

## Press Release

### **Martine Syms**

*Loser Back Home*

June 2–August 26, 2023

Public Reception: June 1, 6-8pm

Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles

**Sprüth Magers**

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are delighted to announce the representation of Martine Syms and present the artist's first solo show with the gallery. The exhibition *Loser Back Home* will premiere her latest works in video, sculpture, painting and photography. Garnering widespread attention for her work that combines conceptual grit, humor and social commentary, Syms has emerged in recent years as one of the defining artists of her generation. Sprüth Magers is pleased to be representing Syms in collaboration with Sadie Coles HQ and Bridget Donahue.

The show's title, *Loser Back Home*, deliberates upon "displacement," a term created by historian Barbara Fields to describe the destruction of place and the loss of a shared sense of connection to one's familiar or home country. In one of Syms' new video works, *This Is A Studio* (2023), the artist uses surveillance footage that captures a late-night police visit. This document raises questions about home, belonging and systems of power – concerns that reappear across the exhibition.

In another new video, the two-channel *i am wise enough to die things go* (2023), Syms explores the idea of psychosis through an unnamed protagonist reciting a monologue. Responding to the work of iconic animator Chuck Jones, Syms transfers the form and narrative structure of an animated short into live-action. Working with the inherent challenges and restrictions brought about by this sort of translation, she delves into both the breaking up of images and the breakdown of the psyche. Through a series of visual gags and special effects, and an original score, the work evokes the experience of disorientation that results from being ungrounded.

Clothes, which Syms often designs herself, offer the Los Angeles-based artist a further medium through which to examine the figure. Historically, the fields of sewing, film editing and computer programming are linked; all were initially considered monotonous and menial work and, therefore, positions often occupied by women. In *i am wise enough to die things go*, the actor wears a T-shirt that reads "To Hell With My Suffering" – a piece of clothing that has been worn by Syms' digital avatars in previous videos. In reference to an Arthur Rimbaud poem on freedom and the discrepancy between desire and reality, the T-shirt defiantly declares "Being patient and being bored / Are too simple. To the devil with my cares." For her textile paintings, an array of previously worn garments – including screen-printed T-shirts, baseball caps and

sweatshirts, some branded with high fashion labels – are stitched together into tapestries and stretched over metal frames. Taking on a totemic quality, the paintings become offerings of past, projected and shadow selves.

In the upstairs gallery, Syms presents *Dream about the forrest fingering me from both ends* (2023), an installation comprising a large wall-based photocollage and intricate laser-cut sculptures that draw on moving boxes, ubiquitous commercial packaging and the folds of origami. The video *The Fool* (2021), playing on a screen housed in a custom cardboard television box, melds varied footage while a narrator describes a brief encounter with a former love interest. A performance of a gymnastics routine merges with iconic Baroque paintings; club scenes mix with a day at the beach. Taking the viewer on a hazy, dream-like journey, the images at times seem to illustrate the story being recounted but elsewhere fail the narrator entirely: in one surreal moment, a large fig tree rolls across a hallway on a skateboard.

For the photocollage and sculptures alike, Syms has amassed a library of images in a similar vein to stock photography banks, compulsively photographing everyday objects and settings, such as buildings, cars, mountains and flowers. Sourcing from this photographic research as well as from her own collection of ephemera, Syms transforms the material of everyday life into a visual field rich with personal iconography, poeticism and play.

**Sprüth Magers**

Martine Syms (\*1988, Los Angeles) lives and works in Los Angeles. Syms obtained an MFA from Bard College in Annandale-On-Hudson, New York (2017) and a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2007). Selected solo exhibitions include Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and Philadelphia Museum of Art (both 2022), Fridericianum, Kassel (2021), Secession, Vienna (2019) and Museum of Modern Art, New York (2017). Group exhibitions include Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2022), MUDAM, Luxembourg (2021), MMK - Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2020), Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2019) and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2018). Syms' work has been recognized through multiple awards, including Herb Alpert Award (2022), Creative Capital Award (2021), United States Artists Fellowship and Future Fields Art Prize (both 2020). Syms is a 2023 Guggenheim Fellow.

Syms has written and directed three feature films, *The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*, *Incense Sweaters & Ice* and *The African Desperate* (Mubi), which was the closing night film of New Directors/New Films 2022 and nominated for an Independent Spirit Award in 2023.

She is in a band called Aunt Sister and hosts Double Penetration, a monthly radio show on NTS. She also runs Dominica Publishing.

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