William Beckman

**Deidra**
2003  
Oil on panel  
55.9 x 49.5cm (22 x 19½”)
Private Collection

**Overcoats (American Modern)**
1998-1999  
Oil on panel  
Stretcher: 228.6 x 198.1cm (90 x 78”)
Frame: 247 x 216.5 x 10.8cm (91¼ x 85¼ x 4¼)
Lent by Seven Bridges Foundation, Greenwich, CT

**Studio #3 (Ducati)**
2005  
Oil on panel  
Stretcher: 240.7 x 203.2cm (94¼ x 80”)
Frame: 259.7 x 221.6 x 10.8cm (102¼ x 87¼ x 4¼)
Lent by Seven Bridges Foundation, Greenwich, CT

**Deidra**
(1:24 min)

The painting Deidra, who is my daughter. I have done two earlier works of her. One when she was a baby in her mother’s arms done in the early seventies and one when she was about nine or ten, also posing with her mother, done in the late seventies. She has offered to pose over the years, but I don’t know, I just wasn’t ready to paint her alone until she became an adult. She was in her mid-thirties when I painted this. She posed in my studio and I simply incorporated the farm behind. It’s about as close as I get to a true portrait, that is, this is strictly Deidra. An individual, one person, not a generic subject meant to define all women. In fact, in this painting the fields behind her are from our family farm from Minnesota. The small building site on the right side is the farm my great-grandfather homesteaded.

I’ve done a number of paintings using the farms from Maynard over the years. The Chicago Art Institute owns a larger version of the landscape you see behind her shoulders. So in a way, the painting of Deidra, for me, is meant to tie five generations of Beckman’s to the land.

**Overcoats (American Modern)**
(1:28 min)

The *Overcoats* painting is another reflecting of my childhood. Perhaps all paintings are. I grew up on a farm on the border of South Dakota and Minnesota. My father passed away in the late eighties and my mother had a stroke in the mid-nineties, forcing her to move off the farm. So in a sense in this painting there’s a sense of leaving the farm, the family farm, forever.

For me there is a real tie between the sky, the land, and the people who work the land. There is a tension in the closeness that exists in the small Midwest towns, much more so than in the East where I have now lived for decades. Families out there are real families, community families, five, six generation families all passing into and through the same
farm. Now having acknowledged, or better, finally accepting, the sale of our farm, putting it in the past if you will, was part of what inspired this work. For me, placing the figures directly in front of you helps force this separation. It pushes you away from what I have lost. In my mind it brings full circle the conflict of urban-rural understanding.

**Studio #3 (Ducati)**

(1:15 min.)

With the Ducati painting, its also personal. Probably the most personal painting I’ve done in that I’ve owned and raced motorcycles for much of my life. They are a very integral part of who I am and it’s the first painting where I’ve included one in my work. It’s been written about a number of times or people have heard me talk about motorcycles and in some cases art people have actually watched me on the track. But for some reason until now I have left bikes out of my paintings. Maybe we all like living two lives.

Anyhow, there is an aspect of risk taking in motorcycling, especially racing, that is very comparable to how I feel about art. The competitive nature of both is obvious, but it is the physical and mental concentration that they each require where I see the overlap. You cannot take your mind’s eye off the track or brush without loss. If you do, and it’s minor, perhaps you can get up and finish, or sand and scrape for a restart. But if it’s major, you generally trash it and wait for the next race or idea. The hours are the same, both require endless practice.