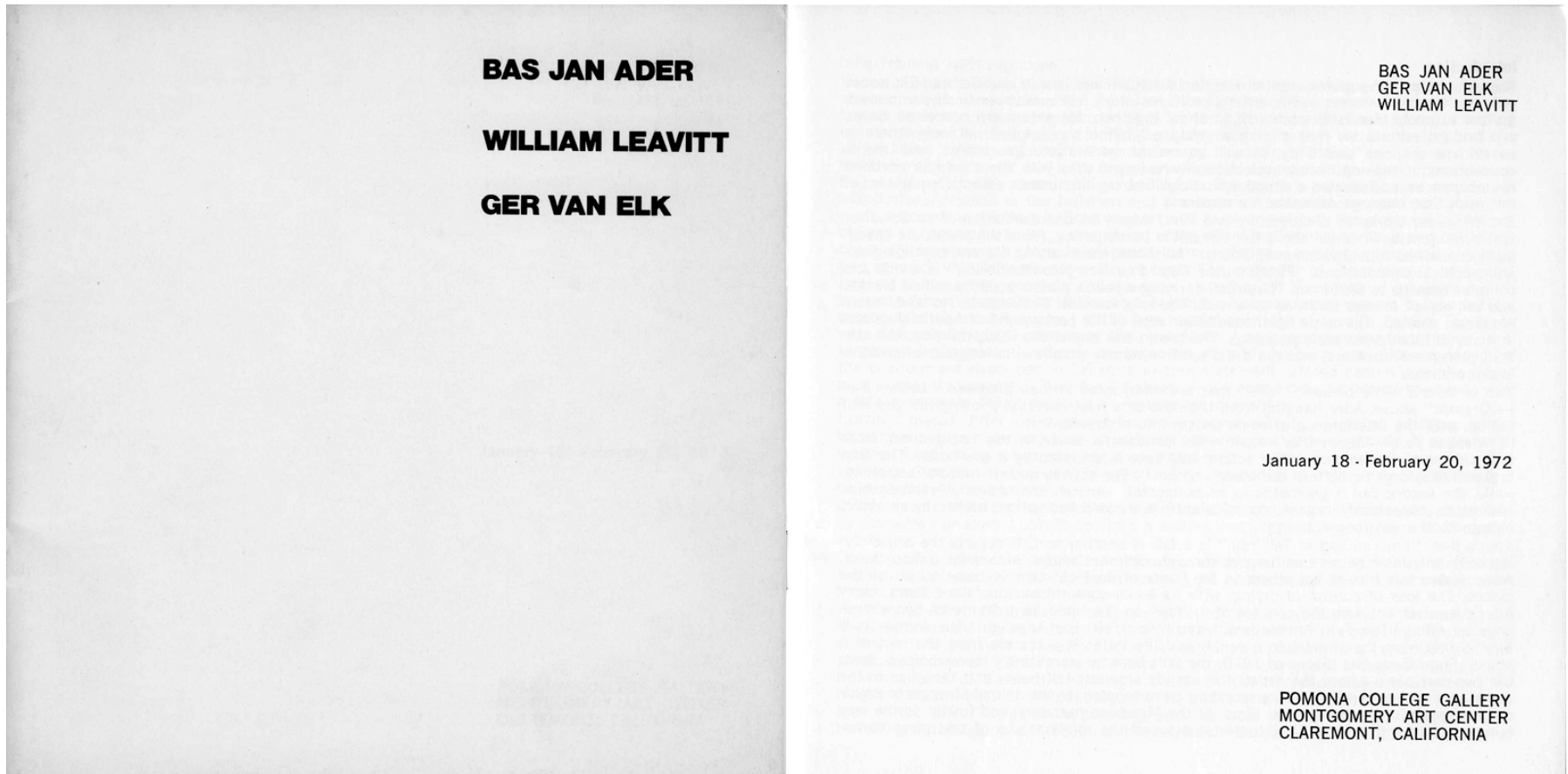


MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY

812 n. robertson boulevard los angeles 90069

Winer, Helene. *Bas Jan Ader, William Leavitt, Ger Van Elk*. Claremont: Pomona College Gallery, 1972.



