

Magdalena Suarez Frimkess
noW girls allowed
opening september 6th, 6-8pm
kaufmann repetto new york

Joan Didion once said that "we tell ourselves stories in order to live." Magdalena Suarez Frimkess tells her stories with clay and glazes, working every day in the early morning hours in order to keep going, to survive, and, yes, to live. Her fellow travelers are a steadfast menagerie of characters, animals and scenes taken from a handful of books and comics and her adopted home of Venice, California. One of her favorite figures is Condorito, the wry Chilean cartoon condor, whom she has often described as her philosopher. As she has stated frequently: "He has an answer to every problem." When visiting Magdalena some time ago, I noticed that she was reading a bound collection of Condorito cartoons at the kitchen table while she waited for me. It made me realize just how seriously she takes these supposed children's characters. They might appear to be happy go lucky, but their glib demeanors belie something truly profound. There's nothing "Pop" about Magdalena's work. There's no conceptual appropriation here, but rather an endless digestion of the absurdities and existential queries raised by her cartoon friends. For her it is not a strategy. There is simply no other way to work or to live. These are the companions that she chose to spend her life with a long time ago (or perhaps they chose her?) and now they're all sticking together until the very end. Magdalena just turned 95 and when we raised our glasses to celebrate her long-awaited exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art this summer she shouted out, "To the future!". At 95 years old? You've got to be kidding me.

Magdalena's life has been marked by hardship and loss. Her stories are wild and many, and she has had her portion of seeing people around her fall apart while she at times also lost it herself. As she often says, "If I don't work, I die." This is work as survival but also work as something profound that is about completely trusting what you do. This is work as an embodiment of that core sense of truth that keeps you going, that makes you resilient and determined not to give in to the madness lurking around the corners. Looking at it this way, Magdalena chose her life companions wisely. Minnie Mouse, Felix the Cat, and Betty Boop get kicked around constantly but always bounce back, forever unchanged (although, in pretty rough shape in their incarnations as Magdalena's hand-built stoneware forms...there are no cartoony idealizations or Koonsian finishes here!).

Magdalena has lived almost a full century as a woman and what a journey that has been. Stumbling through the classic traps set out by a world made by men, she certainly did not fulfill her societally prescribed role as a perfect housewife and mother and her work is full of angry girls and women who stand in for the artist. We see her rebellious resoluteness play out in a number of works such as when she paints Olive Oyl slapping Popeye (who is often only a thinly disguised stand in for her husband and frequent collaborator Michael Frimkess). In other

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works, Barbie gets electrocuted, the wonderful Little Lulu defiantly paints a fat, red "W" to subversively edit a boy's sign to read "NoW Girls Allowed", or, my all-time favorite, the Lady Knitting Snakes. Can we talk about reclaiming the old sexist story about humanity's expulsion from Eden? The snakes are back baby and being knitted at high speed by an old lady who enjoys doing this more than anything else! She has a basket full of them. It's the perfect self-portrait. When I picture Magdalena in my mind, that's who I see. A woman who owns up to her life and who keeps moving forward by making her art with exquisite nonchalance (the glazes!), devastating humor and total determination.

Hanneke Skerath, August 2024

Magdalena Suarez Frimkess (b. 1929 in Caracas, Venezuela) lives and works in Venice, California. She's currently the subject of her career retrospective at LACMA (Los Angeles) and her work will be included in the next El Museo del Barrio La Triennial (New York) in October 2024. She's currently included in the exhibition *Transmissions: Selections from the Marciano Collection*. Previously she has shown at White Columns, New York, kaufmann repetto in New York and Milan, and South Willard, Los Angeles. Her work was included in *Made in LA*, the Hammer Museum Biennial, Los Angeles (2014), as well as in group exhibitions at MAK Center, Schindler House, Los Angeles (2017), and Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco (2021). Suarez Frimkess' work is held in the collections of the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Museum of Arts and Design, New York; among others.

Hanneke Skerath is director of Marciano Art Foundation in Los Angeles. With Douglas Fogle, she is putting together a forthcoming monograph devoted to Magdalena Suarez Frimkess focusing on her hand-built work of the last 25 years. The book will include newly commissioned contributions by the writer Olivia Laing and the photographer Catherine Opie and is co-published by MACK Books and ida joon.