

# GREENE NAFTALI

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## William Leavitt *Sign Language*

May 3<sup>rd</sup> – June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor

William Leavitt is part of a generation of Los Angeles artists integral to the development of Conceptual art in the 1960s and '70s. His multidisciplinary and distinctive body of work, comprising paintings, works on paper, installations, and screenplays, draws largely from the singular Modernist architecture of Southern California, often alienated from its native context and increasingly accompanied by mysterious, futuristic iconography. For his third exhibition at Greene Naftali, Leavitt presents two new series of paintings, each expanding on the artist's conceptual concerns. The series *Robots and Ruins* maintains the temporal and spatial discontinuity that has leant surreal effect to the artist's modernist motifs, here inhabiting a more ambiguous era and site. Another series, twelve paintings, identical in size, challenge conventions of display through the integration of chance in both subject matter and presentation, as Leavitt implements a system of predetermined images and wall arrangements.

*Robots and Ruins* originates from one of Leavitt's screenplays. In the artist's Southern California neighborhood, a modernist home was erected, only to have its construction stalled over the ensuing seven or eight years, giving the site the appearance of a modernist ruin. This impression resulted in a scene in Leavitt's script with the modernist ruin, now inhabited by robots, transposed into a desert setting. The works of *Robots and Ruins* expand on these incongruities, positioning cyborgs and silhouettes laden with circuitry in a barren desert, filled with toppled architecture, CPUs, transformers, and resistors—imagery bearing signs of both the futuristic and the ancient. Leavitt's formal strategies further compound this sense of estrangement and rupture.

In a work done prior to either series and that inspired both, the horizontally oriented *Sign Language* (2018), emphatic gestures of shadowy figures appear to propel shifts across space and scale, variously situating its anonymous characters among classical ruins, industrial storage tanks, and railroad tracks, accompanied by a giant pair of unmoored dice.

For the second series, Leavitt applies a system of chance, at once rigorous and random. After selecting sixty words and objects from J.E. Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols*—the 1958 glossary of archetypes examined for their significance across cultures and disciplines—Leavitt transcribed the terms onto cards, drew every fifth one, and executed a painting of its content. Leavitt then drew from a second set of cards dictating both the wall arrangement of the twelve paintings and how they were to be grouped. Leavitt's images are sourced from the internet, selected for their limited specificity, and isolated, surrounded with pregnant negative space as though awaiting the projection of further context. Associated through their randomly assigned groupings and sequence, the images become increasingly pictographic, illustrative of the instinct to project meaning even onto the entirely incidental.

Lastly, Leavitt presents the installation *Sidereal Time* (2014): a set of pillars, appearing both natural and manmade, support a large, circular rod. Seemingly collaborating to conduct an ambiguous force are a Doric column, a birch tree, a deliberate stack of rocks through which a small stream of water flows, and a fluorescent light enclosed in red curtains. Named for an alternative but still cosmologically based timekeeping system, measured against the stars rather than the sun, *Sidereal Time* demonstrates in three dimensions the temporal rupture of Leavitt's paintings.

William Leavitt lives and works in Los Angeles. Recent solo exhibitions include Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva (2017); Greene Naftali, New York (2016, 2013); and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2011). Leavitt's work is in major public collections including the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, among others.

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