

**ART**  
Monthly

## Still Life

By Mark Prince

March issue, 2022, p. 1

**ART**  
**Monthly**

No. 454, March 2022 £6 €8 \$9

### Still Life

Becky Beasley interviewed by Mark Prince

### On the Surface

Michaële Cutaya

### Alicja Rogalska

Profile by Rose Higham-Stainton

### Blue Curry

Profile by Paul Carey-Kent



# Still Life

The artist discusses the importance of doubt in photography, the tension between exteriority and interiority, distance and intimacy, the pictured space and the frame, colour versus tint, and chasing after green.

Becky Beasley interviewed by Mark Prince



*BACK! (B/W), 2021*

**Mark Prince:** The current exhibition looks back to some of your earlier work – there is a photograph taken during your college days of you in a wig, as Andy Warhol, and a new series of prints of a tin of gloss paint, which you have made from a negative you shot in Berlin in the late 2000s. As I understand it, during those years you went from photographing things you had found to things you had made, in order to short-circuit the referentiality and indexicality of photography and found-object sculpture. And yet much of your work since then has been based on eclectic references to other artists and writers, such as William Faulkner, Bernard Malamud, Thomas Bernhard, Robert Walser, Marcel Duchamp and Lawrence Sterne. You have referred to Herman Melville's *Bartleby*, who said, 'I would prefer not to copy,' yet you wrote to me that you never make things up. Is alluding to the work of others a way of escaping yourself, your tastes, your predilections?

**Becky Beasley:** Not at all. Quite the opposite. It has been a search for identity through what I call modeling. *Bartleby* becomes a ghost out of his refusal to copy. He haunts the building. Eventually, he refuses to eat. He dies in prison. Ultimately, *Bartleby's* profile is highly autistic. He is different. He is tolerated. He is experienced more as a piece of furniture than as a man.

I have recently been formally diagnosed as autistic. Social death – not being experienced, and thus not being treated as a person – is one of the more painful aspects of being autistic.

Early on I saw the space of the photographic image as a tomb, a memorial space. This cup [points to a cup on the table] was there once, and here is the photograph to prove it. I revisited the problem of photographic anteriority, or retrospection, in Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, in which he reproduced the image of a man on death row, awaiting execution, and wrote: 'By the time you see this photograph, he will be dead.' For me, the future perfect is the tense implicit in my relationship to an image: the time between the taking of the photograph and now, or, for the man in the picture, between the taking of the photograph and his death.

Early on, I was working exclusively in black and white, hand-printing silver prints. The serial photographs in the current show are of a tin of gloss I used to paint structures I made for some of my early photographs. Each print is digitally tinted a different pastel tone, creating a personal rainbow of colours. For quite a few years I used coloured Plexiglas in the framing stage to tone my prints, but at intervals I have hand-tinted images, and more recently I have been working digitally.



What is the difference between tinting a black-and-white photograph green and using a sheet of green Plexiglas, which is placed over the image in the framing?

I began using coloured Plexiglas for framing when I was living in Germany and wanted to introduce colour into my monochrome practice, but without it having anything to do with painting. I didn't want to tone the works or hand-tint them. I like that the Plexiglas was a technical solution, not a gestural one. The space inside the box frame recedes. The prints I have tinted green – for example, the postcards in *Flora, A Life* – have a different effect. It is more about image than space. It creates a darkness, into which you look to see the image, but also an intimacy, a sense of the image having been touched, which I associate with the history of hand-tinting photographs.

The tint emphasises the interior space of the image behind the box of the framing, while also holding you back, resisting the assumption that the pictured space is accessible. It veils the image rather than being invested in it. When you photographed objects underneath a rubber mat in the early 1990s, it produced a similar effect: that something was not available.

For me the distance it creates is, paradoxically, what allows you in. It goes back to the idea of a den. I was an avid den-builder as a child, and I was never very good with shared studio space. I need to be alone to work, and for a long time used

my bedroom. A photograph is always an imaginary space, an inhospitable, uninhabitable space.

