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PRESSKIT

MARTINE SYMS: *APHRODITE'S BEASTS*

July 3, 2021 – January 9, 2022

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PRESS RELEASE

MARTINE SYMS: *APHRODITE'S BEASTS*

July 3, 2021 – January 9, 2022

Born in 1988 in Los Angeles, Martine Syms has, in the last few years, emerged as one of the central and indeed defining figures in the recent international discourse on art and culture. In her interdisciplinary practice, which spans film, photography, installation, performance, and writing, the artist explores manifold, compelling questions in order to map out new perspectives on life and society. Through precise observation and in-depth research, Syms addresses the representation and reception of US-American identities and cultures, the theories and realities of feminism, conditions of interpersonal communication, and the impact of digital media on everyday life. Characterized by both conceptual and pop approaches, her work displays a distinct sense of humor without diminishing its urgency and relevance. Specifically developed for Kassel, the exhibition *Aphrodite's Beasts* presents a comprehensive overview of the artist's practice in Germany for the first time. Forming the backbone of the show are three film works that at times bear the stamp of expansive installations. *Ugly Plymouths*, a work created in 2020, introduces the exhibition. On three large flat screens mounted on poles, brief, sometimes intimate footage of everyday life in Los Angeles is used to narrate a one-act play whose title picks up on a phrase from the poem *Hollywood* by Beat poet Bob Kaufman (1925–1986). Syms's protagonists are *Hot Dog*, *Doobie*, and *Le Que Sabe*, whose voices overlay the film singly or in conversation and speak of their daily concerns, promises, and temptations. Their utterances reference the form and content of text and voice messages of the digital age, revealing the simultaneous possibility and impossibility of communication and social interaction. *Ugly Plymouths* has strong immersive qualities, not least through the accumulation of sound and moving image and its embedding in a space flooded with red light.

In contrast, the work *Lesson LXXV*, realized in 2017, generates an entirely different effect. Presented in an endless loop, the silent film shows the artist in three-quarter profile against a plain black background. In the sequence, which lasts for only a few seconds, milk pours down Syms's face,

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hairline, thin braids, and torso. Occasionally, the blinking of her down-turned eyes can be made out, while on her chin, smaller and larger drops repeatedly follow gravity or seemingly defy the Earth's pull. Despite the barely perceptible action, a silent power is exuded by the image, recalling depictions of icons. However, the starting point of *Lesson LXXV* is a more secular theme. Here, the artist refers to the demonstrations against racist violence in the United States and other parts of the world, where protestors often pour milk over their faces to relieve the pain caused by the deployment of tear gas. The work thus suggests a highly political impetus that, due to its specific formulation, potentially offers a timeless appeal to humanity. At the same time, Syms contextualizes her production within art history by presenting the film on a flat screen mounted horizontally atop a cuboid sitting on the floor referencing Minimal Art. Running counter to the standard palette of the prominent art movement of the 1960s, the cuboid and adjacent windows are rendered in a deep purple, alluding to the women's movement, Alice Walker's 1982 novel *The Color Purple*, and the hue's manifold meanings within the LGBTQIA community.

Just as Syms positions herself at the center of *Lesson LXXV*, acting as the conveyor of a message, she also takes on the role of protagonist in the film *DED*, completed in 2021. Thus, in the approximately sixteen-minute work presented as a screen projection, she appears in the form of an avatar created using a 3D scan of her body. Against the backdrop of an unfathomably vast space structured only by a horizon line, the viewer experiences Syms undergoing a constant alternation between life and death, resurrection and demise. Sometimes she dies as a result of a gushing emptying of the contents of her stomach or esophagus, sometimes through the use of a firearm or knife, and at others through a fall from a great height or an implosion. Over and over again, the animated figure manages to come back to life, regaining its strength to get up and keep going. These dramatic sequences are at times accompanied by a rousing pop composition in which Syms's vocals metaphorically describe the various facets of life in the twenty-first century and the elementary conditions and questions of humanity that accompany it. The line *MY BEATING HEART* can be

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heard as well as *I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU HERE* and *I WANT TO GIVE AND RECEIVE*.

