

**PRESSBOOK**

Leslie HEWITT

*The Brooklyn Rail*

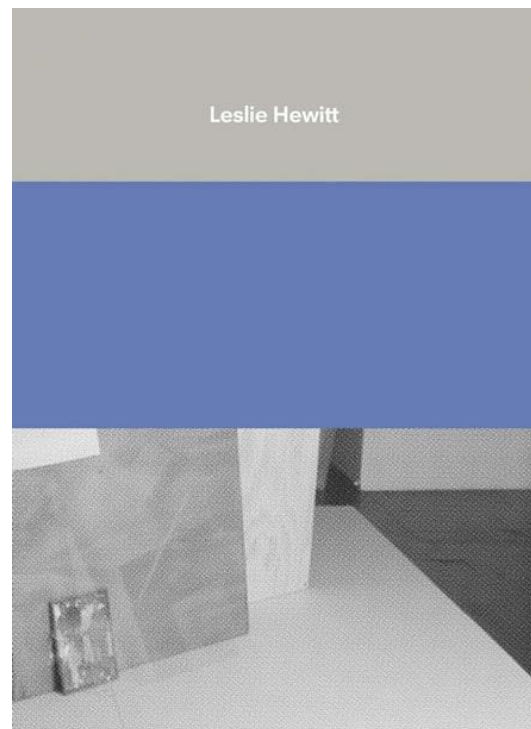
*March 2019*

# Leslie Hewitt

by Megan N. Liberty

**Leslie Hewitt**  
**Ed. Cay Sophie Rabinowitz**  
**(Osmos, 2019)**

Leslie Hewitt's photography blurs the lines between photo and sculpture, exploring the intersection of history, memory, and archive. Her work destabilizes our assumptions about images and objects, treating photographs as sculpture, presenting family photos, book covers, and stacks of magazines in ways that highlight them as objects, a fact often forgotten in the digital age when images exist mainly on screens. "Hewitt stresses the importance of objects we may take for granted, like old magazines, family snapshots, or other possessions found in family members' houses, even if they offer up little more than abstract forms," scholar Nana Adusei-Poku notes in Hewitt's first survey monograph, published by Osmos. "Every object, every color is a reminder of the dynamic ways in which history is told in our surroundings." In her "Midday" series, Hewitt plays with the tradition of still lifes, but her series of photographs showcase arrangements of a single orange, square wood panel, piece of blue-and-white fabric, paperback book—Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1965), his story of coming of age in Harlem, an iconic text for Civil Rights activists—and scattered snapshots of Harlem, the Netherlands, and Rotterdam. These items are staged resting on the floor against the wall. She then in turn places these large photographs in plain wooden frames installed on the floor against the wall like the objects she depicts—a clever trompe-l'œil that reminds us we are looking at a thing, not just an image of things.



It is no surprise then, that her approach to photobooks would be similarly sculptural. Her first survey monograph, self-titled, is a slender lushly illustrated tome that reimagines both a photobook and survey catalogue. The cover is textured, with a raised light purple stripe that runs horizontally across the front, spine, and verso, corresponding to the color motif used throughout the book. It is especially attuned to sequence—a quality that all good photobooks take advantage of—putting series of installation and artwork images with other aspects of Hewitt's practice, including her collaborations, essays on the work of her colleagues, and lectures. The book follows a chronological history of her practice from 2004 – 2018 told visually through these spreads with Hewitt's remarks interspersed throughout, illuminating her thinking during the time, in addition to essays by scholars and art historians Adusei-Poku and Lisa Lee, and an interview between Hewitt and curator Eva Respini.

In the earliest iteration of her "Riffs on Real Time" series (2002 – 2005), Hewitt created ten photographs composed of three stacked objects: a small photo from her own personal archive, a larger piece of printed ephemera—such as a magazine, book, or sheet of paper—and the grainy wood or colored carpet of the floor. The first exhibition history chapter includes a detail of (*9 of 10*) from this first series showing a snapshot of a boat's wake, a pencil drawing, and a bright blue carpet. In the book, the work is presented unframed against a light purple page, giving it weight and separation from the object we are holding. Next to it, Hewitt explains:

I work with wood not only for its structural properties and its significance in our daily built environment, but also for its spatial and totalizing role as a living organism that supports our need to breathe fresh air. In this early "Riffs on Real Time" photograph, I paired pencil drawings of the properties of wood in a school primer from 1962 with waves in the ocean. Juxtapositions provide for the poetic register of free association.

The book seems to follow this method of free associations. The drawing referencing her work with wood is succeeded by installation shots of shows that include actual wood constructions—like the "Make it Plain" and "Midday" series—from LAXART in 2006, Artists Space in 2007, and the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2008. Wood is thus a connecting thread between these works. And following the final installation image from the Studio Museum is a section about her 2007 – 2008 residency at the museum. "Riffs on Real

Time" owes much to music, the title suggesting the moments of improvisation in jazz music. Likewise, the book's sequence similarly flows in these loosely connected sections.

Some of the more interesting parts of the book are when it departs from Hewitt's artwork per-say, as with the "Dialogues" section towards the end of the book. This contains the artist's comments on collaborations, which include two public conversations, one dialogue between Hewitt and urbanist Leah Meisterlin, the other less obviously a dialogue, a lecture she gave at Dia on Carl Andre as part of the "Artists on Artists" series. Other dialogues in the section consist of a contribution to fellow artist Matt Keegan's book and a broadsheet she made with artists and gallerist Esperanza Rosales. This broadens the idea of a dialogue, much as she puts materials in conversation with each other in ways that expand our understanding of each part in the whole, her "Dialogues" section makes us rethink how conversation, presentation, and collaboration fit into an artist's larger practice.

Fittingly, this chapter is followed by the only interview in the book, a conversation with Hewitt and Respini. Hewitt tells Respini, "For me, moving in the liminal space, the threshold between the haptic and the virtual, or the sculptural and the optical, grants the most latitude to be expressive today." Books also exist in liminal space, as visual and tactile objects. *Leslie Hewitt* beautifully takes full advantage of all these aspects, playing with the visual sequencing of book pages and the textures and associations of the form, a form that is referenced visually and metaphorically in the artwork that fills the pages.