

QUEENS Chronicle

The mind's eye, meditating on form and memory By Neil Chiragdin, qboro contributor — May 5, 2016



PHOTO BY NEIL CHIRAGDIN

The SculptureCenter's industrial mode makes for a striking contrast with Leslie Hewitt's work "Untitled (Where Paths Meet, Turn Away, Then Align Again)."

Where does memory reside? Is its form confined within our own cognition, or can traces of history be found in the physical world? What does it mean to see with our mind's eye?

These cerebral questions are parried with grace in an elegant exhibition at the SculptureCenter in LIC. A collaboration between artist Leslie Hewitt and cinematographer Bradford Young, "Collective Stance" comprises two film projects, a series of lithographs and a large formation of deceptively minimalist sheet metal sculptures, coated in white.

The sculptures are the first thing to command a visitor's attention upon entering the gallery. Originally outfitted as a trolley repair shop, and later used as a manufacturing center for construction equipment, the SculptureCenter has lofty rafters and an abundance of natural light that lend a surreal aura to Hewitt's "Untitled (Where Paths Meet, Turn Away, Then Align Again)" (2012). Each about the size of a full-grown adult, the five white structures resemble massive sheets of paper, folded here and dog-eared there. In the SculptureCenter's industrial space, these stark white, monolithic pieces can feel like an encounter with the sublime. Walking among them, it is impossible to determine which side of any given piece should be the front or back — or whether they should be thought of as having a front or a back. As the viewer's vantage point changes, so too do the collective shapes of the objects, so that form is in flux. Considered here is the "movement" of the sculptures in conjunction with the motion of the viewer's gaze.

Compelling the viewer to move are a series of Hewitt's photolithographs and, on either side of the space, rooms showing the dual-projected film "Untitled (Structures)" (2012), and the triple-projected "Stills" (2016) — the exhibition's opening serving as the New York premiere for both.

The lithographs, for Hewitt, and the films, for her and Young, serve as reactions to an archive of Civil Rights-era photos at The Menil Collection in Houston. According to Michelle White, Menil Collection curator, "Hewitt and Young began to ask questions about the fragility of memory ... and the slippery subjectivity inherent to the medium of photography."

This is most readily apparent in "Untitled (Structures)," which projects each of its two screens onto perpendicular walls, and, because of the layout of the room, forces viewers to face one of the screens head-on, lest they obstruct other visitors from entering. Beyond this somewhat meta detail, the installation makes clearer allusions to the limits and abilities of photo-capture.

While both videos are perfectly synchronized in their editing, they won't always show the exact same content. The left screen may be surveying a sunny wheat field, while the right depicts an empty highway. Other times, the same shot will appear on both screens, with a difference: church pews, both in and out of focus. Or, a shot of a train, both as it begins and finishes crossing a bridge.

All the while, the camera is notably static, perhaps a nod to the supposed objectivity of its gaze. The most stirring shots of Young's indelible cinematography are of people, who, in between the many building interiors and exteriors spur the viewer to absorb as many emotive details as possible before the next cut. Indeed, the clips are individually fairly short, and impressions can feel like snap judgments, leaving the viewer hungry for more information. Contributing to the dizzying display is the fact that the installation loops without any title cards, so that the viewer must decide his own entry and exit points.

For those in a philosophical mood, "Collective Stance" is an exhibit well worth the visit, so long as you're prepared — questions will only be answered with more questions.

'Collective Stance'

When: Thru Aug. 1, Thu.-Mon., 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

Where: SculptureCenter, 44-19 Purves St., Long Island City

Entry: \$5 suggested donation; \$3 students.

(718) 361-1750, sculpture-center.org