Introduction

The exhibition of the recent work of Bas Jan Ader, William Leavitt and Ger van Elk issues not only from an interest in the artist's individual work, but more specifically, from their mutual respect, friendship and wish to show together. No externally conceived basis, or standard criteria for determining a group exhibition was applied, although there is an evident common sensibility, as well as certain generation, geographic, and media connections. In making his own selection of who he will show with, the artist has extended his art choices, and created a situation that clarifies or illuminates essential qualities of the work that may not otherwise be apparent.

Bas Jan Ader works in photography and film, largely as documentation of an actual or real time activity in which the artist himself is participating. All of the pieces are specifically concerned with physical or emotional "falls" and their varying literary, psychological, philosophical connotations. "Pitfall on the Road to a New Neo-Plasticism," is a rich and complex homage to Mondrian. The artist, carrying a yellow plastic container, blue blanket and red object, is seen sprawled on a road. The location is in Westkapelle, Holland, where Mondrian painted. The same lighthouse tower seen in the background of Ader's slide was in many of Mondrian's early paintings. The tower, the locale, the road, the title, the random placement of colors, and the artist's fall variously combine to suggest alternative interpretations.

Two of Ader's films present "falls" that are interrupted in their progress. "Broken Fall — Organic" shows Ader hanging from the limb of a tree, eventually losing his grip and falling, with the interference of some brush, into a stream.

In "Broken Fall — Geometric," again with Mondrian's tower in the background, Ader falls sideways on a road in a stiff action; this time interrupted by a saw-horse. The first broken fall is organic both in the visual rhythm of the activity and the natural sequence; while, the second fall is geometric in its horizontal, vertical and diagonal relationships and in its consciously organized, calculated, and controlled action, broken by an object foreign to the environment.

Ader's film, "I'm Too Sad to Tell You," is a fall of another sort. It depicts the artist crying, with only his face seen as he goes through different states of tearful unhappiness. Ader relates this film to his others in the "loss of control" that is basic to all of the pieces. The loss of control of crying, with its facial contortions and falling tears, carry Ader's involvement with the concept of a "fall" to the opposite extreme of two simple physical falls: "The Fall, Amsterdam," and "The Fall, Los Angeles." The former is a bicycle ride from the street into a canal, and the latter is a tumble from the roof of a house. From these two pieces of 1970, the falls become increasingly more complex, from the two-part piece where the artist first stands amongst tall trees, and then lies in the same spot with several of the surrounding trees toppled; to the animal struggle to physically maintain in the broken fall films; to the Mondrian narrative; and finally, to the very human act of crying. Specific interpretations and the relationships of one piece to an-

other remain relatively open.

William Leavitt's works are in the traditional art media of drawings on paper and constructions or arrangements. The works realistically depict fragments of a familiar scene that is from our immediate surroundings or through the media. Each scene or setting is just short of being specific, clarifying exactly what it is that we are seeing and the general time period or location it would occupy. "California Patio," is a life-size reconstruction of an interior wall with a drapery-edged sliding-glass door that opens onto a flag-stone patio, with plants and garden lights. The scene is very believable and rich in associations. Instead of the isolation and displacement establishing a surreal aura, the piece succeeds in allowing a direct rapport and involvement with the proposition. We are obliged to consider a scene, encountered often within its ordinary context, and one which obviously requires the viewer's response for completion. Leavitt has provided a setting and a mood, with no apparent critical intent. The potential of the scene is of honest interest to the artist, and has, like deadpan photography, the sense of straightforward, unmanipulated information. Unlike a photographic likeness, what appears to be a faithful reproduction is actually arrived at through careful deletions of specific details. The three watercolor sketches, "Picturesque Mountain Valley" and accompanying descriptive commentary, depict natural, slightly nostalgia-tinged settings. Each is a different aspect of the environment described in Leavitt's written statement, placed centrally on the paper as an irregular vignette. "Plan for a Ballroom" is a pencil drawing depicting a scene with a totally separate set of personal or literary associations.

Leavitt's pieces differ substantially from the recent activity in realist painting, where technique and minute detail are of primary concern. His work is realistic in appearance without establishing a process-like involvement with how the appearance is achieved. It becomes clear that the concern is with the ideas embodied therein, and not with the fact or problems of representation.

