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MIT List Visual Arts Center



Ericka Beckman, *You the Better* (still), 1983. 16mm film transferred to HD video, color, sound, 32:00 min. Image courtesy the artist. © Ericka Beckman.

Ericka Beckman: Double Reverse

May 24–July 28, 2019

Exhibition opening: May 23, 6:30–8:30pm

Artist talk: June 6, 6:30pm

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Since the mid-1970s, Ericka Beckman (b. 1951, United States; lives and works in New York and Boston) has forged a signature visual language in film, video, installation, and photography. Often shot against black, spatially ambiguous backdrops, her moving image works are structured according to the logic of child's play, games, folklore, or fairy tales, and populated by archetypal characters and toy-like props in bright, primary colors. Throughout her work, Beckman engages profound questions of gender, role-playing, competition, power, and control. *Ericka Beckman: Double Reverse* presents four moving image works that highlight her ongoing efforts to parse foundational relationships between games and gambling, conditions of labor, and the larger structures of capital. In her groundbreaking film *You the Better* (1983), a group of uniformed players (including artists Ashley Bickerton, Tony Conrad, and Keith Sanborn) engage in a series of enigmatic ball games futilely betting and competing against a house that always wins. *Cinderella* (1986) presents a feminist restaging of the titular fairy tale alongside a parallel commentary on the legacy of industrial manufacturing. Rather than toiling in her stepmother's house, Beckman's protagonist is a worker in a metal forge who, after several aborted attempts to woo the prince, decides to strike out on her own.

The artist has produced more recent works on location, rather than in the studio, integrating the spatial politics of industrial and other purpose-built architectures into the films. *Switch Center* (2003) is a kind of post-Soviet, post-industrial ballet shot in a defunct water treatment plant outside Budapest. In *Tension Building* (2016), Beckman relates the recurring design elements of stadium architecture to the pageantry surrounding sporting events and, more broadly, to political ideologies that support competition as spectacle.

Over the last decade, Beckman has shown major films from the 1980s and 90s in installation settings with sculptural elements and theatrical lighting. *Double Reverse* features these installations, providing the first opportunity to more fully survey Beckman's contribution in a US museum.

Ericka Beckman: Double Reverse is organized by Henriette Huldish, Director of Exhibitions and Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

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