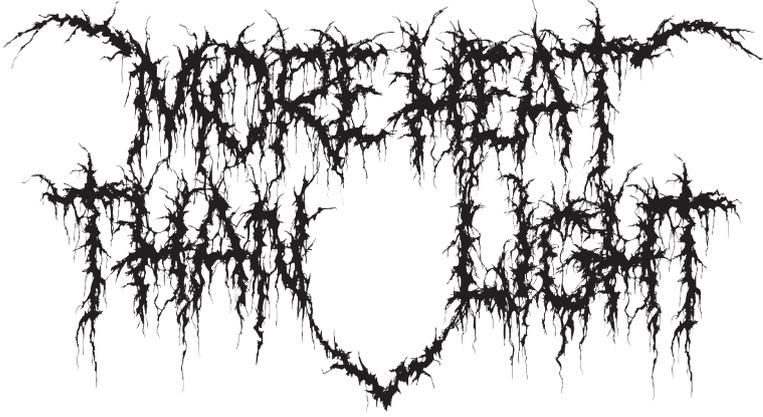


# Sam Lewitt



**1.4. – 29.5. 2016**

**Kunsthalle  
Basel**

Interrogating flows of information and capital through the global economy drives much of Sam Lewitt's oeuvre. Or, you could say, the *currents* of information and capital. As it happens, "currency" and "current" share the same root, from the Latin *currere*, "to run." Money, or currency, doesn't have value if it's not in circulation—in other words, if it's not running around. And an electrical current isn't considered operative if it doesn't flow—in other words, if it isn't running around. The US-American artist's project at Kunsthalle Basel reflects this need to keep moving by redirecting the flow. Literally. By rerouting the electrical current used for lighting to create heat instead, Lewitt redirects and thus disrupts one of the exhibition space's primary operations. **EN**

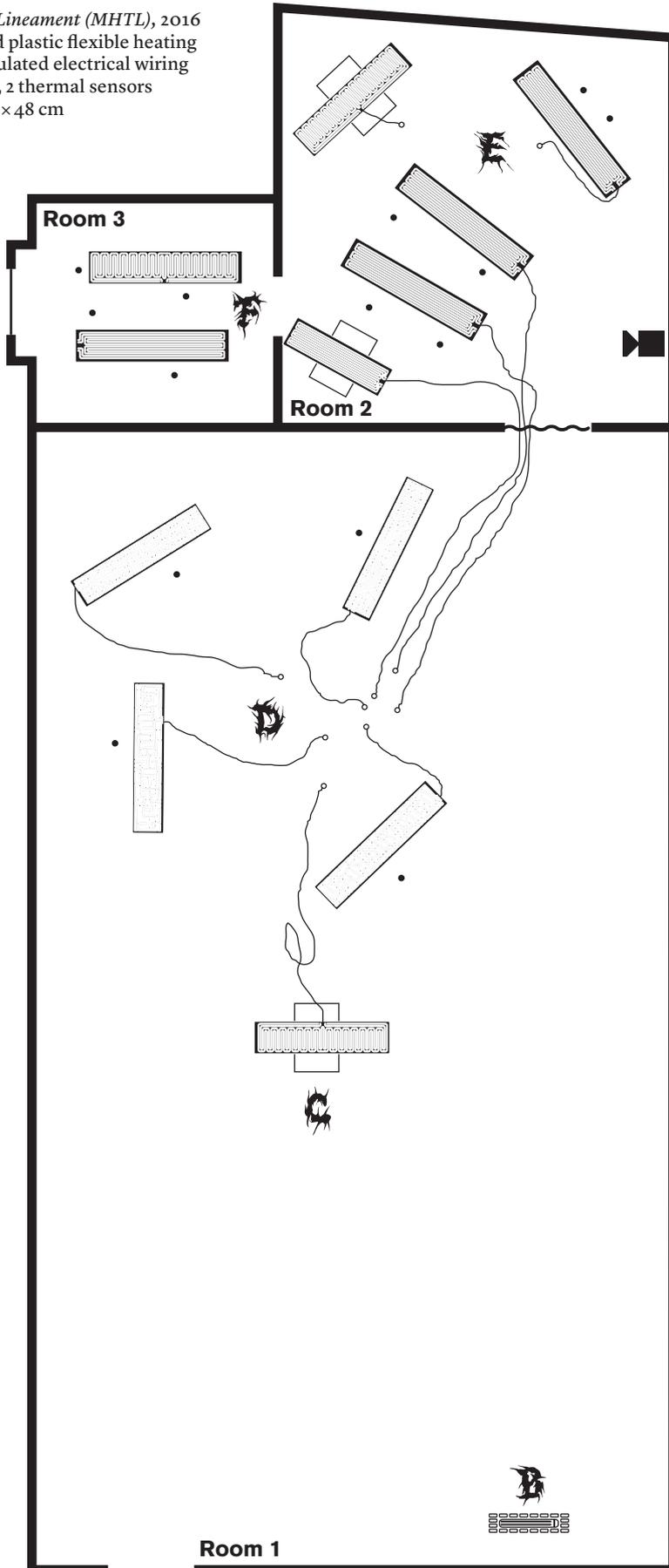
In the upstairs gallery a number of custom-made, flexible, ultrathin heating circuits lie across the floor, some draped over Volkswagen engine blocks. Wires hanging from the ceiling send power from the gallery's lighting grid to these copper-clad plastic (Kapton) heaters. The threshold to the back galleries is enclosed with the type of rubberized curtain that is meant to allow circulation while keeping temperatures contained. To enter the back spaces is to feel the thermal energy more pronouncedly than in the main gallery, where heat diffuses quickly in the cavernous space. Either way, the heaters are not meant to create a radiant blast of heat, nor to hold onto it; they create only as much heat as the institution's lighting grid will "feed" them. Lewitt's title, *More Heat Than Light*, thus announces a material fact of the experience of the show, but the visitor's perception of the heat might be more intellectual (thanks to the sensor readouts) than concretely sensual.

