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Shows That Matter: Leslie Hewitt at SculptureCenter By Noelle Bodick — May 16, 2016



Leslie Hewitt's "Untitled," 2012, (installation view).

WHAT: "Leslie Hewitt: Collective Stance"

WHERE: SculptureCenter, 44-19 Purves Street, Long Island City, New York

WHEN: Through August 1

WHY IT MATTERS: Five large sheets of white-coated metal litter the gallery, dog-eared or bent at right angles like incipient origami. But given that photographer **Leslie Hewitt** is their maker, these sculptures may more aptly be compared to undeveloped photographic paper, suggesting still-latent images on their sheeny surfaces. Indeed, the objecthood of printed photographs — their frames, their edges, the materiality of the images — is a feature Hewitt is keenly aware of as an artist. "I was often overwhelmed by the flatness of the photographic image," she wrote in the pamphlet-style catalogue for the show, "how its limits — the geometry of it — are often so very apparent to me."

Hewitt explores these limits, both within the photograph itself and in the broader context of the photographic archive, in two film installations that she created in collaboration with **Bradford Young** (the cinematographer behind Academy Award-winner "Selma") and that appear, along with the five metal sculptures and some recent lithographs, in her new exhibition at **SculptureCenter, in Long Island City**.

In 2010, the Menil Collection invited Hewitt and Young to comb through 230 photographs shot by such Magnum photographers as Elliott Erwitt and Bruce Davidson during the civil rights ferment of the 1960s. In response, the two revisited pivotal locations in the Arkansas Delta, Memphis, and Chicago captured by those lensmen, to film the spots, many now empty but still freighted with historical memory, occasionally inserting actors, like specters, in the frame.

The result is a split-screen video loop of quiet details overlooked in the predominantly white Magnum photographers' original framing. Hewitt and Young's camera zooms in on a luscious square of red carpet at Memphis's First Baptist Church on Beale Street, for instance, and on a patch of gem-like light cast by the stained glass. Elsewhere, it pans through the austere offices of the Universal Life Insurance Company, an African American-owned insurance company in Memphis that was a center of civil rights activism.

These lingering shots are nearly still — intensely immobile — until they aren't, recalling the effect of the last scene of Chris Marker's "La Jetée," 1962. A pair of patient, clasped hands shifts imperceptibly, a strand of hair blows across a woman's face, leaves rustle, and the stillness of history that Hewitt and Young picture unsettles and awakens.

