

SAM LEWITT

Sam Lewitt investigates systems of meaning—archives, mediums of communication, and technologies both cutting-edge and obsolete—as they are manifested materially, framed by institutions, and interpreted by subjects.

To this end, Lewitt excavates industrial, commercial, and educational materials to uncover the conditions of their production and their relationship to the context in which they emerged. Although he assumes authorship, the artist views his role more as an editor than a source of ideas; the signs he produces function like indices. His works deploy existent systems as source materials—their elements are displaced and manipulated to provoke signifiatory shifts and interpretive ruptures. In foregrounding the relationship between subjective choice and standardized systems, the works reflect a larger concern for the connection between content's material support and the socially and the historically specific process through which it is interpreted.

In the early work *Paper Series*, Lewitt individually photographed the components of a letterpress and digitally assembled different elements to create configurations that only exist virtually. Viewing and reading are configured in a tense and unreconciled relation in Lewitt's work. In opening up interpretation to conflict-ridden timeframes, he calls attention to “the peculiar faith placed in the transparency of the messages” within the seeming unity of an image. For *Fluid Employment*, included in the 2012 Whitney Biennial, Lewitt recontextualized Ferrofluid—a material comprised of magnetic particles suspended in liquid that is used in the manufacture of computer hard drives, speakers, and military aircraft—within a self-contained evaporation system of magnets and fans that fluctuated continually over the course of the installation.

With circulation at the crux, Lewitt's *Weak Local Lineaments* series are etchings on Pyralux, a copper-clad plastic laminate designed for the manufacture of flexible and ultra-thin circuit boards used in a variety of electronic equipment, including cameras, cellphones, and computers. As either enlarged reproductions of these circuits, or etched lines generated by an optimization algorithm that trace paths around a series of keyword pairings, the works physically submit to the flexible control regime that is encoded into the world of materials to which Pyralux belongs. This includes those from *More Heat Than Light*, where the lineaments take the form of custom-designed flexible copper heating circuits that redirect all of the available electricity in the gallery's lighting grid, affecting the gallery's circulatory system through the transformation of light into heat.

His recent works, *Stranded Assets* and *Dreamboat Dirtblock*, expand his inquiry into metabolism of production and infrastructure. *Stranded Assets* emerges from a set of lamps found in the stairwell of the recently decommissioned Giuseppe Volpi thermoelectric power plant in Venice's industrial port of Marghera. In providing light to the exhibition section, the work shades into an uncanny phantasm of the power plant's namesake figure, Giuseppe Volpi di Misurat, who sought to modernize urban infrastructure as Mussolini's finance minister. *Dreamboat Dirtblock* revisits and puts under pressure the systems examined in his earlier works, dislocating and rendering malleable the systems of meaning yet again. The lamps of *Stranded Assets*, made from pure compressed ash, become compressed blocks of soil extracted from NYC building foundation pits; the heating circuits from *More Heat Than Light* reemerge as the unrealized Norman Bel Geddes boat design; the Cesariano etchings are supplanted by the Assyrian relief etchings, which stand visually identical to the patterns of the heating circuits. Systems are montaged and morphed under a new contextual frame.

What emerges in Lewitt's practice, then, are the conditions of knowability and unknowability, and the potential for constellations of graphic and plastic material to bring them into relief. In his view, the contents of an exhibition act as examples of something that have no given conditions of knowability, but rather, can generate them retrospectively. Heeding Marcel Broodthaers, who stated, “Fiction enables you to grasp both reality and at the same time those things that reality hides,” Lewitt seeks to inflect a knowledge of reality with elements that reality cannot perceive in its own structure.

Sam Lewitt (b. 1981, Los Angeles) completed the Whitney Independent Study Program in 2005 after receiving his BFA from the School of Visual Arts in 2004. In 2020, Lewitt had a solo exhibition, CURE (the Work), at Z33 – House for Contemporary Art in Hasselt, Belgium. In 2017, his work was presented in VIVA ARTE VIVA, the 57th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale. Lewitt's exhibition More Heat Than Light was on view in 2015 at the CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco, and traveled to the Kunsthalle Basel, and, under the title Less Light Warm Words, to the Swiss Institute, New York. Previously, Lewitt co-organized the exhibition and Materials and Money and Crisis at the MUMOK, Vienna, with Richard Birkett, a show in which he was also included, and drunken walks/cliché/corrosion fatigue/ebay at Miguel Abreu Gallery. His work "Fluid Employment" was exhibited in the 2012 Whitney Biennial. Solo exhibitions dedicated to Lewitt's work have been held at Miguel Abreu Gallery (2020, 2018, 2014, 2011, 2008, 2006), Galerie Buchholz, Berlin and Cologne (2017, 2013, 2011, 2008), Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Düren (2014), and Galleria Franco Soffiantino, Turin (2009, 2007). His work has also appeared in exhibitions at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Museum of Modern Art, Bergen Kunsthall, Secession, La Panacée, The Brno House of Arts, the Pulitzer Foundation, Fridericianum, David Roberts Art Foundation, White Columns, SculptureCenter, MoMA PS1, Artists Space, the Swiss Institute, David Zwirner, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, and Andrew Roth Gallery.

His work is held in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, MUMOK, Vienna, the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, the Aïshti Foundation, Beirut, the Pinault Collection, Fondazione Memmo, Rome, and the Fondation d'Entreprise Galeries Lafayette, Paris, among others. Lewitt was the recipient of the 2018 BMW Open Work commission at the Frieze Art Fair in London, a 2018 Grants to Artists award from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and was also the 2018 Teiger Mentor in the Arts at Cornell University. Fluid Employment, a monograph dedicated to Lewitt's eponymous work, was published in 2013. In 2014, his artist book Template, was published by Three Star Books. Catalogues of his exhibitions CURE (the Work), More Heat Than Light and Stranded Assets were printed in 2022, 2016 and 2017, respectively.