



ARTFORUM

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ERICKA BECKMAN

Playacting as underdog, messenger, or agente provocatrice, female protagonists rule the screen in this exhibition of Ericka Beckman's films. *Cinderella*, 1986, *Switch Center*, 2002, and *Hiatus*, 1999–2015, are projected large while select drawings and other seminal films are shown in the adjoining galleries and theater. Considered an early member of the Pictures generation who developed a punk, poststructuralist style, Beckman is finally gaining traction.

Her handcrafted props and digital animations of objects rendered in saturated or neon colors beam across the black space of the film set, carry the charming patina of an 8-bit Commodore 64 or Lite-Brite toy. Though the film *Hiatus*—featuring a young woman's adventures in a virtual-reality system—may feel less like *Second Life* and more like laser tag, it was initially developed alongside top computer scientists at NASA and VPL Research and is unique and fascinating to watch for its foresight.

Throughout, goal-oriented characters confront challenges or rules aligned with video games and children's fairy tales. Trial and error, repetitive actions, and a "blotter effect" (as Beckman defines it) of images or shapes appearing and disappearing make way for visual punning in moments of self-consciousness and triumph. Wang, the baby-blue cowboy in *Hiatus*, declares, "A woman shouldn't waste her talents on such a harsh game," as he sexually harasses the female avatar Wanda, steals her power, and attempts to overtake the garden she nourished. Later, Wanda perseveres to win back what she worked so hard to achieve. Despite the dejection, bondage, and continuous erasure that Beckman's heroines face, they maintain a winning humility, humor, and strength that blaze everafter.

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