

Martin Beck

I wish it would never get dark

November 14, 2018 – January 13, 2019

Martin Beck's third exhibition at 47 Canal, titled *I wish it would never get dark*, brings into dialogue five bodies of work that, through a variety of approaches, explore ways in which time informs value, labor and the production of meaning. Through systemic analysis, the works investigate what Beck has referred to as "the relationship of structure and affect."

In *Antonio Canova, Amor and Psyche, plaster model, late 18th century, Gipsoteca Museo Canova, Possagno, Italy*, the camera does not move. Throughout the seventeen-minute video, which depicts a detail of the gypsum model of neoclassical sculptor Antonio Canova's *Amor and Psyche*, the single element to shift is the light. The high windows of the Gipsoteca Museo Canova, in Possagno, Italy, where the work was filmed, fill the space with columns of sunlight that evocatively torque throughout the day. The dramaturgy of this architectural conceit emphasizes the powerful sensuality of Canova's figures, even as plaster models. Following high demand, Canova developed techniques to produce multiples of his marble sculptures. Ridges from the mould are visible, while nail heads, used by Canova as measuring points, pockmark the model. The exquisite offering of a butterfly (given, according to Ovid, by Psyche to Amor as a symbol of her soul) is infused with ambiguity by the composition's tight framing. It is unclear who is who. The vulnerability of the exchange is heightened by the work's competing temporalities, as numerous layers of reproductive technology mediate this tender moment.

A conglomerate is a sedimentary rock comprised of a diverse array of stone fragments that have cemented together into a matrix. They are formed by intense pressure over millennia, yet easily break apart. In *Conglomerate*, Beck has sourced such rocks, which vary in composition according to the region in which they were formed. Recontextualized as sculpture, the complex geological readymades disrupt perceived separations between nature and culture. Conglomerate also means a company comprised of multiple heterogeneous corporations. Within this structure, time and pressure catalyze into a different, more fraught instability: that of the capitalist market. The metaphorical density of the conglomerate could be said to offer a methodology for Beck's artistic process, in which delicate connective systems are formulated, and new meanings suggested through the interplay of different propositions.

A suite of twenty-four drawings, *more ways*, builds on the rhetoric of productivity enhancement manuals, taking as its starting point the 1972 publication *The Universal Traveler*, a self-described guide to "creativity, problem-solving and the process of reaching goals." Beck has isolated certain words and phrases, recombined, rescaled, and composed them in pencil on 16 x 22 inch paper. The approachable musculature of the typeface captures the optimism of its era, in which countercultural strategies were earnestly applied to nascent consulting industries. *more ways* continues Beck's long-running research into the recursive relationship between alternative and corporate organizations.

Curtain, a curtain segment made of cream-pink silk chiffon, hangs opposite the gallery's entrance. Part window covering, part wall, it functions simultaneously as material, as architectural element, and as metaphorical device. Beck originally developed the work during a residency at Harvard's Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, where it referenced a curtain used in early exhibitions to mitigate the openness of the Le Corbusier-designed building. In this version, the translucent chiffon of *Curtain* hovers above the floor, registering movement and stillness in the room. Transitional and provisional, its value emerges in its subtle effect on the atmosphere of its environment. A liminal work, it brings change, and the idea of the threshold, into focus.

working forwards is an ongoing project initiated by Beck in 2014, in which he produces one letter-size document per day for extended periods. In 2016 he made a document for every day of the year; other durations have lasted for a few weeks or months. The linear, chronological order of the work suggests the managerial function of time, which organizes and regularizes production. Yet it also functions as a constraint, amplifying the creativity of an artist often engaged in research, while offering a framework for reflection, like a journal. Conflating process with result, the outcome is in equal parts ephemeral and personal. On this occasion, documents from July 2018 have been framed in the format of a calendar.

Martin Beck's work has recently been presented in solo exhibitions at Frac Lorraine, Metz, France; at Kunsthalle Bergen, Norway (both 2018); at Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Vienna, Austria; at The Kitchen in New York; and at Galerie für zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig, Germany (all 2017). Previous exhibitions include *Program* at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, Cambridge (2014–16); *The thirty-six sets do not constitute a sequence.* at 47 Canal, New York (2015); and contributions to the 10th Shanghai Biennale (2014) and the 29th São Paulo Bienal (with Julie Ault) (2010). Beck's publications include *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe* (2007), *The Aspen Complex* (2012), *Last Night* (2013), *An Organized Systems of Instructions*, and *rumors and murmurs* (both 2017).