

a gentle man becky beasley

june 14 – august 19. 2017

80wse gallery presents *A Gentle Man*, an exhibition by Becky Beasley inspired by a short story by Bernard Malamud. The great problem of the short story, as Bernard Malamud puts it, is “to say everything that must be said and to say it quickly, fleetingly, as though two people had met for a moment in a restaurant, or a railroad station, and one had time only to tell the other they are both human, and, here, this story proves it.”¹

In a time where ceaseless brevity of encounter and communication is a way of life, the short story feels more vital than ever and the short form is at the heart of this exhibition. *A Gentle Man* is a video installation with a linoleum floor and decor that transforms the length of the gallery’s five rooms into a journey, from day to night.

This newly commissioned four-part video portrait of an imaginary man from birth to the present (1940—2017) explores gentleness through its four discreet chapters: *The First Story*; *Me for You*; *In the Rain/MAMA*; *A Man Walking Up Broadway*. The work presents four short films of brief encounters, offering them as minor transgressions (of engagement, responsibility, cliché, profound love), and proposes their transformative potential as choices. Each chapter’s location, along a floor design that traces Broadway through Manhattan, represents, symbolically, a different time of day — morning, afternoon, evening and night — and, emotionally, in an unspecified interior or exterior. In the exterior scenes it is always raining. The floor design sparely maps the space of Bernard Malamud’s early writing, and the short story, ‘Spring Rain’ (1942), which is set around Morningside Heights. Malamud’s free education — from Flatbush to Harlem — is also mapped. British actor Russell Tovey (*Looking*, HBO; *Quantico*, ABC; *Angels in America*, Royal National Theatre, London) narrates.

‘Spring Rain’ — written by the Brooklyn-born Malamud when he was 28 — was not published until 1989, three years after his death, and has received little attention. Malamud’s biographer Philip Davis has confirmed this. Beasley has been fascinated by the story for a decade, and at 80WSE she has taken the opportunity to chase the story in Manhattan itself. ‘Spring Rain’ is a tender picture of interiority and a glimpse into a man’s experience of himself and responses to others. It is also about present-ness and time; a life and an evening flash into clarity for a moment as a result of watching a young

man die at the beginning of the story and, later, whilst walking in the rain with his daughter’s boyfriend.

Using only existing light, the exhibition moves from day-lit front rooms on Washington Square to unlit rear spaces, illuminated here by large video projections. *Kissing Chairs*, designed as a multi-part sculpture by the artist, is presented in each of the rooms of the exhibition for visitors to sit on.

Cartographer Molly Roy’s beautiful map, *Oscillating City* — which charts population density in Manhattan by day and by night — from *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas* (UC Press) by Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Schapiro will be exhibited in the first gallery as a prelude.

1 – Conversations with Malamud, Edited by Lawrence Lasher, p12

Becky Beasley lives and works in St. Leonards-on-Sea in the United Kingdom. She has had solo exhibitions at Towner Gallery (2017), Tate Britain (2012), Spike Island (2012), Leeds City Gallery (2013), Stanley Picker Gallery (2011), and produced solo live projects at Serpentine Pavilion (2010) and South London Gallery (2014). She was shortlisted for the Max Mara Prize in 2009 and the Contemporary Art Society Annual Museum Award in 2014. Her work has been included in major group exhibitions including *Flatland: Narrative Abstractions*, France and Luxembourg (2016—17); *A Change of Heart*, Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles (2016); *Over You, You: 31st Biennial of Graphic Arts*, Slovenia (2015); *Think Twice*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2012); *The Imaginary Museum*, Kunstverein Munich, Germany (2012); *La Carte D’Après Nature*, curated by Thomas Demand, NMNM, Monaco (2010). She graduated with an MFA from the Royal College of Art in 2002. She is represented by Laura Bartlett Gallery, London and Francesca Minini, Milan. *A Gentle Man* is Beasley’s first institutional exhibition in the United States.

80wse Gallery in Washington Square is part of the NYU’s Steinhardt School. The art gallery is a space for dialogue, experimental and cross-disciplinary projects by noted artists and curators, often produced in collaboration with the faculty and students from the department of arts and arts professions.