Caught somewhere between life and death, hope and despair, power and powerlessness, *DED* evokes a grotesque, at times surreal image that certainly reflects the current atmosphere of global crises and catastrophes. With its observations, questions, demands, and fantasies, the work marks the closing point of the exhibition and offers impetus for an everlasting search. *FIND A WAY* can accordingly be read both on a frieze-like, luminous banner on the façade of the Fridericianum and on the strap weavings of the chairs that flank Syms's cinematic works, alongside a group of six photographs. The latter feature the similarly deliberate, empathetic, cursory gaze that also informs the footage in *Ugly Plymouths* at the start of the exhibition.

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MARTINE SYMS

*1988 in Los Angeles

Lives and works in Los Angeles

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2021

Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen

Aphrodite's Beasts, Fridericianum, Kassel

S1:E4, part of Glasgow International, Tramway, Glasgow

SOFT, Sadie Coles HQ, Bury Street, London

2020

Ugly Plymouths, Sadie Coles HQ off-site, London

New Media Series, Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis

Ugly Plymouths, 5239 Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles

2019

Boon, Secession, Wien

Shame Space, Institute of Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond

2018

Incense Sweaters & Ice, Graham Foundation, Chicago

Big Surprise, Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York

SHE MAD: Laughing Gas, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

Grand Calme, Sadie Coles HQ, London

Contemporary Projects: Martine Syms, Fundação Serralves, Porto

2017

Projects 106: Martine Syms, Museum of Modern Art, New York

VNXXCAS: Martine Syms, Camden Arts Centre, London

The Easy Demands, CONDO, London

2016

Borrowed Lady, Audain Gallery, Vancouver

Fact & Trouble, Institute of Contemporary Art, London

COMPORT MENT, Karma International, Beverly Hills

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Black Box, Human Resources, Los Angeles

2015

Art on the Move: Martine Syms, Locust Projects, Miami

Notes On Gesture, Machine Project, Los Angeles

Vertical Elevated Oblique, Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York

White Flag Projects, St. Louis

2014

The Queen's English, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (selection)

2022

We Are Not Aliens: Arthur Jafa, Martine Syms, and Afro-Futurism 2.0, as part of *Beyond the End of the World: Approaches in Contemporary Art Seminar*, Mary Porter Sesnon Art Gallery, University California Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz

2021

Underexposed: Women Photographers From The Collection, High Museum of Art, Atlanta

The Stomach and The Port, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool

2020

For Real This Time, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, State Art Museum of Florida, Sarasota

The Body Electric, Miami Dade College Museum of Art and Design, Miami

Sammlung, TOWERMMK, Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt, Frankfurt

No Space, Just a Place. Eterotopia, Gucci x Daelim Museum, Seoul

Uncanny Valley: Being Human in the Age of AI, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, de Young Legion of Honor, San Francisco

Honestly Speaking: The Word, the Body and the Internet, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland

William Greaves, Sondra Perry, Martine Syms, Princeton University, Princeton

Colored People Time: Mundane Futures, Quotidian Pasts, Banal Presents, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge

2019

Manual Override, The Shed, New York

In Production: Art and the Studio System, Yuz Museum, Shanghai

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The Body Electric, Yerba Buena Center For The Arts, San Francisco
It's Urgent! – Part II, Luma Westbau, Zurich
Dry Land, Gladstone Gallery, Gladstone 64, New York
Celebration of Our Enemies: Selections from the Hammer Contemporary Collection, Hammer Museum
The Foundation of the Museum: MOCA's Collection, The Geffen Contemporary at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
Whitney Biennial 2019, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Straying from the Line, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin
Hypertimes, FuturDome, Milan
The Body Electric, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis
Colored People Time: Mundane Futures, Institute of Contemporary Art at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

2018

Per_ forming a collection. The Show Must Go_ON, Madre museo d'arte contemporanea
Donnaregina, Naples
An Evening of Queen White, FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial For Contemporary Art,
Toby Devan Lewis Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, Cleveland
The 12th Gwangju Biennale Exhibition: Imagined Borders, Gwangju
Succession Sounds, Kunstverein, Amsterdam
Eckhaus Latta: Possessed, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Radically Ordinary: Scenes from Black Life in America Since 1968, Allen Memorial Art Museum,
Oberlin
Unlimited, Art Basel, Basel
This is Utopia, to Some, Kadist Foundation, Paris
Mapping the Invisible, Yebisu International Festival for Art and Alternative Visions 2018, Tokyo
Photographic Art Museum, Tokyo
Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today, Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Boston
(touring)

