

# “Magdalena Suarez Frimkess: The Finest Disregard” at LACMA, Los Angeles

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READING TIME 4'



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.

Variouly 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.

Curated by  
José Luis Blondet

at LACMA, Los Angeles  
until January 5, 2025