CODA

Bernard Malamud (April 26, 1914 — March 18, 1986) was a Brooklyn-born American and short-story writer. Along with Saul Bellow and Philip Roth, he was one of the best known American Jewish authors of the 20th century. He studied at Erasmus Hall High School, Flatbush (1928—1932), City College (BA, 1936) and Columbia (MA, 1942). He was president of PEN American Center from 1979 to 1981. Although he granted occasional interviews, Malamud led an intensely private life. In an interview with Joseph Wershba in 1958, Malamud commented that he had not (as yet) made a living from writing, only from his teaching, and that “the books have paid for car repairs, an encyclopedia set for the children, maybe a washing machine.” (*Not Horror but Sadness*, Joseph Wershba (1958) in *Conversations with Malamud*, Ed. Lawrence Lasher, University Press of Mississippi, 1991, p7.)

Erasmus Hall High School located in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn, was one of the oldest (founded 1786), largest (5,000 students) and most Jewish public high schools in America. It has many famous alumni. Founded as Erasmus Hall Academy, the private institution of higher learning was named after scholar Desiderius Erasmus, a Dutch Renaissance humanist. During the 20th century, Brooklyn experienced a rapid growth in population, causing the originally small school to enlarge. The City of New York designated the school as a landmark in 1966, describing the school as one of the oldest secondary schools in the country. Due to poor academic scores, the city closed the school in 1994, turning the building into Erasmus Hall Educational Campus and using it as the location for five separate small schools. (See also ‘The Lost World of Jewish Flatbush’ by Joel Dinerstein in *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas*, Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, University of California Press, 2016, p74-75.)

The City College of the City University of New York (more commonly referred to as City College, CCNY, or City) is a public senior college of the City University of New York (CUNY) in New York City. Located on a hill overlooking Harlem in Manhattan, City College is affectionately known as the “Harvard of the proletariat” and has graduated more Nobel Prize winners than any other public university in the United States. Founded in 1847, City College was the first free public institution of higher education in the United States. It is the oldest of CUNY’s 24 institutions of higher learning, and is considered its flagship college. Other primacies at City College that helped shape the culture of American higher education include the first student government in the nation (Academic Senate, 1867); the first national fraternity to accept members without regard to religion, race, color or creed (Delta Sigma Phi, 1899); the first degree-granting evening program (School of Education, 1907); and, with the objective of racially integrating the college dormitories, “the first general strike at a municipal institution of higher

learning” led by students (1945). In 1976, City College ended its 129-year tradition of free tuition.

PEN American Center (PEN), founded in 1922 and based in New York City at 588 Broadway, works to advance literature, defend free expression, and foster international literary fellowship. In addition to defending persecuted writers, PEN America sponsors public literary programs and forums on current issues, sends prominent authors to inner-city schools to encourage reading and writing, administers literary prizes, offers writing workshops to hundreds of inmates across the country, promotes international literature that might otherwise go unread in the United States, and offers grants and loans to writers facing financial or medical emergencies. PEN is also a member of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), a global network of nongovernmental organizations that monitors free-expression violations worldwide and defends journalists, writers, human-rights activists, and internet users who are persecuted for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Broadway is a road in the U.S. state of New York. Broadway runs from State Street at Bowling Green for 13 mi (21 km) through the borough of Manhattan and 2 mi (3.2 km) through the Bronx, exiting north from the city to run an additional 18 mi (29 km) through the municipalities of Yonkers, Hastings-on-Hudson, Dobbs Ferry, Irvington, and Tarrytown, and terminating north of Sleepy Hollow in Westchester County. It is the oldest north-south main thoroughfare in New York City, dating to the first New Amsterdam settlement, although most of it did not bear its current name until the late 19th century. The name Broadway is the English language literal translation of the Dutch name, Brede weg. Broadway is known widely as the heart of the American theater industry.

Linoleum was invented in 1855 by Englishman Frederick Walton. Walton coined the name linoleum from the Latin words linum, which means flax, and oleum, which means oil. Walton lost a lawsuit in defense of the use of the name linoleum, which he had not trademarked, with the court opining that even if the name had been registered as a trademark, it was by now so widely used that it had become generic, only 14 years after its invention. It is considered to be the first product name to become a generic term. In 1873 the American Linoleum Manufacturing Company opened the first U.S. linoleum factory in a town on Staten Island. The town was named Linoleumville. After the factory closed in 1928, the name was unanimously changed to Travis in 1930.