The use of coloured Plexiglas also coincided with when I first began to work with a gallery and had the opportunity to have works properly framed. I was asking myself, what is this frame for? What is it doing other than, at the most basic level, protecting this piece of paper? I wanted more from it than that. I had to use the Plexiglas even at the printing stage because it affects the contrast. I would print them at a lower contrast and the Plexiglas would produce the exposure effect I wanted once it had been framed. I wanted a meaningful relation between the work and the frame. I also wanted to work meaningfully with respect to editioning.

What do you see as the meaning of the number of prints in an edition?

I think you have to go back to silver printing, which is a black-and-white, chemical, photographic process. I was mainly only making two prints. I didn't want to deny the reproducibility of the medium – in the Walter Benjamin sense – by making one print. I wanted to avoid the 'aura' and emphasise the reproducibility, so two prints became an interesting number. I had always had a strong connection to Bas Jan Ader's 1971 piece *I'm Too Sad To Tell You*, the film of him crying. For years I hadn't actually seen it: you couldn't simply go online in the 1990s and see the film. I saw it once in an exhibition. But I felt the film captured this emotional event, this personal moment. Then, some years later, I discovered that he'd made it two or three times, and I felt so disappointed.



*Je dors, je travaille (Lucie Rie), 2021*



'H.S.P. (or Promising Mid-career Woman)', 2021, installation view, Plan B Cluj, Berlin

Because you discovered that it was performative?

Yes. Well, it was always that for me, but his having done it twice undid the effect of the single event. Andy Warhol said that sex is nostalgia for sex. It was through that disappointment that so much opened up for me.

You associated the doubling of the photograph, its reproducibility, with artifice?

Not with artifice, but with depleting some expectation around what this sentimental moment might have been about. It separates out: there's one thing here, but there will always be another one there. It has come up with collectors. There are two, why not one?

Would having an edition of three, rather than two, reinforce or weaken your sense of being released from the singularity of the unique art object?

Whether there are two or three prints in an edition is specific to each work. Three gives you a triangle, which creates a space. I'm very interested in three-part equations. I first explored this in the opening room at Spike Island, for the 'Spring Rain' exhibition in 2013 (Reviews *AM364*), with the juxtaposition of the linoleum floor, the life-size photograph of my partner holding a cucumber, and the large-scale life-sized photograph of a gingham tablecloth with a hole in the centre for a parasol.

There's an introduction to George Perec's novel *Things: A Story of the Sixties* in which he quotes from a lecture he gave at a university in the UK. He said he saw *Things* filling the void between four other literary works: Barthes' *Mythologies*, Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* and two others – I forget their names. And the structure of these four works created a space for him to write in. Similarly, over time, I began to understand the space I wanted to work into as a three-part equation.

You often cultivate analogies between spatial narrative and textual narrative. In your previous show here at Plan B, in 2018, you included one of your 'Brocken' sculptures. When I first saw these in London in 2009, I assumed they must be minimalistic objects, then realised from supplementary textual information that they were structured around quotes, the language analogous to the relative proportions of the lengths of wood and the links between them. In your 'Spring Rain' show, the links between the galleries were associated with the tripartite structure of a short story. Here the letters of the initialism HSP – Highly Sensitive Person – are ranged across the space as three pink linen hanging curtains. The attempt to translate textual material into artistic material is a fertile problem for many artists who take literature as their source material.

I see the hermetic core of human beings as their mystery. It is what fundamentally connects and separates us. Art is one way of breaching this. Being autistic makes me extremely sensitive to other people, and I experience this actively in each social decision I make: both the risk and the opportunity of the other.





