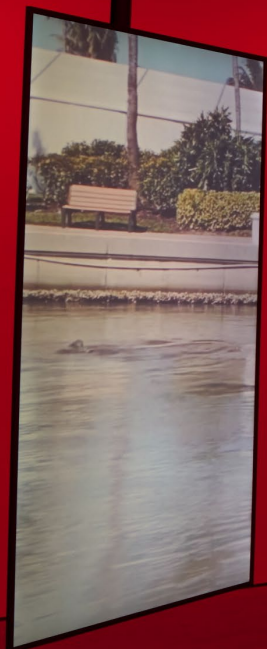


Martine Syms

UGLY PLYMOUTH

Martine Syms
Ugly Plymouth
Sadie Coles HQ off-site
06 - 31 October 2020

Sadie Coles HQ



Martine Syms
Ugly Plymouths, 2020
3 channel video

[LINK TO VIEW FILM](#)



This October, Sadie Coles HQ inaugurates an offsite residency at 24 Cork Street beginning with a month long solo exhibition by Martine Syms, the first UK presentation of her latest project *Ugly Plymouths*, 2020.

Ugly Plymouths is a one-act play comprising an immersive three-channel video installation – starring Hot Dog, Doobie, and Le Que Sabe – in which Syms continues her explorations of performance, narrative and techniques of filming. As their narratives progress, the three characters talk and sing alongside and over each other, one receding as another moves into the foreground. On occasion their dialogue falls into a robotic unison, a kind of emotionless chorus – the voices define the distance between them more than their relation. They have trouble relating, despite their efforts at romance, and this troubled connection is the subject of their dialogue. In the footage the characters are not visualized; only their surroundings, and surrounding thoughts, are; and this anonymity underscores the isolation in their experience.