Linoleum, also called lino, is made by oxidizing linseed oil to form a thick mixture called linoleum cement. The cement is cooled and mixed with pine resin and wood flour to form sheets on a jute backing. Forbo’s linoleum, Marmoleum, is made from 97 percent natural raw materials, 72 percent of which are renewable and will grow back within 10 years. Marmoleum is made with 43 percent recycled content to reduce the need for virgin raw material. Marmoleum is 100 percent biodegradable.

80wse gallery 80 washington square east, new york steinhardt.nyu.edu/80wse hours: 11 — 6 pm tuesday to saturday Fold along this line

A Gentle Man
A film with decor by Becky Beasley, 2017

Prelude
Oscillating City
by cartographer, Molly Roy

From *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas*,
Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Schapiro,
University of California Press, 2016

Chapter 1
Morning, Interior — The First Story
Commissioned video (part 1 of 4), color,
sound, 7:30 min
Man: Peter Beasley
Voice: Russell Tovey

How a man came to engage as a writer
and to write his first published stories /
News of war from Europe / Recording
the quotidian signs of ordinary life.

Text extracted from Robert Giroux's Introduction
to *The People & Uncollected Stories* by Bernard
Malamud, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989

Chapter 2
*Afternoon, Exterior (Spring Rain) —
Me For You*
Commissioned video (part 2 of 4), color,
sound, 7:30 min
Man: Peter Beasley
First voice: Russell Tovey
Second voice: Benjamin Beasley
Music: "Mir sol sein far dir," sung by
Irving Grossman (1931)

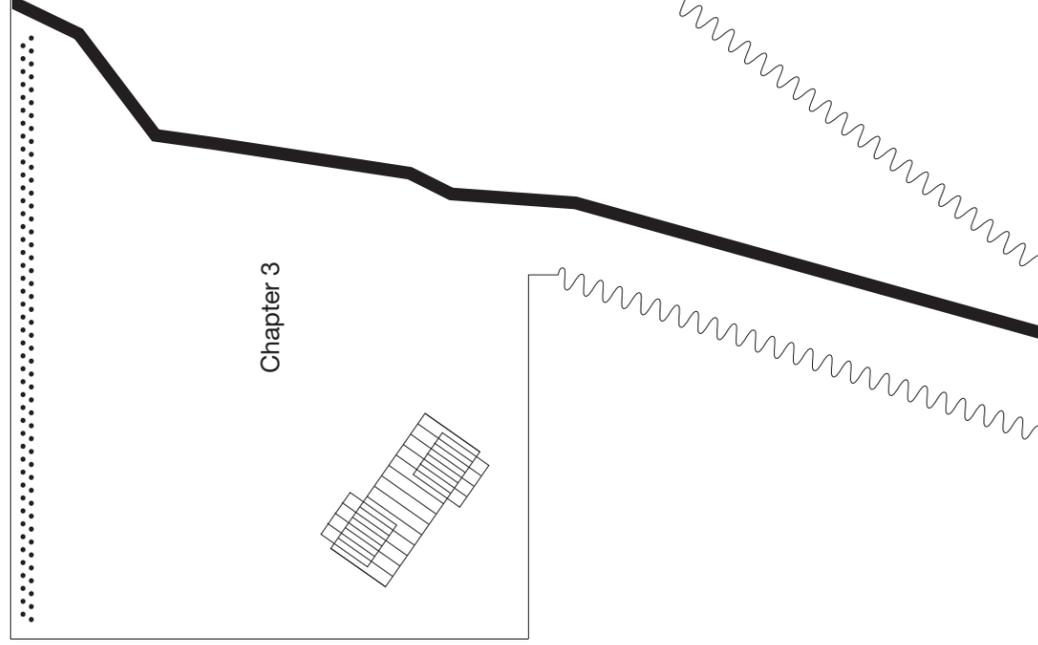
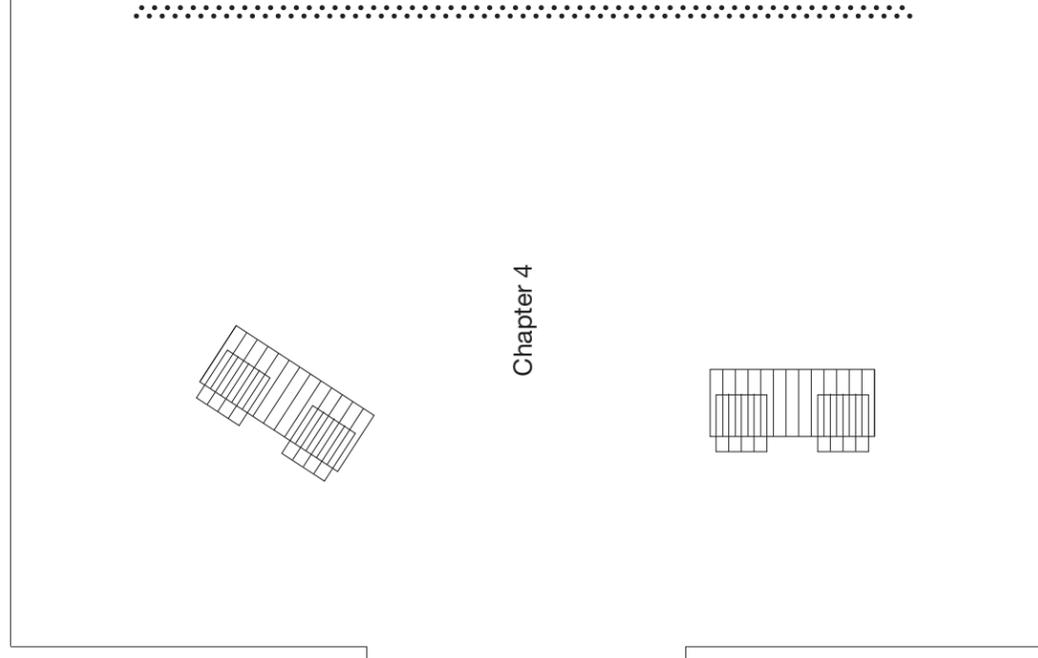
"Mir soll sein far dir," or "Me
for you," is a Yiddish mother's
lament, which Malamud
affectionately relates instead
to his father: "One day during
the Depression, as I was
lying in bed with a heavy cold,
miserable because I had no
job, (my father) came up the
stairs from the store, and after
we had talked a minute, he
took my foot in his hand and
said 'mir soll sein far dir' —
'I'd rather it were I than you.'
I've always remembered that."

