

PRESS RELEASE

Martine Syms

Big Surprise

September 16 - October 28, 2018

Big Surprise is the second solo exhibition at Bridget Donahue by writer, filmmaker, and publisher Martine Syms, concurrent to her solo exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, London, *Grand Calme*. The culmination of both exhibitions is a synchronized, interactive video installation entitled *Mythicbeing*. At Sadie Coles HQ, a large LED screen presents an aspirational self, a digitally-rendered avatar of the artist.

At 99 Bowery, four video monitors are set to the backdrop of a photographic wallpaper. On the screens we encounter the protagonist Mythicbeing (my thick being) embodying the postures of his Los Angeles life, as if from the journal pages of a dark shadow:

Morning

We follow Mythicbeing into the bathroom, to his reflection in the bathroom mirror and in the bedroom mirror. He cleans his face, eats a cookie halfheartedly and adjusts his clothing. This is the beginning of the day.

Afternoon

Phone in hand, he intermittently scrolls blogs, television recaps, and social media. He takes notes. He wears a shirt with the text across the back: "To Hell With My Suffering".

Evening

Turning from side to side in bed, he modulates his voice as he repeats, "The human race repulses me." This line either comes from the book he holds in his hand, or from the script of the film. Dancing, and a breakdown into sobbing, interrupt his languid pose. He rearranges pillows, punches them, puts them into place. Various ways to get back to sleep. Or to wake up.

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Gallery viewers can engage in a transatlantic control of both the left and the right brain of the video - the avatar and the actor - through SMS conversation with each protagonist, and inadvertently, in conversation through a chatbot programmed with Martine's voice. The bot is an algorithmic entity. Inhuman, it has limited, programmed knowledge. The audience engages in conversation with a disembodied engine, and *Mythicbeing* answers through animation, images and text bubbles:

*I wish this hotel had room service.**What does joy look like for me?**How do I cultivate my joy?**Are there blocks to my joy? If so, what/who are they?**Where is there already joy in my life?**I think I'm the only black person on this aircraft.*

Big Surprise is a narrative in the process of being live-edited. In describing how she writes an essay, Martine once said that she walks the length of her apartment talking out loud into her voice recorder. The habitual movement of walking from one room to the other triggers speech: "Walking and talking out loud is the fastest way to get to the point." Martine later transcribes her voice into the computer, but it all begins with talking to the walls, in order to talk to you.

Big Surprise is made with additional support from a Pioneer Works Tech Residency.

Martine Syms (b. 1988, Los Angeles) graduated with an MFA from Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson (2017) and a BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2007). Solo exhibitions include *Contemporary Projects: Martine Syms*, Serralves Foundation, Porto, Portugal (2018); *Front International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art Projects*, Cleveland, Ohio (2018); *106: Martine Syms*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2017); *VNXXCAS: Martine Syms*, Camden Arts Centre, London (2017); *The Easy Demands*, CONDO: Bridget Donahue hosted by Sadie Coles HQ, London (2017); and *Fact & Trouble*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2016). She has been included in group exhibitions including *The Body Electric*, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis (2018); *Unlimited*, Art Basel, Basel, Switzerland (2018); *Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today*, ICA Boston, Boston (2018); *Speech/ Acts*, ICA Philadelphia (2017), USA; and *Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2016). Syms lives in Los Angeles. She is the founder of Dominica Publishing, a publishing imprint dedicated to exploring blackness as a topic, reference, marker and audience in visual culture.