

Exhibition: *Magdalena Suarez Frimkess: The Finest Disregard*

Dates: August 18, 2024–January 5, 2025

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 4)

(Los Angeles, CA—July 19, 2024) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Magdalena Suarez Frimkess: The Finest Disregard*, the first-ever museum survey of the Venezuelan-born, L.A.-based artist's prolific career. Spanning over five decades, the exhibition explores ceramics, paintings, and drawings, including an important selection of works made collaboratively with her husband, Michael Frimkess, and numerous works never-before shown in public. With insights into the artist's fascination with illustrations from art books, popular media, animation, autobiography, and the comedy of everyday life, *The Finest Disregard* celebrates the inventiveness of Suarez Frimkess's practice, securing her position in the recognized, longstanding tradition of artists working with ceramics in California.

Variously described by admirers as hilarious, melancholy, macabre, lovable, deeply strange, contrarian, and even sinister, the ceramic objects of Suarez Frimkess evoke equal parts humor and unease. Taking its title from a 1952 article that called Suarez Frimkess "the most daring sculptor working in Chile," *The Finest Disregard* challenges notions of her work as the product of a self-taught or naive artist, foregrounding her complex relationship with craft and technique in handmade ceramics, drawings, and paintings. The exhibition is curated by José Luis Blondet, Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA) and former Curator of Contemporary Art at LACMA.

"Suarez Frimkess is an artist's artist. Most of the lenders of this exhibition are L.A.-based artists who have been collecting her work over the years, including Mark Grotjahn, Karin Gulbran, Shio Kusaka and Jonas Wood, and Ricky Swallow and Leslie Vance," said Blondet. "On top of that embarrassment of riches, the exhibition features several pieces never shown coming from the artist's older daughter's

collection. *The Finest Disregard* offers a rare insight into the work of an artist that traverses several art histories in Los Angeles since the 1970s.”

“LACMA is proud to present *The Finest Disregard*, continuing our tradition of spotlighting pioneering California artists,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “At the age of 95, Suarez Frimkess continues to command her own narrative, inspiring new generations of artists to redefine expectations and push against the grain, beyond categories.”

Exhibition Highlights

Sectioned by major influences and motifs, the exhibition brings together 170 works—including a number from LACMA’s collection—that reveal unexpected connections across Suarez Frimkess’s eclectic repertoire.

Cartoon figurines: In the late 1970s, Suarez Frimkess began making figurines of cartoon characters such as Popeye, Olive Oyl, Donald Duck, Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Betty Boop, Felix the Cat, and Porky Pig. She designs these humble objects with a precision that is not always evident, deliberately leaving unfulfilled any expectation of a well-finished piece. Their shambling appearance belies the artist’s shrewd sense of humor. Suarez Frimkess has lovingly crafted Minnie Mouse in an infinite array of dresses, shoes, and fashion accessories.

Drawing and writing: Drawing on paper is part of Suarez Frimkess’s daily routine. Concerned almost exclusively with line, these flat, abstract, or figurative compositions are made of fragmentary outlines, silhouettes, or copies of cartoon strips. Around 2015, after an accident in which her wrist was broken, she embarked on a series that blurs the boundary between writing and drawing. Worried that she would be unable to sign insurance papers, she practiced signing with her nondominant hand.

Technique and forms: Suarez Frimkess forged a connection with traditional ceramic techniques on her own terms, building on her background in sculpture, painting, and sewing. Her hand-built, irregular vessels and objects—cups, teapots, jars, plates, bowls, bottles, carafes, pitchers, mirrors, tiles, boxes—are vehicles for “pictorial mantras” drawn from her life and a habitually incongruent cast of characters lifted from pop imagery.

Collaboration with Michael Frimkess: The strength of the works produced by Suarez Frimkess with her husband, Michael Frimkess, resides in the tension created by the apparent mismatch of their aesthetic goals. In their collaborations, she disrupted his impulse to make a classical, perfect vase. Her decorative schemes do

not always follow a narrative arc. Organized visually, their impact lies in the not-always-rational power of accumulation.

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue co-published by LACMA and DelMonico Books/D.A.P. Exploring a selection of Suarez Frimkess's works from the 1970s to the present, the publication features essays by scholars and artists including curator José Luis Blondet, Luz Carabaño, Carribean Fragoza, Karin Gulbran, Shio Kusaka, Jenni Sorkin, Ricky Swallow, and Jonas Wood.

About Magdalena Suarez Frimkess

Magdalena Suarez Frimkess (b. 1929 in Caracas, Venezuela) lives and works in Venice, California. In the 1940s, she studied painting at Artes Plásticas, Caracas, Venezuela, moving in 1949 to study sculpture at the Catholic University in Santiago, Chile. In 1963, Suarez Frimkess was awarded a fellowship to study ceramics at the Clay Art Center in Port Chester, NY, where she met her partner and long-time collaborator, Michael Frimkess. While their collaborative work has achieved acclaim, her first solo exhibition was not held until 2013, at the age of 84. Since that debut, she has been undoubtedly known for her unique hand-painted ceramics, recognized for their unique flare in the candid capturing of pop culture iconography, ancient histories, mythologies, and intimate memory.

In addition to LACMA's retrospective, this fall, Suarez Frimkess will be featured in the El Museo del Barrio Triennial as well as a major solo exhibition at kaufmann repetto in New York. Previously, she has shown at White Columns (New York), kaufmann repetto (New York and Milan), and South Willard (Los Angeles), and has been included in group exhibitions at the Marciano Art Foundation (Los Angeles), the MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House (Los Angeles), and the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, as well as the Hammer Museum's *Made in L.A.* biennial. Suarez Frimkess's work is held in the collections of the Hammer Museum; the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens; LACMA; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, among others.

Credit: This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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About LACMA: Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of nearly 152,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions: (Left) Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, *XXL Minnie Mouse* (detail), 2009, collection of Karin Gulbran, © Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; (center left) Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, *Drawing* (detail), c. 2014, collection of Mark Grotjahn, © Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, photo by Ruben Diaz, courtesy of Mark Grotjahn; (center right) Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, *Untitled (No more apples for me)* (detail), 1973, collection of Delia DeSasia, © Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; (right) Magdalena Suarez Frimkess and Michael Frimkess, *Untitled (Bowl Tiger)* (detail), 1985, collection of Delia DeSasia, © Magdalena Suarez Frimkess and Michael Frimkess, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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