Malamud Papers, Harry Ransom
Humanities Research Centre,
University of Austin, Texas (HRC 29.6)

Extract of "Mir sol sein far dir"
translated from Yiddish:

*Every mother prays...
If I could only suffer for you, if only I
could suffer instead of your little bones,
instead of your little teeth, my dear child...
It's hard to forget her tender words:
"If I could suffer for you."*

Chapter 3



Chapter 3

Evening, Interior — In the Rain / MAMA
Commissioned video (part 3 of 4), color,
sound, 7:30 min
Voice: Russell Tovey
Music: Astley's Lament by Mordant
Music (2007)
Text: Extracted from 'Spring Rain'
(1942) by Bernard Malamud

"When Malamud was making notes on
his friend Howard Nemerov's collection
of poems, *The Western Approaches*
(1975), he suddenly sketched out in the
midst of them a little frail poem of his
own. Written more than forty-five years
after her death, it was headed 'In the
rain / MAMA.'"

In the rain / MAMA

Don't go in the rain
Not in the rain, my son, she said
Or it will make you catch a cold
You will get sick
So don't go in the rain.
Mama, when you died
I walked in the rain.

"I walked in the rain" meant that finally
no one could or even should protect
him. To become a free man with even
a normal life meant taking defiant
risks and feeling the pain and the
loneliness that went with them. It felt like
necessary disobedience and yet was
still a cry of lostness."

Bernard Malamud: A Writers Life, Philip Davis,
Oxford University Press, 2010, p7

In the rain / MAMA: the original script can be
found at the Library of Congress: Malamud
Holding LC II 12.14

Chapter 4

*Night, Exterior (spring rain) —
A man walking up Broadway*
Commissioned video (part 4 of 4), color,
sound, 7:30 min
Man: Peter Beasley
Music: Winterreise (The Linden Tree) by
Schubert; Performed by Mark Padmore
& Paul Lewis (2009); Played in reverse

