

art # US

Leslie Hewitt BY LORI SALMON

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Leslie Hewitt's "Replica of a Lost Original" is like a sonnet written in elegiac couplets, endlessly rhyming ephemera suspended in time. Installed in Artists Space's project room, Hewitt's first New York solo weighs and strips away mediated ideals of "political and social agency," including their relationship to subjective claims of genuine flux and change.

In *Make It Plain (2 of 5)* (2006), a life-size, ash-wood-framed photograph leans against the wall revealing a methodically arranged assembly of snapshots, books, a box, and copper penny, all replicating striking views. While the imagery tends to appear nostalgic given the attire and warm smiles of their bygone protagonists, the books evoke a sense of stagnant periodicity, signified by Hewitt's erasure of the author's name in one titled *Black Protest*, leaving you to draw your own conclusions. The other keepsakes to be found there all

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hauntingly testify to past and present revolutionary social values.

The same personal/political theme reverberates in *Back Up* (2005), a diptych of identical photographs of a coat rack with dangling hangers, bare of any coats or jackets, standing in front of a panel of children learning their ABCs. On closer inspection, however, the glass frame of one is broken while the other sits pristine in its casing, both together yet eternally apart. Also on view is *How To Read A Moving Black Image* (2007), a collaborative piece with writer Rose Olu Ronke Ojo. Comprising newsprint mounted by pins directly to the wall like a note stuck on a refrigerator door, one reference alludes to a snapshot of a "chubby-cheeked ten-year-old in an orange and green polka dot dress with matching hair barrettes," while elsewhere keynotes are made on an item called "How to Consume a Black Moving Image," bluntly describing a sprinter depicted in a popular beverage ad as having almost Olympian prowess and nobility. What the piece lays bare is an uncontroversial, almost matter-of-fact overcompensation of both innocence and strength, in which the titration of race gets distilled down to an intoxicating beverage. Yet however one responds to these accounts of simple humanity, a bitter aftertaste of vicariance binds to every phrase of joy.

Leslie Hewitt's photographic/poetic rhyming vernacular undoubtedly has unsettling ramifications. Still, the hint of strangeness that always adheres to the quotidian is a sure guide to the misrepresentation at the heart of ideality.