

## WILLIAM BECKMAN



“Working large gives the body freedom...The physical action changes your mental approach to the image. Movement becomes part of the creative act. At this scale, larger than life, the process opens doors to new discoveries. In a strange way the scale encourages you to become a living partner to your work.”

It is hard for me to imagine art without our own image. Whether it is human or animal, the individual is what draws us in, what makes us want to see more. My inspiration comes from the earliest cave painting to the present-day digital images of ourselves.

Process is what making art means to me. The response to the act of doing, joined with one’s own judgement of its result, is what creating good works is.”

—WILLIAM BECKMAN

Interview by Tom Butler, former Director of The Columbus Museum, GA, on the occasion of *Drawings, 1967-2013*, traveled to Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts in Little Rock, 2014.

“Beckman neither memorializes nor allegorizes. He never sacrifices the look of things to a fantasy about invisible depths. A straight-ahead realist, he is unswervingly devoted to the visible...Beckman makes the kind of images that convince at first glance.

In (the) double portraits...he makes explicit the distance—not physical but emotional—that separates the figures...They are not separated by hostility so much as by ideas of themselves so definite that the two of them hardly seem to be in communication.”

—CARTER RATCLIFF, art critic, writer, poet, contributing editor of *Art in America*

Catalogue essay written on the occasion of *Drawings, 1967-2013*, presented by The Columbus Museum, GA; traveled to Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts in Little Rock, 2014.

“It is not mere coincidence that Beckman is renowned for his paintings of places and faces. Born and raised in rural Minnesota..., the heartland of the nation – America’s Midwest – is engrained in his psyche as well as his artistic vision. Beckman’s portraits are intimate and personal yet they exude a similar sense of monumentality, and, perhaps, a bid for immortality.”

—DAVID EBONY, contributing editor and former managing editor of *Art in America*, author of *David Ebony & Art Books*, Yale University Press

Catalogue essay, “William Beckman and the Art of Self-Reflection,” written on the occasion of *William Beckman: Five Decades of Self-Portraits* presented by Forum Gallery, New York, 2021.

“Beckman dramatizes himself and the people and places closest to him. Yet his paintings are not intimate...In their nakedness, his figures are at once powerful and vulnerable. Even as it makes them passive objects of our scrutiny, their exposure becomes an act of aggression on the part of the artist toward the viewer...his sensibility is thoroughly modernist. His challenging images are fraught with the tension, anxiety and ambiguity of meaning that plagues modern life.”

—NANCY GRIMES, *Art in America*, September 1994

“Beckman’s mastery of his medium has the power to make viewers want to scrutinize things that in real life wouldn’t be especially interesting...It’s as if the artist can’t resist reminding the viewer of the difference between paint and the sorcery of bringing it to life.”

—SARAH VALDEZ, *Art in America*, February 2004

“Mr. Beckman follows Northern Renaissance painters like Dürer and Cranach in his ambition to give the figure an uncanny sculptural vividness. Without neglecting any wrinkles, he gives skin a relatively simplified, waxy smoothness, which, along with the flat, monochromatic backgrounds, enhances by contrast the detailed palpability of eyes, glasses and hair. His figures seem to exist in a space between two and three dimensions...Mr. Beckman’s (art) is a meditation on youth, age and mortality.”

—KEN JOHNSON, *The New York Times*, November 16, 2007

William Beckman is known primarily for his exacting realist paintings of the human figure in which months of patient observation yield images of immense visual subtlety and surprising emotional insight. He frequently pairs figures in ways that explore the complexity and difficulties inherent in relationships between men and women, and his work also reveals the trajectory of the artist’s own life.

—JOHN A. PARKS, *The Drawing Magazine*, Summer 2014