

Magdalena Suarez Frimkess Organized by Shio Kusaka

April 11–May 22, 2026
606 N Western Avenue, Los Angeles



Magdalena Suarez Frimkess and Michael Frimkess, *Untitled*, 1986
© Magdalena Suarez Frimkess. Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milano/New York

David Zwirner is pleased to announce an exhibition featuring ceramic sculptures and works on paper by Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, on view at the gallery's 606 N Western Avenue location in Los Angeles. A longtime resident of Venice Beach, California, Suarez Frimkess is well known for forms that employ familiar iconography, ranging from Mickey Mouse to the Chilean comic-book character Condorito, among other figures and motifs. The gallery has invited the Los Angeles-based artist Shio Kusaka—who is well known for her playful and open approach to the ceramic medium—to organize this exhibition of Suarez Frimkess's works. This presentation also includes two collaborative works created together by the artists. The exhibition coincides with the solo show *Magdalena Suarez Frimkess: Ninety-six and Pissed*, which opens at the Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, on May 6, 2026.

Born in Venezuela in 1929, Suarez Frimkess was raised in Caracas at a Catholic orphanage after her mother passed away. Recognized for her talents at an early age, she enrolled in the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Caracas to study painting and printmaking. In 1949, she relocated to Santiago, Chile, and continued her artistic studies at Pontifical Catholic University with visiting American faculty Norman K. Carlberg, Paul Harris, and Sewell Sillman. These artists taught courses on collage, printmaking, and sculpture that were animated by twentieth-century pedagogies in color theory and abstraction. Suarez Frimkess began to experiment with figurative sculpture and cast-plaster forms, and Harris would claim

that she was “the most daring sculptor now working in Chile.”¹ In 1962, she moved to Port Chester, New York, to pursue a residency at the Clay Art Center, where she met her partner Michael Frimkess (1937–2025), with whom she would begin a lifelong collaboration. The couple settled permanently in Venice Beach in 1971, establishing a studio and a creative partnership that would commingle Suarez Frimkess’s bold draftsmanship and inventive visual vocabulary with Frimkess’s extensive knowledge of ceramics and the history of clay.

The works on view highlight Suarez Frimkess’s innovative handbuilt sculpture and drawing. The artist models her own ceramics based on her educational background in painting, sculpture, and textile. Her imagery ranges from animal and floral motifs, ancient Mesoamerican art, and Venezuelan statesman Simón Bolívar to popular cartoon characters from the United States and Latin America, such as Blondie or Felix the Cat, and neighbors from her immediate Venice Beach environs. Magnolias and birds of paradise cover irregular stoneware plates, while freestanding figurines picture Olive Oyl from *Popeye* and Minnie Mouse. She has undertaken a daily drawing practice, producing abstract and figurative works on paper that are likewise preparatory, standalone, and self-reflexive. These sketches speak to her recurring visual vocabulary and the primacy of her line, evident in the rendering of well-known characters and the inscriptions that cover these drawings. The presentation also includes some of her collaborative works with Frimkess, a master ceramicist who studied under Peter Voulkos at the Otis Art Institute. Suarez Frimkess would draw upon and glaze Frimkess’s wheel-thrown clay forms, which were informed by classical shapes such as Chinese ginger pots and Greek kraters. This partnership yielded an expression of tender friction between her confident, irreverent line and his traditional vessels.

Kusaka first saw Suarez Frimkess’s work at South Willard, Los Angeles, in 2012, and would meet the artist around the time of the 2013 group exhibition *GRAPEVINE~* at David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, curated by artist Ricky Swallow. This presentation brought together Suarez Frimkess and other California-based ceramicists, putting her forms in conversation with those by Michael Frimkess, John Mason, Ron Nagle, and Peter Shire. As Suarez Frimkess’s work was spotlighted in these years, fellow artists such as Kusaka and Jonas Wood, Swallow, Mark Grotjahn, Jennifer Guidi, Karen Gulbran, Evan Holloway, and Lesley Vance began collecting her work in depth and brought renewed interest to her oeuvre beyond the region and across the art world. In 2024, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art presented *The Finest Disregard*, a survey exhibition that brought further recognition to Suarez Frimkess.

