

- What to See in New York Art Galleries

## This Week : New York Times Art July 20, 2017



An installation view of Becky Beasley's exhibition "A Gentle Man" at 80WSE. Credit...Courtesy of the artist; Benjamin Lozovsky/80WSE Gallery, N.Y.U.

By [Roberta Smith](#)

### BECKY BEASLEY

Through Aug. 19. 80WSE Gallery, 80 Washington Square East, Manhattan; 212-998-5747, [steinhardt.nyu.edu/80wse](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/80wse).

Fans of the spare Joycean short stories of the American writer Bernard Malamud should see "A Gentle Man," the impeccable New York debut of the British artist Becky Beasley at 80WSE Gallery at New York University. So should those who don't know his work. Ms.

Beasley calls her installation piece “a film with décor,” using as its title a description of Malamud (1914-1986) by his longtime editor Robert Giroux. Actually, the work is four short films that make highly particular use of light, color, music and words (all Malamud’s); impinge on one another in thought-out ways; and incorporate telling details and small objects gleaned from the Malamud archives, including to-do lists and notebooks. The films are accompanied by austere wrought-iron benches, linoleum and men’s padded pullovers in a progression of colors.

The piece illuminates the flow between Malamud’s life and his heavily autobiographical fiction, centering on “Spring Rain,” a short story so spare it almost seems flayed, written when Malamud was just 28, but only published three years after his death. It covers slightly more than one day and fully conveys the hobbled life of George Fisher, an older man played here by the British actor Peter Beasley, the artist’s father, whose emotion-filled, rain-spattered face dominates the last film.

A yellow highway line on the floor charts Broadway’s course, and Malamud’s early life and education, through Manhattan to City College. It also leads us from the only light source — 80WSE’s big front window — into darkness, and night, like the story.

Much is clarified and deepened by reading the available printed matter, an explanatory brochure and “Spring Rain” itself. Some may take issue with the need for ancillary information. Initially I did. But it is a great pleasure to read this material in the gentle atmosphere of Ms. Beasley’s beautiful piece, and then walk through it, sitting here or there, occasionally returning to the light to reread.

ROBERTA SMITH