

Galerie Francesca Pia

Ericka Beckman

Lucky Charm – Drawings and photographs from the 80's until today

Curated with Jeanne Graff

Opening February 3, 6–9 pm

February 4 – March 18, 2023

Ericka Beckman (*1951) is known for her experimental cinematic work and her expansion of the medium of film through a sculptural, spatially immersive dimension that also assigns an active role to the viewer.

The numerous references to pop-cultural motifs in her early work, and the distinction from the minimalist art film aesthetic prevalent at the time, are shared with some of her most important artistic companions, such as Mike Kelley, James Welling, Ashley Bickerton, and Matt Mullican. Beckman, who was later also associated with the so-called *Pictures Generation*, consistently looked to decode cultural representation, and examine and depict the underlying norms, especially the notion of performance and the constant optimization of our working and living environments. In her repeated references to games as a fundamental structural device of our capitalist order, as well as to anthropological theories by Jean Piaget or Roger Callois, Beckman artistically anticipated the emergence of social media and the gamification of our everyday experience.

Ericka Beckman was born in Hempstead (NY), USA in 1951. She now lives and works in New York. Institutional solo exhibitions have been held at Centre Pompidou, Paris (2022), Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover (2021), M Leuven, Leuven (2020), MIT List Visual Arts Center, Boston (2019), Secession, Vienna (2017), Tate Modern, London (2013), Kunsthalle Bern, Bern (2013), The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2005), among others.

Her work is in major international collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York City; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Broad Museum, Los Angeles; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus; and the Zabłudowicz Collection, London.

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When Ericka Beckman draws, her mind is no longer in her eyes, it's in her hands: When you're drawing from memory for a long time, after a while everything becomes a drawing, driving your car along road lines and markers, the contours of the landscape, the bend in the limbs of shrubs and trees, every movement turns into lines until the feeling disappears. As a child in Japan in the 50's she would watch her father design airplanes for hours, and when he was old and couldn't move his legs anymore, to keep his mind intact he drew very technical drawings on long sheets of paper. When he lost his foot in an accidental fall that wouldn't heal, he drew the broken rudder of an airplane, over and over again: "I can't make it work". She drew 'Industrial Series; Forged to Fit' during her stay in Amsterdam in 1980. The drawing stayed in her mind for a while and turned into a film that turned into a photograph. How long before? Hard to say... years later, it's gouache, oil, charcoal, and gold, more like a painting.

Wheels and all things mechanical are important to her. The mechanics of a game showed up in Ashley Bickerton's character in her film 'You The Better' (1983): Ashley leaves the sports playing field and goes to the center position of the spinning roulette-style gameboard in order to see what's going on in the game, why it's unbalanced. He chose to leave his position on the periphery to get a different perspective of the field in order to better understand the situation. Before 'You the Better' around 1982, she was fixated on wheels in terms of a visual and a temporal structure – the loop. She made drawings that dealt with spinning platforms that you would play on. In one of the preparatory drawings for 'You The Better' you can see this little boy pushing a cart with a stick because it has a broken wheel, physically it doesn't run smoothly. They are trying to figure out how to continue their work with a broken wheel – to create a balance where there is an imbalance, how to get out of an imbalanced state into a balanced state.

In early 1982, she was also moving from super 8 to 16mm, and knew she had to work with more people and more images because of the scale of the image. She made these drawings looking like storyboards but they are not really storyboards; she was just working things out temporally, working out sequences and transformation. Many of the drawings in this show aren't in the films at all; they are preparatory images, focussing on imagining and editing of themes for the production, as for example the environment of an amusement park that later will turn into a black box. She drew the stadium (Two tents in an Arena) in 1980, years before the film 'Tension Building' as a way to her give courage to find the real stadium and start to shoot. These drawings are from the late 70's up through the 2000's, but it's not about years it's about attitude towards drawing: drawing as a language, drawing instead of writing a narrative.

There is a strong link between 'Cinderella' and 'Hiatus': the computer was coming of age. Storage system, getting trapped in a computer. And all the costumes also come from the drawings: they are made out of lines. 'Lucky Charm' (the sparkling boat) was made in 1980, for her show at Francesca Pia in 2023, Ericka Beckman has decided to show it with all those drawings and photos that have seldom been seen, and to continue to draw lines on the floor so that the architecture and the entire show become a sparkling drawing.