

RECENT ACQUISITIONS IN FOCUS

# LATENT NARRATIVES

This exhibition features multipart photographic works by four contemporary artists: William Leavitt, Liza Ryan, Fazal Sheikh, and Whitney Hubbs. Juxtaposing images of people, places, and things, the works present fragmentary, enigmatic narratives that nonetheless establish a powerful, almost palpable atmosphere or mood. When sequenced by the artist in a specific order, the images recall storyboards used for motion pictures. When excerpted from a larger series, they suggest a stream-of-consciousness meditation on a theme. By providing the visual cues or markers of stories still to be played out, these photographs encourage visitors to participate in completing the narratives.

On view for the first time at the Getty, all the works in the exhibition are recent acquisitions drawn from the Museum's permanent collection. Several were donated or purchased with funds provided by our donors, whom we would like to thank for their generosity.

# WILLIAM LEAVITT

Based in Los Angeles since attending Claremont Graduate School in the mid-1960s, William Leavitt is associated with West Coast Conceptualism—a movement that, like its international counterparts, privileges the concept over the finished object. Employed as a production assistant and set designer in the 1970s and 1980s, he frequently references L.A.'s entertainment industry and vernacular culture in his work, which includes performance, installation, sculpture, painting, and photography.

Many of Leavitt's photographs present works that he created in other media. *Spectral Analysis* is based on his 1977 one-act play of the same name, which featured a man and a woman in conversation within a set furnished with a starburst light fixture, a sofa, a side table with a portable television, and a long beige curtain onto which a rainbow of color bars was projected. Removed in place and time from the performance-installation, the sequence of three photographs distills the original work into pictographic shorthand.

The four photographs in *Innuendo* depict the lobby of an apartment building, a painting of a fountain, a painting of a motel in East L.A., and a circular UFO-like construction made of PVC pipe (the latter two were created by Leavitt). These images provide the loose structure of a narrative that moves unseen actors from one location to the next.

# LIZA RYAN

A native of Virginia, Liza Ryan moved to Los Angeles in the early 1990s to pursue her MFA at California State University, Fullerton. Working primarily in photography and video, she often incorporates references from literature, poetry, and film to introduce additional layers of meaning. By cutting, collaging, and grouping her photographs and installing them in a manner that borrows from sculpture, she establishes evocative associations between multiple images.

Measuring thirty feet in length, *Spill* is a running band of cinematic narrative that alternates images of the human body and nature. Ryan poured india ink onto the surface of the prints, coaxing the pigment into a continuous, organic line that links the twenty-three frames as it wends its way from the primal scream at far left to the intimate touch at right. Movement and stasis, containment and release play off each other, as do passages of delicate pencil drawing in conjunction with the thickly spilled ink. The corner placement of the piece offers the possibility of different points of entry into and departure from the narrative.



# FAZAL SHEIKH

Since graduating from Princeton University in 1987, New York–born photographer Fazal Sheikh has documented displaced communities in Cuba, Brazil, East Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and the Himalayas. Executed in black-and-white with a large-format camera, his photographs typically portray the victims of human-rights violations and social injustices, serving as a call to action.

For the series *Ether*, Sheikh traveled to Varanasi (also known as Benares, Banaras, or Kashi), a city located on the banks of the Ganges River in northern India. Hindu pilgrims bring their deceased to this holy site for cremation, believing that the soul will ascend to heaven and be freed from the eternal cycle of reincarnation.

Rendered in luminous, jewel-like tones, Sheikh's *Ether* photographs (his first images in color) highlight the vulnerability of subjects captured in the still of night or during early morning hours.

Excerpted from the larger series, the four images presented here—a sleeping man, sleeping dogs, a funeral bier, and burning embers—suggest the narrative progression of a pilgrimage. Collectively they can be seen as a meditation on the cyclical nature of life, as well as on the universal yet elusive experience of dreams.



# WHITNEY HUBBS

A native of Los Angeles, Whitney Hubbs received her BFA from the California College of the Arts in San Francisco and her MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her installations of richly detailed gelatin silver prints in various sizes create lyrical but ambiguous juxtapositions. Citing music as an important influence, Hubbs is more interested in establishing a mood than in conveying a clear-cut narrative. Her subject matter includes architectural details, figure studies, and closely cropped views of Southern California's varied landscape.

The five images presented here—a rock formation, a building entry, a set of stairs, a woman crouching in a bed of shrubs, and a baby lying on a blanket—are taken from the series *The Song Itself Is Already a Skip*. The title was inspired by a passage in a text by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) that discusses the oscillation between order and chaos and the possibility of becoming undone. The deep blacks of Hubbs's meticulously printed photographs lend ominous overtones to her dreamlike imagery.





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