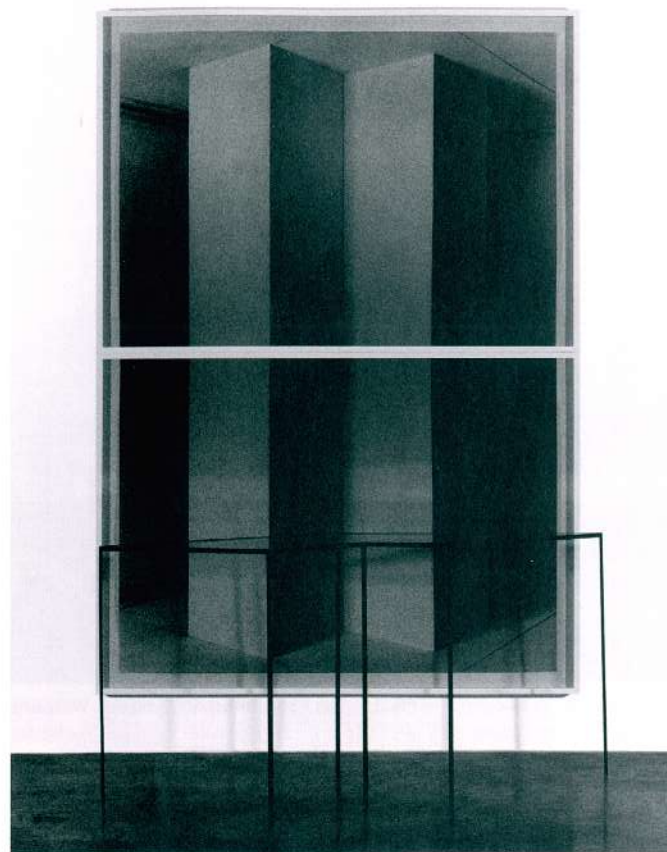
*Me as Andy (1996), 2021*

The three-part structure is literary. It is literally the stuff of fairy tales, but also the Christian Trinity, so I'm not inventing. The woodworks were based on the lengths of my ageing dad's arm span and joints. The title, 'Brocken', can be translated from the German to mean 'literary fragments'.

These days, since my autism diagnosis, I prefer the term 'model' to 'reference'. The models often come from literature, but also from works by other artists, Duchamp's *Étant donnés*, for example. It's a question of what I can learn for my practice by going in close to a thing over time. The first time I visited Casa Mollino in Turin I felt I could work out some things with respect to colour and photography by engaging with the interior. But the question of colour first came up when I began to use coloured Plexiglas for framing.

Secret spaces appear repeatedly in your work. *Étant donnés* is a semi-illusionistic space, visible only voyeuristically through two peepholes. Duchamp worked on it secretly over the final two decades of his life. Casa Mollino is an interior which Carlo Mollino extravagantly decorated as an apartment he would retire to in an afterlife he imagined for himself, although he never actually lived in it. Do you make a connection between the hermeticism of the spaces represented in the images and the fact that they show objects you have made yourself?

One way of looking at it is that my career is the sum of what I have managed to do on my own. At the Royal College I realised I could shoot, process, contact and print black-and-white film all in a day, without having to speak to another human being. The reality is that



*Literary Green, 2009*

there are always practical limitations on what you can do. But more generally I see the hermetic core of human beings as their mystery. It is what fundamentally connects and separates us. Art is one way of breaching this. Being autistic makes me extremely sensitive to other people, and I experience this actively in each social decision I make: both the risk and the opportunity of the other.

**In your 2016 show at Laura Bartlett Gallery there was a photograph of a shopfront in Athens which faced a visitor on entering the gallery. It provided a jolt of contrast, an escape valve out of the exhibition's self-enclosure. Although the rest of the installation alluded to works of yours and other artists, there was nothing else visible which you hadn't made yourself.**

I have introduced more documentary photographs at intervals over the years. *Fig Tree (Amwell Street)* and *Sedum Joy* are other examples. Maybe they are like rabbit holes. The shopfront photograph is titled *The Left Door*. I flipped the image, so the door handle appears in reverse. Benjamin once wrote – I'm paraphrasing – 'all the best moves are made left-handed'.

