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From OUT OF HAND, a film by Ericka Beckman

Ericka Beckman

INTERVIEWED by

Ardele Lister and Bill Jones

To this date Ericka Beckman's major work has been in super-8 film. Due to her recent prominence she has been cast as a major innovator in that medium, though super-8 for Beckman was an expedient short-stop in lieu of more sophisticated, more expensive visual technology. Still Beckman is a true innovator not only in super-8 but in larger filmic terms. Ericka Beckman is one of the few filmmakers or artists of any sort for that matter, to extricate communicable ideas from age old, and rather badly manhandled story telling devices. The proof of this feat is that when watching Ericka Beckman's films one has the sense of specifically knowing what they are about even through one can't necessarily say what that is. Knowledge is imparted in a new way. The way itself is Beckman's own sense of meaning as residing in actions rather than codified objects. There is a language of movement in which Beckman is most fluent.

The desire to perform a dissection of the conglomerate of form, function, content and idea (what we think of as meaning) is not new. A great amount of cutting up has been done over the past sixty years, but little coherent putting back together. Usually form substitutes for all else and we are left with nothing more than the knowledge that we have shared the same concept of space as the artist.

Through her films Ericka Beckman gives us a new way of perceiving reality as action and thus allows the viewer to codify and make meaning of the material in relation to his or her own experience. Each person views the same film but sees it differently. This is what art is all about.

Bill Jones

BJ: How do you make your films?

EB: I start with drawings. This procedure began in 1974. I was painting from dream imagery, but I found painting terribly restrictive, because it was so minimal and formal. So I began to experiment by using video to essentially form still images of body parts in compositions. Then I photographed the video image.

AL: It was a very private use of video.

EB: Yes, I was developing a personal language and forming meaning within it while performing these pieces privately, but always with the intent of composing images within the frame. I never showed these tapes, but I did photograph them and film them so I could edit in the camera. My work began to divide between photography and film. The photography dropped away and the film stayed.

AL: Do you work directly from the drawings?

EB: The drawings are very important to the way the films look. The style of the drawings changes with each film. They often depict the full narrative that I began with and then I cut back when shooting the film. In *Out of Hand*, for example, I began with a full story of a family in South America who are forced to move from house to house around the periphery of the city. They are never allowed into the central city by the military who keeps them out for political reasons. There is a young boy who sees all the moving around but realizes that things never get any better. Because of their position he has to take things from the authorities who are not necessarily his friends, but he has no other source. Then he goes back to a house that once seemed to offer security and searched back through some of the old offerings.

AL: Why didn't you make that story as you describe it?

EB: No money, no time. So I cut it back and simplified it in a way to fit my means. At first I was only interested in the form the film took. I didn't think ahead to where they might be going. The ideas were small. Now they are large and complex and I have to cut them back which makes for the style of the films.

BJ: What would you do if you had more resources?

EB: It's impossible to say now because the ideas are now coming up reduced, so the time seems to have passed.

AL: What's your next film about?

EB: It's going to be an eight minute film very tied to a musical sound track and based on a particular prop, a large wheel which is something like a ferris wheel. The story is that there is a factory worker on an assembly line who decides to leave and make more of his life. The assembly line becomes a ferris wheel, then the prop wheel with a pole at the center. He begins at the outside of the large wheel and through a number of game structures he passes to the center, mounts the pole and then becomes the pole. It is a simple metaphor for becoming more motivated, more directed, more aligned, through the playful quality of the games and the ferris wheel. It's not intended to be a fantasy though, it's a physical film about his movement. Through movement and action he transforms his spatial situation. It is a simple metaphor acted out, but for me the treatment of the metaphor in making the film is most important.



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