

Becky Beasley: Spring Rain

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Becky Beasley's *Spring Rain* is a juxtaposition (or, perhaps, a morphing of) the two-dimensional and three-dimensional planes, the photographic and the sculptural. It is, essentially, a highly conceptual exhibition, in that it demands the visitor to engage in both literature and art history to grasp its meaning, albeit even then, a highly personal experience.

The title of the show comes from a short story by Jewish American writer Bernard Malamud. This text deals with such eternal issues as death, love, isolation and the family in surprising depth given its brevity. It is an ideal piece of writing to act as a trigger for consideration of Beasley's work which also can be seen as taking on similar subjects, whether it be reproduction and birth, or tending and growth.

And those latter two topics bring us on to the real star of the show: Beasley's bendy cucumbers. She makes no excuses for the bawdy jokes in relation to these most phallic of fruits. Of course, we can thank Freud for making this an intellectual discussion when he stated that anything longer than it is wide is a phallic symbol. At the time he had a cigar in his mouth, but then sometimes a cigar is just a cigar!

So the *Cucumber Hand* series can be seen, in this light, as a masturbatory or onanistic act, not the first time this has been done in the fine art world (for example, Brion Gysin's first use of film to capture his solo sexual experiences). And, yes, this is the perfect gallery visit if you feel like impressing a friend with coarse Carry On style humour, all in the best possible taste and keeping it, supposedly, intellectual.

Plus, if you didn't skip your art history lessons, there is more than a sideways nod to Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donnés*. In case you did truant then Duchamp, after decades of producing some of the most influential art works of the 20th century, claimed to have given up art in preference for playing chess. But secretly, he worked on *Etant Donnés*, as seen by Beasley at Philadelphia Museum of Art, which forces the viewer to peep through a slit in the gallery to see his final creation. Beasley admires the way that, like literature, this is an intensely personal experience and, therefore, more profound.

Etant Donnés is referenced in the entrance/exit to the main gallery with a floor-based work that you walk over to see the rest of the photographic and sculptural works. Alongside this is a room of Victorian professional gardener Charles Jones' photographs of vegetables, fruits and flowers which are really rather sumptuous.

Then, Beasley has selected works from the Leeds Museums collection which are presented without labels. During her enlightening tour of the show with curator Sarah Brown, she describes this room as a terrain where objects and spaces come together with the objects as key players in a kind of theatre of the absurd. Radical recent works appear alongside more classical works in a manner which would be quite bewildering if you didn't make at least some effort to comprehend Beasley's conceptual approach.

Until 22 September 2013, **Leeds Art Gallery**