**The Athens picture was more than a decade old when you chose to exhibit it, and in the current exhibition you have printed from negatives you shot in the mid 1990s and the late 2000s. What prompts you to return to photographs so long after they were taken?**

I have always understood each negative as a raw ingredient, not necessarily for the time it was shot. A language is present, but it may be for the future. I have often worked with parts of negatives or print

With other art-making processes you start with nothing and add, but with photographs everything is already in the frame. Yet it is so far away, which allows you to look at the thing, think about it, and go back to it.

offcuts in this way. The works for my two-person show with Michael Dean, 'Our Blindsides', were all made from offcuts from my 'Curtains' trilogy. The works in the current show have been produced in the past year, subsequent to my being formally diagnosed autistic. I can now see my obsession with the relation between the interior and the outside in that light. Once I began to have the opportunity to exhibit regularly, from around the age of 30, I understood that my self-presentation through art was being well-received by other people, and that the work had found a place in the world. But outside of art, you learn from a very early age, as an autistic female, that it is not publicly acceptable to reveal your interior reality, so you learn to mask. I learned that it was not OK to be myself. Mainstream society is oppressive for many people. Now I'm 46 and slowly processing my life and, due to my career opportunities, I have had the privilege to look back over the shows that I made. The public space I have been given was so vital because the private was so difficult and disempowering.

**In the title of this show, you use the phrase 'mid-career woman', and over the past few years your exhibitions have become increasingly self-referential. The last exhibition here was a mini-retrospective.**

I was parodying the recent film, *Promising Young Woman*. I came to understand that I was mid-career, and I communicated with a few colleagues about what this was and what it meant and why it felt odd. Now I know. I did my research. The period you are referring to, from around 2014 to 2018, when I was working curatorially with existing works from the previous decade, was a period of breakdown, miscarriage, pregnancy, healthcare negligence. I made the decision to revisit works I had made over the previous decade to learn about where I had been and where I wanted to go. I was thinking archivally, curating works which came from their own distinct larger projects around themes I wanted to explore. 'Spring Rain', for example, was about the carnival of adult life. For the last show here in Berlin, 'Depressive Alcoholic Mother' in 2018, the lino floor was new, while the rest was curated by Mihnea Mircan from my existing works. The current show is all new work.

**And yet the objects in vitrines, arranged on stools, are composed out of mostly found material – old editions of novels, and matchbooks from hotels and restaurants. They have the look of keepsakes or souvenirs, traces of a personal past, although the composite arrangements they form under the glass have the effect of transforming them into new wholes. Previously, when book-like objects have appeared in your installations, they have been wooden sculptures in the dimensions of particular editions, but never the books themselves. Do the vitrines distance the foundness of the objects in the way that the tinted Plexiglas has distanced the photographs?**

This is the first time I have incorporated found objects and included the ceramics I started making in 2019. Certainly my relation to images is embodied by the effect of the glass boxes on the objects assembled inside. The colour of the Plexiglas, from which the vitrines are made, is called 'Glass Effect'. It's slightly greenish, optically affecting the colour of the objects they contain. There is an 'ish-ness' about the chromatic relation between the objects. It's like putting what you thought was white paper next to white paper and finding that one looks yellow. The colours are very gentle, but I would like to think that some strong content is being filtered through this soft, whimsical palette.

**Each of the vitrines creates a mini-narrative by triggering a process of association among the elements it contains. This is a persistent dynamic in your work, by which disparate references to remote content are corralled together, the arbitrariness of the conjunctions overcome by the intensity of the focus you bring to them. In 'Spring Rain' there was the floorplan of Duchamp's *Étant donnés*, figured as a linoleum floor design, in relation to a reference to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* – in the photographs of the curly cucumbers – and to the Malamud story in the show's title.**

Isn't this bringing of intensity to arbitrary conjunctions what we call life? 'Spring Rain' was an investigation into what it means to be an adult. Titles are like headlines. They hit the world first. I made the titles of the current show, 'Highly Sensitive Person', and the previous one, 'Depressive Alcoholic Mother', as aquajet-cut words in a circle on a linoleum floor, which you encounter as you enter the gallery foyer. The titular figure becomes literally ground.

