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ERICKA BECKMAN ON FILMMAKING, GAMEPLAY, AND HER BERLIN SHOW

VW (VeneKlasen/Werner) has launched New York-based Ericka Beckman's first solo exhibition in Berlin. The eponymous exhibition features three film installations in addition to a body of drawings and collages that are being shown for the first time. Beckman is best known for her playful yet formally demanding films that challenge traditional aesthetic and cultural values. Mixing games with fairy tales, she creates films that have been described as "hybrids with new rules."

"Ericka Beckman" includes the films *Hiatus* (1999/2015), *Switch Center* (2002), and *Cinderella* (1986) which cover the last thirty years of her production and are tied together by a narrative based on game structures, architecture, and memory. *Tension Building* and other films will be screened in the gallery's cinema.

To find out more about her exhibition at VeneKlasen/Werner in Berlin, BLOUIN ARTINFO got in touch with the artist and asked her a few questions.

Your exhibition at VeneKlasen/Werner features three film installations covering the last thirty years of your practice. What do these three films reveal and convey about your practice during this period?

The works I am showing in the main galleries are examples of my commitment to film as a performance medium, both for the staging of the action in the frame as well as the interaction of live action with animation in the frame. They represent my engagement with all features of the 16mm production including the building of the sets, props, costumes, and the shooting.

I have substituted 'gameplay' for narrative as a means to engage the audience. The formal process of making the films mirror the accident prone actions of my characters in the films, and serve to reinforce the subtext in my films, which include learning through trial by error, the assimilation of new schema and the adaptation to new goals.

The in-camera effects are created during the shooting of the performance before the film is taken to the Lab for processing. Since the alignment of live action and animation is not controlled as it would be in post production, I willingly leave myself open to the chance juxtapositions of these elements, and therefore incorporate more 'play' in my direction on set.

You draw inspiration from an eclectic range of sources in your work including psychology, American sport culture, Hollywood films, and 1960s cartoons. What are the threads that link the sources of inspiration that you use in your work?

My work is involved with deeper processes that are present in the references you mention. Since I use 'gameplay' as a structuring device, I am involved in competition, integrating or challenging a rule based system, action and gesture as a language, integrating the body to a physical space and obstacles, and engaging with the intuitive mind to solve problems.

What was the motivation behind the selection of these three particular films for the VeneKlasen/Werner exhibition and what are the links that bind them together?



I showed these three films at the TATE Modern in a program in 2013 and they played very well with the attendees. They all happen to be the most narrative of my work, as opposed to the six films that are playing in the theater, which includes my most recent film 'Tension Building'.

The narratives are very loosely built along the premise of the 'damsel in distress'. Here we have three protagonists who are unable to retreat or escape from the narrative machine that is imposed on them, who must find a way to clarify the problem, change the direction of the story, or restore their integrity.

The exhibition also includes a body of drawings and collages. What do these works add to the exhibition and how do they link to your film practice?

My films always proceed from research. Instead of writing scripts, I write lyrics or dialogue. Parallel to the development of this spoken text is drawing. I draw in notebooks to work out the time and space of the film; you might say the mise en scene, as well as the props and the choreographic interaction in the space with the characters and the props, whether they are live or models.

Each film has many relevant underlying themes that I can use to illustrate my concepts. It is through drawing that I actually edit out what will not make it into production. If a visual idea, representing some thematic material lasts through successive drawings, it will make it to the filming.

This is your first solo exhibition in Berlin. What do you think your work will express and convey to the Berlin audience and how do you think they will react to, and engage with your works considering the Americentric nature of many of your sources of inspiration?

My work has strong tradition in experimental dance, music and experimental theater from the 70's. I switched from painting to performance when I moved to LA and discovered the work of artists like Chris Burden, Guy de Cointet, the Kipper Kids, and of course the strong So Cal conceptual art and photography. There I developed performance pieces that I would document with a super-8mm camera. It was not until I moved to NYC that I discovered how strongly I was aligned with experimental theater and performance art - Laurie Anderson, Julia Heyward, Robert Wilson, and the Mabou Mines.

I am very happy to be able to bring my work now to Berlin.

I hope to restore a missing link between the time-based work that proceeded me in the 70's with the work of younger artists working today. My generation, the 80's visual artists, is less known for its experimental film or theater, but rather is best known for appropriation in photography, substantiating photography as an art commodity and its music.

I am the artist who has made films alongside the punk filmmakers in NYC in the 80's, and after the structural filmmakers of the 70's. I hope the audience will see the continuum between my work and historic filmmakers that preceded me, like Warhol, Frampton, Sharits, Owen Land, and Amos Poe, and see the break I made from structural filmmakers of the 70's, by incorporating the body and performance. My work shows a strong connection to my peers in music, aka Rhys Chatham, Glenn Branca, and the minimalists that inspired them, Terry Riley and Steve Reich.

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