

FRIEZE

Becky Beasley's Second Act

By Mitch Speed

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At Galeria Plan B, the artist aims to symbolically transform visitors into a state of extraordinary openness.

The title of Becky Beasley's solo show, 'H.S.P. (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)', her second at Galeria Plan B, twice signals an autobiographical approach. (The acronym stands for 'Highly Sensitive Person'.) Despite this, a tricky interpersonal dynamic quickly flips into view. On the floor of the gallery's entranceway, the phrase 'Highly Sensitive Person' is written in circular form, in vinyl letters (*H.S.P. [or Promising Mid-Career Woman]*, 2021). Circumscribed by these words, we the viewers suddenly become the sensitive ones. It's a provocative move to suggest, before we have even entered the gallery that our sensitivities might be inadequate. But the gesture also contains vulnerable humour, evoking an artist so aware of their work's potential unintelligibility, as to symbolically transform their visitor into a state of extraordinary openness. In so doing, she teases out one of art's core issues, which is as familiar as it is under-discussed: how one person's experience of great aesthetic subtlety can be another person's impassive ritual.



Becky Beasley, 'H.S.P. (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)', Galeria Plan B, Berlin. Courtesy: the artist and Plan B Cluj, Berlin; photo: Trevor Good

The bulk and range of the exhibition's accompanying literature hints at a fundamental anxiety about how and where the show's effect should unfold: in the gallery or on the page? In addition to a 1000-word press release, which describes the show as a 'coming out' for Beasley, who was diagnosed with autism in 2020, there is a printed conversation between the artist and curator Anna Gritz, as well as a poster collaged with quotations from *The Notebooks of Joseph Joubert* (2005). Physically, the show comprises multiple series of arranged objects and photographs, sufficiently distinct as to suggest a group show rather than a solo exhibition. For instance, in 'Je dors, je travaille' (I Sleep, I Work, 2021), Beasley has placed four small, glazed ceramics on books about photography and ceramics within clear Perspex cases atop low wooden stools. One of these objects has been sliced in half – a practice used to evaluate a potter's skill. By displaying this sliced vessel, Beasley signals that her ceramics are not only ceramics as such, but a meta-analysis on the medium. Given the dearth of discernible or surprising content in this reflection, however, the gesture rings hollow: this is self-awareness for its own sake.



Becky Beasley, 'H.S.P. (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)', Galeria Plan B, Berlin. Courtesy: the artist and Plan B Cluj, Berlin; photo: Trevor Good

Nearby, six photographs hanging within curtained booths offered a more perplexing, and therefore more interesting, reflection on photography and ceramics. A plurality of imagery is run through with allusions to photography. *Me & You (1975–2021)* (2021) shows a double plate and cut film holder as an inverted image, with ghostly white lines sketched in black space, while *BACK! (Ilford Ceramic)* (2021) pictures a ceramic vessel marked 'ILFORD'. *Me as Andy (1996)* (2021) is a Cindy Sherman-esque portrait of a 20-year-old Beasley made up as Andy Warhol. *The Bedstead (1939) by Eric Ravilious* (2021) is a deft painting of a domestic interior, reproduced as a photo, with a colour swatch included in the frame, *a la Christopher Williams* (who is mentioned generously in the exhibition literature).



Becky Beasley, *Me & You 1975–2021*, 2021, rosewood, green acrylic glass, black marker pencil, 79 × 57 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Plan B Cluj, Berlin; photo: Trevor Good

This show's major takeaway was a quandary of interpretation that, to its credit, appeared heartfelt rather than purposively elusive. Given that, aside from the Warhol photo, legible autobiographical meaning was nowhere to be found, we have to take Beasley's word that the exhibition 'expresses the joys and complexities of an entirely autistic life understood only in retrospect'. The show's semiotics are recursive and cryptic; its texts suggested multiple interpretive routes, from the conditions of feminine subjectivity and socialization to the writing process and Beasley's various artistic influences. This was overwhelming, in a strangely enjoyable way, as a reflection of how art, language, life and mythology hang together in particular and often inscrutable formations.

Becky Beasley's 'H. S. P. (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)' is on view at Galerie Plan B until 5 February 2022.

*Main image: Becky Beasley, *Je dors, je travaille (Food III)* (detail), 2021, ceramic, book, glass effect acrylic glass box, vintage stool, 78.5 × 40 × 39 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Plan B Cluj, Berlin; Photo: Trevor Good*