**And the personal becomes the formal. I associate this with your effort to render photographic space less indexical by limiting its contents to objects you have made specifically for it. It works against the evidential power of the photograph, which confirms that 'this was here'.**

Doubt has always been an important register to me. Doubting Thomas was the apostle who interested me the most as a child. With my early photographs there was always the question, or doubt, as to the prior existence of the things which appeared in the photographs. I think a lot of them felt more like drawings, which are not evidential at all, except for the process which made them. The evidential quality was diminished by the process. I was pushing against the limits of photography by printing too large with an average enlarger for the medium-format negatives I was using. The effect was to take out some of the tightness of the grain detail, weakening a sense of realism in the image, and raising the question of what is it that we're looking at.



In the current exhibition, the letters HSP are presented in the form of pink linen curtains, hung on shaped frames, which would only register as the letters on which they are based if viewed from the ceiling or higher. They do not speak the language they imply to a viewer.

Unless you're a drone or a fly, the shapes are only made explicit on the floor plan. The letters are experienced rather as a series of intimate spaces. As someone brought up Catholic, and still traumatised by confessionals, as I finished the show I began to think about how it reflects our attempts to make our own spaces, spaces we can live in, out of the experience we bring with us out of the past. Jean-Luc Godard said, '*L'adulte n'existe pas*' – there is no such thing as the adult, just the boy and the old man.

**Did sculpture in your work come out of photography, in the sense that it began as something to be photographed then took on a life of its own?**

Yes. Still life was the genre I loved most when I was young. At a certain point I made the decision to create my own objects, free from the commotion of nostalgia and cultural baggage. My first sculpture was a floor-based print-pile work called *Stumbling Block*. I moved to the floor and set something out there, unmoored. I had always loved and collected objects, and then I made the decision to design my own things, because I also always had an interest in design.

And your installations have a distinctive identity as design – the lino floors with their formalistic shapes, and the minimalistic objects, which are both sculptures in the gallery and what the photographs represent – and you have referenced the history of modern design, from the Casa Mollino to your collaboration in the current exhibition with Christopher Williams, an artist very much concerned with the history of design as it intersects with art.

With respect to interior design, I have always had a love affair with foyers. I remember going to Oxford for a Jannis Kounellis show, where he was giving a talk, and he spoke about how, in Greek homes, the atrium was where you would lay your dead for mourning, but also hang up your coat and hat. The foyer space at Plan B is this type of entry space.

**You create narratives by negotiating the space, as well as by establishing relations between the works in the space.**

For my 2017 exhibition 'A Gentle Man' in New York I mapped Broadway in linoleum on the floors through all five rooms of the gallery. I imagined a man walking up Broadway, a hybrid of my dad and Bernard Malamud. There was a big bay window facing onto Washington Square at the front of the gallery, but no other windows in the other five rooms. As I began to work with the floorplans, I realised I didn't need to use any interior lighting. The front space had daylight, which filtered through to the second room just behind it. I eliminated the third space by creating a corridor with curtains on either side – a palisades – and in the back spaces there were larger video projections, which created their own light.

Much of your work, including this current show, has an autobiographical strain running in parallel with a more objective allusiveness to objects in the cultural field, available to us all. How do you balance the personal and cultural, or are they finally the same thing? You don't seem to make any distinction between the casts you make of twigs your father gathered as windfall after a storm and the lines you quote from Glenn Gould or Thomas Bernhard.

I came to Glenn Gould through Thomas Bernhard, not through music. And I have been making work in relation to my father since I was 17. These are all figures to me. I understand now that my pursuit of all these white males, in art and literature, is related to trying to understand my relationship to him. I think I recognise different aspects of my father in all these men. Edward Hopper's last painting, *Two Comedians* from 1966 – of two clown figures, male and female, standing on a stage – has always been key for me. I saw the figure of my father in this way: this lanky, sensitive person who was my formative man. And when I visited the Casa Mollino, I thought a lot about Mollino's strange night activities, his monastic bedroom, his love of secrecy. I saw these as ways of maintaining one's opacity, which brought me back to colour. What was it for and what did it mean to me? From there I went on to read Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Colour*, which led to my goldish and silverish photographic works. A personal experience takes me out into the culture.

In that book, Wittgenstein worried away at a distinction between green as potentially transparent, as in the form of green glass, and white as innately opaque, like milk. You can't think of a transparent white, he points out. Green has been a touchstone, from the Plexiglas frames to your tinting of your black-and-white photographs of your parents' garden green, in 2014, and giving them away as postcards. It's like looking at nature or art underwater, as if the pressure has been altered.

