

Institute of Contemporary Arts

PRESS RELEASE

*I must create
a Master Piece
to pay the Rent*
Julie Becker

8 June – 12 August 2018
Opening Thursday 7 June,
6–8pm



Whole (Screen), 1999, C-print on aluminium.
Courtesy Greene Naftali, New York.

The Institute of Contemporary Arts is pleased to present the first survey exhibition devoted to the work of the late Julie Becker (1972–2016).

Embedded in the psychological, cinematic and material geographies of Los Angeles, her home city, Becker produced a legendary body of installations, sculpture, drawings, photographs and video.

Becker's oeuvre speaks to the language and mythology of the late 20th century American Dream turned nightmare, drawing from sources as diverse as Stephen King's *The Shining*, Disney's fantasy *The Gnome-Mobile*, Kay Thompson's children's books *Eloise*, and suburban stoner myths espousing the karmic convergence between *The Wizard of Oz* and Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

Materialising architectural spaces at actual scale and as models, Becker constructed altered and highly interiorised worlds, where cultural references appear as part of pervasive psycho-aesthetic mindscapes, connecting the artist's childhood with experiences of precarity and dispossession. Becker once stated, 'A refrigerator box, in American cities, can be the last refuge of the homeless. They're also temporary

places for children to play in.' In the artist's work, interior spaces appear volatile and provisional, conjuring sites for potential refuge and fantastical escape.

Exhibited for the first time in over 15 years, *I must create a Master Piece to pay the Rent* presents Becker's seminal installation work *Researchers, Residents, A Place to Rest* (1993–1996), which she began as an MFA student at CalArts. *Researchers, Residents, A Place to Rest* comprises a closed architectural space in three parts – a waiting room, a central display space dominated by two large models of miniature interiors and a research area populated by books, photos and videotapes. Writer and filmmaker Chris Kraus identifies the installation in her book *Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness*, as an investigation into the lives of Becker's co-habitants in a single room occupancy hotel – 'the last stop before homelessness'. Becker's uncanny doubling of real architecture and scale model, and the dense accumulation of research materials, suggests the imagining of the occupants' transient lives as well as parallel fictional ones: numerous references point towards the child characters of Danny Torrance from *The Shining*, living with his parents in the empty Overlook Hotel, and the eponymous heroine of the 1950's children's books *Eloise*, living alone in the penthouse of The Plaza Hotel in New York. According to Kraus, the work combines 'a Balzacian zeal to excavate urban archaeology through fiction, and a very post-modern willingness to acknowledge the strange penetrations and crossed subjectivities that occurred in the body and mind of the researcher herself'.

In the late 1990s, Becker began a series of works under the title *Whole*, a project that suggested the possibility of completeness, but was formed by 'an endless exposing of parts... not ever reaching a whole.' Similarly to *Researchers, Residents...*, the various parts of *Whole* – including drawings, sculpture, photographs and video – focus on a building in LA's Echo Park where the artist lived and worked. The owners, the California Federal Bank, leased the building to Becker for free under the condition she clean out the belongings of the previous tenant, who had died from AIDS related illness. The property subsequently changed hands numerous times while Becker lived there, with *Whole* channelling this complexity of property relations, imminent gentrification and displacement and the lingering presence of the building's former inhabitant, known only to her through their possessions. Appearing frequently in these works is the figure of the CalFed building, a modernist 1960s structure dominating Echo Park, standing as a monument to the power of financial capital.

Throughout her work, Becker navigated the formations of truth, fiction and myth with a singular aesthetic vision. She once speculated that, 'the history of recent art could be told as the transformation of the artist's presence from belonging to a community with shared assumptions to one of idiosyncrasy (or even obsession, serious obsession) and a sense of quirkiness, ranging along a scale from hilarity to deep depression'.

With a real-estate mogul-cum-reality TV celebrity currently occupying the position of 'leader of the free world', Becker's body of work unerringly articulates the fantasies and dispossessions underpinning the social imaginary of late-capitalism.

Julie Becker was born in 1972 in Los Angeles where she lived until her death in 2016. During her lifetime she held solo exhibitions at Kunsthalle Zürich (1997), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2001), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2003) and Greene Naftali, New York (2016). Her work was included in group exhibitions including the 23rd São Paulo Biennial (1996), and at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1997), Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (1999), Guggenheim Museum, New York (2007), and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2009). Works by Julie Becker are held in the collections of museums including MoMA, New York; Guggenheim, New York; MOCA, Los Angeles; Migros Museum of Contemporary Art, Zürich; and The Denver Art Museum, Colorado.

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Untitled, 2015, mixed media. Courtesy Greene Naftali, New York.



Still from *Transformation and Seduction*, 1993/2000, video. Courtesy Greene Naftali, New York.



Installation view of *Researchers, Residents, A Place to Rest*, 1993–1996, mixed-media installation. Courtesy Greene Naftali, New York.