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Critic's Picks
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Robert Beck

— By AMOREEN ARMETTA

Poetic phrases written in white chalk cover the floor. A smudged line neatly traces the gallery's perimeter; the text has been eroded by viewers' feet shuffling past the forty-five drawings hanging on the walls. In one, a nude woman appears to be emanating rays of light, though two blocks of text typewritten directly on the drawing describe the scene as A WOMAN'S BODY APPARENTLY EMERGING FROM THE EARTH. With the title, *Untitled* ("Approaches to Art Therapy: Theory and Technique" ed. by Judith Aron Rubin), 1996–2007, [Robert Beck](#) indicates his methodology and provides a clue as to why the drawing contains an interpretation of its own content.



Beck, known for psychologically charged installations, presents in this exhibition the culmination of a decade of work involving psychologist John N. Buck's 1966 House Tree Person personality-assessment test, in which a subject is asked to draw the above-mentioned items, answer a series of questions, then draw the items again. Beck has drawn them once more—mostly in black and white—using, among other traditional materials, the powder with which police officers uncover fingerprints. This powder tips us off to Beck's preoccupation with covering and uncovering. To wit, the works are contained in a walled-off room within the gallery. Like a palimpsest, before one impression forms, another settles in: Viewers' feet erase text, multiple interpretative voices compete, what appear to be subjects' drawings are in fact Beck's re-creations of them. SONG TO WHO AM I SELF reads a section of floor text, recalling Whitman's canonical lines "I celebrate myself, and sing myself / And what I assume you shall assume / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." Through such associative leaps, Beck elegantly demonstrates the collaborative nature of the creative process.