The green is an expression of intimate distance. My first relation to photography was a sense of its being both intimate and distant.

**Which sounds like a paradox.**

I think it was Ian Jeffrey who applied the word promiscuous to photography. With other art-making processes you start with nothing and add, but with photographs everything is already in the frame. Yet it is so far away, which allows you to look at the thing, think about it, and go back to it. I have been chasing green for a long time now. *Literary Green* is the work which perhaps best expresses my quest. I like green and I like when it shows up. I recently asked the novelist Tom McCarthy what he made of the words 'literary green' and he quoted a line from Andrew Marvell's poem *The Garden*: 'To a green thought in a green shade.'

Becky Beasley is an artist whose 'H. S. P. (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)' was at Plan B in Berlin until 5 February.

Mark Prince is an artist and critic based in Berlin.



## Becky Beasley GALERIA PLAN B | BERLIN

By Martin Herbert

February issue, 2022, p.172



View of “Becky Beasley,” 2021–22. Photo: Trevor Good.

Becky Beasley’s art is nothing if not autobiographical. In a text accompanying her latest show, “H.S.P. (or Promising Mid-Career Woman),” the British artist alludes to her own depression and drinking. The initials, we’re told, stand for “highly sensitive person,” and the display is described as a “coming-out exhibition.” In 2020, she received a late diagnosis of autism. She also identified herself as progesterone intolerant, and her life experiences—“I was an odd ball, a bit weird, unusual. I was also called unstable, needy, obsessive, demanding, intense, scheming, a monster, a witch”—made belated sense. The primary constituents of “H.S.P.” are photographs, ceramics, and fabric, and that all of these can be classed as “sensitive surfaces” is no accident. Here, Beasley is avowedly owning, even embracing, the capacity to be strongly imprinted.

Ten of the photographs are titled *BACK!*, 2021, with various subtitles. Eight of them, ranged around the walls, repeat a black-and-white image—from a reverse-printed negative—of a tin of black paint. Each image is tinted a different shade taken from the palette of Eric Ravilious’s 1939 painting *The Bedstead*, seen in reproduction elsewhere in the show. The paint is a German brand that Beasley used in Berlin two decades ago to paint sculptures before photographing them. Accordingly, “back” refers to the back of the flipped image, to being back in the city, and to the artist being in some way restored to herself, while also suggesting an insistence on personal space. Reiterating that, the show repeatedly cycles between past and present. Hung in one of three vaguely medical booths with peach-colored curtains, shaped to spell out H, S, and P, the photograph *Me as Andy* (1996), 2021, made when Beasley was twenty, shows her in a Warholian silver wig and staring out at us, trying to escape herself in a retrospectively poignant fashion. Arranged on the floor, meanwhile, are a succession of old wooden stools topped with glass cubes, vitrines containing books (monographs on ceramicist Lucie Rie and artist Valentine Schlegel, *Everyman’s Dictionary of Fictional Characters*, and a reference work on photography) and Beasley’s ceramics. These volumes and objects at once appear to advertise her interests—what touches her and what she has touched, what helps—and mark a kind of distance. They’re closed books, and we don’t know exactly how they’ve affected her.

Such is the double play of “H.S.P.,” which constantly attests to strong subjective experiences, fragments of life, and then suggests that they can only be pointed toward, not shared. The third and final room features *Me & You* (1975–2021), 2021, four more vitrines containing black-and-white photographs of a folded striped shirt and a matchbook, plus real matchbooks and the occasional ceramic bowl. These objects, though, sit on glass-topped tables into which Beasley has inserted, in quarters, an editioned Christopher Williams photograph she’d bought and found too large to frame. Her formal solution is a literalist way of manageably displaying something unwieldy, and the very sense that she’s found an answer and given form to her experience is the emotional tenor of the show. Beasley’s diagnosis didn’t “cure” her. She calls it, in the handout, “possibly one of the strangest of happy endings—not exactly happy and certainly no end,” but some quality of resolution, even restitution, is palpable here.