At David Zwirner Los Angeles, Kusaka—with her signature eye for installing ceramic sculptures—arranges Suarez Frimkess’s work on a long pedestal, allowing viewers to see them individually. This installation calls attention to Suarez Frimkess’s connecting narratives and singular line, characteristics Kusaka admires. When Kusaka learned that Suarez Frimkess could no longer form clay and make her own ceramics, she asked if she could make pots for her and Suarez Frimkess accepted. Kusaka brought the pots to her home with an underglaze pencil, which Suarez Frimkess then used to draw on the vessels. As Kusaka observes of Suarez Frimkess’s self-assured line: “I like that she didn’t feel like she had to fill the whole surface of the pot. She draws just as much as she wants to and then stops.”²

Magdalena Suarez Frimkess (b. 1929) was born near Caracas, Venezuela, where she studied painting and printmaking at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas. In 1949, she moved to Santiago, Chile, later studying sculpture at Pontifical Catholic University. She relocated to the United States after she received a residency at the Clay Art Center in Port Chester, New York, in 1962. With her husband and collaborator Michael Frimkess, she moved to Los Angeles and settled in Venice Beach in 1971, where she continues to live and work.

In 2024, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art presented a solo exhibition of the artist’s work titled *Magdalena Suarez Frimkess: The Finest Disregard*. She has also had solo presentations at Kaufmann Repetto, Milan (2016, 2021); Kaufmann Repetto, New York (2017, 2022, and 2024); South Willard, Los Angeles (2013, 2015, and 2019); and White Columns, New York (2014).

The artist's work has been exhibited in a number of group exhibitions, including *Made in L.A.: New Art Now*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2014); *Artifices instables, Stories of ceramics*, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (2020); *Funk You Too! Humor and Irreverence in Ceramic Sculpture*, Museum of Arts and Design, New York (2023); and *Flow States – LA TRIENAL*, El Museo del Barrio, New York (2024). Her work is also currently on view in the 2026 exhibition *2026 KAWS: Art & Comix* at the Albertina Modern, Vienna.

Work by Suarez Frimkess is held in prominent institutional collections worldwide, including the Albertina, Vienna; Gardiner Museum, Toronto; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Arts and Design, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Logan, Utah; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Shio Kusaka (b. 1972) was born in Morioka, Japan, and moved to San Francisco in the early 1990s. After receiving her BFA in 2001 from the University of Washington, Seattle, she moved to Los Angeles, where she currently lives and works.

In early 2020, the historic Neutra VDL Studio and Residences in Los Angeles held a solo exhibition of Kusaka's work, curated by Douglas Fogle and Hanneke Skerath. Museum Voorlinden in Wassenaar, the Netherlands, held a two-person exhibition of Kusaka and Jonas Wood in 2017. Kusaka's work has also been included in important group exhibitions, such as the Whitney Biennial (2014); *Going Public: The Napoleone Collection – International Art Collectors in Sheffield*, Graves Gallery, Sheffield, England (2016), which traveled to Touchstones Rochdale Museum, England (2016–2017); *Recent Acquisitions in Asian Art*, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio (2017); and *Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950–2019*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2019–2022).

The artist's first solo exhibition with David Zwirner, *Shio Kusaka: one light year*, was presented at the gallery's 19th Street location in 2022. Kusaka's second solo exhibition with the gallery was on view at David Zwirner Paris in 2024.

In 2021, Kusaka received the Isamu Noguchi Award alongside Toshiko Mori. She was commissioned to create a twelve-foot-tall sculptural installation at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which will debut in 2026.

The artist's work is held in public collections worldwide, including the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; The Broad, Los Angeles; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, the Netherlands; Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Notes

1. Paul Harris, "Sculptors in Chile," *Art in America* 50 (Winter 1962).
2. Shio Kusaka, in conversation with the gallery, March 2026.

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