

## Melissa Joseph *Irish Exit*

Margot Samel is pleased to present *Irish Exit*, a solo exhibition by Brooklyn-based artist Melissa Joseph.

The term “Irish Exit” suggests a colloquial threshold, a transition: bodies passing from one space into another. It also alludes to identity and belonging. The term transforms across cultures and borders, shapeshifting to fit different contexts; in some zones, “Irish Exit” becomes “French leave”, “English goodbye”, the list goes on.

It’s an apt framing device for Joseph’s latest explorations in felt, ceramics, and paper pulp—a diverse practice that is powered by a deep engagement with identity and sense of place. It is also one that exists comfortably on edges and in spaces without clear definition. In lieu of a singular approach, her methods combine the languages of craft, painting, and sculpture, giving form to multifaceted concerns.

The exhibition expands on Joseph’s ritual of unearthing and reshaping images of her family and the spaces they’ve made their own. It also engages themes of gendered labor—textiles wielded as a rebuttal to dominant patriarchal traditions. She begins with archival and recent photos, then translates them through new materials; her primary medium is felt, which she layers and shapes by poking fibers into a wool base. The result is painterly, with thick passages of color resolving into recognizable, if fuzzy, forms. This process holds many meanings. Its blurring of details reflects the pliability of memory and identity, channeled through Joseph’s own multivalent experience as a biracial woman, artist, and teacher (her mother is American of Irish descent, her father was born in Kerala, India).

When Joseph renders figures in *Irish Exit*, the most prominent are women. On the right side of the diptych *Wedding Ablutions*, a white woman and a girl stand near a bed; one helps the other clip garters to knee-high yellow socks. Split on the left side, a brown woman stands, observing the scene. Renee Green’s use of the term contact zone comes to mind, which the artist and theorist has described as “various moments when negotiations between different cultures have to be made . . . ranging from literal spatial instances to psychological ways of coping with what appears to be foreign.” Joseph tells me that the duo are her aunt and mother, on her mother’s wedding day. In a provocative fuzzing of chronology—one enhanced by her fibrous medium—the figure on the left is Joseph herself. The thin space separating the work’s two sides plays a third subject, the live edge is significant.

Joseph forges many live edges and contact zones across *Irish Exit*. Some works dispense with figures, instead zooming in on various facets of her family’s home—corners, cupboards, furniture. In a smaller piece called

# Margot Samel

*Margot, after Meret*, she playfully connects themes of domesticity and materiality to a lineage of women artists. Shelves of cups and wine glasses stack on top of each other, a wink towards Meret Oppenheim whose multidimensional practice resists easy categorization. Joseph sees this piece as something of the nucleus for *Irish Exit*, an exhibition permeated by objects and thresholds that become proxies for identities and relationships, along with spaces they consume, bump against, or leave.

–Alexxa Gotthardt

Melissa Joseph (b. 1980, Pennsylvania) received an MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, an MAT in Art Education from the Rhode Island School of Design, an AAS in Textile Surface Design from Fashion Institute of Technology, and her BA in Individualized Study from New York University. Recent solo exhibitions include *Irish Exit*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2023); *Conflicting Truths*, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA (2023); *Née*, REGULARNORMAL, New York, NY (2021) *Tharavadu: 42nd Annual Wind Challenge*, Fleisher Art Memorial, Philadelphia, PA (2019), and *Sisters, not Twins*, The Growlery, San Francisco CA (2018). Group exhibitions include *Memory is the Seamstress*, Green Art Gallery, Dubai (2023); *Maskenfreiheit*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2023); *Genius Loci*, Charles Moffett, New York, NY (2023); *This Too Shall Pass*, Venus Over Manhattan, New York, NY (2023); *A Study in Form (Chapter One)*, James Fuentes, New York, NY (2023); *Cycles*, Dimin, New York, NY (2023); *Hand over Hand*, Mindy Solomon Gallery, Miami FL (2023); *Crisis of Image*, MOCA Arlington, Arlington VA (2023); *In the Bleak Midwinter*, Swivel Saugerties Saugerties, NY (2022); *Feast of the Gods*, Aicon Contemporary, New York, NY (2022); *Wonder Women*, Jeffrey Deitch, Los Angeles, CA (2022); *Handiwork: Art, Craft, and the Space Between*, Charlotte Street Foundation, Kansas City, MO (2022); *(De)Framing Identity*, Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Salt Lake City, UT (2022); *Workspace Exhibition*, Dieu Donné, Brooklyn, NY (2022); *Felt Experience*, Brattleboro Museum and Art Center, Brattleboro, VT (2022); *Wonder Women*, Jeffrey Deitch, New York, NY (2022); *Last Call*, Bradley Ertaskiran Gallery, Montreal Canada (2022); *Hues*, Hanna Traore Gallery, New York, NY (2022); *Interval*, Turn Gallery New York, NY (2022); *Manufactured Narratives*, UICA, Grand Rapids, MI (2022); *Hereditary*, Swivel Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (2021); *If Tomorrow Comes*, Bravin Lee, New York, NY (2021); *Stowaway*, Smallbany, Albany, NY (2021); *Summer Summer*, Ross + Kramer Gallery, East Hampton, NY (2021); *Illusions and Other Protective Spells*, Pentimenti Gallery, Philadelphia, PA (2021); *Once Removed*, Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA (2021); *Exhibition #8*, Holsum Gallery, Kansas City, MO (2021); *Diasporic Rhizome*, South Asia Institute Chicago, Chicago, IL (2021); *The Privilege of Getting Together*, REGULARNORMAL, NY, New York (2020); *Subtle Speaks*, Textile Arts Center, Brooklyn, NY (2020); *In Union, Remotely*, Shaker Museum, Mt. Lebanon, NY (2020); *Intrinsic*, The Yard, Brooklyn, NY (2020); *It's the End of the World as We Know It and I Feel Fine/Not Fine*, 601 Artspace, New, NY (2020); *Reused Recycled*, Site Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (2019); *America is...*, Touchstone Gallery, Washington DC (2019); *Patterns of Influence*, The Painting Center, New York, NY (2019); *Post Script: Emerging Notions in Contemporary Craft*, The Delaware Contemporary, Wilmington, DE (2019); *JAGAH //JADOO*, Mission Cultural Center, San Francisco, CA (2019); *Held Dear*, PAFA Museum, Philadelphia, PA (2019); *Immaterielle Hautungen*, Lite Haus Gallery + Project Space, Berlin, Germany (2018); *After the Pedestal*, The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH (2018). *5 into 1*, Charles Addams Gallery at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA (2018); and *Responders*, PAFA Museum, Philadelphia, PA (2018).

Margot Samel  
295 Church St  
New York, NY 10013

+1 212 597-2747  
info@margotsamel.com

margotsamel.com