



PLAYFUL OBSESSIONS: FILMS BY ERICKA BECKMAN

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8:30pm

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For over four decades Ericka Beckman's work has developed parallel to the growing presence of gaming in our society. Tapping onto the inner workings of games, the rules that define and govern the expected performance of participants, the arbitrary nature of ludic structures, the role of chance, and the increased presence of virtual and computing technologies, Beckman's lavish productions reflect on the tensions between competition and play, scoring and leisure, societal behavior and identity formation.

This program will showcase some of Beckman's most iconic films: *You the Better* (1983) and *Switch Center* (2003) in their luscious analogue form, alongside *Hiatus* (1995/2015) and her most recent production *Reach Capacity* (2020) in equally vibrant digital formats.

The screening is followed by a conversation and Q&A with Ericka Beckman

"Beckman explores connections between games and gambling, the larger structures of capital, as well as the gamification of a culture which has given itself over to scores, challenges, tokens and rewards as a means of control."

—Pamela Reynolds, *wbur*

"Ericka Beckman is the closest to a consensus heroine—her stylistically assured, graphically dynamic, relentlessly go-go work has been included in three consecutive Biennials, as well as the New York Film Festival, and has been reviewed in Art in America, The Millennium Film Journal, and the Village Voice"

—J. Hoberman, *Village Voice*.

"[a] delightful slipperiness of meaning, a mental vertigo induced by the changefulness of contexts and rules in regard to a given word or object."

—Sally Banes, *Millennium Film Journal*

PROGRAM

You the Better (1983) 32 mins

You The Better is a film based on games of chance, and as games such as roulette or craps go, this one is closed—meaning that the player cannot really affect the outcome. A team of uniformed players, led by the artist Ashley Bickerton, performs the mechanics of a game servicing an off-camera betting entity, the "House." Although the game keeps changing and players are swapped out, one thing remains the same: the "House" is hidden and controls the bets, the "chance" of winning is nil. The game, in fact, is not between the players, but rather between the "House" and the "Bettor." —Ericka Beckman [1983]

"More compelling than Monday Night Football, Beckman's *You The Better* situates the viewer as challenger of the "House" or "Establishment." It's a brisk meditation on competition, jealousy, and probability. As one of the protagonists, against all odds, repeatedly wins at the wheel of fortune, his adversaries grow hostile and jealous—the very moods provoked in Beckman's NY Film Festival audience, who were busy feigning not to understand. Beckman's was the one truly vanguard achievement in the Festival, and the only analysis and indictment of the competition that keeps the wheel of fortune spinning. Beckman made an art movie, when the audience clamored for Art." —Carrie Rickey, *Artforum Magazine*

Hiatus (1995/2015) 21 mins

Hiatus is a 20-minute experimental narrative film about a young woman who plays *Hiatus*, an on-line interactive "identity" game. Propelled through action by her Go-Go cowgirl construct Wanda and powered by a computer corset that stores her programs in a garden interface, Maid meets Wang, a powerful take-over artist. She must learn how to use the power of her "organic memory" to block his expansion and preserve her freedom. —Ericka Beckman [1999]

"Beckman pictures a near-future which questions the notion that technology can provide the means for empowerment, but imagines the possibilities of appropriating interactive CD-ROM technology to generate new narratives and futures." —Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert, *Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life*

Switch Center (2003) 12 mins

When I began preparing the film in Budapest in 2000, I found myself surrounded by the remnants of the Soviets' Modernist Architecture. I was immediately captivated by these buildings—not because they were esthetically appealing, but because they embodied perfectly, not only their purpose, but also the ideology upon which they were built. They were not constructed to last but a few years, but rather to endure through millennia, corresponding to the expected lifespan of the regime. The fact that they still stood—solid, defiant even—while the empire had crumbled into dust made them all the more appealing to me. I chose an abandoned water purification plant on the outskirts of Budapest as the setting for *Switch Center*. In conceiving of this film, I was inspired by Léger's early avant-garde picture, *Ballet Mécanique*. In my film, the structure itself comes to life through the manipulations of the employees who work inside it. I wanted to make a tribute to the kind of futuristic pragmatism expressed by these buildings that are now being razed to allow space for shopping malls and corporate offices. —Ericka Beckman [2002]

Reach Capacity (2020) 15 mins

Combining mechanical musical numbers, digital objects, and board-game parameters, Ericka Beckman renders lower Manhattan into a giant board game-like scenario upon which viewers are invited to reflect on the proceedings of real-estate speculators and contracted labor as they compete for dominance of the board in a programmatic dance.

Viewers will reminisce the structure and formal elements of one of the most (if not, the most) famous board games of all times: *Monopoly*. Yet something is different from the game we've come to know. Beckman picks up the original setting proposed by Elizabeth Magie in the early 1900s, when she created a first version of the game called "The Landlord's Game." Magie's game had two sets of objectives, a "Monopolist" set and a "Prosperity" set—the second one was dropped when Parker Brothers further developed the game without Magie. Drawing on Magie's version of the game, Beckman brings back a dual game narrative, while offering a thoughtful critique on speculative economics and social well-being.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

For over four decades, **Ericka Beckman's** playful yet formally demanding films have challenged traditional aesthetic and cultural values, mixing games with fairytales to create hybrids with new rules. Beckman uses play in every sense to shape her message.

Beckman's work has been shown at festivals, museums, and galleries around the world. Her one-woman shows include: Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland; Le Magasin, Grenoble, France; the Tate Modern, London; MOCA, Los Angeles; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. She has been in four Biennials at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Her works are in the film collection of the Whitney Museum; New York's Museum of Modern Art; the Metropolitan Museum; The Walker Art Center; Anthology Film Archives; plus the British Film Institute, and the Zabłudowicz Collection. Amongst the numerous awards received for her work are: two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts; two New York State Council on the Arts grants; one from Massachusetts Council on the Arts; and a residency from the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France.

The Jack H. Skirball Series was organized by Bérénice Reynaud and Eduardo Thomas.

UPCOMING FALL 2022 FILM/VIDEO PROGRAMS AT REDCAT

October 24 Lives of Devotion: Stories from the Philippines

November 7 Decolonizing the Body

November 21 Kahlil Joseph: Another *BLKNWS*

December 5 Sergi Pedro Ros: *Yo'eme's Labyrinth*



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