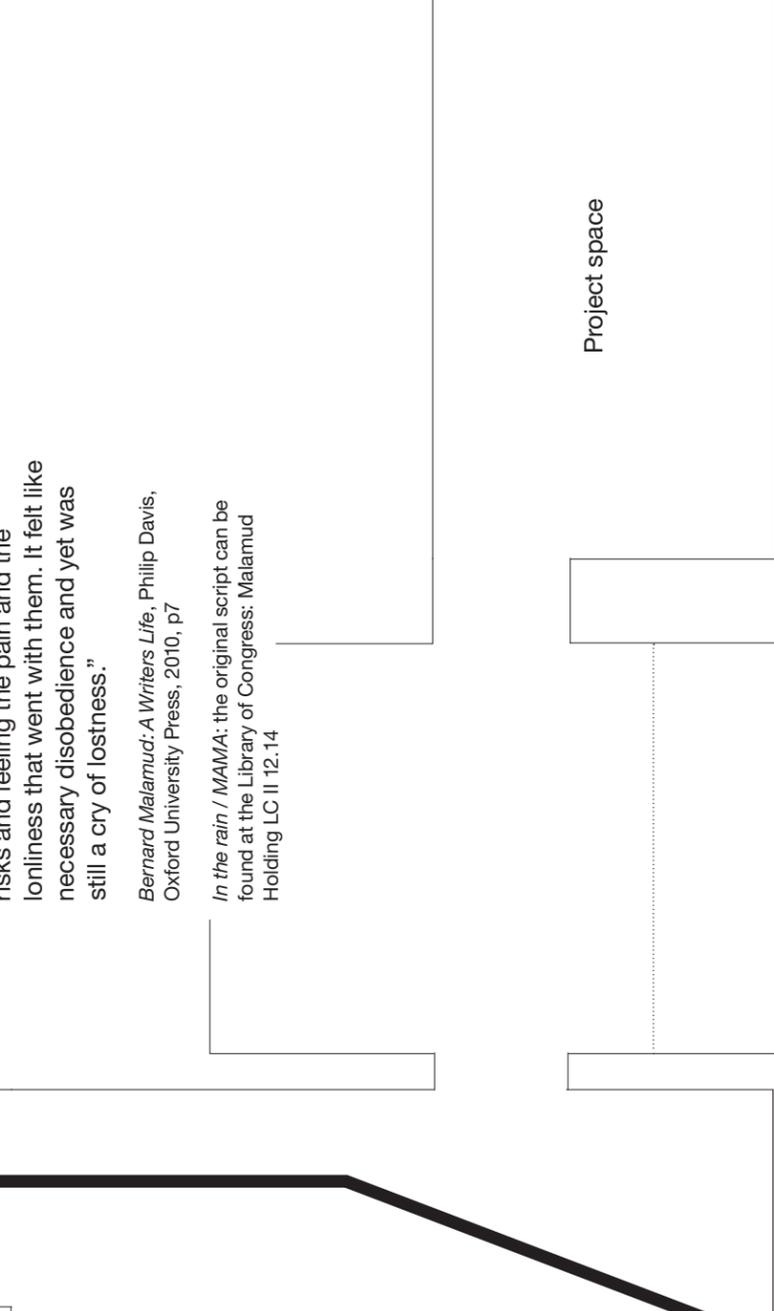
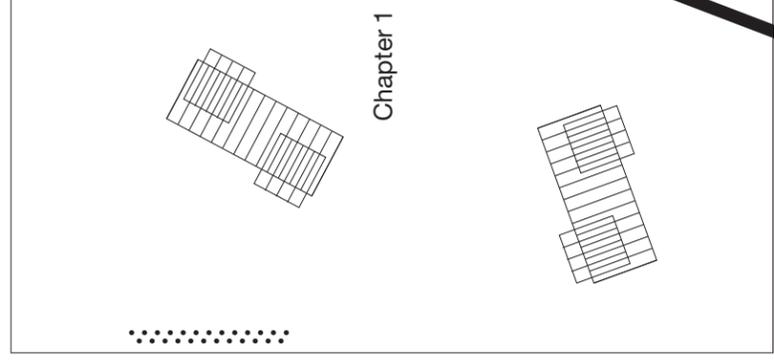
Don't be fragile
Don't be fragile
Don't be fragile
Don't be fragile

A note to himself, written by Bernard
Malamud on Tuesday March 18, 1986,
the day he died.

The original script can be found at the Harry
Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University
of Austin, Texas, Malamud Papers, Box 34 Folder
4 (HRC 34:4)

Décor

Linoeum (black, lilac & yellow)
'Broadway' floor design, six colored
metal 'kissing' benches, four 'sweater-
cushions', and 'Palisades' curtains.



Chapter 1

ENTRANCE

Project space