In the reverse of theatre sets or book illustrations, (where the visual material is suggested by the action or story), Leavitt provides a setting that suggests a mood, time and possible action.

Ger van Elk's works are colored photographs, which are direct or indirect art comments. Each of his pieces involve a sophisticated use of photography, that is somewhat unorthodox or at least unusual for art purposes.

Contrary to Ader's photographic documentation, or the usual honesty of the media, van Elk uses color photography to arrive at works that are much like a painting. The internal elements, and behavior of the media, are selected, manipulated, fully controlled, and not particularly natural. "The Return of Pierre Bonnard" is comprised of reproductions of the front and back of Bonnard's painting, "L'Esterel," framed and hinged to a mirror. The hinges allow the back of the painting, with hardware and labels, to be visible at the same time as the mirror image of the painting, and the boat in the reflected image is seen travelling in the opposite direction of the original. The piece is an elaborate humorous

allusion to the recent revival of interest in Bonnard's work.

van Elk's "The Reality of G. Morandi" is a similarly specific visually presented art comment. The insistence that the Italian painter, Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964) had for grouping objects tightly on a shelf and extending the shelf but not the objects to the edge of the painting is the subject of the piece. van Elk has created imaginary continuations of Morandi's shelf with further objects. The two photographic suggestions of what else Morandi had on his shelf are hung on either side of a reproduction of the painting. "The Symmetry of Diplomacy" is a photographic study in formality, in social as well as visual or art terms. The unnaturally rich color, the stiff formal attire, exacting placement and traditional Western symmetry are attended to in every detail, down to the matting and frames. van Elk posed for the two photographs, sitting in a chair to the left and then to the right of the central round table. The piece represents a static situation that is at the same time compositionally reassuring and literally unnatural. van Elk's work becomes an exercise in thorough but decisively controlled visual presentation of an idea. It seems that the humor in the pieces is somehow derived from the neatness with which the idea is visually concluded rather than from the concept itself, which is not necessarily humorous. van Elk's pieces are very precise conversations that could not exist verbally and rely upon a very clear visual language.

Helene Winer
Gallery Director

Bas Jan Ader

Born April 19, 1942, Winschoten, The Netherlands
Lives in Claremont, California

1. Fall, Amsterdam, 1970
Photographs, (8)
2. Fall, Los Angeles, 1970
Photographs, (8)
3. I'm Too Sad to Tell You, 1970-1971
Film, 16mm
4. Nightfall, 1971
Film, 16mm
5. Broken Fall (Geometric), Westkapelle, Holland, 1971
Film, 16mm
6. Broken Fall (Organic), Amsterdamse Bos, Holland, 1971
Film, 16mm
7. Untitled, Sweden, 1971
Color slides (2)
8. Pitfall on the Road to a New Neo-Plasticism, Westkapelle, Holland, 1971
Color Slide

William Leavitt

Born November 29, 1941, Washington, D.C.
Lives in Los Angeles, California

- 1.a,b,c. Picturesque Mountain Valley, 1971
Water color on paper and statement
2. Plan for Ballroom, 1971
Pencil on paper
3. California Patio, 1972
Mixed media construction

Ger van Elk

Born 1941, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Lives in Amsterdam

1. Flower Replacement, 1969-1971
Color photographs
2. The Reality of G. Morandi, 1971
Color photographs
3. The Return of Pierre Bonnard, 1971
Color photographs
4. The Symmetry of Diplomacy, 1971
Color photographs







It is evening in the backyard and garden of a contemporary hillside home in Southern California. There is a swimming pool, a flagstone patio, a redwood fence, some lawn and the usual tropical landscaping of succulents, ferns, leafy plants and flowering shrubs. The beauty of the scene is most evident at this time of day when the combination of lighted pool, soft garden lights, black sky and the lights of surrounding homes comes into play.

On this particular evening a small cocktail party is being held on the patio adjoining the house. The guests are all close friends of the host and hostess. Their presence adds the elements of motion and sound to the setting; the men standing near the edge of the patio engaged in relaxed conversation, while the women sit in a loose circle of garden chairs arranged on the lawn. Now the hostess comes out through the sliding glass door to announce that a light buffet supper is ready inside.