2017

Electronic Superhighway (2016-1966), Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon
Speech/Acts, Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia, Philadelphia
Future Generation Art Prize @ Venice 2017, Palazzo Contarini Polignac, Venice
Our Words Return in Patterns (Part 1), Galerie PCP, Paris
Whitney Biennial, as part of the John Riepenhoff installation, Whitney Museum, New York
Los Angeles - A Fiction, Musée d'art Contemporain de Lyon, Lyon (touring)
Exhibition of 21 Artists Shortlisted for the Future Generation Art Prize 2017, Pinchuk Art Centre,
Kyiv

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I Am the Organizer of My Own Archive, Dazibao, Montreal

2016

Potentially Yours, The Coming Community, Artspace, Auckland

Los Angeles - A Fiction, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (touring)

Umwelt Inversion, Galerie Conradi, Hamburg

Cool Memories, Occidental Temporary, Paris

Public, Private, Secret, International Center of Photography, New York

Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

It Can Howl, Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta

Imitation of Life: Melodrama and Race in the 21st Century, HOME, Manchester

Electronic Superhighway (2016-1966), Whitechapel Gallery, London

Autobiography, Index Stockholm- The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation, Stockholm

Cut-Up: Contemporary Collage and Cut-Up Histories through a Feminist Lens, Franklin Street Works, Stamford

2015

How We Work, Project Row Houses, Houston

Open House, Todd Madigan Gallery, California State University, Bakersfield

Tele-novela, ACRE TV, acretv.org

Candice Lin/Martine Syms, Chan Gallery, Pomona College, Claremont

Artists' Film Club: Avant-Noir, Volume 2, Institute of Contemporary Art London, London

The Daily Show, Bureau, New York

Intangibles, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

2015 Triennial: Surround Audience, New Museum, New York

2014

Rhetoric, Aran Cravey, Los Angeles

Speaking of People: Ebony, Jet and Contemporary Art, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York

First Look: Martine Syms: Reading Trayvon Martin, New Museum, New York

Another Cats Show, 356 Mission, Los Angeles

Small New Films, REDCAT, Los Angeles

Black Radical Imagination, Cooper Union, New York

2013

gURLs, Transfer Gallery, Brooklyn

2012

Act II: The Props, Public Fiction, Los Angeles

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First Among Equals, Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia, Philadelphia
Mise-En-Scène, Young Art, Los Angeles

2011

The Didactic Possibilities of Film Titles, Houston Museum of African American Art, Houston
Implications & Distinctions, Project Row Houses, Houston
Future Plan and Program - Lecture by Steffani Jemison and Martine Syms, Prairie View A & M University, Prairie View


PUBLIC COLLECTIONS (selection)

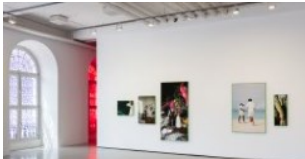
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago
Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore
Carré d'Art, Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes
Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, New York
Hammer Museum, Los Angeles
KADIST, Paris and San Francisco
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Museum of Modern Art Library, New York
San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio
Fundação Serralves, Porto
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Studio Museum in Harlem, New York
Tate Collection, London
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York


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LIST OF PRESS IMAGES AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD WITH IMAGE CREDITS

1.  Martine Syms: *Ded*, 2021 (Installationsansicht / Installation view *Aphrodite's Beasts*), Fridericianum, Kassel, 2021 © Martine Syms, documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH. Andrea Rossetti (photo)

2.  Martine Syms: *Aphrodite's Beasts* (Installationsansicht / Installation view), Fridericianum, Kassel, 2021 © Martine Syms, documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH. Andrea Rossetti (photo)

3.  Martine Syms: *Ugly Plymouths*, 2020 (Installationsansicht / Installation view *Aphrodite's Beasts*), Fridericianum, Kassel, 2021 © Martine Syms, documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH. Andrea Rossetti (photo)

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4.



Martine Syms: *The path is long and winding*, 2021
(Installationsansicht / Installation view), Fridericianum,
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5.