# FRIEZE

## Becky Beasley's Second Act

By Mitch Speed

February 04, 2022



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*



**Symptomatic conspicuous**  
**Becky Beasley in Galeria Plan B**

By Julia Meyer-Brehm

January 06, 2022

With "HSP (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)", Galeria Plan B is showing a wonderfully minimalist exhibition by Becky Beasley. The artist embarks on a search for traces of her own past. Between pastel colors, posters and wigs, an unusually quiet and personal approach has emerged that moves.



Becky Beasley, HSP (or Promising Mid-Career Woman), exhibition view, Galeria Plan B, Berlin, 2021.  
Photo: Trevor Good. Courtesy the artist and Plan B Cluj, Berlin.



When things suddenly start to make sense that have not matched for years, you can safely call them a happy ending. For example, when emotions or symptoms can suddenly be classified, depression , burn-outs or exhaustion become clues for a diagnosis. With her exhibition "HSP (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)" in Galeria Plan B.

HSP is an acronym for "Highly Sensitive Person". High sensitivity means an increased processing sensitivity of different stimuli. This personality trait plays a key role in Becky Beasley's exhibition: The circular lettering "Highly Sensitive Person" emblazoned on the linoleum floor in the entrance area of the gallery. As you read the words, you inevitably turn your head back and forth, creating a subtle disorientation. This temporary sense of confusion is intended by the artist: it is a metaphor for the eerie experience of what she herself went through.



Becky Beasley, HSP (or Promising Mid-Career Woman), exhibition view, Galeria Plan B, Berlin, 2021. Photo: Trevor Good. Courtesy the artist and Plan B Cluj, Berlin.



In the media presentation, highly sensitive people are often labeled as shy, sensitive people or overwhelmed dreamers. In reality, there is so far no uniform theory or definition of the phenomenon - nor is there a consistent diagnostic method. Becky Beasley has done research and found out a lot about gender research and the gender health gap . Since research is carried out on male subjects much more often, women are often misdiagnosed with neurological abnormalities. Many diseases, including autism, are diagnosed in significantly more men. This is also because women are not examined for it in the first place.

Beasley only received her diagnosis as an adult: Her autism was diagnosed in the winter of 2020. In addition to the usual symptoms, the artist has also experienced bullying, stigmatization, social exclusion or gaslighting for years. Hence, Beasley describes her late diagnosis as "probably one of the strangest happy endings" - not the ending and not that happy at all.



Becky Beasley: BACK! (G), 2021 / BACK! (R), 2021 / BACK! (B / W), 2021. Photo: Trevor Good. Courtesy the artist and Plan B Cluj, Berlin.

In her second solo exhibition in the Plan B gallery, the artist looks back on her life, which only makes sense in the retrospective. And although the exhibition has a minimalist formal language, references and links can be found again and again, such as the three pastel pink curtains that divide the room. Only when you think around the corner do you recognize the meaning of its shape: If you were to look down at it from above, there would be three letters: H, S, P.



Speaking of pastels: there are seven prints on the wall, the photo series “BACK!”. Each print was tinted in muted colors, a dream in gray, pastel pink or green. You can see a bucket full of black paint and read "BLACK". Beasley used to paint her sculptures with this black. So a look back? That remains to be seen.



Becky Beasley: Je dors, je travaille (Food II), 2021 / Je dors, je travaille (Encyclopedia of Photography), 2021 / Je dors, je travaille (Lucie Rie), 2021. Photo: Trevor Good.

As part of the exhibition, Beasley is showing her ceramics for the first time. She combines them with photos and various books, especially novels, but also artist biographies, guides and a lexicon are included. Under their glass hoods, the assemblages seem like a hodgepodge of personal memories. Constructs that give a vague impression of who the artist is or was.

Beasley's own positioning is an important part of the show: the 25-year-old photograph “Me as Andy” shows the artist with red lipstick and a Warhol wig and creates an exciting connection between self-discovery and self-portrayal. At the same time, the exhibition is by no means just about them: the connection to the visitors is established again and again. For example, based on the installation “Me & You”, which was created from 1975 to 2021 and consists of four low, table-like sculptures in the rearmost room of the gallery. As you walk around you almost feel like you are part of the installation, a huge, lively collage of life.





