



Ruth

Beckermann



Ruth Beckermann, born in Vienna in 1952, has been creating essay films and documentaries for 40 years and is well known internationally as one of Austria's most courageous and spirited filmmakers.

An examination of "the work of memory" combined with a close observation of present circumstances is at the core of Beckermann's work. Time and again, she makes the viewer aware of how one flares up in the other, as in her treatment of questions of personal and collective identity (or their disruption). She never resorts to experimental gimmickry. Her films reveal an author who feels the need to express the time she lives in.

Her time as filmmaker goes back to the Vienna of 1977. As a member of an independent video collective, she compiled material on the struggle for an autonomous cultural center in Vienna: *Arena besetzt (Arena Squatted)*. A documentation of a utopia and its end, but also an attempt to make cinema politically useful. A traveler from early on including studying in Paris and New York and working as a journalist in Switzerland, Beckermann's interests are by no means localized.

Die papierene Brücke (Paper Bridge, 1987), a cinematic quest for traces of Jewish life in the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, illustrates the geographical space of her cinema (even if the Waldheim election campaign in Vienna suddenly bursts in at the end of the film). Her road movie *American Passages* started after the financial crisis in Harlem on November 4, 2008 – the day Barack Obama became the first black president of the United States. Then the film continues as an associative travelogue ending in Las Vegas.

At the same time, Beckermann's films bridge gaps across time: from the fate of her father, born in Czernovitz (*Paper Bridge*), and intense conversations with communist Franz West about interwar Vienna (*Wien Retour/Return to Vienna*) to her present day doorstep, the



Marc Aurel Street in what used to be Vienna's Jewish textile district (*homemad(e)*). From the traces empress Elisabeth left in Egypt (*Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient / A Fleeting Passage to the Orient*) to the exhibition "Crimes of the Wehrmacht" and the memories it triggered in visitors, the majority of whom were former Wehrmacht soldiers (*Jenseits des Krieges / East of War*).

With the first Austrian retrospective of Ruth Beckermann's films, the Austrian Film Museum explored the work of a director equally suspicious of both closed narrative forms and linear views of history and memory. As the images in her work become ever freer and bolder, they intertwine past and present, the here and there, the filming I and the world. This nimbleness, reminiscent of the work of Chris Marker, is reinforced by the titles of her most recent works: *Those Who Go Those Who Stay* (2013), an essay concerned with voluntary and involuntary movements across the European continent; *The Missing Image* (2015), a controversial artistic intervention on Vienna's Albertina Square; and *Die Geträumten* (*The Dreamed Ones*, 2016) – Beckermann's first, wonderfully harmonious hybrid fiction film, in which she imagined and staged the relationship between the poet Paul Celan and the young writer Ingeborg Bachmann. (Austrian Film Museum)

1 **Arena Squatted**

Josef Aichholzer, Ruth Beckermann, Franz Graf,
1977, 16mm/DCP, b/w, 77 min

By means of material that was created in the Arena, the film shows the squatting, the organization of collective work, the negotiations with the city and finally the demolition of the buildings. It calls to memory how a generation had been politicized through their involvement in the Arena movement.

2 **Suddenly, a Strike**

Ruth Beckermann & Josef Aichholzer, 1978, 16mm/DCP, b/w, 24 min.

In the tire factory Semperit the only strike after World War II takes place in May 1978 and lasts six weeks. The film shows the course of the strike in interviews, photos, graphics and conversations at a pub. It draws attention to the position of the union between its loyalty to the workers and its responsibilities towards the entrepreneurs.

The Steel Hammer Out There on the Grass

R. Beckermann, Josef Aichholzer, Michael Stejskal,
1981, 16mm/DCP, col & b/w, 40 min

The city of Judenburg protests for the preservation of their steel plant. The demonstration is a late attempt to avert the threat of job loss. The film shows how the international steel crisis affects Austria.

The Missing Image [Documentation of the installation]

Ruth Beckermann, 2015/16, DCP, col, 11 min.

The installation THE MISSING IMAGE relates to the bronze figure in the city center of Vienna of a bearded man lying down with a brush in his hand. This is an illustration of the Jews forced to clean the streets during the pogrom after the “Anschluss” in March 1938. Using footage recently found in film archives, Ruth Beckermann completes the scene by adding the missing images of laughing spectators.

Suddenly, a Strike



The Missing Image



Arena Squatted



The Steel Hammer Out There on the Grass

3 Return to Vienna

Ruth Beckermann, Josef Aichholzer, 1983, 16mm/DCP, col & b/w, 91 min

Franz West (1909–85) remembers his youth in Vienna: the variety of the Jewish population of the so called Matzah-Island, his commitment to the worker's movement of Red Vienna and the rise of Austro-fascism and National Socialism. West's masterly narration combined with impressive archive footage illustrate and elucidate the complex Austrian history between WWI and WW2.

