

Baldessari, John. "William Leavitt : Theater Objects." *Artforum* (January 2011), p. 86-87.

Previews

Three times a year *Artforum* looks ahead to the coming season. The following survey previews forty-five shows opening around the world between January and April.

William Leavitt: Theater Objects

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES

March 13–July 3

Curated by Bennett Simpson and Ann Goldstein

WILLIAM LEAVITT IS FINALLY having a retrospective, and in his hometown. There *is* some justice in the world.

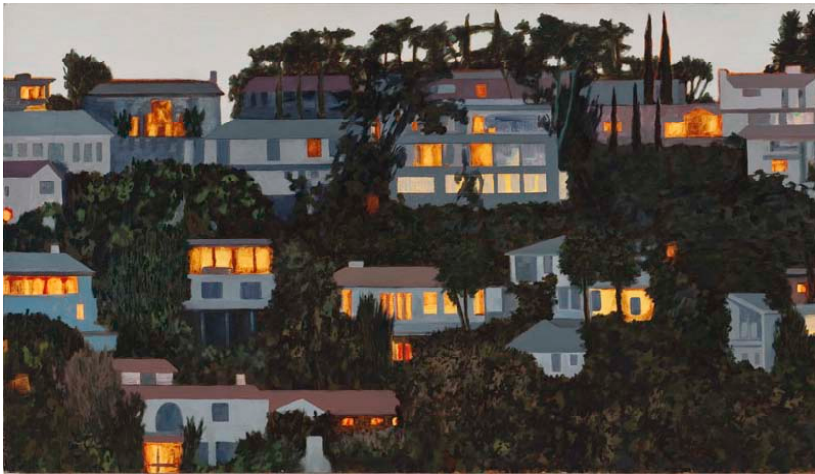
I came to Los Angeles in 1970, when the dominant modes were Ferus Gallery, Light and Space, and plastics. I felt isolated but gradually met a few other *arrière-garde* artists: Bas Jan Ader, Michael Asher, David Askevold, Guy de Cointet, Ger van Elk, Richard Jackson, David Lamelas, Allen Ruppersberg, William Wegman, and Bill Leavitt.

Bill's subjects are almost everything I hate about Los Angeles: patios, sliding glass doors, tract homes, etc. I've always said anything can be art, but he has done what I didn't think possible. He may be the Edward Hopper of Los Angeles. He is a master of the overlooked and inconsequential. Organized by MoCA curator Bennett Simpson and by Ann Goldstein, former MoCA senior curator and now director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, this exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue featuring contributions from the curators, art historian Annette Leddy, and artist-writers Erik Bluhm and Thomas Lawson—providing the kind of comprehensive scholarly overview and examination that is a master's due. (Full disclosure: I am a trustee of the museum.)

My favorite Leavitt work is a theatrical environment he did in the early years of the now defunct Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, in a darkened area of the gallery [*A Proof of Infinity*, 1976]. Upon coming near, you saw a woman seated on a park bench situated on a grassy mound dimly illuminated by a streetlight, staring wistfully into the gloom.

He showed at Metro Pictures in the 1980s; some years later, I was delighted to see a Leavitt painting in Sherrie Levine's loft. *Untarnished* and *uncluttered* are words I employ to describe his vision. I'm a fan.

—John Baldessari



William Leavitt, *Hillside Lights*
(*Incandescent*) (detail), 2004,
oil on canvas, 24 x 60".