

MIT List Visual Arts Center

Leslie Thornton: Begin Again, Again

October 22, 2021–February 13, 2022

Press Event: October 21, 2021

Thornton's List Center exhibition marks the artist's first US solo museum exhibition and most comprehensive presentation to date.

The exhibition will premiere a new video work, *Hemlock* (2021), as well as a new installation of Thornton's influential cycle *Peggy and Fred in Hell* (1983–2015).



Cambridge, MA, July 14, 2021—This fall, the MIT List Visual Arts Center presents Leslie Thornton's first US solo museum exhibition and most comprehensive presentation to date.

In a career spanning nearly five decades, Leslie Thornton has produced an influential body of work in film and video. Her early encounters with experimental, structuralist, and *cinéma vérité* traditions as a student in the 1970s fueled her iconoclastic take on the moving image and gave shape to her practice of weaving together her own footage and voice with archival film and audio. In part through her forceful and dynamic use of sound, Thornton exposes the limits of language and vision in her works, while acknowledging the ways that language and vision nevertheless remain central to scientific discourse and narrative in general.

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The relationship between technology, power, and violence is an enduring concern for Thornton. In early works, such as *X-TRACTS* (1975), *All Right You Guys* (1976) and *Jennifer, Where Are You?* (1981), Thornton contends with the basic conditions of representation in film and how the camera itself wields power. In *Let Me Count the Ways* (2004–ongoing) and *Cut From Liquid to Snake* (2018), Thornton takes up the United States' history of nuclear warfare—a subject fraught with personal resonance for her, as both her father and grandfather were involved in the Manhattan Project, the top-secret effort that produced the atomic bombs that the U.S. dropped on Japan in the final weeks of World War II. A touchstone of experimental film, *Peggy and Fred in Hell* is a multi-chapter work in film and video that surfaces the Cold War-era anxieties that shaped Thornton's formative years and plumbs the psychological impact of technology in the decades since.

Thornton's recent film *Ground* (2020) embeds the voice of a physicist discussing particle decay within elegant yet foreboding technological landscapes. *Hemlock* (2021), which debuts in this exhibition, complements and builds on *Ground*. In this newly-commissioned two channel video, conversations about particle physics, multi-dimensional universes, and anti-matter overlay shallow-focus shots taken in the woods of New Hampshire that reveal intimate patterns of growth and decomposition.

The exhibition's title, *Begin Again, Again*—borrowed from a line in *Peggy and Fred in Hell*—alludes to human-made cycles of destruction and renewal as well the hallmarks of Thornton's practice: an accumulation and repetition of images and language and a radically open-ended approach to observing, processing, and understanding.

Thornton's exhibition is organized by Natalie Bell, Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

Accompanying the exhibition, Sternberg Press will publish the artist's first monograph in Spring 2022, including contributions by Bell, Erika Balsom, Rosalyn Deutsche, Su Friedrich, Chrissie Iles, Shanay Jhaveri, Dan Kidner, Chris Kraus, Mason Leaver-Yap, James Richards, and Milan Ther.

Leslie Thornton (b. 1951, Knoxville, TN) lives and works in New York. Her work has been exhibited and widely screened internationally at: documenta 12, Kassel; The Whitney Museum of American Art, MoMA PS1, and Artists Space in New York; Tate Modern and Raven Row in London; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève; and at the Rotterdam, Berlin, Buenos Aires, and New York Film Festivals, among many others. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions have taken place at Kunstverein Nürnberg (2020); Malmö Konsthall (2019); Secession, Vienna (2018); Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (2018); as well as Brooklyn Academy of Music (2016). Thornton is the recipient of two Rockefeller Fellowships, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Maya Deren Award for Lifetime Achievement, and the first Alpert Award in the Arts.

[Leslie Thornton: Begin Again, Again](#) is made possible with the support of Fotene & Tom Coté, Audrey & James Foster, Idee German Schoenheimer, Joyce Linde, Cynthia & John Reed, and Sara-Ann & Robert Sanders. This exhibition is also supported by generous donors to the 2020 McDermott Award Gala, hosted by the Council for the Arts at MIT.



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For a full list of events and programs, please visit: <https://listart.mit.edu/events-programs>

Image Credit: Leslie Thornton, *Peggy & Fred in Hell: Folding* (still), 1983–2015, 16mm black-and-white film, video, and digital graphics transferred to HD video, color, sound, 95:00 min. Image courtesy the artist and Rodeo, London / Piraeus.

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