courbet's 1866 succès de scandale, *Woman with a Parrot*. In Keogh's adaptation, which is made to appear like a woven composition, Courbet's woman reaching toward a parrot has become a headless gray female mannequin, its body cut in half at the torso. Magritte's *The Red Model* (1936) seems to have inspired the exhibition's title work, *Loose Ankles*. A pair of severed feet wearing mustard-colored high heels are tied to a hand smoking a cigarette. Smoke wafts and lingers, giving the painting a listless air, incredulous and bemused.

In *Renaissance Painting*, Keogh takes on a wider swath of art history. Despite the title, the painting seems most closely related to self-portraits by Frida Kahlo. Organs adorn a piece of armor engineered to accommodate a female bust. Most of the anatomical parts are blown-up fragments of other organs (e.g., the bronchi from the lungs). Keogh's depictions, with the organs outlined in black, hover between biomorphic abstraction and precise scientific renderings. Here, she brings the inside out, creating a tension between vulnerability and protection. Like many of the canvases on view, *Renaissance Painting* reflects her shrewd and generous approach to art history, and her penchant for engaging complex and often difficult representations of femininity. Just as an erudite *Harper's* editor pores through texts with an eye honed for "Readings," Keogh presented a group of images that feel like the visual equivalent of a salon conversation.

—Sam Korman

Caitlin Keogh: *Headless Woman with Parrot*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 96 by 72 inches; at Bortolami.

ANTEK WALCZAK
Real Fine Arts

Antek Walczak's pre-9/11 New York is gray: a flat, bored expanse of exploitation. He captures Paris in the same dull palette, but it's New York, with its schizophrenic capitalism, that set the tone for Walczak's "Films 1998–2000," a two-and-a-half-hour looped screening at Real Fine Arts. In 1994, Walczak (b. 1968) cofounded the downtown New York art/fashion collective the Bernadette Corporation, whose theory-driven interest in the clothing industry—like that of its precursor, Art Club 2000