The heaters themselves are altered ready-mades. Lewitt specially fabricated enlarged versions of an existing industrial technology meant to regulate heat in highly controlled environments. Microthin and flexible, they are designed to wrap around or slide between parts in a closed environment and ensure that a certain temperature remains stable, for instance so that a portable computer, an outdoor digital billboard, or a satellite arm in space doesn't get too hot or too cold.



*Weak Local Lineament (MHTL), 2016*  
Copper-clad plastic flexible heating circuits, insulated electrical wiring with fixture, 2 thermal sensors  
Approx. 243 × 48 cm

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*Weak Local Lineament (MHTL), 2016*  
Copper-clad plastic flexible heating circuits, Volkswagen TDI 1.9 engine block, insulated electrical wiring with fixture, 2 thermal sensors  
Heating circuit approx. 243 × 48 cm, engine block approx. 30 × 43 × 34 cm

*Weak Local Lineament (MHTL), 2016*  
Copper-clad plastic flexible heating circuits, Volkswagen TDI 1.9 engine block, insulated electrical wiring with fixture, 2 thermal sensors  
Heating circuit approx. 243 × 48 cm, engine block approx. 30 × 43 × 34 cm



*A Weak Local Lexicon (MHTL), 2016*  
Four Copper-clad plastic flexible heating circuits, insulated electrical wiring with fixture, 8 thermal sensors  
Each approx. 249 × 48 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London



*Weak Local Lineament (MHTL), 2016*  
Copper-clad plastic flexible heating circuit, Volkswagen TDI 1.9 engine block, insulated electrical wiring with fixture, 2 thermal sensors  
Heating circuit approx. 243 × 48 cm, engine block approx. 30 × 43 × 34 cm



*The Cold Parts, 2016*  
Aluminum ingots cast from 7.0L LS7 Chevrolet Corvette engine block, etching on copper-clad plastic  
Dimension variable



*A Weak Local (Vacuum Sealed - Trace Revision 1E), 2016*  
Etching on copper-clad plastic, steel brackets,  
304.8 × 50.8 cm



**Landing**

All works, unless otherwise noted:  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York

The upstairs galleries of Kunsthalle Basel are now a large-scale version of such a controlled space. But here Lewitt's heating circuits draw their power from the lighting grid, disabling the grid's usual function. It might be said that the artist turns off the lights to throw these conditions into view.

After all, what is an exhibition but a site for the presentation and display of selected items before a public? Lewitt doesn't refuse this, but he does disrupt it. By producing a detour in the infrastructure of an institution that is meant to put things *on exhibit*, he misuses its energy resources in order to throw them into relief. Optimal visibility is exchanged for thermal inefficiency.

And as the conditions of the space change—the addition of body heat from visitors, the sun's heat coming in through the skylight, gusts of wind from a child running—so too must the heaters constantly adjust themselves to maintain an even temperature. Thermal sensors extending from the individual circuits provide real-time readings of their output. A thermal camera in the exhibition space records these—but also the heat given off by visitors' bodies. It broadcasts all this on our website [kunsthallebasel.ch](http://kunsthallebasel.ch), thus transmitting real-time, round-the-clock data regarding the institution's energy and labor patterns. Both the thermal sensors and the camera images remind us that visibility and knowability, like flexibility and enclosure, are here at stake.