Martine Syms: *The path is long and winding*, 2021
(Installationsansicht / Installation view), Fridericianum,
Kassel, 2021 © Martine Syms, documenta und Museum
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6.



Martine Syms, *Lesson LXXV*, 2017 (Installationsansicht /
Installation view), Public Art Fund, Time Square, New York,
6. Februar – 5. März 2017 / February 6 – March 5, 2017
© Martine Syms, courtesy Public Art Fund and Sadie Coles
HQ, London

7.



Martine Syms: *Lesson LXXV* [still], 2017
© Martine Syms, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London

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8.



Martine Syms, *Ugly Plymouths* (Installationsansicht / Installation view), Sadie Coles HQ off-site, 24 Cork Street, London, 6. – 31. Oktober 2020 / October 6 – October 31, 2020. © Martine Syms, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London. Foto / Photo: Robert Glowacki.

9.



Martine Syms, *Ugly Plymouths* (Installationsansicht / Installation view), 12. – 17. Februar 2020 / February 12 – February 17, 2020. © Martine Syms, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London, and Bridget Donahue, New York. Foto / Photo: Mario de Lopez

10.



Martine Syms, *Ugly Plymouths* (Installationsansicht / Installation view), 12. – 17. Februar 2020 / February 12 – February 17, 2020. © Martine Syms, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London, and Bridget Donahue, New York. Foto / Photo: Mario de Lopez

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11.



Martine Syms: *Ugly Plymouths* [still] , 2020 , 3 channel video. © Martine Syms, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London, and Bridget Donahue, New York.

12.



Martine Syms: *Ugly Plymouths* [still] , 2020 , 3 channel video. © Martine Syms, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London, and Bridget Donahue, New York.

13.



Martine Syms: *Ugly Plymouths* [still] , 2020 , 3 channel video. © Martine Syms, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London, and Bridget Donahue, New York.

14.



© Martine Syms, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ and Bridget Donahue Gallery

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15.



Martine Syms, August 2018
© Martine Syms, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London.
Foto / Photo: Taylor Rainbolt

16.



Martine Syms, 2021
© Martine Syms

17.



Martine Syms, 2017 © Martine Syms, courtesy Cultured Magazine and Sadie Coles HQ, London. Foto / Photo: Manfredi Gioacchini

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EXHIBITION PREVIEW

Toba Khedoori

October 2, 2021 – January 9, 2022

For over twenty-five years Toba Khedoori, born in Sydney in 1964 and now living in Los Angeles, has been developing a body of work that can be described as one of the most outstanding and singular contributions to contemporary art. Her works—made through a lengthy, highly concentrated production process—tread a fine line between painting and drawing, while also possessing a distinctly haptic quality. As a rule, the starting point for her art are sheets of paper treated with wax that she combines to form monumental image carriers that envelop the viewer’s field of vision. Upon these, Khedoori then creates immensely detailed drawings in graphite and oil paints, which are extraordinarily precise in their execution. Her motifs range from buildings, windows, cinema seats, and fireplaces to branches, grasses, clouds, horizon lines, and more. Human beings are only ever present in the traces they leave; they are never the prime focus of a composition. In many of Khedoori’s works the motifs are detached from their original context and occupy an expansive, empty pictorial space. Time and place do not appear to apply in these realms. This in turn creates a situation where certain works develop moments of abstraction, which open up yet another dimension in Khedoori’s art. Since 2008 Khedoori has also made paintings on canvas that are considerably smaller than the aforesaid works on paper. These smaller pieces continue to engage with themes arising from the tension between human beings and the natural world, albeit with a greater emphasis on the interplay between representationalism and abstraction. Many of these compositions avoid easy legibility, bringing to the fore the interaction of lines, structures, and colors. Regardless of their level of abstraction these paintings exude an unusual strength—quiet yet remarkable—which in fact characterizes all of Khedoori’s art. This innate strength raises questions about the fundamental parameters of life and in so doing establishes the philosophical meta-level of her work.

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From October 2, 2021 to January 9, 2022 the Fridericianum will present Khedoori's first solo exhibition in a German art institution. With close to thirty works created between 1994 and 2021 this show will provide a wide-ranging insight into her oeuvre, highlighting the diversity of her drawings and paintings and their evolution over the last three decades.