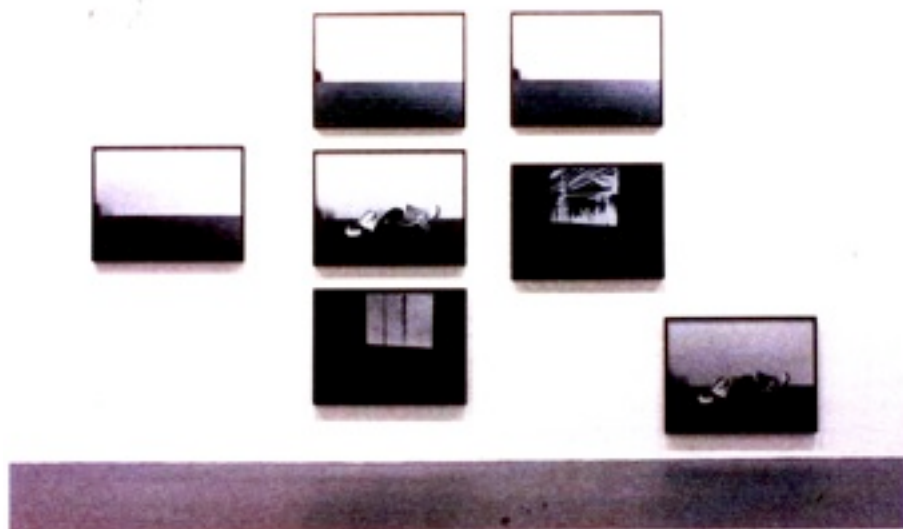


Art Review:

Summer 2010

REVIEWS: USA



Leslie Hewitt

On Beauty, Objects, and Dissonance

The Kitchen, New York

27 March – 10 May

Leslie Hewitt, like many of her peers, has delved into the legacy of the civil rights and Black Power movements in her photographs and sculptures, but she has done so obliquely, through a challenging practice that subverts collective history through recourse to individual experience, blurs boundaries between photography and sculpture, and, as the title of her solo at the Kitchen indicates, skilfully balances aesthetic composure with the indeterminacies of time and memory.

Like their musical equivalents, the works in the series *Riffs on Real Time* (2008) are improvisations on a standard, in this case iconic photographs from recent African-American history. Each photograph shows a fading snapshot placed on top of a suitably antique artefact – a weathered book; a page from an old magazine – arranged on a hardwood floor. Here, personal and public archives are intertwined, the former filling in and adding texture to the latter. For example, in the series' final image, a colour snapshot of a forested hillside obscures most of the face and body of a suited man on his way to the office, picturing his interior state and privileging it over his public role. Though these banal everyday images are visually embedded in and framed by the collective, they assert their primacy in the construction of history.

Conceptually driven, Hewitt often works in series. *Midday* (2009) consists of large-scale photographs of temporary arrangements of objects, books and photographs presented inside sculptural wooden frames that, in sitting on the floor and leaning against the wall, echo elements within the images themselves. In *Untitled (Connecting)* (2009), a square wood panel leans against a wall, propped up on a stack of two paperbacks, one of which is a worn copy of Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1965), an autobiographical coming-of-age tale set in mid-twentieth-century Harlem. An orange sits on the floor in front of it, a wry nod to Dutch still lifes and the neighbourhood's namesake town. *Untitled (Seems to Be Necessary)* (2009) repeats these elements with subtle shifts in position and some additions: the spines of both books face away, and two photographs and a swathe of teal-striped cloth à la Daniel Buren are positioned above the panel, the latter's colour repeated on the cover of another paperback wedged behind it. As the images vacillate between appearing carefully composed and completely incidental, so do our attempts to draw meanings from them.

Also inspired by Brown's book, the dual-channel video projection *Untitled (Level)* (2010) mines Harlem's streets for their historical traces through pairs of short, silent and almost photographic clips that tremble just slightly with life. Recognisable landmarks are avoided, while an African-American man wearing a period-appropriate grey pageboy cap, often facing away from us, is the only obvious link to the book. But in some pairs, Hewitt varies focus and camera position slightly between the two clips, literally making the scene fuzzy; the site becomes harder to resolve but easier to project into, creating space to recall fading personal memories. *Murtaza Val*