In another Kunsthalle (Bern), in another time (1969), artist Michael Asher moved all the radiators in the exhibition space to the foyer, rerouting the institution's heat supply and making it "the show." Lewitt's project and his idea of a "weak locality" provide a sly counter to Asher's site-specificity. Whereas the Asher work tied an experience to a specific place and immediate infrastructure, Lewitt attempts to trace the *weakness* of the local, opting instead to subject different venues to the same exercise with the goal of making the experience (or at least the temperature) comparable no matter where you are.

"I like the idea that an artwork can determine its site: really structure it and not just aesthetically activate it," Lewitt has said.

Neither site-specific nor autonomous, his artwork needs a site to be operative, but it is made to be operative anywhere. Moving between the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco, where some of the heating circuits were first shown, a rented Airbnb apartment in New York, and Kunsthalle Basel, it localizes eddies of disorder within each of these different systems by accessing their global orders of flow and circulation. Lewitt thus realizes an artwork that can, following Airbnb's motto, "belong anywhere," but only on the condition that nowhere does it fit precisely and uniquely.

This is not to say that the way these works manifest themselves in their different locales, or the differences in their presentation, don't impact how they're perceived and understood. In the work *Weak Local Lexicon (MHTL)*, the graphic characteristics of Lewitt's sculptures are formed through etched lines generated by an algorithm that measured the most efficient path for lines to be traced around a series of signs or words. Some of these come from twenty-first-century capitalistic mantras such as "belong anywhere," "get connected," "custom profiling," or "flexible control." Others bear a fleeting resemblance to the anachronistic Greco-Roman "fret" decoration found as often on disposable napkins as on the doors of Basel bank vaults. Lewitt saw several of the latter on a site visit, curious about other local institutions' environmental regulation measures. The etched lines manifest an undeniable echo of this kind of decorative patterning, which in the case of the early 20th century strong-rooms suggests an apparent timelessness—that their protected contents are secure, ever the same, across time and space, a bit like the thermal regulation that determines constant conditions from one portable device to another.

The engine blocks over which Lewitt's heaters are draped specifically allude to the (millions of) cars that Volkswagen equipped with software that could detect when they were being emissions tested, and cheat. What was dubbed the "diesel dupe" created a moment of crisis in the seemingly airtight "truth" of technical systems and corporate communications about them. Strange relics that bespeak a scandal as much ideological as it was economic, they act as even stranger pedestals for Lewitt's sculptures.

In a 2012 project for the Whitney Biennial entitled *Fluid Employment*, the artist used ferrofluid, a NASA-developed lubricant used in everything from consumer electronics to military aviation, sliding between a product's internal elements in order to eliminate friction. When the ferrofluid is exposed to air—the moment the structure in which it's working is opened and the fluid can be *seen*—it congeals, ceasing to function. Exposure, then, leads to obsolescence. There is a connection between Lewitt's interest in opening up closed systems and his disruptions of operational flow. Here the flow in the institution's current is momentarily transformed into an unstable thermo-regulating machine. It may be darker inside the exhibition space than it should be, and it may be hotter than you remember from last time, but this is Lewitt's point.

Sam Lewitt was born in 1981 in Los Angeles, USA; he lives and works in New York, USA.

The exhibition is co-organized with the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco.

Thanks to Miguel Abreu Gallery, Simon Baier, Denise and Rolando Benedick, Daniel Buchholz, Pilar Corrias, Peter Currie, Patrick Dreyfus, Hammer Zurich, Anthony Huberman, Alan Longino, Scott Minneman, Christopher Müller, Special Methods, Three Star Books, Thea Westreich and Ethan Wagner

The exhibition is generously supported by Regent Lighting and Roldenfund.

#### GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German

10.4.2016, Sunday, 1 pm

curator's tour, in English and French

26.5.2016, Thursday, 6.30 pm guided tour, in English

#### EDUCATION / PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Children's tour *I Spy with My Little Eye!*

10.4.2016, Sunday, 1 pm and 3 pm

29.5.2016, Sunday, 3 pm

A tour and workshop for children, from 5 - 10 yrs., in German

Kunsthalle Brunch

10.4.2016, Sunday, 10 am - 4 pm

Brunch à discrétion at the

Restaurant Kunsthalle followed by guided

tours for adults and children at 1 pm and 3 pm

through the current exhibitions

Student's tour *Student discount*

28.4.2016, Thursday, 6.30 pm

Guided tour by and for young people interested in art, in German

Symposium with Sam Lewitt: *The Whole Cool System*

27.5.2016, Friday, 10 am - 6 pm,

at eikones NCCR Iconic Criticism,

Rheinsprung 11, 4051 Basel

With Simon Baier, Sebastian Egenhofer,

Devin Fore, Sam Lewitt, Felicity D. Scott,

and André Rottmann, in English,

detailed program at [eikones.ch](http://eikones.ch)

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find an associative selection of publications related to Sam Lewitt and his artistic practice.

More information at [kunsthallebasel.ch](http://kunsthallebasel.ch)