Becky Beasley, HSP (or Promising Mid-Career Woman), exhibition view, Galeria Plan B, Berlin, 2021. Photo: Trevor Good. Courtesy the artist and Plan B Cluj, Berlin.

The work is called “FRONT!” And is an example of the artist's approach: Beasley cut up a poster, turned it, painted over all the text with a black marker and combined it with other elements. Anyone who sees this approach as a metaphor for a fragmented, ramified, multi-faceted life may be right. But it also shows that Beasley analyzes things, looks at them from all sides and puts them into a large context. The exhibition therefore not only looks like a glimpse into the past, but also into the present - including its own location in the same. "HSP" is the strikingly sensitive documentation of a self-discovery and a new discovery, with which Beasley approaches half a life, her life.

**WHEN:** The exhibition "HSP (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)" runs until February 5, 2022.

**WHERE:** Galeria Plan B , Building G, 2nd backyard, Potsdamer Str. 77-87, 10785 Berlin.

## Der Blick zurück

By Beate Scheder

December 15 issue, 2021, p. 24

Becky Beasley geht auf Spurensuche im eigenen Werk, im Bärenzwinger untersucht eine Gruppenschau die queere Vergangenheit am Ort.

„I have always been quite quirky, queer, quer is the German root. I am odd, oblique, off-centre. As I said, quirky. It turns out – could you even believe it? – I am actually autistic. Oh, and progesterone intolerant.“ Die Sätze stammen aus dem Begleittext „Fragments of Sensivity“, den die britische Künstlerin **Becky Beasley** gemeinsam mit KW- Kuratorin **Anna Gritz** zu ihrer aktuellen Einzelausstellung in der Galeria Plan B verfasst hat. Spät erst erhielt Beasley die Diagnose Autismus, die sie als „eines der seltsamsten Happy-Ends“ beschreibt, das aber weder wirklich happy sei, noch etwas mit einem Ende zu tun habe.



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



Von eben diesem Happy-End, das keines ist, erzählt die Schau, von der Freude daran, dass die Dinge, die Emotionen, die Symptome, die sie jahrzehntelang beschäftigten, auf einmal irgendwie Sinn ergeben, die Depressionen, Burn-Outs, die Erschöpfung, die Verunsicherung, die soziale Ausgrenzung; von dem guten Gefühl, endlich einen Anhaltspunkt zu haben, die eigene Komplexität zu verstehen. Autismus wird stereotyp mit Männern verbunden, Frauen gar nicht erst darauf untersucht.

Beasleys Ausstellung in der Galeria Plan B gleicht so gesehen einer Spurensuche, einer Rückschau auf sie selbst als „Highly Sensitive Person“, als Künstlerin in der Mitte ihrer Karriere. **„H. S. P. (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)“** lautet ihr Titel entsprechend. „Back!“, zurück, ihrem Aufruf kann man sich kaum entziehen, er findet sich etwa auf den Drucken an der Wand, vorausgesetzt man ignoriert ein halbes L.

Retrospektiv scheint alles auf einmal noch mehr aufeinander zu verweisen, die Assemblagen aus Büchern und Keramik, die Fotografien und Installationen, oder Vorahnungen zu geben, wie jenes Selbstporträt der Künstlerin in wilder grauer Perücke: „Me as Andy“ (1996). Auch die drei blassrosa Vorhangformationen hängen nicht einfach irgendwie da, sondern ergeben, von oben betrachtet, wieder die drei Buchstaben H, S und P. Beasleys Schau ist eine sehr persönliche, vieldeutige Annäherung an das Gefühl des Andersseins voller Puzzelsteine mit unebenen Kanten.

#### Die Ausstellungen

Galeria Plan B: Becky Beasley: „H. S. P. (or Promising Mid-Career Woman)“, bis 5. Februar, Di.–Sa. 12–18 Uhr, Potsdamer Str. 77-87G