4 Paper Bridge

Ruth Beckermann, 1987, 16mm/DCP, col, 95 min

Paper Bridge is a journey through Ruth Beckermann's own family history. At the same time it depicts the story of the Jews throughout Central Europe. It takes her from Vienna, where her grandmother survived the war in hiding and to which her mother returned from Israel in 1950, to the landscapes of her father's childhood: the Bukovina, once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

5 Towards Jerusalem

Ruth Beckermann, 1990, 16mm/DCP, col, 85 min

Towards Jerusalem is not about a chronological recording of history or a clear-cut evaluation of the short and conflict-laden history of Israel. It is a snapshot, an instantaneous portrait which seems to set itself the Marker principle as a leitmotif: ONE NEVER KNOWS WHAT ONE IS FILMING. On the way to Jerusalem it is not only the many different landscapes, the secular and religious buildings which are often invested with several different mythological meanings that reveal themselves, but also very different cultures. (Christa Blümlinger)



Return to Vienna

Paper Bridge



Towards Jerusalem



6 **East of War**

Ruth Beckermann, 1996, 35mm/DCP, col, 117 min

White-tiled rooms, neon lighting, on the walls black and white photographs documenting the atrocities committed by the German Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front in WW2. Against this background, former soldiers talk about their experiences beyond the bounds of "normal" warfare. An uncompromising film about remembrance and oblivion.

"Ruth Beckermann's film doesn't duplicate the exhibition, but begins where it ends: in a commentary. Its subject-matter is less about history than remembering, less about the past than the present ..."
(Jacques Mandelbaum)

7 **A Fleeting Passage to the Orient**

Ruth Beckermann, 1999, 35mm/DCP, col, 82 min

The filmmaker decides to trace the travels of Empress Elisabeth of Austria to the Orient, even though the results were uncertain. With great openness, she embarks on a journey, running the risk of perhaps discovering nothing at all: no clues to the real figure behind the fairytale princess, no answer to the question of how one deals with foreign countries as a privileged traveller. As the first-person narrator, the filmmaker thinks about images: forbidden, official, falsified and genuine, incidentally including in her reflections the problem of the tourist's view of things, which not even she can escape. (Stefan Grisseemann)

A Fleeting Passage to the Orient



East of War



8 Mozart Enigma (Mozart Minute 10)

Ruth Beckermann, 2006, 35mm/DCP, 1 min

MOZART ENIGMA is an ironic comment on biographical pseudo-documentaries. Envisioning a person? Is that possible? Why not go to a fortune teller, take off your wig and have your cards read?

homemad(e)

Ruth Beckermann, 2001, 35mm/DCP, col, 84 min

Marc Aurel-Strasse, Vienna: The last surviving Jewish textile merchant in what was the textile district, the Iranian hotel proprietor and the Café Salzgries with its regulars. From summer 1999 until spring 2000, Ruth Beckermann undertook a series of small journeys on and around her own doorstep and investigated her neighborhood with the help of a film camera. The film also gives evidence of the political changes which accompanied the extreme right joining the government-coalition.

9 Zorro's Bar Mitzva

Ruth Beckermann, 2006, 35mm/DCP, col, 90 min

At the Wailing Wall or in the spotlight of a stage, wearing a Zorro costume or a designer dress, solemn or rollicking: crossing the threshold to the adult world can take place in very different ways. This film accompanies four 12-year-olds – Sharon, Tom, Moishy and Sophie – as they prepare for their bar or bat mitzvot. It takes a critical and ironic look at Jewish tradition and its interpretations, questions the significance of initiation rituals, and attempts to explore the diffuse terrain of adolescence.

Mozart Enigma



homemad(e)



Zorro's Bar Mitzva

10 **American Passages**

Ruth Beckermann, 2011, 35mm/DCP, col, 121 min

American Passages reveals some of the movements in society which finally result in the election of Donald Trump. At the same time the film is an impressive road-traveling collage of the U.S. at the advent of the Obama era. Although the film was ostensibly made to honor Robert Frank's famed 1958 photo essay, "The Americans," no knowledge of that work is necessary to grasp Beckermann's aims: snapshot cinematic views of a massive country in a moment in time, spanning races, classes and geographies like a peripatetic anthropologist. (Robert Koehler)

11 **Jackson/Marker 4am**

Ruth Beckermann, 2012, DCP, col, 3 min

A cinematic fragment, vibrant in its mystery.

Those Who Go Those Who Stay

Ruth Beckermann, 2013, DCP, col, 75 min

Rain on a window pane, a fire truck, a tomcat with innumerable offsprings: it is an intentionally unintentional gaze that allows for chance encounters, for stories and memories – leads that Ruth Beckermann follows across Europe and the Mediterranean. Nigerian asylum seekers in Sicily, an Arab musician in Galilee, nationalists drunk on beer in Vienna, the Capitoline Wolf, and three veiled young women trying for minutes to cross a busy road in Alexandria. Threads, cloth and textiles pop up like book marks in a fabric of movement, of travelling or seeking refuge.

Those Who Go Those Who Stay is a story of being on the move, in the world and one's own life.

American Passages



Jackson/Marker 4am



Those Who Go Those Who Stay

12 The Dreamed Ones

Ruth Beckermann, 2016, DCP, col, 89 min

The themes of love and hate are depicted in the movie. At center stage are the two poets Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan, who came to know each other in post-war Vienna. Their vivid postal exchange creates the textual basis of the film. Two young actors, Anja Plaschg and Laurence Rupp, meet in a recording studio to read the letters. The tumultuous emotions of proximity and distance, fascination and fear captivate them. However they also enjoy each other's company, arguing, smoking, discussing their tattoos and favourite music. Yesterday's love, today's love and tomorrow's: where the lines are blurred lies the heart of the film.

Tour program organized by sixpackfilm

More information: www.sixpackfilm.com & www.ruthbeckermann.com

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The Dreamed Ones





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