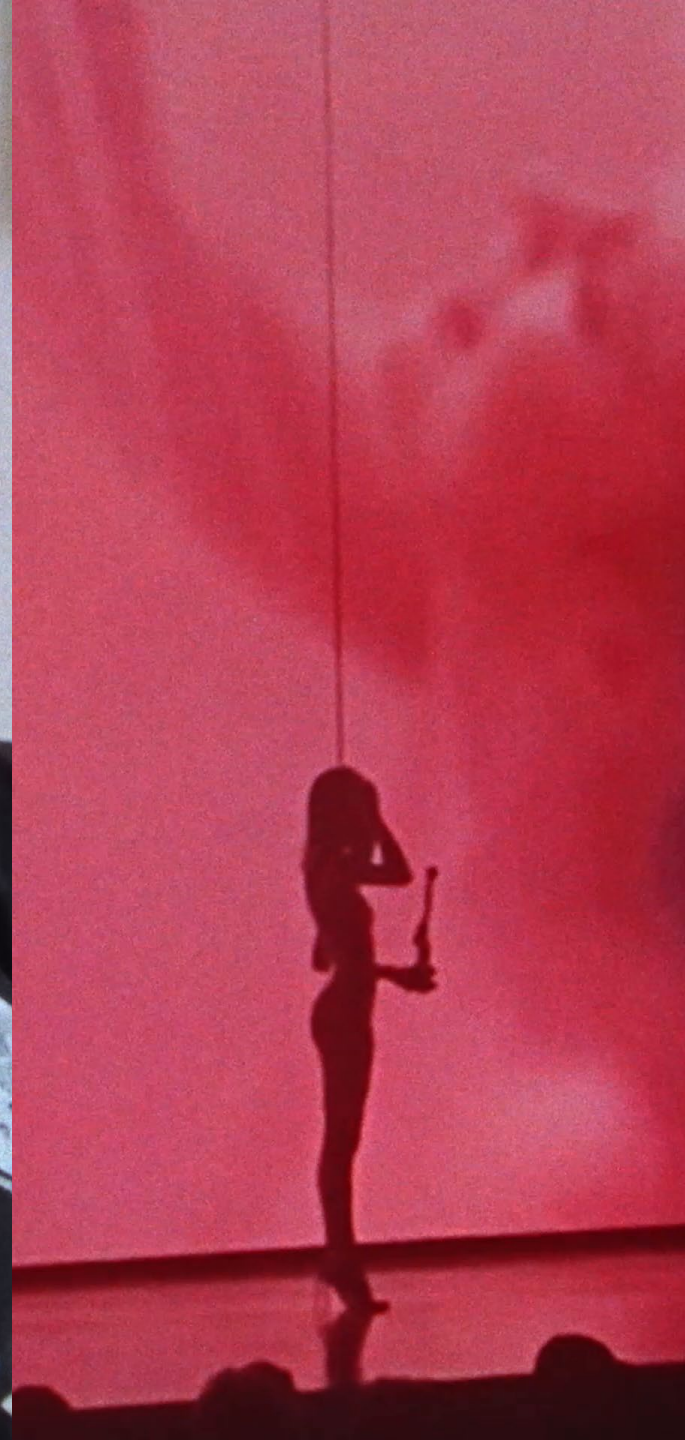
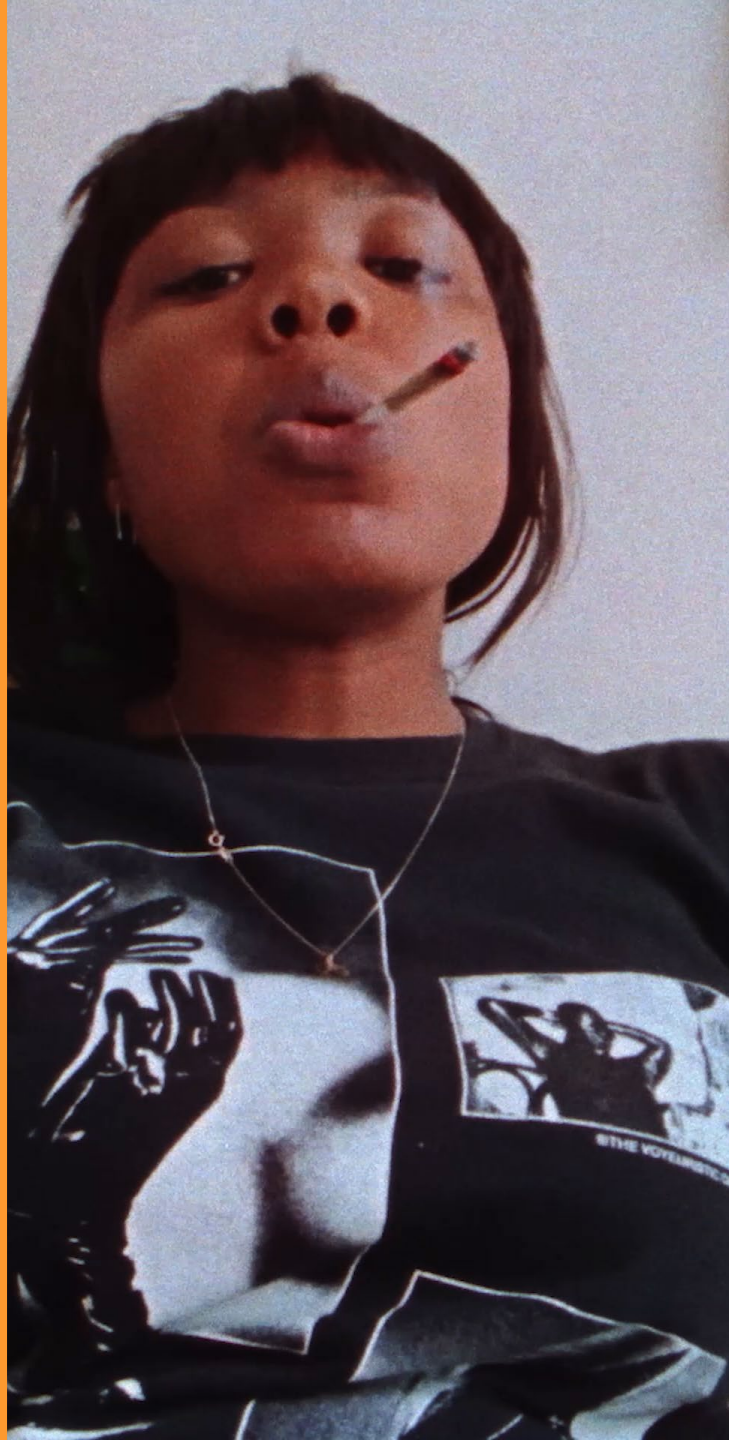
The work takes as its establishing environment the Los Angeles described in American Beat poet and jazz artist Bob Kaufman's poem "Hollywood": in this Los Angeles, the city is sick without leave. Actors, artists, pimps, salesclerks and poets are selling delusions wholeheartedly, where there is always a catch and never a foundation. Kaufman's 'poetry of the streets' and unsparring portrayal of social life, its glamorous veneer and simultaneous malignancies, are transposed into an audio-visual montage of Los Angeles present day. Videos pan across beach vacations, domestic scenes, music concerts and everyday life in motion – occasionally shifting to interior scenes and selfie-style close-up shots of Syms herself.



In *Ugly Plymouths*, verbal gestures and half-conversations emerge in an uneven stream of responses and repetitions. The ongoing registers of exchange feel out of sync – echoing the real-time pace of communicating via messaging apps (the elongated video screens likewise mimicking that of smartphones), and yet the notion of hyperconnectivity is destabilised. This interplay of language, of commonplace expressions and verbal cues, rendered through the prism of technology are an enduring field of exploration in Syms's work. Seemingly small linguistic and physical gestures, abstracted from their subject or context, are honed in upon, spliced, and fragmented to reveal diverse registers of meaning and expressions of identity. As the dialogue progresses, the often open-ended communications, or mis-communications, between the three lead to frustrations; becoming alternately frayed, needy, or resistant, as the characters react to the distances born of the fault lines in their communication.

Mirroring the excess of short lived social interactions, meaningless or otherwise, facilitated by contemporary city life, the visuals shift frenetically between a random assortment of scenes encountered in the everyday. Each screen offers a fragmented glimpse into an only partially accessible reality; reflecting the tensions explored in much of Sym's practice, between the personal and the collective experience, and how these factors co-exist and converge. At various moments locations seen in the footage almost align, before cutting short, transitioning to another space. For a brief moment in the midst of the narrative, the screens' imagery align with exploding fireworks, and at the same time the auditory connection is ruptured, in a single short-lived hiatus of collective unity.

[LINK TO VIEW FILM](#)





EXIT



“Ugly Plymouths swapping exhaust with red convertible Buicks...”

Bob Kaufman, *Hollywood*





Installation views: Martine Syms, *Ugly Plymouths*, Sadie Coles HQ off-site, 24 Cork Street, London, 06 – 31 October 2020

