

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



View of "After the Orgies: Bill Beckley, The Eighties" 2018.

and floral cloth, broom fibers, and sundry black-and-white photographs including a close-up of a scrotum. Painting enters slyly, accompanied by variously dry and dirty jokes, unwieldy sculptural constructions, a family photo, and sundry media images. In the oil-and-encaustic *The Size of Truman's Hat*, 1983, Haberdasher Harry's hat size—7 3/8—is the sole stable element in an energetic field of swooping verticals, grisaille putti, newspaper scraps, a collaged sponge, rubber glove, and other random encrustations. Deadpan facticity collides with painterly exuberance. At what point does the real bleed into expression, information into noise? Works such as these ultimately debunk myths about 1980s art as much as they substantiate them. Knowing, quotation-heavy, even a bit sarcastic, they are also searching, serious, and, thankfully, still radically unresolved.

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Bill Beckley

ALBERTZ BENDA

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According to Bill Beckley, "everything changed" in the 1980s. Reagan and AIDS cast intersecting shadows over the New York art world, where—as the official story goes—bohemian poverty, experimentation, and idealism vitrified into professionalization, cynicism, and knowing irony. In the essay "What Are You Doing After the Orgy?," published in the October 1983 issue of *Artforum*, postmodernist oracle Jean Baudrillard frenetically adumbrated the zeitgeist: "viral contamination of things by images"; "the glazed extreme of sex"; "pornography of information"; a "state of radical disillusion which is pure presence."

In the 1970s, Beckley had come up within an interdisciplinary post-Minimalist cadre of artists gathered around SoHo's artist-run 112 Greene Street (where, among other interventions, he installed a live rooster). With a Baudrillardian title, "After the Orgies," Albertz Benda revisits Beckley's eighties work. A cheekily maximalist turn on Minimalism's primary structures, the canted, hook-shaped Formica construction *Up Yours*, 1987, monopolizes one room, its many surfaces applied with chintzy checkered

Wyma, Chloe. "Critics' Picks: Bill Beckley," *ARTFORUM*. February 23, 2018.

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